BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY VOLUME 4: ISAIAH – MALACHI

Duncan Heaster

Carelinks Publishing, 49 The Woodfields, South Croydon CR2 0HJ United Kingdom
www.carelinks.net freebibles2000@gmail.com

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: ISAIAH

ISAIAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

ISAIAH CHAPTER 1

Isaiah 1:1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah- Some of these kings were generally 'good kings' but the prophecy makes clear that the state of the nation was very weak spiritually and therefore good leadership did not lead to personal spirituality. Hence the appeal is to 'heavens and earth' (1:2), to the ruling classes and also the individual Israelites- an appeal repeated in :10 to "the rulers" and "the people".

There is a very clear structure in Isaiah, which hinges around the historical interlude in Is. 37-39. This demonstrates that the prophecies in Is. 1-36 of judgment at the hands of Assyria were ameliorated and deferred by the intense repentance and intercession of Isaiah's school of prophets. But the interlude concludes with the bad news that the reformation was not thorough, and that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon; and therefore the earlier prophecies of judgment by Assyria would be reapplied to judgment by Babylon. But out of that there was to come a wonderful restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel, explained in the so called 'second Isaiah' (Is. 40-55). But sadly, the Jews who returned failed to allow that amazing potential to come true; and that is the burden of the so called 'third Isaiah' (Is. 56-66). It seems that God therefore gave up trying to restore the Kingdom in a political, national sense; and looked instead to a purpose with individuals who had His word in their humbled hearts.

There's been much talk of how Isaiah 1-39 appears different in style and attitude to Israel from Isaiah 40-66. I'm personally of the conviction that the two 'halves' of Isaiah are by the same inspired author. The phrase "the holy one of Israel" occurs 12 times in Is. 1-39, 14 times in Is. 40-66 (the so called 'second Isaiah'), and only 5 times elsewhere in the Old Testament. The New Testament quotes 'Isaiah the prophet' with the same rubric, regardless of whether 'first Isaiah' or 'second Isaiah' are being quoted (compare Jn. 12:38-40; Rom. 9:22-29; 10:16,20). The Septuagint supports the unity of Isaiah, and the Dead Sea scrolls copy of Isaiah doesn't make any break between chapters 39 and 40. These arguments for the unity of Isaiah must however be balanced against the fact that there is a marked difference in attitude to Israel when chapter 40 begins; and that parts of the prophecy are clearly relevant to Hezekiah's time, whereas other parts are relevant to the events of Judah's restoration and the fall of Babylon which enabled this. My suggestion is that, as with the Psalms and some of the other prophets, Isaiah was

edited and in places re-written, under inspiration, during the captivity. Hence, parts of it clearly have relevance to Hezekiah's time and the deliverance from Assyria, but these were used to inspire and teach the Jews in Babylon about a similar great deliverance and restoration which they could expect from Babylon. This is why some commentators have made a convincing case that the whole of Isaiah applies to Hezekiah's time, whilst others have made an equally convincing case that most of the prophecy applies to the restoration. My suggestion is that the whole of it did apply to Hezekiah's time, but it was re-written, under inspiration, as applicable to the Jews in exile in Babylon and their deliverance from Babylon, which was set up to happen after the pattern of their earlier deliverance from Assyria.

The first 12 verses of Is. 58 are similar in essence to Is. 1:1-31. This is just one of many connections between the later part of Isaiah (Is. 40-66) and the earlier part (Is. 1-35). The two sections are connected by the historical interlude of Is. 36-39, where Isaiah works with Hezekiah towards repentance, and then has to judge him for his pride and collapse of faith, concluding that his sons shall go into captivity in Babylon. The prophecies about the Assyrian invader in Is. 1-35 then become reapplied to Babylon; hence Is. 14 speaks of "Babylon" when it was initially Assyria which was in view. As I explain on Is. 36-39, Hezekiah sinned quite badly and let the baton drop. A Messianic Kingdom could have been established after the defeat of the Assyrian invader outside Jerusalem, but this possibility was ultimately deferred until our last days. But God didn't give up working with Judah. At the time of the restoration, there could again have been a Messianic Kingdom, the temple of Ez. 40-48 could have been rebuilt; but due to short termism and lack of repentance, this didn't happen. Therefore the same appeals are made to the returned exiles as were made to Judah in the days of Isaiah and Hezekiah.

The Inspired Re-Writing Of The Old Testament In Babylon

Briefly, here are corroborative reasons for thinking that perhaps the whole existing canon of Old Testament Scripture was [under inspiration] edited, re-written and codified during the exile in Babylon:

- According to Jewish tradition, Ezra edited and produced the Pentateuch in its present form in Babylon (Carl Kraeling, *The Synagogue* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956) pp. 232-235 reproduces plates from the synagogue wall at Dura-Europas showing Ezra doing this in Babylon). This would account for the record of Jacob in exile being so verbally similar to the allusions made to it in the restoration-from-Babylon prophecies in Isaiah. There was certainly great scribal activity in Babylon- 2 Macc. 2:13 speaks of Nehemiah founding a library of the Jewish scriptures there. This gives another perspective on the way Nehemiah's prayer in Neh. 1 is so full of references to Deuteronomy- if the latter had just been re-written and presented to the Jews in Babylon. The commands to build the tabernacle are repeated in Exodus, and there is the record of Israel's golden calf apostasy set in the middle of them. Ex. 25:1-31:18 give

the tabernacle building commands, then there's the golden calf incident, and then the commands are repeated in Ex. 35-40. Surely this was edited in this manner to give encouragement to the exiles- the commands to rebuild the temple had been given in detail in Ez. 40-48, but the exiles failed- and yet, the implication runs, God was still willing to work again with His people in the building of His sanctuary despite their failure. There is good internal reason to think that the Pentateuch likewise was re-written in places to bring out the relevance of Israel's past to those in captivity. Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 11:17; 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfill His original intentions for them.

- The Talmud claims that the majority of the prophetic books were re-written and edited into their present form during the captivity, under the guidance of a group of priests called "The Great Assembly" (M. Simon and I.W. Slotski, eds, *The Soncino Talmud: Babba Bathra* 14b - 15a (London: The Soncino Press, 1935) Vol. 1 pp. 70,71). There are many verbal points of contact between Chronicles and the returned exiles.

- Time and again we encounter the phrase "to this day" in the historical books of the Old Testament (e.g. "the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there to this day", 2 Kings 16:6)- and each time it appears the reference is to the time of the restoration, when presumably those books were edited and rewritten as relevant for the Jews, either those still in Babylon or those who had returned to the land. A good case can be made, for example, that the book of Judges was rewritten at that time in order to show that God's people don't need a King in order to be His people, but rather they can be ruled by Spirit-filled leaders (See W.J. Dumbrell, 'No King In Israel', *Journal For The Study Of The Old Testament* Vol. 25 (1983) pp. 23-33).

- The way Deuteronomy refers to cities East of Jordan as being "on this side Jordan" (e.g. Dt. 4:41,49) would suggest that the editor of the book was writing from a location East of Jordan- likely Babylon. The comment in Josh. 15:63 that "the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day" sounds very much as if it were written in the captivity, lamenting the way that the local tribes still lived in Zion. "The children of Judah" is very much a phrase used about the exiles. Thus books like Joshua were written up in the captivity in order to show Judah how they were repeating the sins of their forefathers, and appealing to them thereby to learn the lessons. It's even possible that the lament that "Geshur and Maacath dwell in the midst of Israel unto this day" (Josh.

13:13 RV) is a reference to "Geshem the Arabian" and Sanballat dwelling amongst Israel at the time of their return (Neh. 2:19 etc.).

- It has been observed that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings have certain similarities. For example, they all quote the Deuteronomy version of Israel's earlier history, leading to the suggestion that Deuteronomy was the first of the collection, a kind of introductory background history. The curses listed in Dt. 28 are all especially relevant to the situation in Judah before the Babylonian invasion, and a number of the curses are alluded to in Lamentations as being descriptive of the situation after the final destruction of Jerusalem. Some of the curses can have little other application, e.g. Dt. 28:41 speaks of begetting children, "but they shall not be yours; for they shall go into captivity". Other relevant passages are Dt. 28:36 (a king taken captive), 49,50,52. These "former prophets" (Deuteronomy - 2 Kings) appear to have been edited during the exile as history which spoke to the concerns and needs of the exiled people of God (The similarities of style, language and indications of common editing are explained in detail in Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); there is a good summary in Terrence Fretheim, *Deuteronomic History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989). See too M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy And The Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972)). This combined history speaks mainly of the southern Kingdom, which was the group who went to captivity in Babylon; and it explains why this captivity was justified, as well as giving many examples of where repentance could bring about a restoration (1 Kings 8:46-53 is specific). This history addresses the questions which concerned the captives- does God abandon His people for ever? Are Israel entirely to blame for what happened? Is there hope of restoration after receiving Divine judgment and breaching His covenant? Can God have a relationship with His people without a temple? To what extent will God always honour the promises to Abraham and David? Should other gods also be worshipped? Reading these books from this perspective reveals how incident after incident was especially selected by the inspired editors in Babylon in order to guide God's people there. Take the story of Naaman's Hebrew "maid". Naaman had been the enemy of Israel, and that little child [Heb.] was one of the children of those taken captive. But she witnessed to her captor; he turned to Yahweh; and his skin became like that of "a little child" (2 Kings 5:14)- like her. The message was obvious. The children of the captivity were likewise to witness to their captors and bring them into covenant with Yahweh.

- A comparison of Psalms 14 and 53 illustrate this process of re-writing at Hezekiah's time. These Psalms are both "A Psalm of David", and are virtually identical apart from Ps. 53:5 adding: "There were they in great fear, where no fear was; For God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: Thou hast put them to shame, because God hath rejected them". This surely alludes to the Assyrian army encamped against Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:1), put into fear by the Angels, and returning "with shame of face to his own land" (2 Chron. 32:21). Yet both Psalms conclude with a verse which

connects with the exiles in Babylonian captivity: "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Then shall Jacob rejoice, and Israel shall be glad". So it would appear that the initial Psalm was indeed written by David; the version of Ps. 14 which is now Ps. 53 was added to and adapted in Hezekiah's time (Prov. 25:1), and both versions had a final verse added to them during the exile. A number of Psalms appear to have some verses relevant to the exile, and others relevant to earlier historical situations. It would seem that an inspired writer inserted the verses which spoke specifically to the exilic situation. Psalm 102 is an example. Ps. 102:2-12 and 24-25a appear to be the original lament; and the other verses are relevant to the exile. Psalm 22 likewise appears to have had vv. 28-32 added with reference to the exiles; other examples in Psalms 9, 10; 59; 66; 68; 69:34; 85; 107; 108 and 118.

- There are evident similarities between the vocabulary and style of Zechariah, Job and the prophets of the restoration. Thus both Job and Zechariah refer to the ideas of the court of Heaven, "the satan" etc. My suggestion is that Job was rewritten during the exile, hence the many points of contact between Job and Isaiah's prophecies about the restoration. When we read that Job has suffered less than his iniquities deserve (Job 11:6), this is the very term used to describe Israel's sufferings in Babylon (Ezra 9:13). Job, "the servant of the Lord", is being set up as Israel, just as that same term is used about Israel in Babylon throughout the latter part of Isaiah. Job's mockery by the Arabian friends perhaps parallels the Samaritan and Babylonian mockery of Judah; his loss of children is very much the tragedy of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians which Lamentations focuses upon. And Job's final revival and restoration after repentance would therefore speak of the blessed situation which Judah could have had at their return to the land. Job's response to the words of God and Elihu would then speak of Judah's intended repentance as a result of God's word spoken to them by prophets like Haggai and Zechariah. There are many connections between Job and the latter parts of Isaiah which speak about the restoration.

Isaiah 1:2 Hear, heavens and listen, earth; for Yahweh has spoken- The prophets often balance guilt between the leadership ["heavens"] and the ordinary masses ["earth"]. All society was guilty; it wasn't that they all suffered just because of a corrupt leadership. Leadership tends to act how the masses want them to, and so whether or not democracy is practiced, there is over time a subconscious socio-political mechanism in place in human society whereby the masses get the leadership they really want.

I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me- That may be a fair translation in the context, but the Hebrew words essentially carry the idea of exaltation- the phrase is translated 'exalt and magnify' in Ez. 31:4; Dan. 11:36 and Ps. 34:3. As Balaam's prophecy made clear, by grace God had given Israel an exalted

position- not so much in the eyes of the Gentile world, but in *His* eyes. And Israel abused that by rebelling against the Father who had so loved them. Is. 43:27 uses the same word to say that "your teachers" had 'rebelled' against God. But all society, heavens and earth, were thereby rebels, because the false teaching was so eagerly accepted. But the continual conviction of Judah as rebels / transgressors [s.w.] sets the scene for the climactic statement in Is. 53:12, where the word is twice used of how all those rebellions were laid upon the suffering servant, who would die to get them forgiven.

So often in the prophets, the pronouns change. One moment we have God speaking, the next, the prophet is responding in agreement, appealing to his people, or echoing the message in his own words. So in Is. 1:2,3 we have the direct words of God, ending with "They have rebelled against me... my people don't consider". And then in Is. 1:4 we have Isaiah echoing back those thoughts of God: "They have forsaken the Lord". Prophecies begin with God speaking in the third person, and end with Him speaking in the first person; and vice versa. In all these examples, we see God merging with His prophet, and vice versa (Am. 3:1; Is. 3:1,4; Is. 5:1,2 cp. 3-6; 7; Is. 10:12; Is. 11:3,9; Is. 22:17,19,20; Jer. 11:17; Jer. 23:9,11; Jer. 9:1,2; Is. 53:10,12; Is. 61:6,8; Is. 1:2,3,4; Jer. 4:1,2,21,22; Jer. 8:13,14; Nah. 1:12,13). However, there was more than an echo going on between God and the prophet. There was a kind of dialectic in the Divine-human encounter. God is influenced by man, as well as man by God.

The passage condemns Israel's behaviour from a child. It has been observed that it has many similarities with documents which are formal disownings of a child, giving all the reasons. Rather like some of the criticisms of Israel are expressed in terms of contemporary divorce statements. This is God disowning His own child, just as Hosea disowned 'His' children by Gomer, calling them Lo-Ammi, not mine. And yetin Hosea, Yahweh is unable to finally do this for His beloved child Israel. Such disownings of a child even to having them executed were known by the Israelites from Dt. 21:18-21. We have a similar passage in Hos. 11, where as here, hope is still held out that the child may repent. Death was the punishment for a rebellious child (Dt. 21:18-21), but here God decides not to go ahead with this.

Isaiah 1:3 The ox knows his owner- Heb. 'his buyer', s.w. 'redeemer'. There should be some intuitive bond between God's redeemed people and God; if there is not, then it is because His people have consciously cast it off. They had been redeemed from Egypt, as we have been- to serve, as an ox.

And the donkey his master's crib- God had noticed from Heaven how animals and their owners / carers form a special bond. But he found even that to be lacking between Him and His people for whom He had done so much for.

But Israel doesn't know Me, My people don't consider- To live the unexamined life, doing whatever feels good and seems immediately right for us, drifting forward on autopilot as in a dream with no real sense of God… is rebellion against Him (:2) and calls for judgment of the hardest sort. It was because they of themselves would not "consider" / 'understand' that they were psychologically confirmed in their attitudes and blinded so that they would not understand / consider (Is. 6:9,10). And so God operates to this day. It was the suffering of the servant, the Lord Jesus upon the cross, which was designed to as it were jolt them into considering / understanding (s.w. Is. 52:15).

Isaiah 1:4 Ah sinful nation- Heb. *goy*, usually used about the Gentiles. When God's people are rejected they are treated as the world.

A people loaded with iniquity- This sets the scene for the image of the suffering servant, the Lord Jesus, bearing or loaded down with Israel's sins. He was their representative even in their sinfulness. He suffered as them, and therefore by identification with Him, salvation is possible. Sin is the crippling burden. The Lord's appeal to those 'heavy laden' was therefore to sinners to come to Him, and exchange their load for His load (Mt. 11:28). As with the analogy of changing masters, there is no total release from any load whatsoever.

A seed of evildoers- They had been raised as God's children (:2), but this implies they were children by adoption. Despite all His love and nourishment, they reverted to the ways of their biological parents, and forsook and despised Yahweh.

Children who deal corruptly!- Often Biblical Hebrew uses terms for destruction / condemnation which also refer to the actual sin being committed which warrants such judgment. This is because sin is its own judgment. The Hebrew word used here is an example. Three times in the record of the flood we read that the earth was "corrupt" (Gen. 6:11,12), and four times the same word is used regarding how God would therefore "destroy" the earth (Gen. 6:13,17; 9:11,15). And so any indulgence in sin is in fact an indulgence in condemnation; so that ultimately, all who are finally rejected at the last day are those who have rejected themselves from God.

They have forsaken Yahweh, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and backward- The same word is used about how idolaters would 'turn their backs' upon their idols in the time of their condemnation (Is. 42:17). The condemned are left in an unbearable limbo- they turned their backs on God, and now turn their backs on the idols of their lives.

Isaiah 1:5 Why should you be beaten more, that you revolt more and more?- They had been "beaten" by the experiences of the recent invasions ; by the Syrians (2 Chron. 24:24) and the ten tribes (2 Chron. 25:13,23). It seems the results of those invasions

were still felt. They had been intended to learn from them, and yet instead they increasingly revolted- implying that a far greater invasion was to come. We too see God operating like this in our lives.

The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint- The essential problem with Judah was their heart, standing for the mind or head. The spirit, the thinking, conscious and unconscious... is what God is supremely interested in.

Isaiah 1:6 From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it: wounds, welts, and open sores- see on Job 2:7. Job represented sinful Judah. These types of wounds made them ritually unclean. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. "He was oppressed", as Israel at that time were being "oppressed" by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory. Significantly, Isaiah 40-53 speak of the one servant, whereas Isaiah 54-66 speak of the "servants" who fulfill in principle the work of the singular servant.

They haven't been closed, neither bandaged, neither soothed with oil- The implication is that they had refused this. The Lord quarried the language of the wounded man on the Jericho road from this verse. The priests and Levites were unable to offer this; but the despised Samaritan Saviour did. And yet, Judah refused even that.

Isaiah 1:7 Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; foreigners devour your land in your presence and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers- This describes the Assyrian invasion of Judah at Hezekiah's time, burning the cities until Jerusalem alone was left holding out against them. Note the present tenses- the prophetic word was so sure of fulfillment in the future that it was as if it was already fulfilled. And yet as noted on :5, there had been other invasions prior to that from which they were intended to learn.

Isaiah 1:8 The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a besieged city- This could refer to how the Assyrians would take the whole land apart from Jerusalem. The entire "vineyard" of God's work was to be destroyed, apart from a "shelter"- which was Zion. But it is the "daughter of Zion", the faithful remnant, and not the literal Zion which is in view here. They were to be a "shelter", a place of refuge, for others (Is. 4:6 s.w.). As explained on Is. 4:6, Zion was intended to become not only a place of spiritual refuge, but the capital of a revived Kingdom of God in Judah. That didn't happen, Zion was saved by grace alone from the Assyrians; and so the "hut" was destroyed (only s.w. Is. 24:20).

Isaiah 1:9 Unless Yahweh of Armies had left to us a very small remnant- The same Hebrew word as in :8, where God "left" Jerusalem as the only city which didn't fall to the Assyrians. But this was by grace. The very existence of the faithful remnant within Jerusalem (centered around Isaiah himself) was by grace, they were "left" by God. In a sense, even spiritual strength is a gift from God. It was due to that remnant that God did not judge Judah as Sodom- even though their rulers were in fact rulers of Sodom (:10). They were Sodom, disobedient Israel were to be judged as Sodom (Dt. 29:23), but were not judged as Sodom because of a remnant- who themselves were preserved by God's grace. We see grace all through this. The one city that was preserved, Jerusalem, was indeed preserved by grace because 1:21 states that she had become a prostitute against God.

We would have been as Sodom; we would have been like Gomorrah- Even when rebuking them, God sees Israel as in some ways "perfect" (Is. 42:18-20). Israel were like Sodom, and yet they weren't treated like Sodom (Is. 1:10). They were Jeshurun, the upright one, but they kicked at God (Dt. 32:15). We ought to be witnessing “to the Jew first” world-wide in these last days, as well as supporting the work of preaching in Israel itself. Paul makes the point that for the sake of the tiny group of Jews who did still hold and practice the truth, Israel would not suffer the judgments of Sodom in totality (Rom. 9:29 cp. Is. 1:9). This would indicate that there will also be a latter day Jewish remnant which will stop the faithless Israel of today receiving the judgment of permanent destruction.

Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of Yahweh, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!- The rebuke of the rulers of Judah at the time of the Assyrian invasion shows that Hezekiah's spiritual decision making was the more commendable, seeing the rest of his committee, his Government, were worthy of such condemnation. Each of her rulers is condemned in :23.

Isaiah 1:11 What are the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?, says Yahweh. I have had enough of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed animals. I don’t delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of male goats- Despite all their revolt against Yahweh of the previous verses, they still religiously offered sacrifice. It just shows that there is a strong religious inclination within people; but that isn't the same as spirituality. Animals were costly; but they were still offered. Is. 65:12; 66:4 use the same phrase "I don't delight in...". Judah are destined "to the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because when I called, you didn’t answer; when I spoke, you didn’t listen; but you did that which was evil in My eyes, and chose that in which I didn’t delight". The context is their choice of sacrificing to idols; but in Is. 1:11 the same term is used of

God's lack of delight in the sacrifices offered to Him. It seems that they worshipped the idols in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is an abiding temptation for all God's children- to worship our idols in the name of worshipping God.

Isaiah 1:12 When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand- This is a rhetorical question. God has made it clear that *He* had not required all this offering from them, because He couldn't bear it. Who had required it? They themselves, their own religiosity, their need to sacrifice to someone or something. That is the answer to the question. God did not "require" sacrifices, rather He wished that men would "require" or "seek" relationship with Him (Is. 45:19 s.w.).

To trample My courts?- The Hebrew is literally 'to trample underfoot' and is used of the trampling underfoot of Jerusalem by her invaders. But the point is that in essence, this had been done by the Jews already. Their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour. And this really is the essence of condemnation.

Isaiah 1:13 Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to Me; new moons, Sabbaths, and holy gatherings: I can't bear with evil assemblies- Or "The solemn meeting"; perhaps Passover was in view? The feast became sin, just as Paul warned the breaking of bread meeting could turn into a drinking of wine to condemnation rather than blessing (1 Cor. 11:23-31). "Abomination" is a word associated with idolatry (e.g. Is. 44:19 s.w.). Their incense was offered to Yahweh but was effectively part of their idolatry; they worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship (:11). This was 'unbearable' to God, as if He just could not endure it further. Hence the threatened destruction of the entire system. This kind of thing drives God as it were to the limits of what He "is able to bear" (s.w.).

Isaiah 1:14 My soul hates your New Moons and your appointed feasts. They are a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them- A love as strong as God's is going to also elicit the emotion of hatred and anger when that love is rejected and abused. He "hated" (s.w.) Judah's insincere worship and relationship with Him (Is. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4). But it is hard to separate the sin from the sinner. That distinction may be helpful for us in order to avoid judging others too personally, but God it seems doesn't make that decision. He gave Israel into the hands of those who hated her (s.w. Ez. 16:27,37) and in that sense He hated her. The feelings of hatred which Hosea had for Gomer due to her abuse of His love were those of God for Israel: "There I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). God is not simply "love" in the abstract. He is love for real, with all the emotion and psychological complex which goes along with love; and this will include hatred if that love is abused.

The wrath of God, His grief at sin and being rejected, is intertwined with His amazing grace and love. The gravity and emotional enormity of each 'side' of the total equation, the huge tension of the equilibrium that keeps them in perfect balance in God's character and words, was reflected in the prophets personally; and it will be in us too. The result of this is that the anger of both God and His prophets becomes understandable as more an expression of His and their sorrow, the hurtness of their love, even their weariness. God says that He has "had enough" of Israel, even saying "I am weary to bear" them (Is. 1:11-15). Is. 43:24 specifically speaks of God's weariness with His people- and this too was part of the prophets' spirit. And yet shining through all that is God's hopefulness for His people, and His grace: "The Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore will He exalt Himself [in judgment] to show mercy to you" (Is. 30:18). This wasn't an angry God hitting back at a rebellious people; this is the God of Israel looking at judgment only as a way to reveal His grace and mercy in the longer term.

Isaiah 1:15 When you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you. Yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood- See on Is. 6:7. Their incense was as an idolatrous abomination to God (:13), and their prayers likewise, seeing incense represents prayer. Full hands was an idiom for sacrifice; but God saw them as deeply unclean, and with the guilt of blood on their hands. Jer. 22:3 uses the term with reference to how human victims (perhaps not only children) were offered to the idols in the name of Yahweh, and this was done in the temple.

Isaiah 1:16 Wash yourselves, make yourself clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil- The language is priestly, as if all Israel were priests, and were intended to wash themselves and then come and offer true sacrifice. It isn't possible to make ourselves clean (s.w. Prov. 20:9); it was Yahweh who could wash them (s.w. Is. 4:4); but He would do that if they had the desire to wash themselves.

Isaiah 1:17 Learn to do well- Heb. 'be taught'. They were to accept God's teaching (s.w. Is. 48:17); this is an exhortation to be open to His leading and teaching, rather than to academic Bible study of itself.

Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow- They had to show justice to others; and if they wished to do that, then God would purge them with His "spirit of justice" (Is. 4:4). God will confirm us in the way in which we wish to go. All these sins of omission left them with actual blood on their hands (:15)- through their inaction. We would likely have chosen idolatry and child sacrifice as parade examples of their need for repentance; but God instead focuses upon their inaction in being just towards the vulnerable. For this is of equal significance to Him.

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, says Yahweh- A legal term. God and man enter into judgment- and the judge pleads with the guilty to accept forgiveness from Him. God is *beseeching* men to see the obvious logic of responding to His word (2 Cor. 5:20), *pleading* with us to see the greatness, the magnificence of His love towards us in Christ, *begging* us to realize that if He gave up His Son for us while we were yet sinners, how much more will He give us *all* things now that we are reconciled to Him through baptism (Rom. 5:6-10)! This is more than logic, way beyond the limits of linguistic reasoning.

This is extraordinary indeed. God is seeking to persuade men to accept the forgiveness available in the blood of His Son. And He asks us to do this work for Him, to reflect this aspect of His character to the world, with that same spirit of earnest humility: " As though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). No wonder in the context Paul says that we should *therefore* watch our behaviour and attitudes. The fact men turn away from God's *beseeching*, His *praying* that they will accept His grace, is surely the greatest tragedy in the whole cosmos, in the whole of existence.

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool- David's sin, desperation and restoration are typical of the experience of all God's true people (e.g. Ps. 51:7 = Is. 1:18). But this becoming white as snow was due to God's purging, the work of His Spirit; it would not be achieved by repentance alone, simply stopping sinning. A Divine program is in view here, of psychological cleansing; what Jeremiah and Ezekiel call a new heart, a new covenant, the work of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah foresaw the invasion by the Assyrians; what was potentially planned was the complete destruction of Judah. So he appeals for repentance; and the fact that Jerusalem was saved and the Assyrians destroyed could mean that some responded to this appeal. Or perhaps the intercession of Isaiah and the faithful remnant in Jerusalem meant that God relented; but that too was of grace, see on :9.

Isaiah 1:19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land- As noted on :18, Isaiah was appealing for repentance to avert the invasion by Assyria. But more than that, there was the possibility of a Messianic kingdom of God being established in Judah, when they would eat the good of the land. The allusion is to a repentant Israel eating the good of the land of Egypt (Gen. 45:18,20). The entire *eretz* and not just the territory of Judah would be theirs. Ezra 9:12 quotes this as being possible if the exiles repented; but it was again precluded by their lack of penitence (Neh. 9:35,36).

Isaiah 1:20 But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it- The same words are used in Hos. 11:5: "the Assyrian will be their king, because they refused to repent". For the most part, Judah did refuse; and so the fact they were not all devoured was by grace. Those who were thus devoured had done so to themselves; "your own sword has devoured you" (Jer. 2:30).

Isaiah 1:21 How the faithful city has become a prostitute! She was full of justice; righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers- There were a host of issues the prophets could've raised with Israel; but injustice is the recurring theme. Because of the injustice going on in Jerusalem, Isaiah calls her a whore (Is. 1:21). The prostitution was through forging relationships with other nations such as Egypt, in order to save them from the Assyrians; see on Is. 2:6. And part of the deal was that they worshipped their gods. They were murderers not just because of their human sacrifices, but because their injustice would lead to their being devoured by the sword; see on :20.

Isaiah 1:22 Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water- They had been intended to respond to the purging fire of previous invasions (see on :5), but instead that which was by nature supposed not to corrupt, had become dross. This was how insistent was their desire to sin. LXX "Your silver is worthless, thy wine merchants mix the wine with water". The adulteration of the silver and wine connects with the charge of adultery in :21.

Isaiah 1:23 Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves. Each one loves bribes and follows after rewards. They don't judge the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come to them- Hezekiah's personal reforms were not followed even by other members of the royal family; see on :1. They were no better than petty criminal, lowlife merchants who mixed wine with water (:22). They were unjust to the poor just for the sake of small amounts of money. The connection with Hos. 9:15 suggests that *all* the princes were like this.

Isaiah 1:24 Therefore the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, the Mighty One of Israel, says: Ah, I will get relief from My adversaries, and avenge Myself of My enemies- We sense God in pain, needing "relief". His beloved people had turned to be His enemies. We sense His emotions pent up within Him and requiring release. Yahweh of Israel was and is no stone faced deity.

Isaiah 1:25 and I will turn My hand on you, thoroughly purge away your dross, and will take away all your tin- see on Zech. 12:4. Israel had come to perceive of Yahweh as a god like the gods of the other nations and tribes around them. The prophets consciously brought home the fact that He is unique, and *not* at all like any local pagan deity. The pagan gods were thought to punish their people for minor infringements of ritual, or simply because deities were cruel at times. Yahweh wasn't like that; His judgments came only after passionate pleading, after being deferred time and again, and even then, they came in order to bring about correction, as a purging (Is. 1:25,26 and often), and not as an expression of irritation or mere anger of a capricious, unstable deity.

Isaiah 1:26 I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterwards you shall be called 'The city of righteousness, a faithful city'- But this is right after calling them a whore in :21. Hosea's failed marriage with the unfaithful Gomer spoke of God's terribly painful and tragic relationship with Israel. But like God, Hosea lived in hope of restoration. He fantasized about the day when he would re-live his romance with Gomer, they would again wander together in love in the wilderness, they would re-marry with a new covenant, the joy of which would be so great that the birds and trees joined in with them, and he would re-name the children born during their first marriage. Time and again he wished that Gomer would go back to how things were with them at the beginning; and he tried to engineer things so that she would wish to return there too (Hos. 2:9). All this reflected the fantasy of God for Israel's return to Him, for a restoration of things (Is. 1:26; Jer. 33:7,11). And yet both Gomer and Israel were unfaithful from the beginning; and yet as Hosea decided to view their early romance positively, so God decided to view Israel in the wilderness through the lens of His amazing grace.

Isaiah 1:27 Zion shall be redeemed with justice- Justice would require that Judah be permanently destroyed. But God's redemption by grace works in such a way that justice is not infringed. LXX: "For her captives shall be saved with judgment, and with mercy". The judgment of condemnation was going to be used by God to purge them (:25) and thereby save them. If they responded.

And her converts with righteousness- I mentioned on Is. 1:1 that the original application of Is. 1-35 was to the times of Hezekiah; but it was then rewritten and reapplied to Babylon. And so "converts" is literally "they that return of her" namely the remnant that were to return from the Babylonian captivity mentioned at the end of Is. 39.

Isaiah 1:28 But the destruction of transgressors and sinners shall be together, and those who forsake Yahweh shall be consumed- The impression is given of all sinners being destroyed at the same time. Due to some repentance and intercession, this threatened outcome didn't happen in Isaiah's time; but it will come true at the last day. "Destruction" is literally "breaking into shivers" and this will happen at the last day (Rev. 2:27).

Isaiah 1:29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which you have desired, and you shall be confounded for the gardens that you have chosen- For all their offerings of expensive sacrificial animals to Yahweh, they still worshipped idols in the oak shrines. The frequent command "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17 etc.) uses the same Hebrew word translated "desire" when we read of how Eve "desired" the fruit (Gen. 3:6); yet Israel "desired" the wrong fruit (Is. 1:29). The "gardens" were planted enclosures for idolatry; the counterpart of the garden of Eden.

Isaiah 1:30 For you shall be as an oak whose leaf fades, and as a garden that has no water- They thought that oaks were symbols of immortality; but they were to fade like their idols would. They were to be "as a garden" because they had worshipped gardens (:29). People become like the gods they worship (Ps. 135:18). Thus sin becomes its own punishment and judgment (Jer. 2:9). These principles apply today, and are put into so many words in :31.

Isaiah 1:31 The strong will be like tinder, and his work like a spark. They will both burn together, and no one will quench them- GNB "Just as straw is set on fire by a spark, so powerful people will be destroyed by their own evil deeds, and no one will be able to stop the destruction". This is summing up the theme of :29,30; that sin becomes its own punishment and judgment. These people were effectively burning themselves up.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 2

Isaiah 2:1 This is what Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem- These prophecies were about the Judah and Jerusalem which Isaiah had before him; this was the potential which could have come about at the time, had they repented. It didn't, but God's word will finally come true in essence, although not necessarily in every literal detail envisaged in the primary fulfilment.

Isaiah 2:2 It shall happen in the latter days, that the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills;

and all nations shall flow to it- God's intention was that all nations (a phrase which usually refers to all nations around Israel, those within the *eretz* promised to Abraham) would come to worship in the restored temple. It would be raised up above the mountains and hills in that the nations would 'raise up' Zion in the sense of worshipping. The nations would "flow" as a broad stream; later Isaiah in Is. 66:12 sees this as the possibility which could come about after the exile, if the exiles repented and restored Zion and the temple as Ezekiel 40-48 commanded.

The Ezekiel prophecies of Ez. 40-48 had an intended and possible fulfilment at the time of the restoration under Ezra, but this was nullified by Israel's lack of response; and therefore, at least in principle, the prophecies had their fulfilment delayed until the second coming. This enables the prophecies to fit in with others which speak of some kind of centralized worship system after Jesus returns (e.g. Is. 2:2-4; 56:7). Or it could be that these prophecies of Isaiah are likewise talking about what was potentially possible for a restored, obedient Israel; particularly at the time of the restoration from Babylon. The lesson that comes out of all this is the extent to which God is willing to work with us, to tailor His purpose according to how far we are prepared to work with Him, and in that sense to allow Himself to be limited by us. There could be no greater inspiration to a maximal commitment to His purpose and His work.

The returned exiles didn't build according to Ez. 40-48. And their behaviour meant that the small temple they did build was not exalted in the eyes of the nations around. And so these prophecies come true in essence in a spiritual sense. The New Testament quotes several passages evidently prophetic of the future Kingdom as having their fulfillment in the preaching of the Gospel today. Is. 2:2-4 (the word of Yahweh *will* go out from Jerusalem) is alluded to by the Lord as the basis for the ecclesia's witness to the world today, "beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:47). This, the Lord said, was in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets- and He could only be referring to those like Isaiah.

The Jews mixed with the people of the land, they didn't teach them the Name, and so the restoration prophecies like Jer. 12:14-17 didn't come true- they weren't built up in the midst of Israel as intended. Prophecies like Is. 19:18,24 were thereby disabled from fulfilment at that time- "In that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt that… swear to the Lord…in that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria". Is. 2:2-4, Zech. 8:21-23 etc. speak of how Gentile nations would desire to learn the ways of God and come up to a temple in Zion for this purpose. Could it not be that these passages are to be read in the context of Jer. 12:14-17- that all this was only possible if at the time of the restoration the nations had learnt God's ways from the Jews? In this case these passages are not to be taken as 'proof' that there has to be a future temple built in Zion. And the 'establishing' of God's 'house' is the language of the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7:13,16,26; and that finally speaks more of the establishment of the 'house' in the sense of family, through the great seed, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 2:3 Many peoples shall go and say, Come, let's go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem- This has the ring of psychological reality to it. People learning the Gospel very often share their new found knowledge with others. Time and time again this happens. And here we see the same; people will spread the good news to each

other *as they begin to understand* the Gospel (Is. 2:3; Jer. 50:5; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 8:21). Their response to having heard the word is to go up to the temple to receive more teaching there. The Mosaic law will surely not function after the Lord returns; it ended at His death. So this initially describes the potential possible after Judah had repented. The temple system could have been exalted, and the surrounding peoples taught God's law. But it didn't happen. The Gentiles came to Hezekiah in Jerusalem, but he didn't teach them God's law, and the people continued in idolatry; and so the people were condemned to exile in Babylon, and then later Isaiah speaks of the reestablishment of the Kingdom. At that time, all peoples were envisaged as coming to the rebuilt temple. But these things didn't happen, because Judah didn't build the temple as outlined in Ez. 40-48, nor did they repent. And they were not welcoming to Gentiles. The essence of these words is fulfilled in people coming to the temple of God, which today is the people of God; and perhaps when the Lord returns there will be a place of centralized teaching in Jerusalem. The only other use of the phrase "the law shall go forth" is in Is. 51:4, which clearly speaks of this happening at the restoration from Babylon. But it didn't. Perhaps the prophetic potential therefore never will come true; or it may be fulfilled in a reapplied and rescheduled manner.

Isaiah 2:4 He will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plough shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more- The Mosaic system featured a system of justice whereby those with issues against others could have them resolved. The Gentile nations around Israel were to have access to this same system, if they accepted the God of Israel. "Decide" is literally 'to plead' (s.w. Mic. 6:2). His judgments are in order to plead with them for repentance. The result of that judgment will be positive, as the judgment upon Israel was intended to have a positive spiritual outcome. God's judgments lead to the nations learning righteousness (Is. 26:9), or 'being taught righteousness'. The practical outcome of that judgment will be that therefore they will beat their swords into plough shares; and devote themselves to learning of God (:2,3) rather than of war. This is the revere of the latter day situation in Joel 3:10, where the enemies of Israel beat their plough shares into swords. The connection could be in that we are to understand Is. 2:4 as saying that the enemies of Israel, her previous invaders referred to as "the nations" around her, will reverse their aggression against Israel and instead come to accept Israel's God.

Isaiah 2:5 O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!- The rest of the chapter, and indeed the whole prophecy, beseech Israel to act as they should as “the house of the Lord” in view of their future glory. Gentiles would come to worship in God’s house, i.e. in the community of His people, and therefore they ought to live the Kingdom life themselves. Thus following straight on from the prophecy of how Gentiles would come to “the house of the God of Jacob”, there is an appeal in 2:5 for the “house of Jacob” to walk in God’s ways themselves. This was Isaiah's continued appeal to Judah to repent; to walk in the light so that this wonderful potential restoration could come about. In Hezekiah's time, Judah generally wouldn't walk in the light; but the restoration prophecies spoke of a restored Judah after the exile doing just this, along with the surrounding nations also walking in Zion's light (Is. 42:16; 58:8; 60:3). But again, Judah didn't do this, they walked in darkness (Is. 59:9), and :6-8 suggests they preferred idolatry to walking in the light; and so the prophetic potential wasn't realized at the time.

Isaiah 2:6 For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled from the east with those who practice divination like the Philistines, and they shake hands with the children of foreigners- This idolatry (:8) went on at the same time as great apparent zeal in Yahweh worship, offering expensive animal sacrifices (Is. 1:11-13). Isaiah and other prophets were stating clearly what would be Judah's fate; and yet they turned to divination and the wisdom of the East to try to tell the future, acting no better than their historical enemies the Philistines- who were renowned for their claims to foretell the future by divination (1 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 1:2). See on Is. 3:2. "Filled" is the same word we find twice in :7; they were totally committed to these things. It was this rejection of Yahweh's word which led Him to forsake His people; and He likewise is just as sensitive towards our attitude to His word today. Striking hands with foreigners refers to the making of alliances with other nations, which was the prostitution noted on Is. 1:21.

The LXX is more concrete as to what was going on. Judah had returned the land to how it was before Israel had first entered it, acting like the Canaanites, marrying them and having children by them: "For he has forsaken his people the house of Israel, because their land is filled as at the beginning with divinations, as the land of the Philistines, and many strange children were born to them".

Isaiah 2:7 Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures- In the midst of Judah's prosperity, with a land "filled with silver and gold" perhaps from the control of the Red Sea trading posts (2 Kings 14:22), visions of doom haunted Isaiah's soul; he couldn't just go along with the swing of things, knowing that all that wealth was an illusion and being used as an antithesis to faith. Now that's something we see all the time around us and in the brotherhood; but is our soul touched like his was? Do we know the spirit of the prophets? The land full of wealth parallels the land full of idols (:8). The idols were nearly all connected with fertility cults. The idea was that by serving them, prosperity would be experienced. And it appeared to work. But in fact this was all a reflection of deep unspirituality rather than faith. The same may be true of the apparent blessings of unspiritual people today.

Their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots- Multiplying horses and chariots was explicitly forbidden to Israel (Dt. 17:16,17; 20:1), because they were to trust instead on the cherubim Angels fighting for them. Is. 31:1 is explicit that these horses and chariots were Egyptian; they had turned to Egypt for help against Assyria rather than trust in God's heavenly armies.

Isaiah 2:8 Their land also is full of idols, they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made- See on :7. The essence of idolatry is a worship of human works rather than simple faith in God. And that is why the challenge of idolatry is real for all human history.

Isaiah 2:9 Man is brought low, and mankind is humbled; therefore don't forgive them- It makes a good exercise to go through Isaiah 2 and look at all the times when words like 'bow down' and 'lift up' are used. Judah are condemned for 'bowing down' before the idols, when in fact they were 'lifted up' in pride (Is. 2:9,11). We seem to have in :6-9 Isaiah's prayer to God after his appeal for Israel to repent in :5 went unheeded; he asks God not to forgive the people, because they bowed down to

their idols rather than to God, despite having the prospect of the Kingdom placed before them in :2-4.

Isaiah 2:10 Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty- Having asked God not to forgive Judah because of their impenitence, Isaiah now appeals again (as in :5) for their repentance. He asks them to act as if the theophany of judgment day is upon them; *then* they would repent, and Isaiah asks them to do so right now. They did not respond, because the same appeal is made to the judged and exiled community in Is. 40. The whole purpose of the Gospel is to bring down the mountains of human pride and lift up the valleys of those who lack any self-respect (Is. 40:4), thereby making an equality of attitude amongst God's people. The vision of the Kingdom in Is. 2:2-4 was used as an appeal for *humility* amongst Israel (2:10-12). And it should so appeal to us today.

At the day of judgment, we will all go through the Moses experience; hiding in the rock in the presence of God's glory (Is. 2:10 cp. Ex. 33:22). And our vision of that glory in the face of the Lord Jesus *even now* should have the same humbling effect. For the manifestation of glory to Moses is alluded to in John's gospel as pointing forward to the glory of God now perceived in the face of Jesus Christ. Isaiah besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into* the holes of *the rock*... for *fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment.

Isaiah 2:11 The lofty looks of man will be brought low, the arrogance of men will be bowed down, and Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day- If this is to happen "in that day", then we are to humble ourselves now. See on :10. John the Baptist's message was that the valleys are to be lifted up, and the mountains made low, thus creating a plain. I read this as meaning that those with too low a view of themselves are to be lifted up, and the heights of human pride brought down. The over confident and under confident alike are to leveled so that they can be a path for the Lord's glory. "Made low" in Is. 40:4 is surely in the spirit of Is. 2:11, which predicts that in the day of judgment, "the lofty looks of man shall be humbled [s.w. 'made low'], and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down". The experience of condemnation in the coming day of the Lord will mean that "the proud and lofty" will be "brought low" (Is. 2:12,17; 5:15). In fact, Isaiah is full of references to the proud being 'made low' by judgment- the same Hebrew word is common: Is. 10:33; 13:11; 25:11; 26:5. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he said that our preaching is a bringing down of every high thing that is exalted against God (2 Cor. 10:5). Our message is basically that we must be humbled one way or the other- either by our repentance and acceptance of the Gospel today, or through the experience of condemnation at the day of judgment. We're calling people to humility.

Isaiah 2:12 For there will be a day of Yahweh of Armies for all that is proud and haughty, and for all that is lifted up; and it shall be brought low- If everything and everyone proud is going to be brought down "in that day", then we should live today as if that future day is upon us. For it is, in essence. We have to note the huge emphasis upon the need for humility. Israel had lost their hold on true doctrine, many scarcely knew the Law (Is. 57:4,5; 59:3). They got drunk at the temple feasts (Is.

36:10-12; 58:3,4), like Corinth they had an "eat, drink, for tomorrow we die" mentality (Is. 22:12,13); they committed all manner of sexual perversions, along with almost every other form of doctrinal and moral apostasy (Is. 5:11-13,24; 8:19; 9:15; 22:12,13; 24:5; 27:11; 28:7; 30:10; 31:6; 44:8-20; consider the similarities with Corinth). This list is worth reading through. And consider the terrible implications of their perversion in Is. 66:17. But the early chapters of Isaiah sternly rebuke Israel for their *pride*- there is not a whisper of all these other things until later (Is. 2:11-22; 3:16-20; 5:15; 9:9). And even throughout the later rebukes, there is the repeated criticism of their pride (Is. 13:11; 16:6; 23:9; 24:4; 25:11; 26:5; 28:1,3,14; 29:4; 30:25; 50:33; 57:15). This is why Isaiah's prophecies of Christ stress His humility (Acts 8:33), and the "lofty", "high", "exaltation" of God. These words, common in Isaiah, are those translated “pride" in Isaiah's condemnations of Israel's arrogance; as if to say that *God* was the only one who could be 'proud'.

Isaiah 2:13 for all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, for all the oaks of Bashan- The cedars of Lebanon in the temple became iconic, to the point that they are put by metaphor for the temple itself (Zech. 11:1). Judah were so proud of the temple (see on Jer. 7:4). The destruction of the temple was required to humble Judah. "High and lifted up" is the same phrase used of the exaltation of Yahweh in glory in Is. 6:1. What is high and lifted up in human eyes is to be brought down before the glory of Yahweh. It is used in Ez 10:16 about the cherubim, which appear to morph into the seraphim of the Is. 6 vision (see on Is. 6:2). And it is used in Is. 37:23 of how the Assyrians were high and lifted up against Yahweh, and would be brought down- just as the pride of Judah was to be, before the high and lifted up glory of Yahweh. Both Jews and Gentiles would thereby be humbled and the intention was that together they would form part of a restored Kingdom of God in Judah.

Isaiah 2:14 for all the high mountains, for all the hills that are lifted up- The "high places" of Israel are typically associated in the prophets with idol worship. But in Is. 2:14 they are spoken of as places of pride which needed to be brought down. There is therefore a connection between idolatry and pride; believing in one God is associated with no idolatry and thereby humility.

Isaiah 2:15 for every lofty tower, for every fortified wall- The defences of Jerusalem were legendary; and they too were to be brought down, continuing this theme of humility being imposed everywhere and in every way.

Isaiah 2:16 for all the ships of Tarshish and for all pleasant imagery- I suggested on :7 that Judah became a land “filled with silver and gold” perhaps from the control of the Red Sea trading posts (2 Kings 14:22). But the trading ships, "the ships of Tarshish" and their "watchtowers", standing proudly on the ships, were to be brought down. LXX and GNB have "fine ships" for "pleasant imagery". Note that ships of Tarshish mean simply long distance trading vessels. "Tarshish" may have been Tartessus in Spain, and so a long distance vessel would have been called a Tarshish boat; just as in 18th century England, an "Indiaman" referred to a long distance trading boat, so named because the longest distance vessels sailed to India.

Isaiah 2:17 The pride of man shall be bowed down, and the arrogance of men shall be brought low- If we don’t humble *ourselves* now, then God will do this to us through the process of condemnation at the judgment. In this lies the insistent logic of

humility. The theme of ‘bringing down’ pride is a major one in the first half of Isaiah (Is. 2:17; 13:11; 25:5,12; 29:4; 32:19). These passages pave the way for the announcement that in man’s response to the Gospel of Christ, “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Is. 40:4). By the hills of human pride being brought down, and the giving of confidence to those so low in the valleys of hopelessness and lack of self respect, there is a leveling of all those who respond to Christ. But more than this; in this lifting up of the hopeless and bringing down of the proud, there is a foretaste of what will happen in the future day of judgment. In essence, “we make the answer now” by whether or not we bring down our pride, or whether we summon the faith in God’s grace and imputed righteousness to believe that we, who are nothing, are lifted up in His sight. “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low” (James 1:9-10).

And Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day- The idea may be, 'exalted as one'. There will come a day when all the world realizes that God is one (Is. 37:20 Heb.)- in that they will realize that He alone is God and all else is pure vanity. Because God alone is holy, only He will be worshipped then (Rev. 15:4). "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Is. 2:11,17). There is a connection therefore between the unity of God and humility in practice.

Isaiah 2:18 The idols shall utterly pass away- In :19, the AV reads "And they shall go into the holes...". The worshippers of idols are spoken of as if they are the idols; people become like the gods they worship (Ps. 135:18).

Isaiah 2:19 Men shall go into the caves of the rocks and into the holes of the earth from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily- See on :18. This was what Isaiah foresaw as coming upon Judah in his day. But it didn't; the full extent of judgment was averted, by the repentance and intercession of a minority. But the essence of these words, as of all prophecy, will come true in the last days. This passage is therefore alluded to in a latter day context in Rev. 6:16.

This hiding in the rocks is the language of condemnation; Is. 7:19 says that even hidden there, they would be attacked by the Assyrians and Egyptians. But it seems many of them were saved from this by grace, and by the repentance of a remnant. Later Isaiah applies it to the judged exiles in Babylon (Is. 42:22); but with the good news that even from that humbled, condemned position- they could be exalted and returned to the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 2:20 In that day men shall cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold which have been made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats- The wealthy will hide in caves and throw their gold and silver to the animals before the awesome presence of Yahweh's glory, with unclean moles and bats gawping at all the discarded wealth of the humans. Dynamically translating this into our terms, I think we can speak of men being ashamed of their bank balances, stock portfolios, expensive cars and furnishings, holiday homes... when finally (and all too late for many) the penny drops, that all this is shameful, all the pride, wealth and human armament / defenses of man are things to be terribly awkward about before God. But for us, the essence of judgment day is now, as we face up to God's glory in the face of our Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 2:21 to go into the caverns of the rocks and into the clefts of the ragged rocks, from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily- The allusion is to Moses and Elijah; perhaps both of them went into the rocks with a sense of penitence, as they came close to Yahweh's glory. Moses was brought to cower in the rocks, just as the unworthy will do (Ex. 33:22 = Is. 2:21); and he only saw the back, not the face of God, which is the attitude God adopts to those He rejects (Jer. 18:17). And only in this position could Moses see the vision of God's moral glory. Those visions of glory are alluded to in John's Gospel as what we too can see in the face of the Lord Jesus; and we likewise should be thereby convicted of our sin, and yet also of His glory and certain salvation.

Isaiah 2:22 Stop trusting in man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he?- Our faith in God is mitigated against by our misplaced faith in humanity. We would rather trust a doctor, a repair man, a kind neighbour, before throwing ourselves upon God as a last resort. "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of" (Is. 2:22) compared to the great God of Israel?

ISAIAH CHAPTER 3

Isaiah 3:1 For, behold, the Lord Yahweh of Armies takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah supply and support, the whole supply of bread, and the whole supply of water- And yet Hezekiah's tunnel aimed to make Jerusalem have a water supply that could not be cut off by invaders and besiegers. 2 Kings 20:20 credits him for how he made "the pool, and the conduit, and brought water into the city". It would seem that he did this as it were to get around what Isaiah prophesied here. The reality was that Jerusalem was saved by grace, and also by the repentance and intercession of a minority; and so food and water were not totally removed from the city. Jerusalem's salvation was not, therefore, by dint of Hezekiah's ingenuity in apparently avoiding the judgments here given. Finally these words came true at the Babylonian invasion; see on Is. 1:1.

Isaiah 3:2 The mighty man, the man of war, the judge, the prophet, the diviner, the elder- This continues the theme of Is. 2, that all human strength in whatever form was to be brought down and humbled, so that Judah would trust in Yahweh alone. We note that 'diviners' and 'enchanters' (:3) featured within the leadership of the people; see on Is. 2:6.

Isaiah 3:3 The captain of fifty, the honourable man, the counsellor, the skilled craftsman and the clever enchanter- Enchanters and diviners (:2) were embedded throughout society. As lamented on Is. 2:6, Isaiah and other prophets were stating clearly what would be Judah's fate; and yet they turned to divination and the wisdom of the East to try to tell the future, acting no better than their historical enemies the Philistines- who were renowned for their claims to foretell the future by divination (1 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 1:2).

Isaiah 3:4 I will give boys to be their princes, and children shall rule over them- LXX "mockers". This didn't come true in Hezekiah's time because the potential scenario didn't happen at the time due to some repentance; but it could be seen as having a fulfilment in the young sons of Josiah ruling Judah in the last days before the

Babylonian invasion. But "children" is s.w. "delusions" in Is. 66:4. As noted on :3, they deluded themselves by false teaching and supposed revelations from idols; and God would allow these delusions to take a psychological grip upon them which would dominate them.

Isaiah 3:5 The people will be oppressed, everyone by another, and everyone by his neighbour- Oppression of each other was the characteristic of society (Is. 1:17,21,23). But the same word is used of the oppression of Judah by their enemies; their judgment was but an extension of how they themselves had lived.

The child will behave himself proudly against the old man, and the base against the honourable- The picture is of anarchy in the final days of the siege of Jerusalem. But this didn't happen, because Jerusalem was saved from this judgment by grace. However the idea of the elderly not being respected is likely a way of saying that the principles of the Law would be ignored (Lev. 19:32)

Isaiah 3:6 Indeed a man shall take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, You have clothing, you be our ruler, and let this ruin be under your hand- See on :5. This is a picture of the final days of the siege of Jerusalem. The royal family would be no more. And yet even in the fulfilment under the Babylonians, Zedekiah was preserved by grace. "Ruin" is literally a stumblingblock (s.w. Zeph. 1:3), and refers specifically to Jerusalem as a city (:8). Their pride in the city of Zion was their stumblingblock. In the restored Jerusalem there would be no more such a stumblingblock (Is. 57:14) because God would live in the hearts of His people rather than in any restored building.

Isaiah 3:7 In that day he will cry out, saying, I will not be a healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing. You shall not make me ruler of the people- Instead of everyone jockeying for position in the leadership, nobody would want it. This again is a feature of all condemnation- that what was so desperately sought after in this life will be seen to be of no value, just as gold and silver will be thrown to the animals (Is. 2:20).

Isaiah 3:8 For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen- For the significance of Jerusalem being a ruin, see on :6. The historical Judah fell before Joseph in repentance (Gen. 44:14 s.w.). In all God's judgments there is the hope of restoration, and this must ever be our hope and intention if ever we have to judge righteous judgment over issues we face.

Because their tongue and their doings are against Yahweh- The fact is, by our words we will be condemned and by our use of words we will be counted as righteous. The importance of our words cannot be overstressed. Judah were condemned "because their tongue and their words are against the Lord" (Is. 3:8). All their idolatry, perversion etc. was summarized in their words. Again and again, Isaiah and the prophets say that the reason for Israel's condemnation was their words, even those they said under their breath- "your tongue hath muttered perverseness" (Is. 5:24). "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue" (Hos. 7:16). "The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins" (Mic. 6:12,13). Truly "death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. 18:21).

To provoke the eyes of His glory- LXX "Cloud of glory". The *shekinah* glory was still present in the temple in Isaiah's time, perhaps reflecting how God's Angel eyes still were literally present there; and they were provoked by Judah's behaviour and words.

Isaiah 3:9 The look of their faces testify against them. They parade their sin like Sodom. They don't hide it- They were witnesses against themselves. Their body language indicated their abandonment to sin; Jeremiah says they had a "whore's forehead" (Jer. 3:3). It was this psychological hardening in sin and impenitence which merited condemnation, rather than the occasional failures of an otherwise righteous person. But again we recall the grace of Is. 1:9,10- that although they were as Sodom, they would not be judged as Sodom because of the remnant and God's grace.

Woe to their soul! For they have brought judgment upon themselves- Isaiah repeatedly pronounces "woe" upon the people (Is. 3:9; 5:8,11,18,20,21,22; 8:11), and yet in that very context he can exclaim: "Woe is *me*" in chapter 6; he identified with them to the point of also feeling unworthy and under woe [in this clearly typifying the Lord's identity with us].

Isaiah 3:10 Tell the righteous Good! For they shall eat the fruit of their deeds- Just as the wicked were witnesses against themselves (:9). LXX: "Woe to their soul, for they have devised an evil counsel against themselves, saying against themselves, Let us bind the just, for he is burdensome to us: therefore shall they eat the fruits of their works". This would imply that they persecuted "the just", perhaps Isaiah and the righteous remnant of prophets, just as they were to later do to Jeremiah in the Babylonian context. Isaiah was killed by Manasseh, according to Jewish tradition.

Isaiah 3:11 Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them; for the deeds of his hands will be paid back to him- The impression given in these verses is that pay back time will come for the righteous and the wicked, with eternal outcomes. This is nothing less than saying that the day of judgment was about to come. The same word for "paid back" is used of what would happen in the day when Yahweh would be revealed and Judah saved (Is. 35:4; 59:18; 66:6). But that day was deferred in Isaiah's time, as Assyria didn't destroy Jerusalem; and the full nature of it likewise didn't fall at the time of the Babylonian invasion, to which Is. 1-35 was reapplied (see on Is. 1:1). But it will come finally true at the last day.

Isaiah 3:12 As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them- As noted on :7, instead of everyone jockeying for position in the leadership, nobody would want it. This again is a feature of all condemnation- that what was so desperately sought after in this life will be seen to be of no value, just as gold and silver will be thrown to the animals (Is. 2:20). But as suggested on :5, the "oppressors" were to be their invaders, oppressing them as they had each other. Even young men in the Babylonian army and perhaps women amongst them, would oppress the defeated people.

My people, those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths- As noted on Is. 1:1, despite the attempts at reform by individual kings, the leadership structure was apostate and was not reformed. The implication of this verse is that the ordinary people ought to have refused that leadership.

Isaiah 3:13 Yahweh stands up to contend, and stands to judge the peoples- As a judge

stands to deliver a verdict. The "peoples" around Judah were to be judged at the same time, and thus would have been ushered in God's restored Kingdom, which would have included penitent individuals from amongst "the peoples".

Isaiah 3:14 Yahweh will enter into judgement with the elders of His people, and their leaders- Despite the attempts at reform by individual kings, the leadership structure was apostate and was not reformed. The implication of this verse is that the ordinary people ought to have refused that leadership. For God was punishing the whole society, and not just a corrupt leadership.

It is you who have eaten up the vineyard. The spoil of the poor is in your houses- The language of eating up and spoiling is used of the invaders; again, judgment was to be in essence what Judah had done to each other.

Isaiah 3:15 What do you mean that you crush My people, and grind the face of the poor? says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies- LXX "shame the face of the poor". Out of all the things the leadership could have been condemned for, not least gross idolatry, God focuses upon their attitude to the vulnerable and taking advantage of them. And not just in the material theft from them; but in shaming them. That was so obnoxious to God. His judgment differs from how we would have judged the situation, because shaming a poor man would likely have been far down the list of sins we would have listed.

Isaiah 3:16 Moreover Yahweh said, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and flirting eyes, walking to trip as they go, jingling ornaments on their feet- Reflection upon the omniscience of God leads us to marvel at His sensitivity to human behaviour. He noticed even the body language of the women in Is. 3:16- and condemned them for the way they walked. This is how closely He observes human behaviour. This is the language of prostitution. The daughter of Zion had become a whore through seeking alliances with the surrounding nations. See on Is. 1:21. But it seems such luxury had become possible in Uzziah's prosperous reign (2 Chron. 26:5).

Isaiah 3:17 Therefore the Lord brings sores on the crown of the head of the women of Zion, and Yahweh will make their scalps bald- LXX "The Lord will expose their form", display them as naked, as foreseen also in Jer. 13:22,26. This was the punishment for prostitution; see on :16. Sores on the crown of the head again recalls Job, who is set up as representative of Judah, although personally righteous. Isaiah likewise was faithful but was asked to walk naked, as representative of his condemned people (see on Is. 20:2).

Isaiah 3:18 In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets, the headbands, the crescent necklaces- Crescent necklaces recall the jewelry taken from the Midianites by Gideon. These women are portrayed as prostitutes, in that Jerusalem had prostituted herself to the nations around her in hope of getting help against Assyria. And the price for that was that they adopted their gods and symbols, which they willingly did.

Isaiah 3:19 The earrings, the bracelets, the veils- We marvel at how God noticed the

body language of these people (:9,16) and also their precise jewelry. And His record of these things has been preserved all the centuries to this day. He knows all things.

Isaiah 3:20 The headdresses, the ankle chains, the sashes, the perfume bottles, the charms- These charms were part of their attraction to divination and soothsaying. Isaiah and other prophets were stating clearly what would be Judah's fate; and yet they turned to divination and the wisdom of the East to try to tell the future, acting no better than their historical enemies the Philistines- who were renowned for their claims to foretell the future by divination (1 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 1:2). See on Is. 3:2.

Isaiah 3:21 The signet rings, the nose rings- Signet rings meant that these women were within the royal family, and is evidence that Hezekiah's reforms didn't even touch his own family.

Isaiah 3:22 The fine robes, the capes, the cloaks, the purses- AV "the changeable suits of apparel", as if they had multiple sets of clothing.

Isaiah 3:23 The hand mirrors, the fine linen garments, the tiaras, and the shawls- LXX "The Spartan transparent dresses, and those made of fine linen, and the purple ones, and the scarlet ones, and the fine linen, interwoven with gold and purple, and the light coverings for couches". This all recalls the priestly garments and the tapestry of the tabernacle. And yet they were being used as part of the prostitution of these women. They mixed the things of Yahweh worship with their idolatry, and the "Spartan dresses" were clearly part of idol worship. This was how they justified accepting the gods of the nations- they worshipped them in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is our abiding temptation.

Isaiah 3:24 It shall happen that instead of sweet spices, there shall be rottenness; instead of a belt, a rope; instead of well set hair, baldness; instead of a robe, a wearing of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty- They were to go into captivity in shame, ropes upon their heads, and perhaps literally with shaved heads and branded as if in a Nazi concentration camp. The similarity is so exact that it is clear that this prophecy had some incipient fulfilment then, in the humiliation of Europe's wealthy Jewish women; but the worst is yet to come, when all these prophetic words come to their climax in the last day.

Isaiah 3:25 Your men shall fall by the sword, and your mighty in the war- LXX "And thy most beautiful son whom thou lovest shall fall by the sword". The prophecy initially applied to the times of the Assyrian invasion under Hezekiah, but was reapplied to the Babylonian invasion. In this case, we have here a prophecy of the death of Zedekiah similar to that made by Jeremiah. But by grace, Zedekiah was spared, and did not die by the sword, although many of the royal family did. The prophesy about him, like that about Nineveh's destruction in forty days, was changed in outcome because he repented; just as Jeremiah had said God operates.

Isaiah 3:26 Her gates shall lament and mourn; and she shall be desolate and sit on the ground- LXX "levelled with the ground". This didn't happen when the Assyrians invaded, but the prophecy came true in the Babylonian invasion. Often Jeremiah in Lamentations laments that the walls had not just been knocked down a bit, but had actually been levelled with the ground, at the cost of huge effort by the Babylonians.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 4

Isaiah 4:1 Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own clothing: only let us be called by your name. Take away our reproach- The implication was that there were so few men that women were so outnumbered. The law stipulated that a polygamous man must provide bread and clothing for all his wives (Ex. 21:10); but the desperation of the situation led them to accept that the law of Moses no longer functioned. They were driven by the judgments to throw themselves upon God's grace in the Messianic "branch" (:2) rather than the Law.

Isaiah 4:2 In that day, Yahweh's branch will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the beauty and glory of the survivors of Israel- The revival of Judah's kingdom, based around a Messianic "Branch" and a remnant, would happen "in that day". This is the day of :1, when Jerusalem would be overcome and left in ruins with hardly any men left. We noted throughout Is. 3 that there would be no leadership in Jerusalem; the royal family were to be no more. And yet a branch was to arise, the branch of Is. 11:1, which was to arise out of the moribund stump of the house of David. "The fruit of the land" may refer to the children who would be brought forth, and in whom the remnant would glory. These "survivors" are those saved from the ruins of a desolated Jerusalem, those who "escaped" the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 10:20; 37:31,32); the same word is used in Joel 2:32; Obadiah 17, the "remnant" of Ez. 14:22 (s.w.). The destruction of Jerusalem was intended to elicit repentance and to lead seamlessly into a revived Zion and reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel, when again all things would be "glorious" (s.w. Is. 24:23; 35:2). But this didn't happen. Jerusalem was saved by grace, and yet Hezekiah failed to act as "Yahweh's branch", and Judah were impenitent, unmoved by their salvation by grace. The fruit on the "branch" is spiritual fruit, of the kind the Lord didn't find on the fig tree. When there is such fruit on the fig tree, that generation will see the Lord's return. Hence Is. 4 goes on to speak of the repentant remnant- they are the fruit on the Messianic branch.

And so the prophecies were reapplied to Judah's destruction by Babylon, when again a Messianic branch could have arisen (s.w. Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). The branch was to be "glorious", the word used about the glory of Yahweh being revealed at the restoration (Is. 40:5; 58:8; 60:1). But again, no "branch" appeared. Zerubbabel, "branch from Babylon", failed to live up to his potential. And so the final fulfilment will be at the revelation of the Lord Jesus at the time of Zion's final desolation. The fruit of the earth / land was to be abundant, as promised for the restoration (Ez. 34:27). But this didn't happen; the restoration prophets lament the famine at the time of the restoration, for Judah returned to the land without returning to their God.

The LXX reads as if the tribulation is so in order "to exalt and glorify the remnant of Israel". The idea is that all Jews will be slain in the tribulation until only the repentant remnant are left.

Isaiah 4:3 It will happen, that he who is left in Zion, and he who remains in Jerusalem shall be called holy, even everyone who is written among the living in Jerusalem- LXX "the remnant left". The impression from :1 is that there would literally be very

few Jews left alive, and those who were would become the "remnant", and be written among the living, in the book of life, made spiritually acceptable by their purification in the holocaust to come upon the city (:4). In the latter day application, this group would then be immortalized, written among the eternally living. It could have happened at the time of the Assyrian invasion; but Judah didn't repent. The same scenario is in Zech. 13:8,9, where a third part [perhaps just meaning "a remnant"] would pass through the fire and thereby come to "call upon My Name". That too could have happened, perhaps at the time of Antiochus' invasion; but it didn't. It will therefore come true in the last days.

Isaiah 4:4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from its midst, by the spirit of justice, and by the spirit of burning- See on :3. Those who survived the holocaust to come upon Jerusalem would be spiritually purged and thus become the righteous remnant. The filth of the daughters of Zion had just been explained in Is. 3. Potentially, those very women of Isaiah's time could have been spiritually purged by the Assyrian invasion; but they weren't. And so the prophecy was reapplied and rescheduled to the time of the Babylonian invasion, which was intended to "purge" Judah (Jer. 51:34 s.w.) with a spirit / wind of burning (s.w. Ez. 5:2); and when that didn't happen, to our last days. Although it could perhaps also have come true at the times of Jerusalem's other desolations under the Greeks and Romans.

It was Yahweh who could wash them; but He would do that if they had the desire to wash themselves (s.w. Is. 1:16). They had to show justice to others (Is. 1:17); and if they wished to do that, then God would purge them with His "spirit of justice". God will confirm us in the way in which we wish to go.

"Burning" is s.w. "put away", and is used of the putting away of the guilt of innocent blood (Dt. 21:9). The repentanec of the remnant will involve the recognition that Israel indeed slew the ultimately innocent blood. This is the coming day that burns as an oven (Mal. 4:1 s.w.). It is the word often used of the burning of God's wrath against Jerusalem; but the word also means to "put away" sin, in that His latter day judgments will bring about the destruction of the wicked and purging of the remnant who do repent. Hence the stress upon this process happening in Zion and Jerusalem. Convinction of sin will therefore be the intention of the tribulation; the same phrase "spirit of judgment" is used of how thereby Yahweh will "declare unto Jacob his sin" (Mic. 3:8).

Isaiah 4:5 Yahweh will create over the whole habitation of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy- See on :6. This is the language of the exodus from Egypt and the theophany at Sinai when they entered the old covenant. Perhaps it was literally intended that such a canopy would appear over the literal glory of Yahweh which would again appear in Zion; the same word is used of Yahweh appearing from the canopy around a redeemed Zion (Joel 2:16). The symbolism suggests that Israel had been released from abuse in Egypt, and were now about to enter a new covenant and the Kingdom of God in Israel. That could have come true at the time of both the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions; but Judah refused to accept that new covenant.

LXX is clearer in the application to the Lord's second coming in a cloud, just as the Angels predicted in Acts 1: "And he shall come, and it shall be with regard to every place of mount Sion, yea, all the region round about it shall a cloud overshadow

by day, and there shall be as it were the smoke and light of fire burning by night: and upon all the glory shall be a defence".

Isaiah 4:6 There will be a pavilion for a shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a refuge and for a shelter from storm and from rain- "Pavilion" is s.w. "shelter" in Is. 1:8. The entire "vineyard" of God's work was to be destroyed, apart from a "shelter"- which was Zion. But it is the "daughter of Zion", the faithful remnant, and not the literal Zion which is in view here. They were to be a "shelter", a place of refuge, for others (Is. 4:6 s.w.). The storm and rain therefore spoke of the judgments to come, the warranted condemnation, using the same figures as in the Lord's parable of the builders. But there was to be refuge in Zion. This was literally the case at the time of the Assyrian invasion, and it was intended to be the case spiritually. But so much more was possible then; God would have made a literal canopy over her (:5), and established His Kingdom then. But in Hezekiah's time, Zion was saved by grace alone. The daughter of Zion was not the refuge for others she could have been. Perhaps the idea is that the storm and rain which destroys her abusers will not harm Zion. The "heat" in the last days could refer to some kind of localized nuclear holocaust.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 5

Isaiah 5:1 Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard- This could be Isaiah's own inspired song, sung to God, summing up how he perceived things. And it is commented upon by God in :3, when the pronouns change and God speaks. But the "well beloved" is consistently Israel (Dt. 33:12; Ps. 127:2; Jer. 11:15; 12:7). Isaiah was perhaps singing this song to Israel, to get them to see their potential, to see themselves from outside of themselves. We need to look at our position before God likewise; for the message of the song is that actually, God has done everything to give us an optimal environment for spiritual fruitfulness. And yet we of course struggle to believe that, preferring to believe that if only we had a different career, home, domestic situation... we would be more fruitful. But God wants our fruitfulness; and He gives us the optimal environment for that.

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill- This may follow on from the allusions to the vineyard noted on Is. 4:6, the previous verse. The vineyard was able to bring forth spiritual fruit- Zion is described as a fruitful hill. "Fruitful hill" is a Hebrew phrase also translated "horn of oil". There is the hint that a Messiah / anointed figure could be connected with this vineyard.

Isaiah 5:2 He dug it up- LXX "fenced it".

Gathered out its stones, planted it with the choicest vine, built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein- As noted on :1, God has done everything to give us an optimal environment for spiritual fruitfulness, as He did to Judah at this time. For God wants our fruitfulness; and He gives us the optimal environment for that. Yet the vineyard of Judah was destroyed because they refused to be fruitful, and the Lord's parable of the vineyard clearly alludes to this. And the vineyard has now been given to a new Israel, for whom likewise everything has been done to make it fruitful. The gathering out of the stones means that the land was "good soil", "very fruitful" (:1). The parable of the sower alludes here- and the message is that we are all potentially the good ground. The watchtower and fence meant that it ought not to

have been spoilt by others- the fact the vineyard was about to be overrun meant that Judah had removed these things.

This was the situation at Isaiah's time; but God tried again at the restoration, gathering out the stones again (Is. 60:10). But again, Judah didn't respond. And so as the Lord's parable explains, the vineyard was given to others.

He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes- God acts as if surprised and bitterly disappointed, with so much work apparently in vain. The hewing out the winefat (Mk. 12:1) reflects His confident hope that fruit would be brought forth. He enters fully into our time-space limitations, so that He can legitimately express feelings of disappointment. This helps us understand the eagerness with which He looks to our spiritual response and growth. See on Jer. 2:21.

Isaiah 5:3 Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard- Note the change of pronouns; see on :1. They were asked to see themselves from outside themselves, and to understand that their lack of spiritual fruit was completely their fault. And thus they would judge themselves.

Isaiah 5:4 What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?- God doesn't force spiritual growth, rather does His Spirit enable the environments for it to occur; in another figure, He does all that could be thought of so that His vineyard brings forth good fruit. We of course may be tempted to doubt this, considering that if only this or that situation in our lives were different, we would be enabled to grow spiritually. But God knows best, and His Spirit works in various ways to provide [by 'providence'] the best situation for our growth and new creation.

Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes?- There even seems at times a difficulty on God's part to understand why the people He had loved could hate Him so much: "Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, We will no more come to thee?" (Jer. 2:31); "Why then has this people turned away?" (Jer. 8:5); "Why have they provoked me to anger?" (Jer. 8:19; Jer. 2:14; Jer. 30:6; Is. 5:4; Is. 50:2). "What more could I have done for my vineyard... why did it yield wild grapes?" (Is. 5:1-7). This is so much the anguished cry of bewildered middle age parents as they reflect upon a wayward child. This Divine struggle to understand reflects the extraordinary depth of His love for them; and it warns us in chilling terms as to the pain we can cause God if we spurn His amazing love.

Isaiah 5:5 Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down- The Lord's parable of the vineyard is shot through with allusions to the vineyard parable of Is. 5. When the Lord asks "What will [the owner of the vineyard] do?" (Mk. 12:9), those who picked up the Isaiah 5 allusions would have found the answer in Is. 5:4,5: "What… to do… what I will do". Ps. 80:12,13 takes the logic further- the fence was removed and wild beasts entered and destroyed the vineyard. We notice that the nations around Judah, especially the Assyrians and Babylonians, are the prototypes for the "beast" system of the last days. The same peoples are in view. God's taking away the hedge was done with a heavy heart- because such a huge amount of His work and concern was to thereby be destroyed. His judgments were not therefore painless to Himself. It was the Babylonians who broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and yet here this is presented as God doing so. We see here the principle of God manifestation; and this is why the Lord Jesus can be spoken of as functioning as

God, but this doesn't mean He is God personally, just as the Babylonians were not personally God.

Isaiah 5:6 I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briers and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it- This and the similar prophecy of desolation in Is. 7:23-25 didn't happen at the Assyrian invasion; it was reapplied to the situation after the Babylonian invasion, when the land was intended to rest (Lev. 26:34,43) until Judah repented. But even that program didn't work out, and so the Lord's parable of the vineyard explained that therefore the vineyard was given to a new Israel. Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Yet "briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (Is. 9:18; 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them; and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Isaiah 5:7 For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant- Ephraim, the ten tribes, were likewise God's "pleasant" child (Jer. 31:20 s.w.). The idea is that He intensely delighted in them; just as the owner of the vineyard had been almost obsessed with his vineyard, it was his pride and joy, and for it to be fruitless was tragic; for it was as if his whole life's passion had come to nothing.

There are many passages where God emphasizes the essential unity of Israel and Judah through the device of parallelism. This is one of them. "For the vineyard of Yahweh of armies

is the house of *Israel*,
and the men of *Judah*

His pleasant plant".

And He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness, but, behold, a cry of distress- God planted the vineyard of Israel, just as He creates the environment for the new Israel, because He sought (spiritual) fruit. And that fruit was summed up so often in one word: "justice" (Is. 5:2,7). The inspiration process uses various puns through which to bring home the subtlety of the difference between true spirituality and fake. Take Is. 5:7: "He looked for justice (*mishpat*) and found oppression (*mishpah*), for righteousness (*sdaqah*) and heard cries of distress (*saqah*)". The real aim of our life in Christ, our being a Christian, our prayer, our Bible reading, our attendance at meetings, our spirituality- however you want to look at it- the real aim is to develop a character in harmony with that of God, to manifest Him. This means not getting bitter, forgiving others, being quick to overlook, to read the best motives, to be patient with your husband, with your dog, with your cat, to be full of meditation on our peerless Lord Jesus, to love the Father's word as He did... this is what it's really all about. The occasional heights of self-sacrifice and devotion, the complete dedication of one's life and thinking to the things of " the Truth" , our church (or however we want to describe it), this isn't *necessarily* the same thing as being a really *spiritual,* Christ-centered person. It often takes new converts a long time to realize this; and the quicker we do so, the better. The essential state of our *heart* is what God is ultimately interested in. This is why men may perform the same outward actions, but be judged quite differently. Consider how both Cain and Jonah fled from the presence of God; both Peter and Judas denied the Lord; both Samuel and Eli failed to control their apostate sons.

Think of how *eager* the Father and Son have been to find spiritual fruit in us. Through the centuries of His involvement with Israel, God had expected to find the fruit of justice in the vineyard of Israel- but He found only poison berries (Is. 5:4), instead of justice He found abuse and oppression of others (Is. 5:7). And all that despite doing absolutely all He could for that vineyard. But according to Mt. 21:34-38, this didn't stop Him from having a hopeful, fruit-seeking attitude. He sent His servants the prophets to find the fruit- but they were beaten and murdered. He finally sent His Son, reasoning that "*surely* they will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37). But they murdered Him. I have suggested elsewhere that this language can only suggest that God in some sense limited His omniscience and omnipotence in order to fully enter into our dimensions; and hence His experience of dashed hope and deep disappointment. Amazing as the Father's hopefulness was, His Son's was even greater. This Father who had had all this experience of simply not getting any fruit, asked His vinedresser (the Lord Jesus) to cut down the tree of Israel, as for the three years of Christ's ministry He had sought fruit from them and not found any; and further, this tree was 'cumbering the ground', taking away nutrients which He could have given to another (Gentile) tree. But His servant argues back with Him; the servant asks to be allowed to dig and dung around the tree; and then, he says, '*You* can cut it down, although you asked *me* to do this job'. This was quite unusual for a servant to talk like this; but it's an insight into the way the Lord Jesus was even more hopeful than His longsuffering Father.

Isaiah 5:8 Woe to those who join house to house, who lay field to field until there is no room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land!- He repeatedly pronounces "woe" upon them (Is. 3:9; 5:8,11,18,20,21,22; 8:11), and yet in that very context he can exclaim: "Woe is *me*" in chapter 6; he identified with them to the point of also feeling unworthy and under woe [in this clearly typifying the Lord's identity with us]. Fields were to return to their original owners at the jubilee, but it seems fields were stolen and the landmarks rearranged, all in disobedience to the Mosaic law. The idea is as in GNB "Soon there will be no place for anyone else to live, and you alone will live in the land". Effectively the rich were driving the population into exile from the land; and that is what was to happen.

Isaiah 5:9 In my ears Yahweh of Armies says- The implication is that what Yahweh discreetly and intimately told Isaiah, he was preaching. It seems the Lord Jesus alludes to this in Mt. 10:27 and asks us each one to live in the spirit of prophets like Isaiah: "What I am telling you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight, and what you have heard in private you must announce from the housetops".

Surely many houses will be desolate, even great and beautiful ones, unoccupied- see on 1 Tim. 4:1. This didn't fully happen in the Assyrian invasion, because Jerusalem was saved, including its houses. But the destruction of the "great houses" of the wealthy is a major theme in Jeremiah, and in the record of Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians (see on Jer. 5:27; 52:13).

Isaiah 5:10 For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield an ephah- Although they had selfishly grabbed land (:8), that land was to become very low yielding. It has been calculated that ten acres of vineyard ought to yield an average of five hundred baths (or four thousand gallons) instead of one bath (eight gallons). If a homer of corn seed yielded only an ephah, then only a tenth of the

seed sown was being harvested. It wasn't worth planting them. And this is what all the condemned will realize; that what they so strove for in life will then become worthless. They will throw their silver and gold to the bats (Is. 2:20).

Isaiah 5:11 Woe to those who rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; who stay late into the night, until wine inflames them!- Israel are criticized for their early morning attitudes (see on Is. 50:4)- in the mornings they fantasized after their neighbours' wives (Jer. 5:8; Hos. 7:6), got up and wanted to get drunk again (Is. 5:11), had unjust thoughts about others (Jer. 21:12; Mic. 2:1). That's quite some emphasis- God was *so* unhappy with what His people thought about in the mornings. And Zeph. 3:7 is perhaps the most challenging of all- God condemned His people because they rose each morning and cast off all their opportunities (Heb.), despite Him every morning [potentially] revealing His word to them (Zeph. 3:5). They allowed themselves to be simply too busy to see all that God potentially enabled for them every single day. And what about us? God has prepared huge potential achievement for each of us- but we tend to fritter our days away in busyness and poor planning and lack of a self-disciplined life.

Isaiah 5:12 The harp, lyre, tambourine, and flute, with wine, are at their feasts; but they don't respect the work of Yahweh- The "but" suggests that their usage of these instruments was somehow connected to Yahweh worship, so the "feasts" were those of Yahweh. As Corinth turned the breaking of bread into a drunken orgy partly dedicated to idols, so Judah did the same with Yahweh's feasts, mixing them with idol worship; for musical instruments and drinking wine were not prescribed for the feasts of Yahweh.

Neither have they considered the operation of His hands- They did not regard Yahweh, and so He rejected them by no longer regarding or looking at them (s.w. Lam. 4:16). As Jeremiah so often demonstrates in his prophecy, condemnation was articulated in language which showed it to be but a continuation of attitudes and positions the condemned had already adopted in their lives.

Isaiah 5:13 Therefore My people go into captivity for lack of knowledge. Their honourable men are famished, and their multitudes are parched with thirst- This doesn't mean that they went into captivity for some intellectual failures in their theology. "Knowledge" is used in the Hebraic sense of relationship. The reasons why they were going into captivity have been listed so far in Isaiah, and they don't include failures in abstract theology. They were all practical reasons. The point was, they had no relationship with Yahweh. But Judah didn't go into captivity in Isaiah's time; the threatened judgment was delayed because at least a minority repented. We marvel at God's eagerness to respond to the slightest signs of genuine repentance, and this is how we should respond to others.

Isaiah 5:14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged its desire, and opened its mouth without measure; and their glory, their multitude, their pomp- This is a similar figure as in Hab. 2:5. The grave enlarged its desire; death, the punishment for sin, is personified as if it were the sinner itself. So the sin is parallel with its punishment; which is a major theme of the prophets. It wasn't that God was judging them by lashing out in anger; their judgment was in fact an extension of their own sin and essential lifestyle.

We note that *sheol* is the punishment for indulging sinful desires; *sheol* is the grave, death, and not eternal conscious punishment.

And he who rejoices among them, descend into it- The idea may be that this destruction was not just for the wealthy minority, but also for those who admired them. And there we have a challenge to us; for our society is full of people who congratulate opulent, sinful living and dearly wish to be able to live likewise. And that is just as culpable. See on :15.

Isaiah 5:15 So man is brought low, mankind is humbled, and the eyes of the arrogant ones are humbled- This is a different message to that in :14, which is of death as the punishment for sin. Here, God hopes that His people will be humbled, so that He can be exalted (:16). It was humility which He sought to inculcate by the judgments; and not humility just for its own sake, a few moments of humility before death- but the humility of repentance. The AV says that the "mean man" will be humbled; as noted on :14, those who rejoiced in the opulence of the wealthy and wished to be like that, would be likewise punished.

Isaiah 5:16 but Yahweh of Armies is exalted in justice, and God the Holy One is sanctified in righteousness- The message was that man would be humbled, and Yahweh exalted. Peter perhaps gives his take on this in saying that we are to allow ourselves to be humbled, so that *we* may be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). It is Yahweh who is to be exalted, not us; and yet through identification with His principles, we will be exalted. And so through executing judgment, 'the holy God shows Himself holy by righteousness'. To not punish sin would be unrighteous. And yet it is through that justice that in the grand economy of Divine salvation, we are saved by grace; see on Is. 4:4.

Isaiah 5:17 Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, and strangers will eat the ruins of the rich- This is a picture of the restored Kingdom. "Strangers" may refer to repentant Gentiles who would take over the ruins of the homes of the wealthy Jews who had been judged. But it may also have reference to the way in which when Babylon conquered Judah, they took into captivity the wealthy, and the poor masses of the people therefore took possession of their ruined properties. This was Babylonian policy, alluded to several times in Jeremiah.

Isaiah 5:18 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, and wickedness as with cart rope- The idea may be that they were dragging after them a load of sin by cords. But the original is unclear, and the allusion may be to a rope maker, introducing new material to the rope he is making ever longer. The sense would be that sin “is at the beginning like a fine hair-string, but at the finishing like a thick cart-rope". Sin is progressive; unless there is a sense of repentance, it becomes an ever downward spiral.

Isaiah 5:19 who say, Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it!- There was clearly opposition to Isaiah's prophecies. The idea of judgment coming would have been mocked in these kinds of words. But we wonder whether this is really a verbatim quotation from these people; or whether God read their thoughts as effectively saying this, and as being the real implication of their positions. For there is no evidence that Judah abandoned Yahweh; rather did they claim

obedience and loyalty to Him, although they claimed the same about their idols whom they worshipped in His Name.

God was not deaf to their words, or the implications of their thoughts and actions. He in fact heard their mocking 'prayer', because He later says that He will "hasten His work" (Is. 60:22 s.w.). Likewise their invitation for the word or "counsel" of God to "draw near and come" was fulfilled- when Yahweh did draw near to them in judgment (s.w. Is. 46:13; 57:3).

Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet- As noted on :19, we wonder whether this is really a verbatim quotation from these people; or whether God read their thoughts as effectively saying this, and as being the real implication of their positions. For there is no evidence that Judah consciously advocated doing evil in the name of good; rather did they claim obedience and loyalty to Him, although they claimed the same about their idols whom they worshipped in His Name.

Isaiah 5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!- Their wisdom came from themselves and not from God's word. There may be an allusion to Prov. 3:7 "Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear Yahweh, and depart from evil". It is being wise in our own eyes which precludes repentance; and it is recognition of our own unwisdom which provokes repentance.

Isaiah 5:22 Woe to those who are mighty to drink wine, and champions at mixing strong drink- This alcoholism was apparently incorporated into their perverted keeping of the feasts of Yahweh (see on :12). They turned those feasts into the crude drinking games of many bars today- whoever can drink the most is the mightiest.

Isaiah 5:23 who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice for the innocent!- God will not justify the wicked (Ex. 23:7); and He hates those who do so (Prov. 17:15 cp. 24:24; Is. 5:23). But God justifies sinners, "the wicked", by grace. This paradox serves to highlight yet more the grace in "justification by grace". The fact the judiciary was so corrupt is again an indication that the reforms of the kings in Isaiah's time (see on Is. 1:1) were not very far reaching. The mass unspirituality of the leadership therefore reveals all the more how courageous were kings like Hezekiah in trying to reform things.

Isaiah 5:24 Therefore as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust- The fire of judgment is likened to a tongue; and "the tongue is a fire" (James 3:5). Their judgment was to be an extension of their own actions and words. As their tongue had devoured others (:23), so the tongue of fire was to devour them. The fact is, by our words we will be condemned and by our use of words we will be counted as righteous. The importance of our words cannot be overstressed. Judah were condemned "because their tongue and their words are against the Lord" (Is. 3:8). All their idolatry, perversion etc. was summarized in their words. Again and again, Isaiah and the prophets say that the reason for Israel's condemnation was their words, even those they said under their breath- "your tongue has muttered perverseness" (Is. 59:3). "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue" (Hos. 7:16). "The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in

making thee desolate because of thy sins" (Mic. 6:12,13). Truly "death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. 18:21).

Because they have rejected the law of Yahweh of Armies, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel- Again we see evidence for major opposition to Isaiah's prophecies from the leadership (:23). They would not have consciously stated their rejection of the law; but God sees to the essence, to the implication of attitudes and thoughts. See on :19,20.

Isaiah 5:25 Therefore Yahweh's anger burns against His people, and He has stretched out His hand against them, and has struck them. The mountains tremble, and their dead bodies are as refuse in the midst of the streets- The past tenses are used because the threatened judgment was so certain. But in fact, it did not come at Isaiah's time- because there was at least some penitence, and much intercession from the faithful remnant. "The mountains" may refer to the hills of Jerusalem surrounding Zion; the bodies in the streets recalls Jeremiah's lamentations of what happened when Babylon sacked Jerusalem. The intended application to the Assyrians didn't happen, because there was some repentance; but the words were rescheduled to the Babylonians.

For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is still stretched out- Because God's judgment had not achieved its end result, which was Judah's repentance. His hand was stretched out still, both in the sense of judgment, and in seeking to save through eliciting repentance.

Isaiah 5:26 He will lift up a banner for the nations from far, and He will whistle for them from the end of the land. Behold, they will come speedily and swiftly- Clearly enough, the bronze serpent lifted up on the "standard" or pole was a symbol of Christ crucified. But time and again throughout Isaiah, we read that a "standard" or ensign will be "lifted up" in order to *gather people together* to it (Is. 5:26; 13:2; 11:12; 18:3; 62:10). This was the idea of an ensign lifted up. Thus our common response to the cross of Christ should be to gather together unto Him there. And we need to take note that several of those Isaiah passages are speaking about what shall happen in the last days, when divided Israel will unite on the basis of their acceptance of the crucified Jesus. In this context, the nations are being summoned to judge Israel. And yet Isaiah also uses the figure for gathering sinners to the ensign or standard pole of Zion. The intention was that the surrounding nations would be judged and yet some would repent, and become part of a restored Kingdom of God in Judah. But Hezekiah precluded this from happening by getting friendly with the Babylonians and surrounding nations, and his sons worshipped their gods rather than bringing them to the God of Israel.

Isaiah 5:27 None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the belt of their waist be untied, nor the latches of their shoes be broken- LXX "They shall not hunger nor be weary". The language here is that of God Himself and His faithful people (Is. 40:28,31; Ps. 121:4). As will be noted on :28, God's manifestations have similar characteristics; be they through His own people, or through wicked people He uses to perform His judgments. He is totally in control; there is no radical evil in the cosmos.

Isaiah 5:28 whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent. Their horses' hoofs will

be like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind- They would be a manifestation of the cherubim chariot. Ezekiel uses the same idea. The cherubim would be manifest in both Judah's attackers and in God's people. God was totally in control of the whole tragedy. See on :27.

Isaiah 5:29 Their roaring will be like a lioness, they will roar like young lions. Yes, they shall roar and seize their prey and carry it off, and there will be no one to deliver- The initial application was to the lions of Assyria; but due to repentance and intercession, that was averted. And yet lions were also a symbol of the Babylonians, who did carry off Judah into captivity. God acted as a lion to Judah through those lions (Hos. 5:14), manifested through them. God was their deliverer, as so often stated later in Isaiah; but they refused to accept Him as such, and so there was none to deliver. The princes of Judah are also likened to young lions (Ez. 19:3-6); it was their lion like behaviour in abusing their people which led to the young lions coming upon Judah. Again, judgment is articulated in terms of the sins which have brought them. Sin is its own judgment. The lions here in Is. 5:29,30 clearly represent the Babylonians and Assyrians; but the prophetic hope was that the young lion would be tamed and live in Zion (Is. 11:7). The vision was of Judah's enemies being judged and repenting, and coming to live in the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 5:30 They will roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea. If one looks to the land behold, darkness and distress. The light is darkened in its clouds- LXX "as the sound of the swelling sea; and they shall look to the land, and, behold, there shall be thick darkness in their perplexity". The Lord seems to apply these ideas to the situation in Israel in the last days (Lk. 21:26), just as the light being turned to darkness happened at His crucifixion (cp. Am. 8:9). What could have happened at the hands of the Assyrians was averted by repentance; but the prophetic word came true in later judgments upon Judah, and will come finally true in the last days.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 6

Isaiah 6:1 In the year that king Uzziah died- The idea is that although the king was dead, or had ceased to reign in his last years, Yahweh was still king. See on :5. We may enquire why we have this apparent record of the commissioning of Isaiah at this point, rather than at the beginning of the prophecy. He sees a vision of glory and then is given his prophetic calling, which seems appropriate for the start of his ministry, just as happened to Ezekiel. Perhaps Isaiah gave Is. 1-5 and then was now more formally commissioned; see on :9. But the prophets are rarely chronological; Jeremiah particularly is arranged by theme and not chronology. Perhaps the record of Isaiah's commissioning as a prophet is included here because he feels that he is of unclean lips as his people are; and the state of their lips is to be a major theme of his message. So the idea would be that he began his ministry deeply convicted that he was saved by grace and was one with his audience, no better than they, but saved by grace through his faith in the Messianic Saviour figure silhouetted in the vision which itself convicts him of his sin.

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple- The words high and lofty apply to the throne, not to Yahweh Himself (as in Is. 57:15). The same phrase has recently been used in Is 2:12-14 of how what is high and lifted up in human eyes is to be brought down before the glory of Yahweh. It is

used in Ez. 10:16 about the cherubim, which appear to have morphed into the seraphim of this vision (see on :2). And it is used in Is. 37:23 of how the Assyrians were high and lifted up against Yahweh, and would be brought down- just as the pride of Judah was to be, before the high and lifted up glory of Yahweh. Both Jews and Gentiles would thereby be humbled and the intention was that together they would form part of a restored Kingdom of God in Judah. That glory is more specifically defined in Is. 52:13 where "high and lifted up" is used of the exaltation of the suffering servant, the Messiah figure who could have been Hezekiah, had he responded rightly to his sufferings. But after God's attempts to reapply it to Zerubbabel and others, it came to full term in the suffering of the Lord Jesus.

Is. 6:10 is quoted in John 12, with the information that "these things said Isaiah, because he foresaw his glory, and he spoke about him" (Jn. 12:41). The hour of glory was the hour of crucifixion. The son of God, naked, covered in blood and spittle... was the Son of man glorified. And likewise when we are fools for Christ's sake, then we know His glory. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up", with the temple veil torn (Is. 6:4 cp. Mt. 27:51), and was moved to realize his sinfulness, and vow to spread the appeal for repentance (Is. 6:1,5). The high, lifted up Lord whom he saw was He of Is. 52:13- the crucified Lord. And yet Isaiah saw Him enthroned in God's glory, as it were on the cross. So John links the visions of Is. 6 and 52/53 as both concerning the crucifixion (Jn. 12:37-41); there the glory and essence of God was revealed supremely. Jn. 12:38-41 draws a parallel between being converted, and understanding the prophecies of the glory of the crucified Christ. To know Him in His time of dying, to see the arm of Yahweh revealed in Him there, is to be converted.

Isaiah's vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1) connects with the description of the crucified Lord high and lifted up (Is. 52:13). This vision, John tells us, was of Christ in His glory. And John combines his citation of this passage with that of Is. 53 concerning the cross (Jn. 12:41,42). The Lord, high and lifted up in glory, was the crucified Lord. There He was enthroned, in God's eyes, in His throne of glory. When He comes again and sits in the throne of His glory, He will be repeating in principle the glorification of the cross. The very vision of the lifted up Lord convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness, and steeled his faith in forgiveness (Is. 6:5-8). See on Jn. 19:37.

Isaiah 6:2 Above Him stood the seraphim-

The seraphim of Is. 6 are not exactly the cherubim. There are significant differences. Six wings as opposed to four wings; the seraphim had human features whereas the cherubim have four faces (human, lion, ox, eagle); the seraphim are above God's throne, whereas the cherubim are typically beneath or upholding it. And yet clearly they are related. The word translated "seraphim" is used five times elsewhere, where it clearly means a serpent or snake (Num. 21:6,8; Dt. 8:15; Is. 14:29; 30:6). Significantly, it is the word used of the "fiery serpent" which bit the Israelites and a copy of which was placed on a pole. The Lord interpreted this as a

representation of His own, then future, death on the cross. I suggest we have here in Is. 6 a classic case of the kaleidoscope of images which is the apocalyptic genre. Various images, in this case of serpent, cherubim, God's glory, six winged seraphim etc. are brought together and superimposed upon each other, to make a point. This whole vision is interpreted by John's Gospel as being of the Lord Jesus, particularly in His death and glorification. This is why this vision had, and has, the power to both convict of sin, and also to inspire to faith in forgiveness and a desire to serve in response to this ("Here am I, send me"). The serpent on the pole was representative of the spotless the Lord Jesus. The serpent clearly represents sin; in His death, "God made Him sin for us, who knew no sin". He who was personally sinless was totally identified with human sin, and through that representative death, the way to victory over sin was opened up. I suggest this is why the word for "seraph" is also that for "serpent". In the more immediate context, six winged creatures were known in ancient Mesopotamian mythology: "Archaeological finds from sites like Tel Halaf feature 10th-to-9th-century BCE guardian and hybrid animal-human statues with six wings". Quite possibly Isaiah is making the point that the surrounding local beliefs were nonsense; it was Yahweh and His court who alone had such six winged creatures at His command.

The cherubim overshadowing the ark, where the shekinah glory was, are described as six winged seraphim; or perhaps in the vision, they morph into this form. The word is used of the brazen Seraph (s.w. Num. 21:8) made by Moses; and yet they have human faces, partly human like the cherubim figures of Ez. 1, which were also "high and lifted up" (Ez. 10:16 s.w.). We seem to have here a kaleidoscope of images, classic apocalyptic genre.

Each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet and with two he flew- "Feet" can also be read as "body". The sense is well expressed by the Targum: “With two he covered his face that he might not see; and with two he covered his body that he might not be seen". The seraphim / cherubim themselves are presented as in awe of the glory revealed, and even have a sense of unworthiness before that glory; for the same word for "covered" is used of sin being covered (Ps. 32:1; 85:2). Perhaps if Angels are in view, they carry with them the sense of forgiven sin from a previous creation. So little wonder Isaiah was even more convicted.

Isaiah 6:3 One called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of Armies! The whole earth is full of His glory!- The "earth" in view is *eretz* Israel primarily, the territory promised to Abraham. And yet that area was full of sinful behaviour, as Isaiah has demonstrated. But still God's glory was articulated there at that time, and would be.

Isaiah 6:4 The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of Him who called, and the house was filled with smoke- This is a vision of the temple, and if the threshold pillars collapsed, the veil screening the most holy place came down. This is another similarity with the crucifixion (Mt. 27:51). The house filling with smoke speaks of God's wrath, but this wrath was averted in Hezekiah's time. It had various later fulfillments, but finally Rev. 15:8 interprets this as the wrath of God poured out in the last days.

Isaiah 6:5 Then I said, Woe is me!- Isaiah repeatedly pronounces “woe” upon the people (Is. 3:9; 5:8,11,18,20,21,22; 8:11), and yet in that very context he can exclaim:

“Woe is *me*” in chapter 6; he identified with them to the point of also feeling unworthy and under woe [in this clearly typifying the Lord’s identity with us].

For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips- Isaiah realized his unworthiness: "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips". He felt he was going to be condemned. But then out of the same vision, the Angel comforted him: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged". And then immediately he offered to go on a preaching mission to Israel, motivated by his own experience of forgiveness and with therefore an appropriate humility: "Here am I, send me" (Is. 6:5-8). This incident is full of allusion to the sending of an equally hesitant Moses. As God appears in the burning bush, so God appears to Isaiah among the seraphim, the burning ones. Moses is reluctant to bear God’s word because “I am a man of uncircumcised lips”, and Isaiah felt the same. Whom shall I send… who will go? (Ex. 3:8,9) is matched by Is. 6:8,9. The willingness of Moses to go (Ex. 3:4) is that of Isaiah. And it is to be our pattern, going forth in witness firstly convicted of our own utter unworthiness.

The vision occurred "in the year that King Uzziah died" (Is. 6:1)- and he died of leprosy, smitten of God for his sin. Isaiah would've known Uzziah, and prophesied against him. And yet now, after the vision of God's glory, Isaiah declares that *he* is a man "of unclean lips". And it was lepers who had to cover their upper lips (Lev. 13:45). He felt no better than Uzziah, the well known smitten-by-God king of Isaiah's time. Likewise before the experience of God's glory as it was and is in Christ, we shouldn't feel that we are any better than the most famous sinner. See on Is. 7:20.

And I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Armies!- As noted on Is. 3:8, the sinfulness of Judah was epitomized in their language. Isaiah did not actually see God Himself, but an intense manifestation of Him. Likewise Yahweh was manifest in the death of the cross, but seeing Jesus there is not actually seeing God Himself crucified.

Isaiah 6:6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar- Out of the same vision of glory which convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness, there came the power and message of forgiveness. This is what happens as we truly behold the cross. It should account for our conflicting emotions at the breaking of bread when we remember these things, and again encounter the Lord crucified "face to face".

Isaiah 6:7 He touched my mouth with it and said, Behold, this has touched your lips- Isaiah prophesied of the fire of Divine judgment. But the message was that contact with that fire was not necessarily destructive even to man. It is possible to “dwell with devouring fire” (Is. 33:14); that is part of relationship with God. The only other reference to lips being touched by an Angel is in Dan. 10:16, where it gives Daniel the power of speech. And so the connection is established between receipt of forgiveness and empowerment to preach that message.

And your iniquity is taken away and your sin forgiven- The Hebrew here differentiates between guilt and forgiveness of sin. Hence GNB "now your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven". We can ascent theoretically to sin being forgiven; but feeling guilt removed from us is another thing. And that psychological gift is also available from God, through the power of the cross. The very terms iniquity taken away and sin forgiven are found in Is. 27:9; these things would happen if Judah were repentant and destroyed their idols. Isaiah is set up as representative of Judah. His cleansing could have been theirs. But they didn't perceive the glory of the suffering

servant, because they were impenitent. There were later chances for fulfilment of the prophecy- Zech. 3:4 speaks of how iniquity could have been taken away at the time of the restoration from Babylon. But again this was not fully experienced, and so the prophecies now come true in a new Israel who have responded to the glory of the suffering servant, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 6:8 I heard the Lord's voice, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am. Send me!- The sinful but forgiven Isaiah was representative of Judah (:7), and yet also He was 'going for us', representative of God and the Angelic seraphim. Just as the Lord Jesus was representative of both God and man; and as we as men are also the face of God in Christ to this world.

Isaiah realized his unworthiness: "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips". He felt he was going to be condemned. But then the Angel comforted him: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged". And then immediately he offered to go on a preaching mission to Israel: "Here am I, send me" (Is. 6:5-8). This is the essential qualification for all preaching work. Israel's prophets sought to awaken guilt in those of God's people who were repressing it. This is different to mere moralizing. They were appealing for an awakening of true conscience and guilt. Isaiah exemplified his message in his own life. He was convicted of his sin, saying "Woe is me", in order to prepare him for the great truth that "your guilt is taken away" (Is. 6:1-7).

When God asks Isaiah whom He should send out, in a scene reminiscent of the Angelic court of Heaven in 1 Kings 22 and Ps. 89:7, Isaiah says "Send me". He wanted to be part of God's way and word. And with us too, we are all in that sense 'apostles', sent ones, in that the word we preach must be identified with us personally. For the Lord's parable speaks of how the Father sends out His servants- us- to invite men and women in to the supper of His Kingdom (Mt. 22:14). See on Is. 9:7.

The sending forth of Isaiah was the sending forth of God's word to His people (s.w. Is. 9:8). Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh. The man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached. In the immediate context, Isaiah himself was the servant messenger sent forth (s.w. Is. 42:19; 48:16; 61:1); but he was largely rejected, and Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh (Heb. 11:37).

Isaiah 6:9 He said, Go, and tell this people, 'You hear indeed, but don't understand; and you see indeed, but don't perceive'- It was because they of themselves would not "consider" / 'understand' (s.w. Is. 1:3) that they were psychologically confirmed in their attitudes and blinded so that they would not understand / consider. And so God operates to this day. The message Isaiah was commissioned to preach was therefore some time after they had had the opportunity to hear and see the message of Is. 1-5. This would explain why we have this commissioning of Isaiah only now in Is. 6.

Isaiah 6:10 Make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed- For the quotation of these words in Jn. 12, see on :1. The opportunity to repent in Isaiah's time was spurned, for the most part. It was repeated in the times of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and likewise wasn't responded to. And again in the time of the Lord Jesus. And so He began speaking to the people in parables exactly so that they would not understand.

The Lord spoke in parables so that Israel would be deceived (unless they made specific search of the meaning of the parable) and therefore would not come to salvation. This fact is hard to get round for those who feel God *isn't* responsible for deception. Isaiah spoke likewise (Is. 6:9,10; 29:10,11). See on Is. 66:4. Thus men are confirmed psychologically in the way they wish to go.

And yet although *their* ears were "heavy", God's ears were not heavy to them, if they would pray in repentance (s.w. Is. 59:1). It was by the stripes of the suffering servant that they would be "healed" (s.w. Is. 53:5). His sufferings and related glory have been the burden of the vision just seen. But whilst they refuse to "see" that, they would not be healed.

Isaiah 6:11 Then I said, Lord, how long? He answered, Until the cities are waste without inhabitant and houses without man and the land becomes utterly waste-This is the scene of Is. 4:1, when the invasion would severely deplete the population. But the time of their healing by the suffering servant (see on :10) was to coincide with the time of their judgment, in that those left alive were to form the spiritually purged remnant. The Divine intention was that the wasting of Judah would elicit their repentance and acceptance of a suffering servant saviour. This is why the Assyrian invasion coincided with Hezekiah's suffering in sickness. But he elected not to be that saviour servant, and turned in his heart to Babylon. And so the prophecy was reapplied and rescheduled to other scenarios, which likewise didn't come to fruition; and will come to its full term in the latter day devastation leading Judah to accept the Lord Jesus as their healer and suffering saviour.

Isaiah 6:12 and Yahweh has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land- As noted on :11, an exile "far away" and the land laying desolate or emptied of its people (s.w. "deserted place" in Is. 17:9) was required for them to "return" to God, both spiritually and literally to their land (:10 "turn again"). This clearly was the potential at the time of the restoration from Babylon; but there was no repentance. And there is evidence from archaeology and Babylonian records that the "poor of the land" who were not taken captive to Babylon were the majority of the population. Babylon had a policy of deporting the ruling classes. That may however be the scenario implied by the LXX "And after this God shall remove the men far off, and they that are left upon the land shall be multiplied". The final fulfilment will be in the latter day desolation.

Isaiah 6:13 If there is a tenth left in it, that also will in turn be consumed: as a terebinth, and as an oak, whose stump remains when they are felled; so the holy seed is its stump- LXX "and again it shall be for a spoil, as a turpentine tree, and as an acorn when it falls out of its husk". The original is unclear, but the idea is of new life being sown from a minority (ten per cent?) as a result of the destruction of the majority. The image is similar to that of the Messianic "Branch" shooting forth from the decaying stump of the house of David. A ten percent minority is also envisaged in Am. 5:3. They were perhaps the tenth, the tithe, which were intended for God's work. The idea of only a tenth surviving is repeated in Am. 6:9,10. But we read of a third surviving in Ez. 5:1-4; Zech. 13:8, and elsewhere of a quarter. The reason is that the judgments pronounced were dependent upon Judah's response to them. There were various different scenarios of both judgment and blessing, not all of which would come true. Because God is sensitive to human repentance and intercession, and changes the outcomes accordingly (Jer. 18:7-9). The point is that as those trees even

when cut down retain the seed in their roots, which will again spring up into a great tree, so out of the judgments to come upon Judah there would arise a remnant who would grow up into the great tree of God's restored Kingdom.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 7

Isaiah 7:1 It happened in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it- The way Jerusalem survived a siege was to encourage them in Hezekiah's time that with God's help they could likewise survive the Assyrian siege. It seems Syria and Israel were trying to form a power bloc against Assyria, and were doing so with Egypt's help- for this in turn would be a buffer for them against Assyria. Yet soon afterwards Judah were prostituting themselves to Syria and Egypt for help against Assyria. They became caught up in desperate politics, prostituting themselves to these nations and accepting their gods- rather than trust in Yahweh alone.

Isaiah 7:2 It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is allied with Ephraim! His heart trembled, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest tremble with the wind- James 1:6 uses this language and applies it to Christians who lack solid faith; but who like Judah turn to desperate politics to try to save them from situations rather than to their God. The house of David were the royal family, but they are spoken of in the singular, as the trembling heart of their king represented all of them. We note again that the people and the leadership are parallel. The masses were not punished for the unspirituality of their leadership; hence heavens and earth were addressed together at the start of the prophecy (Is. 1:2). The whole land was to tremble under judgment when it came (Is. 24:20 s.w. "tremble"); but judgment was but the articulation of the state of their faithless hearts. They were judged for the state of their hearts. Spiritual mindedness is of paramount significance to God.

Isaiah 7:3 Then Yahweh said to Isaiah, Go out now to meet Ahaz, you, and Shearjashub your son- "Shearjashub" means "a remnant shall return" (see on Is. 10:21). As is made explicit in :14 and Is. 8:18, Isaiah's children were 'signs'. The message of Shearjashub was that a remnant would repent / return; and Isaiah is asking Ahab to be part of that remnant, and to repent of his faithless attitude.

At the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway of the fuller's field- The washer or fuller uses the same word for 'washing' as used in the context of cleansing from sin (Ps. 51:2,7; Jer. 2:2; 4:14; Mal. 3:2). The suggestion was that they could repent and be cleansed of their sin; but they refused these waters which represented forgiveness (Is. 8:6). This location was signifcant, because it was there that Rabshakeh came with his demand for Jerusalem to surrender in Is. 36:2. Hezekiah was intended to recall how Ahaz had been faced with Isaiah at that same spot; and the call was to repent, to be washed, to become the remnant which would triumph. Circumstances repeat in our lives and between our lives and those of others; in this case, the experience of Ahaz repeated in the life of his son Hezekiah. And we are intended to join the dots and learn the lesson.

Isaiah 7:4 Tell him, 'Be careful- The word is translated 'a watchman' later in Isaiah. He was to not fear but to watch- for Yahweh's deliverance.

And keep calm- It was in repentance that Judah would find "quietness", s.w. "calm" (Is. 30:15; 32:17). As noted on :3, Ahaz is being called upon to repent.

Don't be afraid, neither let your heart be faint- The Lord may be quoting from here when He urges His people to not let their heart be troubled (Jn. 14:1). The scenarios at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions didn't fully come about, and so they were applied to a new Israel.

Because of these two tails of smoking torches, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and of the son of Remaliah- The idea is that they were smoking and not burning torches, and would soon fizzle out; both Israel and Syria would be overrun by Assyria. Isaiah will not mention the name "Pekah" perhaps because he was a usurper who murdered the previous king (2 Kings 15:25). LXX "for when my fierce anger is over, I will heal again".

Isaiah 7:5 Because Syria, Ephraim and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying- It is possible that the planned invasion was thwarted because there was some repentance in Judah. But the prophetic word in essence was reapplied and rescheduled; for Assyria "plotted evil against" Judah (s.w. Nah. 1:11). Judah were intended to learn from how this previous plotting of evil had been foiled by Yahweh. Circumstances repeat in our experiences, so that we might learn, and see the same Divine hand at work.

Isaiah 7:6 Let's go up against Judah and tear it apart- The idea is of making a breach in a city wall, as was to happen under the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:4; Jer. 39:2).

And let's divide it among ourselves, and set up a king in its midst, even the son of Tabeel- Tabeel is a Syrian name; this was the puppet king they had in mind.

Isaiah 7:7 This is what the Lord Yahweh says: It shall not stand, neither shall it happen- As suggested on :6, this may have been due to some repentance on the part of a minority in Judah. Circumstances repeat in our experiences, so that we might learn, and see the same Divine hand at work. Because this very phrase is used of how Judah are warned not to make plans according to the flesh, because they would not stand nor happen (Is. 8:10; 28:18). They should have learnt from how the fleshly plans of Israel and Syria did not stand.

Isaiah 7:8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin- The idea may be that their 'heads' were but human, not Divine.

And within sixty-five years Ephraim shall be broken in pieces, so that it shall not be a people- One wonders why the ten tribe Kingdom was to cease being a people within 65 years of Isaiah's prophecy; yet we note that Ahaz was told in the same context: "If ye [the two tribe Kingdom of Judah] will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (Is. 7:8,9). Was the prophetic outline of events in Isaiah 7 not conditional upon the faith of Ahaz and the wide reaching repentance of Judah? The demise of Israel happened 15 years later, but perhaps it was somehow possible that it would have been delayed, up to a maximum of ["within"] 65 years, depending on human response? But 65 years from when Isaiah was prophesying would bring us to about BC 670, when Esarhaddon implemented his policy of bringing foreigners to live in the territory of the ten tribes (Ezra 4:2,10). This was the final breaking in pieces of Ephraim. The immediate destruction of Ephraim and Syria was to be within just a few years (see on :15,16).

Isaiah 7:9 and the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established'- "If you do not stand firm... you shall not be made firm" is a classic example of how God will confirm us in the spiritual path we wish to take. But LXX has "but if ye believe not, neither will ye at all understand", as if understanding in the sense of true relationship with God is predicated upon faith. Misunderstanding of God, in whatever form, therefore usually has a basis in lack of faith; it's not mere intellectual error in interpretation, but rooted in the moral issues connected with lack of faith.

Isaiah 7:10 Yahweh spoke again to Ahaz, saying- The "again" suggests Ahaz had not responded to the call for repentance and faith made in :3,4.

Isaiah 7:11 Ask a sign of Yahweh your God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above- God wanted Ahaz to believe and repent, and Ahaz's refusal didn't mean God just turned away from him; He now gives him the opportunity to ask for concrete evidence upon which to base his faith. Such is God's eagerness for even wicked men like Ahaz to eblieve and repent.

Isaiah 7:12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt Yahweh- As explained on :11, God was giving Ahaz yet another chance to properly believe in Him and repent. His refusal to engage with this offer was therefore sinful, but he masks it in fake humility. We can appear to be humble, and by doing so actually express our pride. Ahaz is one of many Biblical examples of this kind of false humility. He refused to ask a sign of Yahweh, when invited to, lest he be like apostate Israel in the wilderness, and tempt Yahweh (Is. 7:12 cp. Dt. 6:16). But this was actually a 'wearying' of God, and so he was given a sign relating to his condemnation (Is. 7:12,13).

Isaiah 7:13 He said, Listen now, house of David. Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of My God also?- "My God" suggests this is Isaiah talking. But the context is of God speaking directly (:10). This was how intertwined were God and His prophet; the process of inspiration worked through this. Isaiah's patience was tested ["the patience of men"], and therefore so was that of God. As noted on Is. 1:14, God was already "wearied" [s.w. "to try the patience"] of Israel.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel- We could read this as a sign of judgment because Ahaz refused to repent; see on :13. But we could also see God's purpose in Christ as being His attempt to almost force through His saving purpose with Judah. Already in this chapter, Ahaz had twice refused the invitations to repent and believe (:3,12). And so God responds by giving His Son, rather like how in the parable of the wicked husbandmen, the rejection of the prophets is responded to by God sending His own Son. In the immediate context, Isaiah was to have another son, and his children were all children of sign to Judah (see on :3; Is. 8:18). This son could perhaps have been the Messiah figure, but presumably he failed to live up to it; or as suggested on Is. 8:1, this plan was changed by God and the child renamed. And so it came to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. This explains the ambiguity of the word "virgin", which can mean just a young woman (Isaiah's wife, in the first instance), or refer (as LXX) to a literal virgin who was to conceive without the involvement of a

man. This would also explain the ambiguity caused by the verbs "to conceive" and "bear" being participles- ambiguous as to whether they refer to the present or the future.

Seeing it refers primarily to Isaiah's wife, we may wonder why it is quoted of the virgin conception of Mary in the New Testament. But the New Testament sometimes seems to quote the Old Testament *without* strict attention to the context- at least, so far as human Bible scholarship can discern. And rabbinic targums use the text likewise. The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Much Christian material about Israel shows how they have returned to the land, rebuilt the ruined cities, made the desert blossom etc., as fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah etc. The context of these prophecies often doesn't fit a return to the land by Jews in the 20th century; but on the other hand, the correspondence between these prophecies and recent history is so remarkable that it can't be just coincidence. So again we are led to conclude that a few words here and there within a prophecy can sometimes have a fulfilment outside that which the context seems to require.

Isaiah 7:15 He shall eat curds and honey when he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good- Curds and honey could be seen as representing the blessings of obedience to the covenant, which would be enjoyed by the repentant remnant after the desolation of Judah (:22). This time of blessing on Judah was intended to come in just a few years, before the child came to an age of moral responsibility. This implies very small children cannot choose between good and evil. Or as LXX "Butter and honey shall he eat, before he knows either to prefer evil or choose the good". The prophetic potential was that Assyria would invade Judah as well as Israel and take them both into captivity in the time of Ahaz, within a few years (Is. 8:3,4); and the remnant left in the land would, along with this child, eat curds and honey as the land again became fruitful for them. But Assyria didn't destroy Judah, they weren't taken into captivity, and generally didn't repent. The scenario didn't work out. God factored in the repentance of a tiny remnant and their intercession for Jerusalem; and also the fact that generally, there wasn't going to be repentance in Judah. And so this potential scenario was disallowed. See on Is. 8:1.

Isaiah 7:16 For before the child knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings you abhor shall be forsaken- There is an ambiguity in the text, as to whether the land of Judah was to be forsaken as Ahaz feared; or whether the lands of Syria and Israel would be. Hence LXX "and the land shall be forsaken which thou art afraid of because of the two kings". The next verse in any case warns that judgment is going to come upon Judah at the hands of the Assyrians. The ambiguity may be because the outcome depended upon the repentance of Judah; and God protected them from the Israel-Syria invasion because there was some repentance. And likewise, in the end, from the full intended force of the Assyrian invasion (see on :17).

Isaiah 7:17 Yahweh will bring on you, on your people and on your father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah- God said that the division was the greatest tragedy to come upon His people (Is. 7:17). The way the new garment of Ahijah was torn up to symbolize the division, reflects the utter

waste (1 Kings 11:29). For an outer cloak was a garment a man could wear for life; to have a new one was something significant.

Even the king of Assyria- But the Assyrians did not attack in the time of Ahaz, and Jerusalem and the royal family was preserved when they did attack later. As noted on :15,16, this was presumably because there was a modicum of repentance, at least amongst a remnant.

Isaiah 7:18 It will happen in that day that Yahweh will whistle for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria- As explained on :15, The prophetic potential was that Assyria from the north would invade Judah as well as Israel and take them both into captivity in the time of Ahaz, within a few years (Is. 8:3,4), with Egypt attacking from the south; and the remnant left in the land would, along with this child, eat curds and honey as the land again became fruitful for them (:22).

Isaiah 7:19 They shall come, and shall all rest in the desolate valleys, in the clefts of the rocks, on all thorn hedges, and on all pastures- This hiding in the rocks is the language of condemnation of Is. 2:19; but now we learn that even hidden there, they would be attacked by the Assyrians and Egyptians, who like bees and tiny stinging insects would still penetrate to those hidden in clefts of the rock. But it seems many of them were saved from this by grace, and by the repentance of a remnant. See on :15,16,18. Later Isaiah applies it to the judged exiles in Babylon (Is. 42:22); but with the good news that even from that humbled, condemned position- they could be exalted and returned to the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 7:20 In that day the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired in the parts beyond the River Euphrates, even with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard- This sounds like the shaving of a leprous man that he might be accepted back into fellowship with God. As explained on Is. 6:5, Judah were leprous, as Isaiah had felt himself to be, and had not allowed themselves to be cleansed by the vision of Yahweh's glory. So the Assyrian invasion was intended to do this for them, to bring them to fellowship with God.

Isaiah 7:21 It shall happen in that day that a man shall keep alive a young cow, and two sheep- The scenario was that the Assyrian invasion would lead to the desolation of the land; but something would be 'kept alive'. And that young cow would produce so much milk that curds would be made from it (:22). The idea was that the remnant in the land would repent and begin to experience the kingdom blessings. But this scenario didn't come about. God factored in the repentance of a tiny remnant and their intercession for Jerusalem; and also the fact that generally, there wasn't going to be repentance in Judah. And so this potential scenario was disallowed.

Isaiah 7:22 and it shall happen, that because of the abundance of milk which they shall give he shall eat curds: for everyone will eat curds and honey who is left in the midst of the land- "The midst of the land" may refer to salvation in Jerusalem. See on :21.

Isaiah 7:23 It will happen in that day that every place where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silver shekels, shall be for briers and thorns- This and the similar prophecy of desolation in Is. 5:6 didn't happen at the Assyrian invasion; it was

reapplied to the situation after the Babylonian invasion, when the land was intended to rest (Lev. 26:34,43) until Judah repented. But even that program didn't work out, and so the Lord's parable of the vineyard explained that therefore the vineyard was given to a new Israel. Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Yet "briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (Is. 9:18; 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them; and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Isaiah 7:24 People will go there with arrows and with bow, because all the land will be briers and thorns- The land of Judah was not overrun by thorns and left desolate because of the mass destruction of its population by the Assyrians. As explained on :15, the possible scenario didn't happen. These people who remained were intended to be the righteous remnant.

Isaiah 7:25 All the hills that were cultivated with the hoe, you shall not come there for fear of briers and thorns; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of sheep- The LXX suggests that from the once desolate land covered with thorns, there would come pasture at the restoration: "And every mountain shall be certainly ploughed: there shall no fear come thither: for there shall be from among the barren ground and thorns that whereon cattle shall feed and oxen shall tread". These people who remained were intended to be the righteous remnant.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 8

Isaiah 8:1 Yahweh said to me, Take a large tablet, and write on it with a man's pen, 'For Maher Shalal Hash Baz'- "A man's pen" in Hebrew could imply 'in hieroglyphics' [see Keil & Delitszch's commentary], clearly understood visually by men (a requirement for all such prophetic work- see Hab. 2:2; 1 Cor. 14:19). It could be that Isaiah is told to draw this on a plaque for all to see, and then when his wife has a child he is told to use this name to name the child. He was told to write on it "Mahershalalhashbaz", not to write 'concerning' or 'about' his future son [as the AV incorrectly states]. It could also be that God was telling Isaiah to give his book of prophecies, or at least the prophecies in these chapters, a title on the scroll. The fact Isaiah's son had the same name would have made him a kind of 'word made flesh', a living reminder of his father's work. As we know from the example of Zacharias naming John the Baptist, a father would write his newborn son's name on a tablet. So he is naming the child before the child was even conceived (:3). His children were signs (see on Is. 7:3; 8:18), at least in their names. This naming of a new child follows right after the prediction that a young woman (Isaiah's wife) was to have a son, 'Emmanuel', and before he was a few years old, Judah would have been desolated and a righteous remnant emerge (see on Is. 7:15-25). It could be that this new child is that same child; but the name is changed, because the potential scenario changed; see on Is. 7:15.

Isaiah 8:2 and I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to testify: Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah- Presumably, to testify that he had named this child

with this name before it was born; and that he somehow foreknew that it would be a male. Isaiah's knowledge of this would confirm the suggestion made on :1, that this was the 'Emmanuel' child of Is. 7:14 but renamed. We note that despite the general apostasy of the leadership alluded to in Isaiah's prophecies so far, there were at least two other faithful men. However, Uriah is mentioned as being ordered to construct an altar to foreign gods in the temple (2 Kings 16:10,11). Yet here he is considered by Isaiah to be a "faithful witness". It could be a different Uriah; or perhaps he lost his faith, or regained it- it's hard to work out when exactly Isaiah is speaking, before or after the time of 2 Kings 16:10.

Isaiah 8:3 I went to the prophetess, and she conceived, and bore a son. Then Yahweh said to me, Call his name 'Maher Shalal Hash Baz'- Mahershalalhashbaz means 'Speed the spoil, hasten the prey'. The idea is that whilst Judah refused to repent, they were hastening the threatened judgments upon them; they were as the prey running towards the approaching Assyrian hunter, who was speeding towards them. There is a gap between God's threatened judgments and His fulfilment of them, but that gap can be reduced [or extended] by human behaviour. Things can be hastened or delayed; and Judah's impenitence was hastening the fulfilment (cp. Is. 60:22). God therefore said in this context that He was hastening the fulfilment of His word (Jer. 1:12). We can hasten the coming of the day of God (2 Pet. 3:12), for the elects sake the days shall be shortened, the bridegroom delays, yet the days of Amorite iniquity must still be 'filled up' to the required level before judgment comes... These kinds of verses show that some factors hasten the coming of judgment, others slow it down and delay it. The actual coming of the Lord Jesus will not be on some date which was arbitrarily predetermined, but rather on a day which is the result of some huge equation, considering and correctly weighting every factor in a way which only a Divine being could do.

Isaiah 8:4 For before the child knows how to say, 'My father', and, 'My mother', the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria- Judah saw Ephraim's spoil going into captivity, and yet Judah had spoiled innocent people but not been spoiled in return (Is. 33:1). Such was God's grace to them. The idea is that the wealth of both Damascus (Ez. 27:18) and Samaria would be carried away around the same time, and Assyrian inscriptions testify to this.

Isaiah 8:5 Yahweh spoke to me yet again, saying- "Yet again" reflects how the people had refused the offers of repentance and forgiveness so far made.

Isaiah 8:6 Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that go softly- The small brook within Jerusalem which Hezekiah used to give water to the faithful remnant within Jerusalem during the Assyrian siege. The New Testament "pool of Siloam" is the Greek name for the pool of Shiloah. The water was "soft", it was an apparently insignificant stream, but represented the spiritual water given in Christ (Jn. 4:10). Ps. 46:4,5 refer to the stream as symbolic of how "God is within" Jerusalem- just as Emmanuel means 'God is with us'. The reference is to the offer made in Is. 7:3, when Isaiah met Ahaz "At the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway of the fuller's field". The washer or fuller uses the same word for 'washing' as used in the context of cleansing from sin (Ps. 51:2,7; Jer. 2:2; 4:14; Mal. 3:2). The suggestion was that they could repent and be cleansed of their sin; but they refused these waters which represented forgiveness (Is. 8:6).

And rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son- Yet we have just read in Is. 7:1,2 and will do again in Is. 8:12 that Ahaz and Judah were terrified at the prospect of being invaded by Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel, who had come up and besieged Jerusalem. How did they now "rejoice" in them? LXX has "... but wills to have Rassin, and the son of Romelias to be king over you". GNB offers "... and tremble before King Rezin and King Pekah". But if we stick with the Masoretic text, we can conclude that it is the ten tribes of Israel who are being spoken about in this verse. They had been offered the waters of Shiloah, the chance of cleansing in Jerusalem and Judah, but had refused it; and so they were to be destroyed by the Assyrians (:7); and that invasion of Israel was to "sweep onward into Judah" (Is. 8:8). Israel's refusal of the call to repentance, and subsequent judgment for this by the Assyrians, was to be an example to Judah; just as the judgment of others, both in Biblical history and our own contemporary experience, is to be a warning to us, to which we respond.

Isaiah 8:7 now therefore, behold, the Lord brings upon them the mighty flood waters of the River Euphrates: the king of Assyria and all his glory. It will come up over all its channels, and go over all its banks- The Assyrian invader is described as having wings and "glory" (Is. 8:7,8), both of which are terms associated with the Angel-cherubim, seeing that they were ultimately behind the invasion. All that happens on earth is somehow a reflection of, and is reflected in, the situation in the court of Heaven. This verse speaks of the Assyrian invasion of the ten tribes; see on :6. Hence "brings upon *them*".

Isaiah 8:8 It will sweep onward into Judah- The envisaged prophetic scenario was that the invasion and destruction of the ten tribes by Assyria would be at the same time as the invasion of Judah by Assyria, part of the same campaign, sweeping onward to them. This is also envisaged in Is. 17:3. Indeed according to Is. 10:7, "it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations" at that same time. But this isn't what happened. The prophecies offer various potential scenarios, which could be ameliorated, changed, hastened, intensified, delayed or cancelled because of God's extreme sensitivity to human repentance. This is why it's impossible to use Bible prophecies to construct a chronology of latter day events; there are so many variables. Not least the repentance of Israel, the work of the faithful ecclesia in preaching the Gospel to the world and prayer for the Lord's coming- quite apart from the Divine pity which is at the core of His character.

It will overflow and pass through; it will reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, Immanuel- The waters of Euphrates were to rise until only the head of Judah, i.e. Jerusalem, was left uncaptured by the Assyrian invasion. Yet this is the very figure which the Messianic Ps. 69:1 uses in a prediction of Christ's crucifixion. There He was the One, the sufficient remnant, which enabled our salvation- just as Isaiah and Emmanuel had been in Isaiah's time. This means that the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied. As noted earlier on this verse, the potential prophetic scenario didn't happen in Isaiah's time as it might have done. The "Immanuel" Messianic figure was to be in the land when Judah was invaded and swamped by the same Assyrian campaign which destroyed the ten tribes; and that didn't happen, at the time. So it was rescheduled and reapplied. For the essence of God's word shall always come true.

Isaiah 8:9 Make an uproar, you peoples, and be broken in pieces! Listen, all you from far countries: dress for battle, and be shattered! Dress for battle, and be shattered!-

All plans and schemes to resist the Assyrian invasion, trying to form power blocs against them, would fail. Resistance was futile; only the God who was with Judah (:10) could save. This was a tacit appeal for Israel and the surrounding nations to accept Judah's God. This is consistently the prophetic vision; that the surrounding nations would repent and join together as part of a revived Kingdom of God based in Judah.

Isaiah 8:10 Take counsel together, and it will be brought to nothing; speak the word, and it will not stand: for God is with us- Circumstances repeat in our experiences, so that we might learn, and see the same Divine hand at work. Because this very phrase is used of how the fleshly plans of Israel and Syria also did not stand (Is. 7:7). There is the same Divine hallmark in all His operations. The only salvation from the Assyrians was to be "Immanuel", God with us. But this prophetic scenario didn't completely come to pass; see on :8.

Isaiah 8:11 For Yahweh spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying- see on 1 Tim. 4:1. The strength of the Divine hand upon Isaiah was because he was clearly tempted to be caught up in the spirit of panic which was in the society of Judah.

Isaiah 8:12 Don't say, 'A conspiracy!' concerning all about which this people say, 'A conspiracy!' neither fear what they fear, nor be terrorized- They considered that the conspiracy or alliance between Syria and Israel was too powerful for them to resist. So everyone was talking about this "conspiracy"; but the faithful were not to be caught up in the latest paranoia of a faithless society. And that again is a lesson for us.

The Hebrew *yare* means both fear / dread, and also reverence / worship. It is used for literal fear in Is. 8:12,13: instead of fearing the invaders, worshipping their fears, Israel were to be fearing God. Knowing the enveloping mercy of God should lead to a real fear of a God so gracious (Ps. 5:7). However, obedience to God's commands would lead to a fear of Yahweh's glorious and fearful name (Dt. 28:58); not the other way round, whereby fear of God leads to obedience. God's character is not just partly severe, partly gracious. His grace and His judgment of sin are wonderfully interconnected within His character.

Isaiah 8:13 Yahweh of Armies is who you must respect as holy. He is the one you must fear; He is the one you must dread- The heavenly armies of Angels were to be believed in, rather than the armies of their enemies. Fear, respect and dread here all effectively imply 'believe in'; for we believe in that which we fear. The fear of Yahweh's judgment is because of sin; it is our sin and its associated judgment which we should fear, more than any human threat to our existence. And if the fear of condemnation is now removed from us, then we can live boldly and confidently in this world, whatever we face in secular life.

The idea is that God's true people should not share the fears of the unbelieving world [of death, financial collapse etc.] but rather fear God. These verses are quoted and applied to us all in 1 Pet. 3:14,15. The idea of not fearing what men fear but rather fearing God is also in Lk. 12:4,5 and Is. 51:12,13. God being a rock of security for His people (:14) is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 Pet. 2:8- as if to say that we are indeed in the same situation, tempted to fear the world's fear when all hearts are failing for fear, but our rock is the fact that the Lord Jesus died and rose for us and is coming again for our salvation.

Isaiah 8:14 He will be a sanctuary for both houses of Israel- The allusion is how the sanctuary was perceived as a place of asylum (Ex. 21:14; 1 Kings 1:50; 2:28,30). The implication was that Yahweh Himself would be this safe place. In the immediate context, the reference is to how the faithful from both Israel and Judah, "both houses of Israel", fled for refuge from the Assyrians into Jerusalem. The unity of God's people was to be achieved by their joint experience of their desperation, their realization of their sin, repentance and forgiveness. These are the things which bind people together rather than on paper agreements. But the greater reference is to how God in His Son will be for the salvation of all Israel.

But He will be a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem- This didn't happen in Isaiah's day, in that the inhabitants of Jerusalem were spared; this judgment was ameliorated by the repentance and intercession of the remnant. But it did come true later in the Babylonian and Roman invasions; those who remained inhabiting Jerusalem did so in disobedience to the prophetic calls to leave the city, and so were consumed within it. They remained in the city because they believed that the Egyptians (with whom they had made a covenant) would break the Babylonian siege; and so again was fulfilled the warning that covenants with the Gentiles would be a snare to them (s.w. Ex. 34:12). And yet it is the idols of the nations which are repeatedly described as "a trap and a snare" for Israel; ""Yahweh" became that trap and snare because they worshipped those idols in the name of Yahweh worship. The day of the Lord will be a snare to the unsuspecting worldling, who will suddenly find that the Lord has come and destroyed him (Is. 8:14; 24:17,18; Jer. 50:24; Lk. 21:35). Yet the materialistic believer falls into the snare of riches here and now. Surely the point is that our attitude to riches is a preview of the judgment; the materialistic believer has condemned himself, right now.

Isaiah 8:15 Many will stumble over it, fall, be broken, be snared, and be captured- "Many" implies a remnant who would not stumble. I suggested on :14 that it was covenants with surrounding nations and accepting their gods which were the "trap and snare" for Israel and Judah in Isaiah's time. But like all things in the prophetic word, these things became reapplied to the things of the Lord Jesus, so that "Whosoever shall fall on this stone (Christ) shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Mt. 21:44). There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at His return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world. Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at His word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share His resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon Him, really feel the cutting edge of His word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment.

Isaiah 8:16 Wrap up the testimony. Seal the law among My disciples- This could be

Isaiah's prayer to God for his disciples rather than God's command to Isaiah. A possible translation of Is. 8:16 is: “I will bind up the testimony, and seal the instruction by my disciples” [suggested by Dr. Martin Hengel]. The context is Isaiah speaking about his disciples in the school of the prophets he ran, and praying to God for them. "The testimony" may be that which was legally testified to in Is. 8:2. God was now hiding His face from the people (:17) and they were to be left without clear revelation from Him (Is. 6:9,10), and they would not have access to His word (see on :19). The sealing of the book in Daniel likewise means that understanding would be hidden. But Isaiah prays that the word of truth would remain amongst his disciples and immediate family (:18).

The implication could be that the disciples of Divine teaching are actually the seal or credibility of the instruction / testimony which the Gospel contains. Valid converts are therefore a sign of the validity of the preacher, and are therefore a qualification for eldership. The respect afforded to such converters / leaders should, however, be qualified by their meeting of the standards Paul lays down: e.g. their own natural children should be well led by them. The integrity and manner of life of those who converted us is what inspires us to carry on. Thus Paul urges Timothy to “continue” because he knew “of what persons” he had been taught them (2 Tim. 3:14 RVmg.).

Isaiah 8:17 I will wait for Yahweh, who hides His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him- The emphasis is upon "I". Yahweh would be hidden from the majority, but Isaiah and his family (:18) represented the remnant from whom He had not hidden His face, and who could look for Him and find Him whereas the majority could not (:21).

Isaiah 8:18 Behold, I and the children whom Yahweh has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from Yahweh of Armies- The children could have been Isaiah's disciples. But the reference is more naturally to the children of sign, Immanuel and Mahershalalhashbaz, and to Shearjashub his other son (Is. 7:3), which means 'a remnant will return', whose name was used as an appeal for repentance in Is. 7:3; 10:21. The 'return' in mind is, I suggest, a spiritual return to God. That son was a "sign" to Judah and in a way, a witness to the mission and message of his father Isaiah. Just as Isaiah's son 'Immanuel' is alluded to in the statement in Is. 8:10 that "God is with us", so the idea of "Shearjashub' is in Is. 10:21,22: "A remnant shall return... to the mighty God". And practically, this found its outworking in Hezekiah's appeal to all Israel to 'return' unto Yahweh (2 Chron. 30:6). Those who responded came to live in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30:10,11)- and thus the promised "sanctuary" was created there. For many in the rest of the land died at the hands of the Assyrians; only those with Isaiah in Jerusalem were preserved. Because they sanctified Yahweh, He was a sanctuary for them (Is. 8:14). This preservation of the remnant in Jerusalem is a theme of Isaiah- it is alluded to in Is. 26:20 which speaks of coming into a place of refuge until the Assyrian invasion was passed: "Come, My people, enter into your rooms, and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation is past". Likewise Mahershalalhashbaz was a sign in that his name spoke of the coming judgment which Isaiah preached. The words forming his name are found in Is. 10:2,6 where we read of how Judah were to be prey and spoil for the Assyrian invaders. Emmanuel too was a sign, alluded to by Isaiah in Is. 8:10. He was a sign that God *is* with us. Trinitarians need to note that the child was not "God with us" but the *sign* that God *is* with us. 2 Chron. 32:7,8 shows how Hezekiah grasped the

point, when he twice assures Judah that God *is* with us and they need not fear Assyria. This means that Isaiah and his wife (a "prophetess") and his three sons were perhaps the faithful remnant in Jerusalem alluded to in chapter 1, for whose sakes Jerusalem was spared. A faithful couple with three sons recalls the situation with Noah, for whose sake the 'earth' was spared total destruction, and this would explain the many allusions to the judgment of the flood in Isaiah. Here in chapter 8, the Assyrian invasion is explicitly likened to flood waters, and Is. 54:9 puts it all in so many words: "This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you".

The voice of the prophets didn't go entirely unheeded. A tiny minority responded. Isaiah had his school of disciples, referred to in Isaiah 8. The books of the prophets were presumably written up (under inspiration) by their disciples, and the biographical sections added by them. So the very existence of the books of the prophets itself indicates they had some converts who hung on and valued their every word. And yet despite this, the prophets felt lonely men, despite the converts they made- Micah felt like a tree left alone, naked and bare at the end of Summer (Mic. 7:1). Jeremiah "sat alone" (Jer. 15:17). Not only was their perspective on human sinfulness so very different to that of their audience. They preached a message which was counter-cultural and attacked the very bases of the assumptions which lay at the core of individual and social life in Israel. They appeared to back Israel's enemies. Their message was therefore rejected.

Heb. 2:13 applies Isaiah's words here to Jesus, making Isaiah a clear type of Christ, the faithful one by reason of whom Judah were spared from total destruction, as Isaiah 1 began by emphasizing.

Who dwells in Mount Zion- see on Gen. 33:5. There are references in Isaiah to the Lord-Angel- coming out of His dwelling place in the temple to punish the Assyrians; the sacrifices and prayers made "before the Lord" in the temple were thus made in the presence of this Angel. Such phrases as "The Lord of Hosts (Angels) which dwelleth in Mount Zion" (Is. 8:18) are common. Solomon's dedication of the temple emphasized the fact that God's Name dwelt there-which was carried by the Angel (Ex. 23:20,21), and that His eyes (Angels) were present in the house. Thus a literal Angel dwelt in the temple- see on Ps. 78:60.

Isaiah 8:19 When they tell you, Consult with those who have familiar spirits and with the wizards, who chirp and who mutter: shouldn't a people consult with their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?- God was going to hide His face from them (:17), and like Saul when he had no revelation from God nor response to prayer, they would turn to the occult. We see here, as we do in Saul's huge efforts to get to the witch at Endor, the strength of the religious element within man. There is a desire for connection with the unseen, the supernatural and the Divine. There is therefore a hole in the human heart which only the true God can fill. But when He has been rejected, people still wish to turn to other forms of the supernatural. This is why atheism is but bravado; there is a nagging desire for connection with that beyond ourselves, arising from an innate dissatisfaction with our position and condition.

Isaiah 8:20 Turn to the law and to the testimony! If they don't speak according to this word- That which Isaiah taught to his sons and school of prophets (:16), which was no

doubt challenged by the false prophets. There were clearly some in opposition to Isaiah, false claiming to speak prophecy from God, but which was in opposition to the testimony which Isaiah had perhaps literally written down and sealed (:16). Jewish tradition says that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh.

Isaiah had been told to “bind up the testimony, seal the teaching” (Is. 8:16), until the people ask whom they should ask to understand (Is. 8:19), at which time the call will go out “To the teaching and to the testimony!” (Is. 8:20). This may mean that the people would not understand Isaiah's words, read and study them as they might- until the fulfilment came. They would have wondered about this mysterious "Cyrus"- until it was fulfilled. Just as the Lord said that His prophecies about His death and resurrection would not be understood until they came true. And that is how much Divine prophecy is. Striving over its interpretation ahead of time, seeking to work out time lines of fulfilment, is largely futile.

Surely there is no light in them- Keil: "they are a people for whom no morning dawns", perhaps hinting that they have no hope of resurrection to eternity in the Messianic Kingdom; or that the Messianic dawn which was potentially possible at the time didn't happen. Hence Luther: “If they do not say this, they will not have the morning dawn”. Instead :22 says they will be sent out into the darkness of rejection.

Isaiah 8:21 They will pass through it, very distressed and hungry; and it will happen that when they are hungry, they will worry, and curse by their king and by their God. They will turn their faces upward- They would look up to God, only to look back down to the anguished earth (:22). Only Isaiah and his disciples would be able to look upward and find God: "I will wait for Yahweh, who hides His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him" (:17). The emphasis there is upon "I". Yahweh would be hidden from the majority, but Isaiah and his family (:18) represented the remnant from whom He had not hidden His face, and who could look for Him and find Him whereas the majority could not. That faithful minority would find food in the desolated land (see on Is. 7:22), but the majority would not; they would curse God and their king (Ahaz, in the initial possible scenario). This didn't happen as was potentially threatened; but it will come finally true in the last days for those condemned. See on :22.

Isaiah 8:22 and look to the earth, and see distress, darkness, and the gloom of anguish. They will be driven into thick darkness- The scenario envisaged didn't fully happen at Isaiah's time. Judah were saved from condemnation by grace, and the Assyrians were destroyed. But this language of condemnation will still come true, for it is quoted by the Lord Jesus about the final judgment and condemnation in darkness of the unfaithful within Israel (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Likewise distress upon the earth / land and hearts failing with anguish is applied by the Lord to the situation there in the last days, due to the Jews refusing to believe in Him (Lk. 21:23,26)

ISAIAH CHAPTER 9

Isaiah 9:1 But there shall be no more gloom for her who was in anguish- The allusion is to the anguish of childbirth. A new people and kingdom was to be brought forth from the suffering at the hand of the Assyrians. This was perceived by Hezekiah in Is. 37:3: "the children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring

forth". The LXX implies that for the ten tribes (Zebulun and Naphtali) as well as Judah, the drinking of the cup of Assyrian judgment would bring forth a Messianic kingdom, if they now quickly repented: :Drink this first. Act quickly, O land of Zabulon, land of Nephthalim, and the rest inhabiting the sea-coast, and the land beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles". But Hezekiah let the baton drop and did not establish the restored Kingdom of God in Judah which was potentially possible.

In the former time, He brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time He has made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations- The present tense is used of what God was certainly going to do. The northernmost areas of the ten tribes, who had suffered most from the Assyrian invasion (2 Kings 15:29), were to be made glorious in the restored kingdom of Judah. Isaiah writes primarily about "Judah and Jerusalem", but all the major prophets envisage a repentant Israel and Judah united together in the new, restored Kingdom of God. This didn't happen as was prophetically possible at Isaiah's time. But there is the purposefully enigmatic suggestion here that this revival of Zebulun and Naphtali will be something to do with Galilee- the home area of the Lord Jesus, who would bring about the fulfilment. "The way of the sea" has been understood as referring to the region along the west side of the lake of Galilee, where the Lord did much work. It was in this very area that the Lord Jesus first proclaimed the Gospel, in fulfilment of this prophecy (Mt. 4:13).

Because God is beyond time, His prophecies appear to jump around in time; and that is also reflective of the conditional nature of prophecy, with various possible applications at different times, depending upon the potential realized amongst God's people. They only appear disjointed to us who read them with a background insistence that everything must be chronological. Thus the tenses change freely throughout Isaiah 53. And throughout Isaiah, prophecies of the Kingdom are often introduced by the rubric "in that day"; and yet the preceding context is often quite different (e.g. Is. 3:7,18; 4:1; 5:30; 7:18,21; 10:20,22; 11:10; 12:1; 17:9; 19:6; 22:20,25; 25:9; 27:13; 28:5; 29:18). It makes an interesting exercise to go through Isaiah 9 and decide to which time each verse applies. Some of the verses are quoted in the NT and given specific fulfillments. They refer to Isaiah's day, the Assyrian invasion, the birth of Jesus, the beginning of His ministry at age 30, and to His future Kingdom. And yet the verses aren't presented in this order; they move from one to the other at ease, with no linking rubric or explanation. Likewise Daniel's prophecies seem to have a big hiatus in their fulfillment (Dan. 2:34; 8:23; 9:24; 11:39); and Zechariah is another good example. Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least the book of Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfillment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then :12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (Lk. 21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples).

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined- This could be

seen as an invitation to perceive that light, hence LXX "O people walking in darkness, behold a great light". But they didn't. And so the returned exiles, "Zion", are asked at a later stage to arise and shine because their light had come (Is. 60:1). But again they didn't, and so these prophecies of a light coming are reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who was perceived by a new Zion as the light of the world.

The darkness of the context is that of Is. 8:22- the darkness of condemnation, for the rejected for whom there was 'no dawn' (Is. 8:20 Heb.). We can be condemned in this life and yet still change that verdict- by coming to the light of Christ. Chapter 8 concluded by speaking of the wicked being sent into the darkness of condemnation (a common figure in Isaiah, e.g. Is. 5:30; 9:19). Those who dwell in the dark shadow of death are therefore those who have been condemned- but for them, the light of Christ arose from despised Galilee and the area around the sea of Galilee (:1- "the sea" surely refers in the context to the sea of Galilee, not the Mediterranean).

The "great light" could initially have been a reference to the 'great' son of Isaiah who was to be the saving king of Judah (:6). The holy one of Israel within Zion was to be "great" in distinction from the "great" [s.w.] king of Assyria who was as it were the anti-Christ, the opposite number of the "great" one within Zion, with his offers of a fake Kingdom of God (Is. 36:4,13).

Isaiah 9:3 You have multiplied the nation, but You have not increased their joy. They will rejoice before You according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil- Their joy not being increased is hard to square with the reference to their joy which follows. The idea may be that their prosperity at the time of Uzziah and Ahaz did not bring joy. But there was going to be great joy- because the Assyrian yoke would be lifted miraculously if they repented (:4). Keil & Delitsch render: “Thou multipliest the nation, preparest it great joy; they rejoice before Thee like the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they share the spoil". There was not such joy at the time because Judah and Israel didn't repent. And so "the joy of harvest" could have happened at the restoration from Babylon (Ps. 126:5,6). But again it didn't, and we read of the miserable restored exiles suffering famine and poor harvests because they refused to repent.

And so the prophecies were reapplied to the spiritual restoration of God's people in the Lord Jesus, the one from Galilee hinted at in :1. But there was not universal joy in Israel at Jesus of Nazareth- the prophecy was a potential possibility, but Israel chose not to fulfill it. Both Israel and Judah could have spoiled the Assyrians, but that didn't happen as it could have done; it had a limited fulfilment in the people of Jerusalem spoiling the tents of the dead Assyrians. And so the figure of spoil being divided was re-applied by the Lord Jesus to describe His victory over sin and sharing it with those who believe in Him (Mt. 12:29; Col. 2:15; 3:9 Gk.). Again, Israel should have rejoiced in this- but they generally did not.

Isaiah 9:4 For the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, You have broken as in the day of Midian- This was to be the reason for their joy and spoiling of the Assyrians (:3), with the burden of heavy taxation now lifted (Is. 10:27; 14:25).

The idea of breaking the yoke and destroying the oppressive burdens recalls Israel's suffering in Egypt (Ex. 2:11; Lev. 26:13), who were Israel's "oppressors" (s.w. Ex. 3:7 "taskmasters"). The reference to Midian's destruction (repeated in Is.

10:26,27) suggests that a small remnant, akin to Gideon's three hundred men, would destroy a far greater military and political power which was dominating Israel. It calls for a military fulfilment, and this surely was the possibility in Isaiah's day. The righteous remnant were to release Judah from domination by the overpowering Assyria. But they did not fully achieve this, nor did they accept God's new covenant which was to be the basis for them never again being under yoke (Jer. 30:8; Ez. 34:27), and so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the victory of the Lord Jesus over sin (see on :4). His offer of *His* yoke in place of the *heavy yoke* carried by God's people surely alludes here (Mt. 11:29). And His spiritual victory will have its political and 'military' manifestation at Christ's return and His final liberation of Israel from their Arab oppressors.

Isaiah 9:5 For all the armour of the armed man in the noisy battle and the garments rolled in blood will be for burning, fuel for the fire- This is the scene of Ez. 39, when the weapons of Israel's invaders are burnt. Their bloodstained battle clothes will be burnt to cleanse the land. The language is reapplied to the last days. "The noisy battle" is the word for "earthquake". There was no earthquake recorded when the Assyrian army was destroyed outside Jerusalem; this is the language of the last days. "Fuel for the fire" is the same phrase found in :19, where this is to be the judgment upon Israel and Judah. The judgment that could then have come upon their enemies was to come upon them, because they refused to repent and thus precluded the prophetic potential of :5 from coming about.

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given- This sounds like the exaltation of parents at the birth of their child, and the initial application was to the joy of Isaiah and his wife at the birth of the promised child who could have been the saviour Messiah figure. But he was not (see on Is. 7:14; 8:1), and so the prophecy came to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. See on Is. 8:18. This is surely Isaiah's proclamation concerning his fourth son of sign, born to him and his prophetess wife (Is. 8:3). The son may be the same as 'Emmanuel'. Potentially, this son could've been the saving king of Judah. But that child didn't rise up to it, and so the prophecy will have a deferred fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. If Isaiah's disciples are understood as his spiritual children (Is. 8:16 cp. 18), then this spiritual child of Isaiah could refer to Hezekiah. But the child is not named because it failed to fulfill the prophecy.

And the government will be on his shoulders- Every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom, because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

Micah 5 speaks of Messiah being born and being smitten upon the cheek at the same time as Jerusalem is besieged and Judah has been invaded by the Assyrians. Whatever minor fulfilment this may have had in Hezekiah, it was pathetically incomplete- he wasn't born in Bethlehem, and he wasn't smitten upon the cheek with a rod. I read all this as meaning that Messiah could have been born and then suffered in such circumstances- but it didn't happen. The prophecy was fulfilled in essence, although in a different context and in a different way, in the Lord Jesus. Likewise Is. 9:6 speaks as if the birth of Messiah would be at a time of deliverance from Israel's invaders; yet Is. 9:13 RV implies this would only happen if they were obedient: "Yet the people hath not turned / repented".

His name will be called- All the exalted language about the child could therefore have been applied to Isaiah's newborn son; and Trinitarians should note that. "His name will be called..." all these things. This is not to say that He Himself by nature is all these things; they are titles. The titles are all relevant to a Divine deliverer who would arise to save Judah from their enemies and reestablish God's Kingdom in Judah.

At the judgment Jesus will give us God's name (Rev. 3:12); we then will fully carry the name of God. He calls this name, "My new name". Remember, Jesus gave the book of Revelation some years after his ascension into heaven and after he had been given God's name, as explained in Phil. 2:9. So he can call God's name "My new name"; the name he had recently been given. We can now properly understand Is. 9:6, where concerning Jesus we are told, "His *name* (note that) shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father...". This is a prophecy that Jesus would carry *all* the name of God - that he would be the total manifestation or revelation of God to us. It was in this sense that he was called 'Emmanuel', meaning, 'God is with us', although He personally was not God. Thus the prophecy of Joel 2 that men would call on the name of Yahweh was fulfilled by people being baptized into the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:21 cf. 38). This also explains why the command to baptize into the name of the Father was fulfilled, as detailed in the Acts record, by baptism into the name of Jesus.

Wonderful- "Wonderful" uses the word usually used for miracles, "wonders", especially of Divine deliverance from enemies. And that is the context here (Is. 25:1).

Counsellor- He was to be the "counsellor" who would be the Divine answer to the wicked "counsel" of Syria and Israel against Judah (s.w. Is. 7:5).

Divine Warrior- The "warrior" (:5 AV) of their enemies could have been matched by a "Divine Warrior", a Messiah figure who could have saved Israel and Judah from this invasion. This shall come true in the last days in the person of the Lord Jesus. For "mighty God" (AV), see on Is. 10:21. Even if this translation is accepted, men are called "God" in the Bible, e.g. Moses.

This phrase is the same as 'Gabriel'. So can we conclude that at His ascension, Jesus took over the role of the Angel Gabriel? Thus until then the Angel Gabriel would have been a type of Jesus, and perhaps His guardian Angel. Maybe this implies that we will take over the role of our guardian Angel when we are glorified. Is. 9:6 also gives Jesus the title 'Wonderful'- which is the name of another Angel (Judges 13:18 mg.; or is this just another title of the Angel Gabriel?). Thus when Jesus was exalted above the Angels as explained in Heb. 1, Jesus took the names of the Angels as He took those of God Himself.

Father of the Eternal Age- The "eternal age" of the Kingdom of peace could have come at that time, with the Messianic son of Isaiah as the father of that eternal age. But it didn't. It was reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who because He never sought equality with God was given the Name above every Name, all the titles of the Father, in order to give glory to the Father (Phil. 2:8-11; the whole reasoning contradicts the Trinitarian dogma). To be a "father" of something means being the source of something; it doesn't mean that the person in view is therefore 'God the Father'. An eternal Messianic kingdom could then have been established; Judah were urged to repent and allow it to happen in Is. 26:4. And the same potential was there for the exiles who returned from Babylon (Is. 45:17; 65:18). And the "father" of that could have been a Messianic figure who arose in Jerusalem. But these potentials have been reapplied and rescheduled to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus to be established in Zion in the last days. The titles here, including "father", are applied to Eliakim in Is. 22:21;

as noted there, Eliakim could have become a Messiah figure at the time, but he failed (Is. 22:25). So the prophecies were reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Prince of Peace- "Prince" is also a military term, used of the Assyrian generals in Is. 10:8; 31:9 (also s.w. Jer. 40:7 "the captains of the forces"). The Messianic prince of peace could have been the answer to them; but instead Judah preferred to trust in the princes of Egypt (Is. 19:11). And so the Prince who would bring eternal peace from the surrounding enemies was a prophecy reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Is. 9:6 states that the Lord Jesus personally is "called" or "proclaimed" as peace. This is the same Hebrew word as in Dt. 20:10- Israel were to "proclaim peace" to cities they attacked, demanding either their submission or destruction. And yet *we* are the ones who "proclaim [the] peace" of Christ to men (Is. 52:7). Insofar as we represent Him in our witness, our hearers are faced with a radical choice- to submit to Him or eternally perish. It's easy to forget that this is how God sees it, as we witness to people. We're so used to the rejection of our message that we perhaps fail to see the eternal importance of the choice we lay before people; and this should impart a verve and urgency of appeal to our preaching, rather than an indifferent inviting of people to meetings, discussion, etc.

LXX has "and his name is called the Messenger of the great council". The members of this court of Heaven have various names- Holy ones (Hos. 12:1; Zech. 14:5); spirits (1 Kings 22:21-23; Ps 104:4); messengers/angels (Ps 91:11; 103:20); ministers (Ps 103:21; 104:4); servants (Job 4:18); those on high (Job 21:22); princes (Josh. 5:14; Dan 10:13). Supremely, Is. 9:5 LXX speaks of Messiah as "the Messenger of the Great Council" [*megales boules angelos*]. He was to be the vehicle through which Yahweh of Hosts of Angelic armies operated on earth to Israel's salvation.

Isaiah is full of allusions to Zoroastrian ideas (see on Is. 45:6), seeking to teach Judah the true position on these things. Thus it was taught that “Saviours will come from the seed of Zoroaster, and in the end, the great Saviour”, who would be born of a virgin, resurrect the dead and give immortality. These ideas are picked up in Is. 9:6 and applied prophetically to the ultimate Saviour, Jesus – as if to warn the Jews not to accept the prevalent Persian ideas in this area. Indeed as suggested on Is. 1:1, it appears that [under Divine inspiration] much of the Hebrew Bible was rewritten in Babylon, in order to deconstruct the ideas which Israel were meeting in Babylon.

The verse could be rendered: “And the wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, calls his name Eternal-Father, Prince of Peace..."- as if God gives His own titles to this son, which would fit admirably with what God gave to Jesus on His ascension (Phil. 2:7-11). If it is accepted that in the first instance, the child in view was the child of Isaiah and his wife, then we need not conclude that the titles and Divine name given to the child imply that he was to be God Himself in person. The failure of the unnamed son of Isaiah to fulfill the intended role meant that the prophecy had fulfilment in Christ- which is in harmony with the interpretation I have offered for the preceding verses of the chapter.

Isaiah 9:7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, on the throne of David, and on his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness- As explained on :6, this was the Messianic kingdom which could have come in Isaiah's time. But the people of Judah preferred to continue in injustice and unrighteousness- two of the frequent complaints Isaiah makes about

their behaviour. David did "judgment and justice" (2 Sam. 8:15; 1 Chron. 18:14), and yet David said that it was *God* who executed judgment and justice (Ps. 99:4; 103:6).

The idea is that the throne of David, i.e. the Davidic Kingdom, was to be restored- with God reigning through and manifested in the Messianic King, just as He had been in and through David in the past. The Kingdom of God will eternally increase, just as the little stone of Daniel 2 keeps expanding over the earth. It may imply that God's rulership over us will eternally increase, or that we will eternally be involved in expanding and increasing His Kingship [or Kingdom] over other entities, perhaps in the natural creation, or further throughout the infinite cosmos. Whatever, the essence of wanting to extend His Kingdom / Kingship should be programmatic for our lives now, in pastoral care, exhortation, encouragement and preaching work- as well as progressively submitting ourselves to His rulership. For this extension of His Kingship is what we shall spend eternity doing.

From that time on, even forever- AV "From henceforth even for ever". This eternal Kingdom was intended to start in Isaiah's time, through the work of his son (either his literal son, or his spiritual son / disciple Hezekiah). But it didn't- although the possibility and intention was there. Again, we conclude that the establishment of the eternal Kingdom was rescheduled for fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, the One who lived up to all God's hopes and prophetic expectations.

The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will perform this- "The zeal" is s.w. jealousy, envy. God's motivation was not because Judah were righteous but because He was jealous for His beloved but wayward people. The Hebrew word translated " zeal" in the context of God's zeal for us (Is. 9:8) really means the jealousy which flares up in a man for a woman (the same word is in Num. 5:14,15; Prov. 6:34; Song 8:6 etc.). That jealousy burning like fire (Ps. 79:5) is His passion for us His people. He is a jealous God in His zeal for us; and therefore any other relationships with the things of this world cannot be contemplated by us. That zeal of God will be poured out upon us at the second coming, resulting in a consummation with Him as the wife of His covenant (Is. 42:13,14; 64:1). This is a figure which would be unseemly for a man to devise. But this is His passion for us, which the humility of God drives Him to use; and surely it will one day be revealed. To use this very figure of a man in love and consummating his relationship in marriage is so apparently inappropriate that it reflects the humility of God in even considering the use of it. We are God's heritage, His reward / wages (Heb.), His recompense for all His labour for us (Ps. 127:3 Heb.).

Isaiah 9:8 The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it falls upon Israel- The sending forth of Isaiah (s.w. Is. 6:8) was the sending forth of God's word to His people. Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh. The man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached.

Isaiah 9:9 All the people will know, including Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, who say in pride and in arrogance of heart- Israel had lost their hold on true doctrine, many scarcely knew the Law (Is. 57:4,5; 59:3). They got drunk at the temple feasts (Is. 36:10-12; 58:3,4), like Corinth they had an "eat, drink, for tomorrow we die" mentality (Is. 22:12,13); they committed all manner of sexual perversions, along with almost every other form of doctrinal and moral apostasy (Is. 5:11-13,24; 8:19; 9:15; 22:12,13; 24:5; 27:11; 28:7; 30:10; 31:6; 44:8-20; consider the similarities with Corinth). This list is worth reading through. And consider the terrible implications of their perversion in Is. 66:17. But the early chapters of Isaiah sternly rebuke Israel for

their *pride*- there is not a whisper of all these other things until later (Is. 2:11-22; 3:16-20; 5:15; 9:9). And even throughout the later rebukes, there is the repeated criticism of their pride (Is. 13:11; 16:6; 23:9; 24:4; 25:11; 26:5; 28:1,3,14; 29:4; 30:25; 50:33; 57:15). This is why Isaiah's prophecies of Christ stress His humility (Acts 8:33), and the "lofty", "high", "exaltation" of God. These words, common in Isaiah, are those translated “pride" in Isaiah's condemnations of Israel's arrogance; as if to say that *God* was the only one who could be 'proud'.

The only other occurence of the phrase "proud heart" is in Is. 10:12, where this is said of the king of Assyria. Their hearts were no better than that of Sennacherib, and so they were punished as he was. In their hearts they were Gentiles.

Isaiah 9:10 The bricks have fallen, but we will rebuild with cut stone. The sycamore fig trees have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place- Israel were determined to overcome the effects of Divine judgment in their own strength; just as today men vainly battle every way they can to resist the effects of Divine judgment. LXX "and let us build for ourselves a tower" equates them with the builders of Babel / Babylon. And so an even greater judgment was to come upon them, at the hands of Babylon - Assyria.

Isaiah 9:11 Therefore Yahweh will set up on high against him the adversaries of Rezin, and will stir up his enemies- This suggests that the Rezin, the king of Syria, would have enemies who would unite against him (perhaps a reference to the latter day uniting of rebel factions against the Syrian regime), and yet at the same time would join with the Philistines (Palestinians) to be as the jaw of a beast closing upon Israel (:12). "Stir up" is really "join together", as AV. The enemies of Syria were going to join with Syria in devouring Israel (:12). We get a sense of politics and temporary alliances between groups which soon turned against each other, despite having Israel as their common enemy. This is precisely the situation we see in the *eretz* or land promised to Abraham today; these prophecies are coming to their latter day fulfilment. See on :19.

Isaiah 9:12 the Syrians in front and the Philistines behind; and they will devour Israel with open mouth- Again the image of a devouring beast represents the neighbours of Israel, acting as a wild beast towards her. And that continues throughout Daniel and Revelation. These ancient prophecies are beginning to be fulfilled in the last days, with Syria and the Palestinians / Philistines of the sea coast likely to crush an impenitent Israel.

For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still- Isaiah later uses this figure of His hand being stretched out still to describe how God stretches out His hand in appeal for repentance (Is. 65:2). As Emil Brunner observed, "the wrath of God is the love of God". His anger did not turn away exactly because it was His arm stretched out in appeal for Israel's repentance. The smiting of Israel by God's hand was in order that they might turn to Him (:13)- it was not any kind of vindictive anger. Our actions typically have only one or two functions, whereas God is the God of boundless function. His words and actions therefore have multiple intentions and fulfillments- a feature often hard for us to comprehend.

Isaiah 9:13 Yet the people have not turned to Him who struck them, neither have they sought Yahweh of Armies- See on :6. God was the one behind all the enemies of His people. His hand was and still is stretched out against Israel until they turn to Him,

which is why the end of Judah's final woes at the hand of her neighbouring enemies will be only when they turn to God in accepting His Son. His hand is stretched out against them *for* they do not turn unto Him (God) who smites them.

Isaiah 9:14 Therefore Yahweh will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed, in one day- Both the leadership ("the elder... is the head", :15) and the ordinary people were equally guilty, as 9:16 says in so many words, and as Isaiah opened his prophecy in chapter 1 by declaring, in his appeal to both the heavens and the earth. Following bad leadership is not, therefore, any mitigation for the sins committed by ordinary, mislead people. Verse 17 is chilling in this connection- widows and young orphans were all counted as equally guilty and were not spared. Even though God in other contexts is very much the defender of the widows and orphans. The intended judgment was to be "in one day"; suddenly, in moments, every sector of Israelite society was to be destroyed. But this isn't what happened. The various prophetic scenarios at the time didn't all happen; but they are reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 9:15 The elder and the honourable man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail- The false prophets of the last days in Israel were around in Isaiah's time, and according to Jewish tradition, they sawed Isaiah in half after Hezekiah died. His ministry was not without serious opposition from amongst his own people.

Isaiah 9:16 For those who lead this people lead them astray; and those who are led by them are destroyed- But in moral, ethical terms, those led astray were destroyed because they had been willing to be led astray. After all, Isaiah and his school of the prophets were giving them true teaching, and they chose to ignore that. "Destroyed" is better 'to devour'; the devouring of Israel by the beast of :12 was because they willfully followed their false prophets. 'Lead astray' is the same word as in Is. 53:6: "All we like sheep have *gone astray*, we have turned every one to his own way". So although they were led astray, they had chosen this path, making the way of the false prophets their "own way". So they were not simply punished because of being naive, or listening to wrong information. There was more election in it than that.

Isaiah 9:17 Therefore the Lord will not rejoice over their young men, neither will He have compassion on their fatherless and widows; for each one is profane and an evildoer- See on :14. Their 'evil doing' was likely in not saying anything. As has been so often observed by those who have suffered from oppressive regimes, it is the silent majority who quietly tut-tut but do not oppose and thereby enable evil, who are in fact the most guilty.

And every mouth speaks folly- Isaiah and Hezekiah were alone in their faithfulness to Yahweh. The salvation of Jerusalem is explained in Isaiah 1 as only because of the existence of a faithful remnant, and that remnant was basically just Isaiah's family. Isaiah 1 and other chapters emphasize the total apostasy of Judah at this time. We note that it was because of their words that they were condemned; and that sensitivity to our language continues to this day (Mt. 12:37).

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still- See on :12.

Isaiah 9:18 For wickedness burns like a fire, it devours the briers and thorns- Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for

understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Yet "briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (here and Is. 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them (Is. 5:6; 7:23-25); and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Yes, it kindles in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column of smoke- The smoke columns caused by the invaders were actually kindled by the wickedness of God's people. The idea is that the fire spreads from individual thorn bushes and brambles to consume whole thickets of trees. Perhaps the idea is that individual apostasy called for individual judgment, but this spread to the whole nation. Not by any 'guilt by association', but insofar as personal example comes to influence the whole group.

Wickedness burns- The actual sin of the people is spoken of as the fire of judgment. Sin *is* condemnation. To choose to sin is to choose to live out condemnation and apply it to ourselves. The essence of final judgment is therefore going on right now in our behaviour.

Isaiah 9:19 Through the wrath of Yahweh of Armies, the land is burnt up; and the people are the fuel for the fire. No one spares his brother- "Fuel for the fire" is the same phrase found in :5, where this is to be the judgment upon the enemies of Israel and Judah. The judgment that could then have come upon their enemies was to come upon them, because they refused to repent and thus precluded the prophetic potential of :5 from coming about. As explained on :18, the people were both the fire and the fuel for the fire. What is envisaged here is a complete meltdown of relationships, with both Israel and Judah under attack by a group of neighbours who were enemies with each other but united against God's people (see on :11); and at the same time, Israel and Judah warring with each other. This didn't happen in Isaiah's time, and so the prophetic scenario has been recalculated and reapplied to other times and especially to the last days.

Isaiah 9:20 One will devour on the right hand, and be hungry; and he will eat on the left hand, and they will not be satisfied. Everyone will eat the flesh of his own arm- As explained on :19, the devouring of God's people by the mouth of the beast of her neighbours (:12) was to also involve God's people devouring each other. And finally, they would eat themselves. The LXX here appears to be alluded to in the New Testament, because the precise scenario here envisaged didn't quite come true in Isaiah's time: we can bite and devour one another (Gal. 5:15), as the Jews did in their day of condemnation in the Babylonian invasion (quoting Is. 9:19,20 LXX; Jer. 13:14). By doing so we are acting out our own condemnation.

Isaiah 9:21 Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh; and they together shall be against Judah- This appears to be saying that Israel would be divided against itself, and also Israel would be against Judah.

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still- See on :12. What is envisaged here is a complete meltdown of relationships, with both Israel and Judah under attack by a group of neighbours who were enemies with each other but united against God's people (see on :11); and at the same time, Israel and Judah warring with each other. This didn't happen in Isaiah's time, and so the prophetic scenario has been recalculated and reapplied to other times and especially to the last days.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 10

Isaiah 10:1 Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers who write oppressive decrees- The writing in view may be the writing of legal judgments against the poor who were being abused (:2). God had already given His people decrees to live by, so they were effectively playing God by writing their own decrees. Jer. 8:8 seems to be saying that "the pen of the scribes" was replacing God's law. Judah precluded the reestablishment of God's Kingdom in Judah by this behaviour; and similar language is used of how the restored exiles didn't learn the lesson but acted in the same way (Is. 59:4). And so again, the opportunity to reestablish the Kingdom was precluded.

Isaiah 10:2 to deprive the needy from justice, and to rob the poor among My people of their rights, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey!- Spoil and prey are the very words used in :6 of what the Assyrians would do to Judah. But this what Judah had done to themselves; their condemnation was but an extension of how they had lived their lives. We too "make the answer now". We live life standing before God's judgment; if we are condemned at the last day, then we will have been living that way now.

Isaiah 10:3 What will you do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which will come from afar?- "The day of visitation" is interpreted as the day of the second coming of the Lord Jesus in judgment (1 Pet. 2:12). The intended day of judgment at the hand of the Assyrians was averted; but the repentance of the remnant which was responsible for this was not shared by the majority, so the essence of the prophecy shall come true in the last days.

To whom will you flee for help?- This is the phrase used of how the Philistines had fled to Egypt and Ethiopia for help (Is. 20:6). Judah had done just the same in fleeing to those same nations for help, rather than to their God. They had ignored 'Hezekiah', 'Yah is my help'. In other words, Judah gave in to the temptation which we acutely face today- to deal with our fears in the same way as the surrounding world does, rather than fall upon our God.

Where will you leave your wealth?- Under Uzziah and Ahaz, Judah had been prosperous, and they used that wealth to try to buy security against Assyria from Egypt and others. This is described in Ezekiel and Jeremiah as them being as an immoral prostitute who actually pays men to sleep with her.

Isaiah 10:4 They will only bow down under the prisoners, and will fall under the slain- The LXX simply has "that ye may not fall into captivity?". GNB "You will be killed in battle or dragged off as prisoners". This isn't what happened when the Assyrians invaded Judah; so much was averted because of the intercession and repentance of so few.

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still- Isaiah later uses this figure of His hand being stretched out still to describe how God stretches out His hand in appeal for repentance (Is. 65:2). Even if the Assyrian invasion of Judah had succeeded, God would still have been searching for their repentance. As Emil Brunner observed, "the wrath of God is the love of God". His anger did not turn away exactly because it was His arm stretched out in appeal for

Israel's repentance. The smiting of Israel by God's hand was in order that they might turn to Him (Is. 9:13)- it was not any kind of vindictive anger. Our actions typically have only one or two functions, whereas God is the God of boundless function. His words and actions therefore have multiple intentions and fulfillments- a feature often hard for us to comprehend.

Isaiah 10:5 Alas Assyrian, the rod of My anger, the staff in whose hand is My indignation!- A pagan god looked after his own people against their enemies. But Yahweh of Israel sent and empowered Israel's enemies against them, and gave them victory against His own people; He encamped against His very own people (Is. 29:2-4). The archenemy of Israel, Assyria, was revealed as a rod in the God of Israel's hand, and the King of Babylon was Yahweh's servant who would come against Yahweh's own people (Jer. 25:9; 27:6 etc.). The will of Israel's God was that the capital city, seen by the people as the symbol and nerve center of a god's power and control, was to be destroyed by Israel's enemies (Jer. 34:1-5; 21:3-7). In the surrounding culture of Israel, capital cities were portrayed as women, the wives of the gods. They are always presented as pure and wonderful. But the prophets represent cities like Jerusalem and Samaria as fallen women, whores. It was all *so* counter-cultural. Yahweh's prophet even appealed for Israel to surrender when under siege (Jer. 21:8-10). Try to enter into how radical and counter-cultural all this was. The prophets were trying to share the feelings and positions of a God *so* vastly different to the imaginations and understandings of His very own people. The nervous stress of this, the psychological pressure, can't be underestimated. And we are asked to share the spirit / mind / disposition of those prophets. Not only was God on the side of Israel's enemies; yet through all that, He somehow *was* with Israel; quite simply, "God is with us", even though it is He who encamps against them too (Is. 8:9,10; 18:4). The God of Auschwitz is somehow still the God of Israel. The very torment, even torture, of understanding that was etched clearly in the prophets, and it will be in us too.

Isaiah 10:6 I will send him against a profane nation- The word for "profane" is used about how Judah were polluted by idols and unfaithfulness to Yahweh with other gods (Jer. 3:2; Ps. 106:38 etc.). Hence the verse continues, to speak of God's related "anger". AV has "hypocritical", in which case we see how hypocrisy is a cardinal sin with God, just as proud body language is (see on :12).

And against the people who anger Me will I give him a command- This command was given from the court of Heaven. But surely Sennacherib was not consciously addressed. We see here how God works through human psychology. Sennacherib had his own agendas and motivations. But where do our agendas come from? From a complex web of personal history, desires made stronger by our experiences, our location in time and space, our genes... so many things. And yet God worked through all that to give this man a command to attack Judah. But see on :14.

To take the spoil and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets- Spoil and prey are the very words used in :2 of what Judah had done to themselves in abusing each other; their condemnation was but an extension of how they had lived their lives. For now this was what the Assyrians would do to Judah. We too "make the answer now". We live life standing before God's judgment; if we are condemned at the last day, then we will have been living that way now. A desire to take spoil and prey from Israel is the characteristic of the latter day Gog (s.w. Ez.

38:12), and we can therefore understand the Assyrian invasion here threatened to ultimately come about in the last days. For actually Assyria did not take a spoil and prey from Judah at this time, because the whole scenario was changed; due to the repentance of a remnant, the Assyrians never took Jerusalem and were destroyed by an Angel.

Isaiah 10:7 However he doesn't mean so, neither does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations- See on :11. Thus it was in his heart to punish Israel and other nations; he didn't "mean" to solely punish Judah. Or we could read with LXX "But he meant not thus, neither did he devise thus in his soul: but his mind shall change, and that to destroy nations not a few". In this case, God put the idea in his mind when it was not in his plan; and we would then be exhorted as to the power God has to work directly on the human heart. According to Is. 8:8, the envisaged prophetic scenario was that the invasion and destruction of the ten tribes by Assyria would be at the same time as the invasion of Judah by Assyria, part of the same campaign, sweeping onward to them. Indeed as we learn here, "it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations" at that same time. But this isn't what happened. The prophecies offer various potential scenarios, which could be ameliorated, changed, hastened, intensified, delayed or cancelled because of God's extreme sensitivity to human repentance. This is why it's impossible to use Bible prophecies to construct a chronology of latter day events; there are so many variables. Not least the repentance of Israel, the work of the faithful ecclesia in preaching the Gospel to the world and prayer for the Lord's coming- quite apart from the Divine pity which is at the core of His character.

Isaiah 10:8 For he says, Aren't all of my princes kings?- He considered all his princes ought to have somewhere to reign over as kings. But LXX "And if they should say to him, Thou alone art ruler" suggests that if he were to be told that Yahweh alone is king, he would respond by saying that the cities he was planning to invade (:9) were his as much as the cities of his own existing empire. And there we would see the pride and arrogance against Yahweh which is focused upon as the reason for his destruction.

Isaiah 10:9 Isn't Calno like Carchemish? Isn't Hamath like Arpad? Isn't Samaria like Damascus?- See on :8. LXX "Have I not taken the country above Babylon and Chalanes, where the tower was built? and have I not taken Arabia, and Damascus, and Samaria?". He therefore considered that the kingdom of Judah was no different, thus despising Yahweh and treating Him as just another local city idol who was powerless before him (see on :10).

Isaiah 10:10 As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, whose engraved images exceeded those of Jerusalem and of Samaria- LXX "As I have taken them, I will also take all the kingdoms: howl, ye idols in Jerusalem, and in Samaria". It was sadly true that there were plenty of idols in Jerusalem (:11), as well as the temple of Yahweh. Sennacherib reasoned that the gods of the surrounding nations had been powerless before him, and therefore Jerusalem would be likewise, because she had the same gods worshipped within her. And that was fair logic, on one level. Yahweh's salvation of Jerusalem from the Assyrians was therefore all the more an act of pure grace. However we could read him as thinking that Yahweh was a God without idols; other

cities had more idols within them than Jerusalem did, and therefore she would be a walkover.

Isaiah 10:11 Shall I not, as I have done to Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?- See on :10. We have here a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words; see on Is. 3:8. These words were the 'fruit of his heart' (:12)- out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. But see on :7.

Isaiah 10:12 Therefore it will happen, that when the Lord has performed His whole work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem- It was God who was going to hew down the temple in Zion, using Assyria merely as the axe in His hand (:15). The work of destroying Zion would be His work; and it would be the total finishing of Zion in completeness, so the Hebrew implies. Again we marvel at how much was averted by so few. We see the power of prayer and repentance.

He will punish the fruit of the wilful proud heart of the king of Assyria, and the insolence of his arrogant looks- The fruit of his heart were the words of :11 for which he was condemned; for by words are men condemned (Mt. 12:37), because they are reflective of the heart. And the state of the heart is of paramount importance to God. Israel were to be the light to the Gentile world around them, the righteous servant who showed light to the Gentiles. But they sadly failed. Note too how the prophets pointed out to Gentile nations their sins and failed responsibilities before the God of Israel (Am. 2; 9:7; Is. 10:5; Jer. 46; Ez. 27,29). We note here that out of all the things God could have condemned Assyria for (idolatry, viciousness, cruelty etc.), it is their proud hearts and associated body language which He focuses upon. This is how abhorrent is pride to the one God whose moral judgments and perspectives are alone of any importance to man on this earth. The only other occurrence of the phrase "wilful proud heart" is in Is. 9:9, where this is said of the ten tribes of Israel. Their hearts were no better than that of Sennacherib, and so they were punished as he was. In their hearts they were Gentiles. Likewise the phrase "arrogant looks" is used of the Jews in Is. 2:11.

Isaiah 10:13 For he has said, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I have understanding: and I have removed the boundaries of the peoples, and have robbed their treasures. Like a valiant man I have brought down their rulers- The bringing down of Judah is described several times in Is. 2 as being Yahweh's work. He failed to perceive that he was acting on Yahweh's behalf. The fact he was culpable for this, and was punished for it, means that he ought to have looked at his career in life and perceived that the hand of Israel's God was in all this. But he refused to see that picture in his life, and became proud; the references to "my wisdom" may refer to the wisdom he thought he had from his gods. It is by reflecting upon the hand of providence in our lives that we are saved from pride. I noted on :12 that the sins of Sennacherib were essentially those of Israel; they are also condemned for trusting in "the strength of my hand" (Dt. 8:17 s.w.). See on :14.

Isaiah 10:14 My hand has found the riches of the peoples like a nest, and like one gathers eggs that are abandoned, have I gathered all the earth. There was no one who moved their wing, or that opened their mouth, or chirped- LXX "I will take with my hand all the world as a nest: and I will even take them as eggs that have been left; and

there is none that shall escape me, or contradict me". This is tantamount to saying that he would not allow any "remnant" to escape; and yet the escape of a remnant from Judah was a major part of Isaiah's prophecies. The Hebrew is difficult, but the idea seems to be that he intended to totally empty the nest- taking both the eggs and the mother bird, so that there was not a sound from the nest; the mother bird would not chirp or flutter her wings when the eggs were taken, because she was going to be taken as well. This is specifically disobedient to Dt. 22:6,7; just as removing landmark boundaries of a neighbour (:13) was disobedient to Dt. 19:14. It's as if this Gentile king was being held responsible for breaking the Mosaic law. Perhaps the "command" he was given by God in :6 was a direct revelation, which made him therefore responsible to Yahweh's law. And therefore his disobedience was the more culpable. Or it could be that Gentiles are to some extent held responsible for breaking Divine laws and principles even if they don't know them.

Isaiah 10:15 Should an axe brag against him who chops with it? Should a saw exalt itself above him who saws with it? As if a rod should lift those who lift it up, or as if a staff should lift up someone who is not wood- As explained on :32-34, it was God's intention to hew down Zion. Only because He graciously counted the repentance of a remnant as the repentance of the nation was this plan changed (Jer. 18:8-10). As discussed on :14, Sennacherib apparently should have perceived that he was being used by Yahweh, but instead he purposefully refused to see this.

Isaiah 10:16 Therefore the Lord Yahweh of Armies will send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory a burning will be kindled like the burning of fire- As if he is being offered up as a sacrifice. What was so abhorrent to God was the proud glory of the Assyrians. Things like pride and proud language are enough to call down the most awful condemnations. The fatness of the Assyrians was to become lean; but fatness becoming lean is the very language used of what was to happen to the glory of Judah (Is. 17:4). By their arrogance they proclaimed themselves as no better than Gentiles, meriting the same judgment.

Isaiah 10:17 The light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame- Israel were to be the flame which destroyed the Assyrians. But instead an Angel did (2 Chron. 32:21), and God makes His Angels a flaming fire (Ps. 104:4). So the scenario foreseen in these judgments didn't come about exactly as it could have done had all Israel repented, rather than just a minority of them. Because of this, they weren't used as the fire; a single Angel was instead.

LXX "he shall sanctify him with burning fire". This may carry the hint that the fire of judgment would be intended to purify a remnant even from the Assyrians to join with a purified Judah in the reestablished Kingdom. That remnant is spoken of in :19.This is the consistent prophetic vision- that repentant Gentiles would be incorporated within the new, reestablished Kingdom of God. Sadly Hezekiah's attitude to Gentiles precluded this from happening, as he sought their acceptance rather than bringing them to Israel's God.

And it will burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day- Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Sin was its own judgment. "Briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (here and Is. 9:18). Their whole land was to

become like them (Is. 5:6; 7:23-25); and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Isaiah 10:18 He will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field, both soul and body- The Assyrian army is likened to a forest; they were to be cut down just as they intended to cut down the trees of Jerusalem; see on :33,34. They didn't actually get to do this, but they intended to; and were punished according to what they had intended to do. That God recognizes intention as action is a deep challenge as well as encouragement.

It will be as when a standard bearer faints- The idea may be of a sudden loss of heart and collapse of moral; exactly as happened when the Angel smote 185,000 soldiers in a moment.

Isaiah 10:19 The remnant of the trees of his forest shall be few, so that a child could write their number- I suggested on :17 that a remnant of the Assyrians were intended to be purified by the fire of judgment, and be incorporated within the reestablished Kingdom of Judah. But the record of the destruction of their army carries no such hint, and the record concludes in Is. 37 with the Assyrians continuing in their idolatry. The child who would write them may refer to the child of Isaiah spoken of earlier; see on Is. 8:18; 9:6. These things could have come true at that time, in the lifetime of that child; but human refusal to repent precluded them from happening.

This and the similar prophecy of desolation in Is. 7:23-25 didn't happen at the Assyrian invasion; it was reapplied to the situation after the Babylonian invasion, when the land was intended to rest (Lev. 26:34,43) until Judah repented. But even that program didn't work out, and so the Lord's parable of the vineyard explained that therefore the vineyard was given to a new Israel. See on :17.

Isaiah 10:20 It will come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel and those who have escaped from the house of Jacob- This is stated just after we have read on :17,19 of a remnant of the Assyrians surviving and turning to Yahweh. They were to join in the new people of God along with the repentant remnant of Judah and Israel, bound together in fellowship due to their common experience of forgiveness, grace and repentance. This didn't happen, but the essence of the prophetic intention was fulfilled when both Jews and Gentiles were baptized into the Lord Jesus as "the hope of Israel". Is. 4:2 had spoken of how this "remnant" (s.w.) would be the basis of a revived kingdom of God in Judah, based around a Messianic "Branch", "in that day"- the day of Is. 4:1, when Jerusalem would be overcome and left in ruins with hardly any men left. These "survivors" are those saved from the ruins of a desolated Jerusalem, those who "escaped" the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 37:31); the same word is used in Joel 2:32; Obadiah 17, the "remnant" of Ez. 14:22 (s.w.). The destruction of Jerusalem was intended to elicit repentance and to lead seamlessly into a revived Zion and reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel, when again all things would be "glorious" (s.w. Is. 24:23; 35:2). But this didn't happen. Jerusalem was saved by grace, and yet Hezekiah failed to act as "Yahweh's branch", and Judah were impenitent, unmoved by their salvation by grace.

Will no more again lean on him who struck them, but shall lean on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, in truth- This was the bizarre thing; that Judah trusted in the gods of the Assyrians. To "lean" meant 'to trust'. Their acceptance of the Assyrian gods was not therefore a mere matter of political expediency; they 'leant' upon them. Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and he uses this word to describe how Judah did "lean"

upon Yahweh, claiming that therefore "no evil can come upon us", whilst at the same time worshipping idols (Mic. 3:11). We see here how we can make a profession of faith, even adhering to a 'statement of faith'- when in fact we don't have faith at all, but rather trust in secular strength. Faith, like every spiritual virtue, has both an apparent form, and a real form.

Isaiah 10:21 A remnant will return, even the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God- This is a play upon the name of Isaiah's son Shearjashub. "Shearjashub" means "a remnant shall return" (see on Is. 7:3). As is made explicit in Is. 7:14 and Is. 8:18, Isaiah's children were 'signs'. The message of Shearjashub was that a remnant would repent / return; and Isaiah in Is. 7:3 was asking Ahab to be part of that remnant, and to repent of his faithless attitude. "The mighty God" is the title of Isaiah's son in Is. 9:6 (s.w.). The remnant would repent and come to this Messiah figure. But these potentials didn't happen, and Isaiah's children remained but "signs" (Is. 8:18), pointing forward to the future work of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 10:22 For though your people, Israel, are like the sand of the sea, a remnant of them shall return- The idea was that the majority of God's people would be killed, and the remnant that survived would return / repent (s.w.) as a result of the humiliation at the hand of the Assyrians. Their being the seed of Abraham "like the sand of the sea" was not going to save them; they would perish all the same. This level of destruction and repentance didn't happen, although it was the prophetic potential that it could have done. And so the prophecy is reapplied to the repentant of a remnant of Israel who will accept Jesus as Christ, especially in the last days (Rom. 9:28).

A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness- LXX "He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness". Paul quotes this version in the New Testament, again providing more evidence that the LXX is usually quoted over the Hebrew, Masoretic text by the inspired New Testament writers. Rom. 9:28 (see notes there) quotes this, and yet mixes in allusion to Mt. 24:22 "For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened... [or else] there should no flesh be saved". This means there will be a shortening of the originally intended prophetic program in the last days. Yet again we see that God's program is open ended and elastic, in response to a whole raft of factors. Paul quotes this verse from Is. 10:22 along with Is. 1:9,10 about a faithful remnant of Judah being preserved. The destruction determined was to result in righteousness through the repentance of the remnant; but this process of destruction has to be cut short for it to achieve this end. The implication is that they would be so slow to respond to it that they would all be consumed before they repented, and "righteousness" was achieved.

Isaiah 10:23 For the Lord Yahweh of Armies, will make a full end as already determined, in the midst of all the earth- The midst of all the earth / *eretz* refers to Zion. It was God's plan to destroy the temple at the hands of the Assyrians in Hezekiah's time (see on :32-34). But He relented of it, and so the prophecy was deferred until later; and the essence of it, until the last days. God intended to make a full end of Zion and Judah at the hands of the Assyrians; but he didn't. Various factors played their part- the repentance and intercession of a remnant, the evil of Assyria precluding their further usage by God, etc. Very similar language to Daniel 9:26 occurs in Is. 10:23: “For a complete destruction, one that is decreed, shall the Lord of Hosts execute in the midst of the land”. The context is speaking of “the Assyrian”. The same language of the last days is found in Is. 28:22: “a final destruction on all the

earth." The latter day antichrist is therefore modeled upon the "Assyrian" of the Old Testament. Note that "the man of sin" of 2 Thess. 2:8 alludes to "the wicked one" of Is. 11:4 LXX, who is, again, "the Assyrian"! So it would appear very likely that the antichrist figure is somehow associated with 'Assyria'. And what's going on in Iraq and the territory of 'Assyria' right now is gripping the whole world's attention. Note how the Assyrian is described in Is. 30:31–33 as being thrown into a lake of fire – just as the future beast will be (Rev. 19:20).

Isaiah 10:24 Therefore the Lord Yahweh of Armies, says: My people who dwell in Zion, don't be afraid of the Assyrian, though he strike you with the rod, and lift up his staff against you, as Egypt did- The language is ambiguous as to whether they need fear the Assyrians or not; hence LXX "Be not afraid, my people who dwell in Sion, of the Assyrians, because he shall smite thee with a rod: for I am bringing a stroke upon thee, that thou mayest see the way of Egypt". There could be the implication that the Assyrian would not strike them with the rod if they repented. Or perhaps it is specifically the faithful remnant who are being addressed- God's people who dwelt in Zion.

Isaiah 10:25 For yet a very little while, and the indignation against you will be accomplished, and My anger will be directed to his destruction- God's anger was going to come, and the majority of the population were intended to perish (:20). But God urges the faithful remnant in Zion (:24) to be assured of their own safety; the destruction of the majority was to happen suddenly, in only "a very little while". This is the situation of Is. 26:20, when the faithful minority would somehow be miraculously preserved in Zion, whilst the majority of the Jewish population were destroyed. This didn't happen as planned, and the Assyrians never took Jerusalem. But the essence of it will be fulfilled in the last days.

Isaiah 10:26 Yahweh of Armies will stir up a scourge against him, as in the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb. His rod will be over the sea, and He will lift it up like He did against Egypt- The lifting up of the rod by Moses led to the sea destroying the Egyptian army. And the same was to happen to the Assyrians. But :28-34 go on to describe how Assyria would capture Zion. It could be therefore that this destruction of Assyria was to come *after* that. Or it could be that here God foresaw how in fact Assyria would be destroyed so that the prophecies about the fall of Zion at this time would *not* come true. The chronology of the text is therefore bound to be confusing, because so many different possible outcomes are being carried in mind.

The Assyrian was to be destroyed by stirring or (Heb.) raising up a scourge against him, just as he had been a scourge to Judah (Is. 28:15). This is the word used in Is. 41:2,25; 45:13 of the raising up of a Messianic saviour figure who would deliver Judah from her Assyrian oppressors; Micah, contemporary with Isaiah, has the same in view (Mic. 5:5). This didn't happen, and Hezekiah let the baton drop in any case. So it is rescheduled and reinterpreted in fulfilment to the raising up of the Lord Jesus to save latter day, repentant Judah.

Isaiah 10:27 It will happen in that day, that his burden will depart from off your shoulder, and his yoke from off your neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing oil- The reference to Midian's destruction (repeated in Is. 9:4) suggests that a small remnant, akin to Gideon's three hundred men, would destroy a far greater

military and political power which was dominating Israel. It calls for a military fulfilment, and this surely was the possibility in Isaiah's day. The righteous remnant were to release Judah from domination by the overpowering Assyria. But they did not fully achieve this, nor did they accept God's new covenant which was to be the basis for them never again being under yoke (Jer. 30:8; Ez. 34:27). The burden of the Assyrians was to be removed by them being trodden down upon the mountains [an intensive plural for the one great mountain] of Zion (Is. 14:25). But they never got into Zion, and were not trodden down there. And so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the victory of the Lord Jesus over sin (see on :4) and the latter day Assyrian. His offer of *His* yoke in place of the *heavy yoke* carried by God's people surely alludes here (Mt. 11:29). And His spiritual victory will have its political and 'military' manifestation at Christ's return and His final liberation of Israel from their Arab oppressors.

The salvation because of the anointing oil suggests that a messiah ['anointed one'] figure could have saved Judah at this time; but the fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the same message as in Mic. 5:4,5.

Isaiah 10:28 He has come to Aiath, he has passed through Migron; at Michmash he stores his baggage- "Migron" is LXX Megiddo. The mention of Michmash recalls Jonathan's brave victory there; and the history of that time is also alluded to in :29. The idea may be that a faithful remnant, such as Jonathan, Samuel (:29) and David, could bring about the defeat of powerful oppressors.

Isaiah 10:29 they have gone over the pass; they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah trembles; Gibeah of Saul has fled- see on :28. LXX "Fear shall seize upon Rama, the city of Saul". It was the city of Samuel; but the historical image presented is of Saul desperate to hear God's word from Samuel and not hearing it.

Isaiah 10:30 Cry aloud with your voice, daughter of Gallim! Listen, Laishah! You poor Anathoth!- These were villages on the northern approaches to Jerusalem. The exhortation to "cry aloud" may be an appeal for them to repent and avert the threatened catastrophe; and perhaps they did, and so the Assyrians never took Jerusalem.

Isaiah 10:31 Madmenah is a fugitive, the inhabitants of Gebim flee for safety- The villages near Jerusalem were depopulated as everyone fled before the Assyrian advance.

Isaiah 10:32 this very day he will halt at Nob. He shakes his hand at the mountain of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem- We could read this as describing the Assyrians besieging Jerusalem, and expressing their intentions to destroy the temple on Zion. But LXX offers "Exhort ye them to-day to remain in the way: exhort ye beckoning with the hand the mountain, the daughter of Sion, even ye hills that are in Jerusalem". This would then be an appeal for repentance, and for the remnant who had repented to "remain in the way". For this was the way to avert the destruction of the temple described in :33,34. And indeed it seems this appeal was heard by a minority, who were significant enough for that destruction to be averted.

Isaiah 10:33 Behold, the Lord Yahweh of Armies will lop the boughs with terror. The tall will be cut down, and the lofty will be brought low- As explained on :34, it was

the Divine plan for Assyria to destroy the temple. Is. 2:13 likewise associates the destruction of the temple with the bringing down of Judah's pride. The "High and lifted up" temple of Is. 2:13 uses the same phrase for the exaltation of Yahweh in glory in Is. 6:1. What is high and lifted up in human eyes was and is to be brought down before the glory of Yahweh. This language of cutting down Judah like trees paves the way for the next prophesy in Is. 11, which envisages the Messianic shoot sprouting forth out of the cut down stump of the house of David.

Isaiah 10:34 He will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One- The cedars of Lebanon in the temple became iconic, to the point that they are put by metaphor for the temple itself (Zech. 11:1). Judah were so proud of the temple (see on Jer. 7:4). The destruction of the temple was required to humble Judah. Clearly the message is that the Assyrians would surround and threaten Zion (:32)- and then demolish the temple. But this didn't happen. It was intended to; but the prayer, repentance and spirituality of a remnant meant this didn't happen. This accords with the principle of Jer. 17:8-10; that God may state His purpose, but in the gap between statement and realization, there is the opportunity for repentance so that the intended outcome will not happen.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 11

Isaiah 11:1 A shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots will bear fruit- As explained on Is. 10:33, it was the original Divine intention that the Assyrians would take Jerusalem and cut down the cedars of Lebanon associated with the temple. That language of cutting down Judah like trees paves the way for this next prophesy in Is. 11, which envisages the Messianic shoot sprouting forth out of the cut down stump of the house of David. But things worked out differently. The temple was not destroyed at that time, and so the planned shoot didn't come forth; the potential may have been that a son of Isaiah developed into this figure, or perhaps Hezekiah (see on Is. 7:6; 8:1,18). And so the Messianic potential was reapplied to the time of the restoration, and then finally to the Lord Jesus.

When Zedekiah was taken into captivity (Ez. 17:20), it was prophesied that “a tender one” (Messiah- Is. 11:1; 53:2) would be planted “upon an high mountain”, and grow into a tree in whose shadows all animals would live (Ez. 17:21,22). This is clearly the Messianic Kingdom (Lk. 13:19). This young twig at the time of the captivity was surely Zerubabbel, and the “high mountain” upon which his Kingdom could have been established is surely he “high mountain” of Ez. 40:2 where the temple could have been built. Yet the prophecy had to suffer a massive deferment until its fulfilment in Christ.

It seems that Haggai and Zechariah returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in order to prepare the way for Zerubbabel- they were therefore the primary fulfillment of the prophecies of an Elijah-type prophet heralding the coming of the Messiah king. Zerubbabel failure therefore meant that their ministry was re-scheduled and fulfilled in the work of John the Baptist. Zerubbabel is called “the branch” (Zech. 3:8; 6:12; Jer. 23:5,6), and this obviously invites connection with the prophecy of a branch / Messiah who would grow out of the cut down stump of Jesse (Is. 11:1). Again, Zerubbabel fits the picture perfectly. The house of David had been cut down in judgment, but the prophesied branch would not be from the royal line of Kings- but rather simply from the ‘stump’ that had been left, i.e. a descendant of Jesse who was

not in the direct line of kings. Mic. 5:2 speaks of a similar person- a Messiah-king who would be from Bethlehem, i.e. the family of Jesse, rather than from Jerusalem where the royal line of kings were born. His origins would be “from old”- i.e. a person who is still a descendant of Jesse, but not in the direct line of kings. But despite all this, yet again we come to the sad realization that Zerubbabel like his people simply didn’t live up to it; and the prophecies came to be fulfilled finally in Jesus. He could have been Yahweh’s signet ring (Hag. 2:23), His specially favoured son- but he baulked at the height of the calling.

Isaiah 11:2 The Spirit of Yahweh will rest on him- The Spirit was also to rest upon the dry bones of Ezekiel 37, causing the exiles to revive and become a reformed Kingdom of God in Judah (Ez. 37:1,14). Although the envisioned Messianic figure didn't arise in Hezekiah's time, he could have arisen at the restoration. But all these possibilities weren't realized, and so the ultimate fulfilment was in the Lord Jesus.

The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh- This makes six endowments of the Spirit, and the general mention of the Spirit resting upon him in the first part of the verse makes seven. Seven spirits resting upon a Messiah figure is the language of what could have happened at the restoration through Zerubbabel (Zech. 3:9; 4:2). Again we see that the Messianic figure could have appeared at various stages, but human dysfunction precluded this happening. Yet all this comes to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. Indeed "the seven spirits" of Rev. 1:4 could be read as a title of the Lord.

Isaiah 11:3 His delight will be in the fear of Yahweh- AV "Of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord". James alludes to this: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19 RV). If we are truly born by the word then we will swift to hear it, as the Lord Jesus was of quick understanding in the word. We will share His aptitude for it, and we will be slow to speak anything else. For He is but the epitome of personalization of the entire body of Christ.

The Lord Jesus is right now "quick to discern the thoughts and intents of [our hearts]" in mediating for us (Heb. 4:12 RV). But this is how He was in His mortal life here- for then He was "of quick understanding" too (Is. 11:3 is applied to Him then). He would have had a way of seeing through to the essence of a person or situation with awesome speed- and this must have made human life very irritating for Him at times. But who He was then is who He is now. It's the same Jesus who intercedes for us in sensitivity and compassion. Note carefully the tense used in Heb. 4:15: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities". It doesn't say 'which could not have been touched...', but rather "which cannot [present tense] be touched". It's as if He is *now* touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Which opens a fascinating window into what having God's nature is all about. When we by grace come to share it, it's not just that we will dimly remember what it was like to be human.

He will not judge by the sight of his eyes, neither decide by the hearing of his ears- Judging and deciding are the same Hebrew words used in Is. 2:4. Again, the picture of the restored Kingdom of God we meet there could have come about after the arising of a Messianic figure who would save Judah from the Assyrian in Hezekiah's time.

Isaiah 11:4 But with righteousness he will judge the poor, and decide with equity for

the humble of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth- In contrast to the unjust and faulty leadership Judah had at the time. And it was Messiah and not the Assyrian who was now going to strike the earth with His rod (Is. 10:5,15). There was to be a replacement of the Assyrian king with Israel's Messiah.

And with the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked- Note that "the man of sin" of 2 Thess. 2:8 alludes to "the wicked one" of Is. 11:4 LXX who is, again, "the Assyrian" in the initial context. So it would appear very likely that the antichrist figure is somehow associated with 'Assyria'. And what's going on in Iraq and the territory of 'Assyria' right now is gripping the whole world's attention. Note how the Assyrian is described in Is. 30:31–33 as being thrown into a lake of fire – just as the future beast will be (Rev. 19:20).

Isaiah 11:5 Righteousness will be the belt of his waist and faithfulness the belt of his loins- This was the clothing and symbolism of the High Priest; but we have in view here a king-priest, after the order of Melchizedek. Zerubbabel could have met this requirement, but he too failed, and so the prophecy came to total fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

Paul's description of the warrior of the Gospel in Ephesians 6 composites together various descriptions of Messiah's clothing in the servant songs (Is. 11:5 = "loins girded with truth"; Is. 49:2 "mouth like a sharp sword"; Is. 52:7 "bring good tidings / publish salvation" = "the preparation of the Gospel of peace"; Is. 59:17 "breastplate of righteousness"; Is. 59:17 "helmet of salvation"). We are to be Christ to the world.

Isaiah 11:6 The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together; and a little child will lead them- This section of Isaiah repeatedly mentions "a child". As noted on Is. 7:6; 8:1,18; 10:19, this child could have been Isaiah's specially predicted son, in whose childhood the Kingdom could have been restored, perhaps with a reduction of the curse amongst the animal creation. But as noted on :7, the wild animals can be understood as representing the nations around Judah who are now at peace with her and her Messiah; and thereby also with each other. But this didn't happen, and so the prophecy will come to a much grander fulfilment in the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus on earth.

Isaiah 11:7 The cow and the bear will graze, their young ones will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox- The lions in Is. 5:29,30 clearly represent the Babylonians and Assyrians; but here the prophetic hope was that the young lion would be tamed and live in Zion. The vision was of Judah's enemies being judged and repenting, and coming to live in the restored Kingdom. Wild beasts were symbolic of Israel's enemies (see on Is. 5:5). But the idea is that they would become harmless, and through repentance as a result of their judgment, come to live in God's restored Kingdom. This was precluded at Isaiah's time by Hezekiah's wrong attitude to the Babylonians, and Judah serving their gods rather than bringing them to Israel's God. And so the prophecy will come to a much grander fulfilment in the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus on earth.

Isaiah 11:8 the nursing child will play near a cobra's hole, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den- I suggested on :6 that this child could have been

Isaiah's specially predicted son, in whose childhood the Kingdom could have been restored, perhaps with a reduction of the curse amongst the animal creation.

Isaiah 11:9 They will not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain- The situation in mount Zion would reflect that in "the earth" / land of Israel- there would be no destruction on mount Zion *"for* the earth / land will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh". No longer would human sacrifices be offered there; the sins of Israel would no longer be repeated in the new Kingdom envisaged here. Destruction on Zion has been a theme of Is. 10:32-34; there was envisaged there the destruction of both Israelites and Assyrians on that mountain. But "nor shall they at all be able to destroy any one on my holy mountain" (LXX).

For the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea- This stands in contrast to how the land was "full" (s.w.) of idolatry and trust in human philosophy (Is. 2:6,7). The descriptions of the restored Kingdom are so often expressed in terms of how spiritually, this would be the reversal of the unspiritual situation then extant in the earth / land of Israel. "The knowledge of Yahweh" doesn't so much refer to correct doctrinal knowledge as to the Hebraic 'knowing', referring to relationship. This relationship with Yahweh would be throughout the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham; there would be no person or geographical spot which held out against it. Absolutely everyone who survived the conflict around Mount Zion would enter covenant relationship or "knowledge of Yahweh".

Isaiah 11:10 It will happen in that day that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, who stands as a banner of the peoples- "The nations", referring usually to those immediately around Judah, those within the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham, would seek this Messiah figure. This explains how the universal knowledge or relationship with Yahweh of the previous verse comes about. This didn't happen at the time; but His standing as a banner or ensign is alluded to in the figure of the Lord Jesus being lifted up on the cross as an ensign on a pole, and all believers coming to Him there in faith / trust. Hence the LXX "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall arise to rule over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust, and his rest shall be glorious". This is quoted in Rom. 15:12 about Gentiles in this dispensation believing in the Lord Jesus. We note again that the inspired New Testament writers prefer to quote the LXX when it differs with the Hebrew text. For "in him shall the Gentiles trust" is in the LXX but not the Masoretic text.

And his resting place will be glorious- This could simply refer to a literal appearance of glory upon mount Zion, as hinted at in several prophecies. But this was precluded at the time by Judah refusing this "rest" (Is. 28:12 s.w.). Or His resting place could be the hearts of those who "trust" in Him (Is. 66:1,2 s.w.), a resting place chosen by Him because the temple on Zion had not been rebuilt as required and therefore God chose to dwell in the hearts of individuals instead.

Isaiah 11:11 It will happen in that day that the Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea- see on Zech. 12:4. For "Pathros" LXX has "Babylon". These areas included the areas where the ten tribes had been taken captive, and where it was envisaged Judah would also be taken. The prophetic potential was that at the restoration of the Kingdom, all God's people would be gathered together, along with repentant Gentiles, united by the joint experience of conviction of sin, forgiveness and

God's grace. And to this day, that is the basis of unity; "doctrine divides, experience unites", as Paul Tournier put it. Their impenitence at the time of Isaiah and the restoration from Babylon precluded this regathering; they did not return to God, and so He did not return them to their land. But "His hand", His powerful activity, was potentially ready to do this; and it is outstretched to all Israel to this day. This is why the repentance of Israel is critical to the reestablishment of the Kingdom in our days.

Isaiah 11:12 He will set up a banner for the nations and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth- As explained on :10, this ensign was refused by the Gentiles and the outcasts of Israel; and so the banner or ensign is alluded to in the figure of the Lord Jesus being lifted up on the cross as an ensign on a pole, and all believers coming to Him there in trust / faith (see on :10). The whole congregation (LXX *ekklesia*) of Israel were "gathered together" before the smitten rock, which "was Christ" crucified (Num. 20:8 cp. 21:16; 1 Cor. 10:4). The "ensign", the pole on which the brazen serpent was lifted up, would draw together the scattered individuals of God's people; and as stricken Israel were gathered around that pole, so the lifting up of the crucified Christ brings together all His people (Jn. 12:32 cp. 3:14).

We note that the repentant of the nations as well as Israel and Judah were to all come to that banner or ensign. The ensign was the rallying point for a tribe, and they would together become a new tribe or nation / *ekklesia* in the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 11:13 The envy also of Ephraim will depart, and those who persecute Judah will be cut off. Ephraim won't envy Judah, and Judah won't persecute Ephraim- All God's people would be gathered together, along with repentant Gentiles, united by the joint experience of conviction of sin, forgiveness and God's grace. And to this day, that is the basis of unity. All interpersonal frictions, envy (jealousy), the perceived need to settle old historical scores... fade into irrelevance if we genuinely have these experiences of reconciliation with God. Our vertical binding with Him naturally outflows into horizontal bonding with others who have tasted the same grace; as John's letters make clear. We note that in Isaiah's time, it was Israel (Ephraim) who had persecuted Judah, even besieging Jerusalem. So Judah's persecuting of Ephraim refers to their desire for vengeance for that. But that would be no more in their hearts if they accepted the new covenant of grace and accepted their own sins.

Isaiah 11:14 They will fly down on the shoulders of the Philistines on the west. Together they will plunder the children of the east. They will extend their power over Edom and Moab, and the children of Ammon will obey them- The vision of a greater, reestablished Kingdom was of dominance over the surrounding nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. Israel and Judah "together" would do this, flying down as if in perfect league with the cherubim armies of Heaven.

Isaiah 11:15 Yahweh will utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with His scorching wind He will wave His hand over the River, and will split it into seven streams, and cause men to march over in sandals- We noted on :11 that if the exiles wished to return / repent, then God's hand was ready to work mightily to literally return them to the land. Just as with a strong east wind He had dried up the Red Sea, called here "the tongue of the Egyptian sea", so He could dry up "the River", Euphrates, to allow the ten tribes and Judah [envisioned as going into captivity in

Babylon] to return. As they wore sandals which didn't wear out to cross the Red Sea, also part of the miracle, so God would miraculously provide all the human side of things for this great exodus to happen. We note that here and in :12, God foresees that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon; as later Isaiah recognizes. The great possibilities at Hezekiah's time would not come about; and yet God appears to hope against hope that once they had suffered in Babylon, they would finally learn their lesson. The essential hopefulness of God for humanity is our pattern.

Isaiah 11:16 There will be a highway for the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, like there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt- LXX reads "Egypt" for Assyria here. Egypt was always attractive for the Jews; they trusted in Egypt and some even fled there, seeking help from Egypt rather than from their God. The significance of the highway is therefore that God would give the opportunity for spiritual repentance and return to Him; playing on the idea that the Hebrew word for "return" is also used for repentance. Just as He could dry up the Euphrates for the return to happen from there, so He could build a highway in the desert. But there was no literal highway built for Israel when they left Egypt. Yet they had God's guidance, and therefore the unchartered desert was in fact a direct highway- for those with faith to perceive it. And the apparent random twists and turns of our lives must be understood by us in that same way. It's all in fact a direct highway.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 12

Isaiah 12:1 In that day you will say, I will give thanks to You, Yahweh; for though You were angry with me, Your anger has turned away and You comfort me- God fantasizes about the words which the repentant remnant of Is. 11:10-15 will say. Their recognition of the existence of God's wrath is tantamount to recognizing the guilt of their sins; they would come to appreciate that indeed "the wrath of God is the love of God". "Turned away" is the same word used for repentance and return; they will perceive that their repentance has triggered the turning away of His anger. But this scenario didn't happen at Hezekiah's time, for soon after his death we read that God did *not* turn away from His anger, and Judah were sent into captivity (2 Kings 23:26 s.w.). Even though Hezekiah himself urged repentance so that Yahweh's anger would turn away (s.w. 2 Chron. 29:10; 30:8), as did Ezra (Ezra 10:14). He tried to bring these words to fulfilment, but his reformation failed, overall. The comfort ("You comfort me") offered by God in Is. 40:1 was also largely rejected at the time of the restoration. And so Isaiah often laments that His anger was not turned away, and therefore His hand was still stretched out- both in inflicting judgment, and seeking to thereby bring about repentance (Is. 5:25; 9:12,17,21; 10:4). The exiles thought that God's wrath would be turned away simply because He realized they had not actually sinned and were innocent (Jer. 2:35).

Isaiah 12:2 Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust, and will not be afraid; for Yah, Yahweh, is my strength and song; and He has become my salvation- These were the intended words of the repentant remnant; but they fit Isaiah personally, as their representative. For his name means 'Yah saves', and is a form of Yehoshua, Jesus. "Yah is my strength" is 'Hezekiah'. He was the potential Messiah figure who could have been their salvation; but he failed in this, and the destruction of the Assyrians was done by an Angel and not by him personally. In the final fulfilment of this, Judah's repentance and rejoicing in salvation will be because of their acceptance of

the Lord Jesus as Christ. But the whole verse is a quotation of Ex. 15:2, the song of triumph of Moses after the salvation of Israel at the Red Sea: "Yah is my strength and song. He has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him". The song of Moses is put in the mouth of every redeemed Israelite; all would be as Moses. Judaism saw and sees Moses as an icon of unapproachable spirituality; but here, his rejoicing is to be the experience of every redeemed individual.

Isaiah 12:3 Therefore with joy you will draw water out of the wells of salvation- The allusion may be to how after the song of Moses, the people came to the wells of Rephidim, which Isaiah presents as representing the water of salvation, of eternal life. And perhaps the idea is also that when the returned exiles came to Jerusalem, they would do what all pilgrims were supposed to do and drink her spring water (Ps. 87:7), representing eternal life. But Judah turned down such great potentials. And so this is applied by the Lord to the present experience of the believer in Him (Jn. 4:14; 7:38). But Isaiah 12 continues to explain how the joy of that experience will lead to men saying: "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation [as He was for Israel at the Red Sea, cp. our baptism experience]... Praise the Lord, proclaim his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted". The exaltation of the Yahweh Name, the wonder of it, the sheer height of who Yahweh is, these things and our personal part in them is an unending imperative to witness these things world-wide. Men did not confess Jesus to others, despite nominally believing in Him, because they did not love the concept of the glory of God (Jn. 12:43 RV). To perceive His glory, the wonder of it all, leads to inevitable witness to others. For we are offering people the water of life eternal.

Isaiah 12:4 In that day you will say, Give thanks to Yahweh! Call on His name. Declare His doings among the peoples. Proclaim that His name is exalted!- Isaiah foretold that when Israel know their forgiveness and salvation, they will therefore quite naturally "declare His doings among the peoples", and invite the Gentile peoples to call themselves by His Name. This will be the motivation for Israel's witness to the world after the Lord's return. They will fill the face of the world with spiritual fruit – and this will be the fruit of the taking away of their sin, and their experience of repentance (Is. 27:6,9 RV).

Isaiah 12:5 Sing to Yahweh, for He has done excellent things! Let this be known in all the earth!- This continues the allusion to the Song of Moses (Ex. 15:1,25). See on :2. The desire of the forgiven and redeemed exiles and repentant Gentiles would be to spread the knowledge of their great salvation to all the earth. This is a natural response to salvation, and should be the root motivation for all our evangelism. Beholding these "excellent things" is pictured as the reward of the faithful remnant in Is. 26:10; they would then see Yahweh, which is the promise of Is. 12:6.

Isaiah 12:6 Cry aloud and shout, you inhabitant of Zion; for the Holy One of Israel is great in the midst of you!- The prophetic vision was of Yahweh Himself dwelling in Zion, so that the city would be called "the Lord is there" (Ez. 48:35). But the exiles failed to rebuild Zion and operate the services there as commanded in Ez. 40-48, and so this literal dwelling of God amongst His redeemed people is alluded to in Rev. 21,22 as being only fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus to earth.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 13

Isaiah 13:1 The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw- Isaiah is here specifically named as the human author. A document like this against a superpower was a dangerous thing to be author of, but he unashamedly stands up for his belief that the present system shall come crashing down- as we should. Hezekiah ended his days seeking friendship with the Babylonians (Is. 39), and this prophecy stood to condemn his seeking friendship from them. No wonder Jewish tradition has it that Hezekiah's son sawed Isaiah in half for his prophecies. Anyone who condemns "friendship with the world" faces similar hostility.

As explained on Is. 1:1, the first part of Isaiah concerns the Assyrian threat in the time of Isaiah. The appeals for repentance appear to have produced some fruit, and due to them, as well as the intercession of the remnant and also the arrogance of Assyria in refusing to be a mere tool in God's hand, the threatened Assyrian destruction of Zion didn't happen. See on Jer. 18:8-10. But Hezekiah and Judah generally didn't respond to that as fully as they might have done. And so the historical interlude concludes with the news that they are to go into captivity in Babylon. But the later part of Isaiah then goes straight on to speak of their restoration from there into a reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah; although the final section of Isaiah laments that these potential possibilities were being precluded by Judah's unspirituality. The essence of the prophecies will come ultimately true in the establishment of God's Kingdom and the repentance of Israel in the last days; albeit in a reinterpreted and rescheduled manner. And so the material about Assyria became reapplied to Babylon. Harry Whittaker correctly noted how "Assyria" and "Babylon" are used interchangeably in several places. I would argue that the terms are not interchangeable, as they were two separate entities. Rather is the confusion because the material about Assyria was reapplied and transferred to Babylon. And this transference was reflected in the way that Isaiah was perhaps rewritten, under inspiration, as explained on Is. 1:1.

Isaiah 13:2 Set up a banner on the bare mountain! Lift up your voice to them! Wave your hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles- An obvious question occurs in interpreting this chapter: Is it about a Babylonian invasion of Judah which results in Babylon being judged and destroyed by the Medes, or is it all about the fall of Babylon to the Medes? I suggest that the ambiguity of the language is intentional. The judgments Babylon was to bring upon Judah were brought upon her. This is a common feature of Divine judgment of His people's enemies. The book of Revelation therefore has clear parallels between the judgments upon Israel, and those upon the beast system which brings those judgments.

This verse may therefore refer to Babylon coming to mount Zion and mocking it, and then going in to destroy the palatial homes of the nobles (Jer. 52:13). The waving of their hand against Zion would have been seen in the Assyrian mockery of Zion in a similar way in Is. 37:23; the Assyrians did "wave the hand" against Zion, with the same phrase used in Is. 10:32. But the LXX makes the text apply to the fall of Babylon, a city built on the plain of Dura: "Lift up a standard on the mountain of the plain, exalt the voice to them, beckon with the hand, open the gates, ye rulers". This would then refer to how some accounts of the fall of Babylon unearthed by Layard claim that some disaffected with the king opened the gates to the Medes.

The ensign set up on mount Zion would refer to the "pole" upon which the serpent was lifted up, representing the crucified Lord Jesus (Num. 21:8 s.w.). In the latter day application, this is to be the spiritual rallying point for the repentant remnant of both Judah and the surrounding nations (s.w. Is. 11:10,12; 18:3; 30:17; 31:9; 49:22; 62:10). Although this was precluded from happening at the time because those remnants didn't repent, it will become gloriously true in the last days.

Isaiah 13:3 I have commanded My consecrated ones; yes, I have called My mighty men for My anger, even My proudly exulting ones- The language here is clearly alluding to Angels as well as the Babylonians / Assyrians who were to invade Judah, and also to the Medes who were to invade Babylon. The Angels rejoiced in Yahweh's greatness, and the invading soldiers in their own greatness. This is to demonstrate that the geopolitics of the world go in waves, and they are all directly under the control of the Angelic armies of heaven. Ezekiel gives the same message, with the cherubim controlling both Judah and the Babylonians.

Hence in :4 we read that the Lord of hosts (Angels) mustered the host of the battle. Yet we clearly read elsewhere that "the Angel of the Lord" went out and smote the Assyrians. So we have some Angels sent with a mission to bring the Assyrians there and others sent to destroy them. Other Angels are actually described as the armies themselves, the weapons of indignation against the land of Israel. And another Angel 'destroys' them. So here we have the wondrous ways of God, absolute unity in absolute diversity.

All these things will come to their ultimate term in the last days. Is. 13 has many links with Joel's prophecy, which clearly refers to the last days as well as immediate situations with the Babylonians and Assyrians; :8,10 connect with the latter day prophecy of Luke 21.

Isaiah 13:4 The noise of a multitude is in the mountains, as of a great people; the noise of an uproar of the kingdoms of the nations gathered together! Yahweh of Armies is mustering the army for the battle- See on :3. In the context of Babylon's judgment, "the “mountains” would be the Zagros range, North East of Babylon, from where the Medes came. But Babylon likewise invaded Judah from the North East, appearing to come towards them leaping on the mountains (Joel 2:2,5 etc.). What they did to God's people was done to them. As explained on :3, all these things happened with the same Divine hallmark upon them, because the same Angels were manipulating the situation.

Isaiah 13:5 They come from a far country, from the uttermost part of heaven, even Yahweh, and the weapons of His indignation, to destroy the whole land- Assyria and Babylon were Yahweh's weapons (Is. 10), intended to destroy the whole land of Israel. But the language is just as true of the Medes being used to destroy Babylon. Just as Babylon had been the nation from the north who would bring God' judgments, so now she is to be judged from the north. She was to be made to realize how she had made others feel. It is not simply so that 'what goes around comes around'; there is a purpose in these judgments repeating themselves. It was so that those who had witnessed and participated in the judgment of Israel might come to see how it felt, and thereby repent. We too are at times made to feel the effect of our actions upon others- for the same reason.

Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer.

50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation.

The judgment was to be upon all Babylonia, "the whole land", not just the city of Babylon. All attempts to apply this verse solely to the city of Babylon are therefore misplaced; it refers to all Babylonia. And the whole area didn't become a literal desert; the fertile crescent remained fertile. This recalls how the similar judgments upon the area of Edom likewise didn't come about at the time; see on Jer. 49:18. But this will happen in the last days.

Isaiah 13:6 Wail; for the day of Yahweh is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty- Is "Wail!" an invitation for Babylon to repent and cry to God? This verse is about verbatim in Joel 1:15 where it is an appeal for Judah to repent before the Assyrians or Babylonians destroyed them. But now it is true of those nations themselves. Jer. 18:8 clearly states that this purpose could have been changed. It was God's intention that all the nations around Israel would repent along with His people, and turn to Him. Even Babylon could have repented at this point. "Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh..." in Jer. 50:45 is also an appeal for repentance. That God should make so much effort with hardened worldlings... indicates His depth of concern for human salvation. And it should encourage us in our witness. Jer. 51:8 puts it like this: "Wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed". This opens another window into what God potentially planned at this time. Balm in Jer. 46:11 refers to repentance.

Isaiah 13:7 Therefore all hands will be feeble, and everyone's heart will melt- This is not quite the same as the impression given by surface level Bible teachers that the king of Babylon was rejoicing in his city, confident in his own strength, when the Medes diverted the course of the Euphrates and took the city by surprise. The record in Daniel 5 is correct, but that record doesn't contradict the information given here- that the king was already deeply concerned at the advance of the Medes. Here we read that he was feeble at the news of the enemy advance. Hence we should give due weight to the discovery by Layard of inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender.

Isaiah 13:8 They will be dismayed. Pangs and sorrows will seize them, they will be in pain like a woman in labour. They will look in amazement one at another, their faces will be faces of flickering flame- Even this figure suggests that something is to be brought forth; the Divine hope was that Babylon's sufferings would lead to a repentant Gentile remnant who could join in His reestablished Kingdom. See on :6. And the language here is that of Jerusalem's sufferings (Jer. 4:9 etc.), and likewise it was God's hope that a repentant remnant would be elicited by their sufferings. But this didn't happen, and so these things are transferred to the last days. Then, the day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travaileth" (Is. 13:8; is quoted in 1 Thess. 5:3). The Lord also seems to have alluded to this when He spoke of how the faithful just before His coming would be like a woman in travail, with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of acceptance at Christ's return (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. If we choose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen as a characteristic of all worldly life in Is. 65:23). We either cut off the flesh now (in

spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man... shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14).

Isaiah 13:9 Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger; to make the land a desolation, and to destroy its sinners out of it- As explained on :18, the judgments here are not only upon the city of Babylon, but upon the entire "land of the Chaldeans", Babylonia. The scale of sudden destruction implied didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. The prophetic scenario projected in these prophecies didn't fully happen, although it will do so ultimately in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear. The intention of the desolation of the land, both of Judah and Babylon, was to destroy the sinners and leave a repentant, righteous remnant. This wasn't the outcome; perhaps because God foresaw that, He didn't bring the full potential extent of these judgments, neither on Babylon nor on Judah.

Isaiah 13:10 For the stars of the sky and its constellations will not give their light, the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine- These words are applied in the Olivet prophecy to the situation in the last days (Mt. 24:29). For this didn't fully happen at the time, although in a symbolic sense the lights went out for Judah as well as Babylon - Assyria (Am. 8:9; Mic. 3:6). LXX has "the stars of heaven, and Orion". Orion was identified with Nimrod, founder of Assyria, and this constellation was much worshipped by the Babylonians. The prophetic potential was that Assyria and Babylon would be totally eclipsed, along perhaps with the extinguishing from sight of their favourite constellation. But this literal aspect didn't happen, just as the literal changes to the sun and moon spoken of in Is. 30:26 didn't happen, because the Kingdom of God was not reestablished at that time because Judah didn't fully repent.

Isaiah 13:11 I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will humble the arrogance of the terrible- This humbling was surely in order to save them; see on :6. The idea was that judgment day would come there and then; the wicked would be destroyed, and those who repented and humbled themselves before Yahweh would be the only ones left. And again we see that humility is seen as the epitome of repentance and all spirituality.

Isaiah 13:12 I will make people more valuable than fine gold, even a person than the pure gold of Ophir- A repentant remnant is in view; LXX "And they that are left shall be more precious than gold tried in the fire; and a man shall be more precious than the stone that is in Suphir"; also see on :14. As explained on :11, the intention of the judgments, both on God's people and the Babylonians, was that a repentant remnant would be produced; and each one of those people would be of extraordinary value to God; this is the scene likewise of Is. 27:12. The same language is used of the latter day purifying of Israel in Zech. 13:9. Although we can also see in these words the simple truth that the value and meaning of persons will be elevated in God's Kingdom. "Gold tried in the fire" (LXX) is a phrase used in the New Testament of the refining of all God's true people today (1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 3:18).

Isaiah 13:13 Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place in the wrath of Yahweh of Armies, and in the day of His fierce anger-

Clearly heavens and earth are used symbolically, although a literal earthquake is likely in view. Babylon was to be destroyed with the same kind of miraculous Divine intervention as Sodom; but as noted on :19, this didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. But Rev. 18 alludes to all this and makes it clear that such Divine intervention will occur against latter Babylon in the last days.

Isaiah 13:14 It will happen that like a hunted gazelle, and like sheep that no one gathers- A repentant remnant is in view; LXX "And they that are left shall be as a fleeing fawn, and as a stray sheep". See on :12. Stray sheep is the language of men brought to repentance (Ps. 119:176; Lk. 15:6). The judgment of Babylon as later developed in Jeremiah uses the term about Judah (Jer. 50:6). The idea may be that no *man* gathers these lost sheep, as the Lord explains in His parable of the one lost sheep; but the Divine shepherd will.

They will each turn to their own people, and will each flee to their own land- This is developed in Jer. 50:16: "For fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn each one to his people, and they shall flee each one to his own land". The various captive peoples taken to Babylon would each return to their own land, and Judah were to do likewise. But this isn't how things quite turned out. This was the prophetic ideal scenario, but it didn't happen because many Jews preferred to remain in Babylon and they didn't repent.

Isaiah 13:15 Everyone who is found will be thrust through. Everyone who is captured will fall by the sword- This isn't what happened when Darius the Mede took Babylon. This was the potential prophetic scenario which didn't come about, because Judah didn't repent, and their repentance was a condition for the total fulfilment of the prophecies of judgment upon Babylon (see on Jer. 50:3,4). These judgments were to be if Babylon refused to let Judah go (Jer. 50:33). But the reality was that the exiles by the end of 70 years were not asking to go, and when they were given the chance, many chose to remain in Babylon. The threat of a sword hanging over Babylon is an image used elsewhere about Jerusalem, and the idea is that there was therefore an appeal for repentance. This is what God wanted to see from Babylon.

Isaiah 13:16 Their infants also will be dashed in pieces before their eyes. Their houses will be ransacked, and their wives raped- This wasn't really the scene when the Medes took Babylon. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; the Nabonidus Chronicle records that the people of Babylon welcomed Cyrus by spreading green twigs before him (James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 306b). Both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. See on Jer. 51:4.

Isaiah 13:17 Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not value silver, and as for gold, they will not delight in it- There is historical evidence that the Medes didn't value gold and silver. Just as God stirred or raised up Babylon to invade Judah (Jer. 6:22), sharpening her arrows (Ez. 21:21), so He would stir up, or psychologically provoke, other nations to come and judge her (Jer. 50:9,41; 51:1,11 s.w.). This is greatly emphasized. The activity of God directly upon human hearts is a great theme of the Biblical revelation, and is to encourage us that He is eager to transform hearts,

and to place desires within us beyond our own unaided psychological ability. But the Medes didn't destroy Babylon; as explained on :20 and Jer. 51:3,8, there was no destruction of the city, and so much was left that it revived several times and asserted independence. He did not take full vengeance for what Babylon did in His temple because His own people were not eager to rebuild it and were not recognizant of their role in its destruction.

Isaiah 13:18 Their bows will dash the young men in pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb. Their eyes will not spare children- This is what was done to Jerusalem, as Jeremiah frequently expresses in his Lamentations. As people do to God's people, so it will be done to them at the day of judgment. This is a principle relevant to us all. But this isn't the scenario which happened when the Medes took Babylon; see on :16,20. As mentioned often in commentary on Jer. 50, the judgments here are not only upon the city of Babylon, but upon the entire "land of the Chaldeans", Babylonia. The scale of sudden destruction implied didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. The prophetic scenario projected in these prophecies didn't fully happen, although it will do so ultimately in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear. This was because Judah and Israel didn't repent and earnestly seek to restore Zion; see on Jer. 50:3,4,26. And this was intended to be connected with the realization of these prophecies upon Babylon.

Isaiah 13:19 Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride- Babylon is presented as being Yahweh's servant, doing what He commanded against both Israel and the nations, with Him putting the ideas into the king of Babylon's mind. God surely would not then turn around and condemn Babylon for their obedience. I suggest that Babylon is condemned because they overstepped the bounds of their commission, they were proud, and established themselves as Yahweh with their kingdom as His kingdom. We see the huge importance God attached to humility, and how pride is the worst of sins.

Will be like when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah- Such dramatic destruction of Babylon and the area around it didn't happen at the hands of the Medes (see on :20; Jer. 50:26). The image of Sodom's destruction suggests direct, miraculous Divine intervention. This didn't happen at the time, but Rev. 18 alludes to all this and makes it clear that such Divine intervention will occur against latter Babylon in the last days.

Isaiah 13:20 It will never be inhabited, neither will it be lived in from generation to generation. The Arabian will not pitch a tent there, neither will shepherds make their flocks lie down there- Eternal desolation may not be required by the text; LXX has "neither shall any enter into it for many generations". The impression given is that the attack upon Babylon would reduce the city to ruins immediately. But this didn't happen under the Medes; it was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

Isaiah 13:21 But wild animals of the desert will lie there, and their houses will be full of jackals- The language in Jer. 9:11 of Jerusalem's destruction into heaps haunted by jackals is applied to Babylon; and likewise the way Jerusalem was to become a hissing (Jer. 19:8) is also now to be true of Babylon. What latter day Babylon does to Jerusalem shall be done to her; and that is the theme of the book of Revelation, where the seals of judgment upon Israel become the vials of judgment upon the beast system.

Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will frolic there- Literally, "demons", half goat, half divine imaginary creatures, "satyrs". This is proof enough that demons refer to mythical creatures and beliefs of the time, and have no real cosmic existence; and that the language of these things is used, as the language of the day, without any Divinely added footnote to the effect that these things don't actually exist.

Isaiah 13:22 Wolves will cry in their castles, and jackals in the pleasant palaces. Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged- As noted on :20, much of Babylon did escape when the Medes attacked and conquered her, and the city continued being inhabited for some time. This projected scenario didn't come about at the time, and yet will do in essence in its latter day fulfilment, as Rev. 18 explains. Her days as a city were in fact prolonged, because the various preconditions for this eternal destruction were not met at the time. What may be in view however is the power of the Babylonian empire; although that didn't fall for another 170 years from the time of this prophecy. It could be that Isaiah is as it were transported forward in time and speaks as if he is present at the end of Babylon's rule.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 14

Isaiah 14:1 For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land- The time of this "compassion of Jacob" was to be when they returned from exile in repentance (Jer. 30:18; 33:26; Ez. 39:25 s.w.) and accepted the new covenant. But they refused to do this; their return to the land was not matched by a return to God. And so these things are rescheduled to the last days. "Set" is s.w. "rest" in :3,7.

The foreigner will join himself with them, and they will unite with the house of Jacob- As explained on Is. 13:6, it was the Divine intention that the judgments upon Babylon would result in a repentant remnant of the Babylonian confederacy turning to Yahweh. But Hezekiah's friendship with Babylon in Is. 39 precluded that happening; the Jews ended up worshipping the Babylonian gods rather than leading them to the God of Israel. The unity of the new covenant would be a result of Jews and Gentiles together experiencing conviction of sin, repentance and forgiveness by grace. That is to this day the basis for unity amongst God's people.

Isaiah 14:2 The peoples will take them, and bring them to their place- The Divine intention was that the peoples of their exile would return with them to Zion, bringing back home those they had taken captive; and this mass of Gentiles coming to Zion would therefore be the scene of various other visions of the Kingdom.

The house of Israel will possess them in Yahweh's land for servants and for handmaids. They will take as captives those whose captives they once were; and they shall rule over their oppressors- The Gentiles who returned with Israel to Zion would serve them there. But their ruling over them was not enforced, but because the Gentiles themselves chose to take the Jews with them and go to Zion and serve God's people there.

Isaiah 14:3 It will happen in the day that Yahweh will give you rest from your sorrow from your trouble and from the hard service in which you were made to serve- This presents Judah's time in Babylon as if it were like being in Egypt. "Hard service" is the same phrase in Ex. 1:14; 6:9. But there is no evidence that Judah were treated that badly in Babylon, and the books of Daniel and Esther suggest they were even in places of authority. The fall of Babylon / Assyria (see on Is. 13:1) here envisaged didn't come about as fully planned at the time; although Rev. 18 applies it all to the last days. The day of rest is that of :1. The idea was that when Babylon fell, God's people would enter the rest of the restored Kingdom, But that didn't happen, and so because Judah weren't ready for Kingdom, Babylon didn't fall as planned; and that is why all is reapplied to the things of the last days.

Isaiah 14:4 that you will take up this parable against the king of Babylon and say, How the oppressor has ceased!- The initial "oppressor" in view was Assyria (s.w. Is. 9:4). But as the prophetic scenario changed and shifted in accordance with human response to it, it became transferred and reapplied to Babylon. And the prophecies may have been rewritten under inspiration to reflect this; see on Is. 1:1. J.W.Thirtle claims that the original manuscripts of most Old Testament books were sealed with Hezekiah's seal, as they had been re-written and edited during his time (J.W. Thirtle, *Old Testament Problems* (Printland Publishers reprint, 2004 facsimile of the 1914 edition) p. 301). Scripture itself testifies to him and his men re-organizing the writings of David. Isaiah, with its initial application to Hezekiah, and then its obvious reference to the captivity and restoration, is another example. Isaiah 14, an oracle against the King of Babylon, goes on to speak of him within the same chapter as the King of Assyria (Is. 14:4,22,25). What seems to have happened is that a prophecy relevant to the Assyrian invasion under Hezekiah has been re-written, under inspiration, with reference to the pomp of Babylon being cast down too.

The golden city has ceased!- Babylon was judged above all for her pride and exaltation of human strength and wisdom. Babylon is set up as a fake Christ and Kingdom of God. She had proselytes and prophets ["boasters"] (Jer. 50:36,37); a mountain (Jer. 51:25); "The golden city" (Is. 14:4) with a thick, embellished wall (Jer. 51:58); springs and rivers within her (Jer. 51:36); "The praise of the whole earth" (Jer. 51:41). Her sin was that she thought of herself in her own right as the kingdom of God, instead of humbling herself to become part of His Kingdom.

Isaiah 14:5 Yahweh has broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of the rulers- "The staff" is often used specifically of Assyria (Is. 9:4; 10:5,15,24 s.w.). But as explained on :4, the prophecies about Assyria were transferred to Babylon.

Isaiah 14:6 who struck the peoples in wrath with a continual stroke, who ruled the nations in anger, with a persecution that none restrained- The striker was initially Assyria- see on :5. There was no restraint, because Judah had lived an unrestrained life (s.w. Jer. 14:10). Their judgment was but an extension of their own spirit of life.

Isaiah 14:7 The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet. They break out in song- The vision is of the whole *eretz* promised to Abraham now in the rest and quiet of God's Kingdom, praising Him. The "all nations" around Israel were to be annihilated until only a remnant remained, who were repentant and joined themselves to Yahweh (:1). The destruction of Babylon and the reestablishment of the Kingdom were to be at the same time. But this didn't happen because Judah were impenitent, and so the full destruction of Babylon didn't happen to the extent envisaged. Rev. 18 reapplies these things to the last days. This situation could have happened at the restoration from Babylon (s.w. Zech. 6:8) but was precluded by Judah's impenitence.

Isaiah 14:8 Yes, the fir trees rejoice with you, with the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since you are humbled, no lumberjack has come up against us- The cedars of Lebanon were iconic to the temple, and were intended to be cut down by the Assyrians (see on Is. 2:13; 10:34; 37:24). The 'cutter off' ("lumberjack") was initially Assyria (s.w. Is. 10:7). This was averted, but it was done by Babylon. The common fir trees may refer to other nations, or to the ordinary people of Judah, who had likewise suffered from Babylon's destruction; or to the fir trees used in the temple construction (1 Kings 5:8,10; 6:15,34), which the Assyrians had threatened to cut down (2 Kings 19:23). Perhaps also in view was the way the Babylonians cut down the trees around Jerusalem to make siege weapons and platforms (Jer. 6:6). No such feller would come against them or the Jerusalem temple ever again, now that Babylon was humbled. That didn't happen, because the fall of Babylon here prophesied didn't fully happen at the time, as noted throughout Is. 13. But it will happen at the latter day fall of Babylon, when the land will then be eternally secure from any threat of future invasion.

Is. 14:8 records the relief that now the "Lucifer" figure would no longer cut down cedars in Lebanon and hew mountains. This is exactly the language used by Nebuchadnezzar: "What no former king had done, I achieved: I cut through steep mountains, I split rocks, I opened passages and constructed a straight road for the transport of Cedars... to Marduk, my king, mighty cedars... the abundant yield of the Lebanon" (J.B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating To The Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3rd ed., 1969) p. 307). Clearly the figure spoken of in Is. 14 was Nebuchadnezzar.

"Humbled" is literally to lay down. The Lucifer-king was to "lie down" in his destruction- and that Hebrew term occurs later in Isaiah with reference to the 'laying down' of Babylon's King and army in the grave (Is. 43:17).

Isaiah 14:9 Sheol from beneath has moved for you to meet you at your coming. It stirs up the dead for you, even all the rulers of the earth. It has raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations- I noted on Is. 13:21 that the mythical creatures called satyrs were spoken of as if they existed; Babylon's judgment was described there in terms she would have understood, even if those terms reflected ideas which were not literally true. For satyrs don't exist in the form the Babylonians believed. And so here too, their concept of the underworld is used. But in any case, *sheol* is clearly personified here, and in practice it refers to the grave. There is no conscious survival of death; but the idea of dead kings still seated on their thrones in the underworld, rising to meet a new arrival, is used here. This is the kind of thing the Egyptians also believed in, as witnessed by the contents of the pyramids. But

speaking to people in their own terms doesn't mean that those terms are actually correct. See on :15,16,18; Is. 27:11.

Isaiah 14:10 They all will answer and ask you, Have you also become as weak as we are? Have you become like us?- As explained on :9, the Babylonian concept of death and the underworld is being used against them, just as the Lord used the Jewish myths about Abraham's bosom to construct the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Those myths were incorrect, but He used them in order to get a point over to them. The Babylonians' worst fears about the underworld would, as it were, come upon them. Their condemnation was expressed in terms they could relate to; hence the huge emphasis that their bodies would be left as unburied corpses. This was designed to appeal to their greatest fears, and their deepest conceptions of shame. See on :11.

Isaiah 14:11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, with the sound of your stringed instruments. Maggots are spread out under you, and worms cover you- "Worms" refer to crimson grubs, the idea being that as they had once been covered in the scarlet of royalty, so they would in the grave be covered with scarlet grubs. Here we have the reality stated- that *sheol* is the grave, as the word is often translated elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. This is in sharp, consciously juxtaposed contrast to the Babylonian conception of *sheol*, the underworld, as alluded to in :10,11. The sound of their instruments would no longer continue in *sheol*, contrary to their imagination.

Isaiah 14:12 How you have fallen from heaven, morning star [Lucifer], son of the dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, who laid the nations low!- This could refer initially to the sudden loss of power experienced by Belshazzar in Dan. 5, or to the madness which came upon Nebuchadnezzar.

Note that the words “devil” , “satan” and “angel” never occur in this chapter. This is the only place in Scripture where the word “Lucifer” occurs. There is no evidence that Isaiah 14 is describing anything that happened in the garden of Eden; if it is, then why are we left 3,000 years from the time of Genesis before being told what really happened there? Lucifer is described as being covered in worms (:11) and a man mocked by men (:16) because he no longer has any power after his casting out of heaven; so there is no justification for thinking that Lucifer is now on earth leading believers astray. Believers in the 'Lucifer = satan at the beginning' idea must enquire why is Lucifer punished for saying, “I will ascend into heaven” (:13), if he was already there? Lucifer is to rot in the grave: “Thy pomp is brought down to the grave... and the worms cover thee” (:11 AV). Seeing angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36), Lucifer therefore cannot be an angel; the language is more suited to a man. Lucifer was a king like any other king (:9,10).

The idea of 'morning star' is translated 'Lucifer' in the Vulgate [Latin] translation of the Bible made by Jerome. Significantly, he uses 'Lucifer' as a description of Christ, as the 'morning star' mentioned in Revelation. Indeed, some early Christians took the name 'Lucifer' as a 'Christian name' in order to identify themselves with Jesus (Nick Lunn, *Alpha And Omega* (Sutton, UK: Willow, 1992) p. 254). It wasn't until Origen that the term 'Lucifer' took on any connotation of 'Satan' or a force of evil; and even then it was only popularized much later in Milton's *Paradise Lost* . 'Lucifer' in its strict meaning of 'bearer of the light' actually was applied in a positive sense to Christian communities, e.g. the followers of Lucifer of Cagliari were called 'Luciferians'. As an aside, it's worth pointing out that they were one of the groups who

insisted that the devil was not a personal being and held to the original Biblical picture of sin and the devil.

Remember that this is a “proverb (parable) against the king of Babylon” (:4). “Lucifer” means “the morning star”, which is the brightest of the stars. In the parable, this star proudly decides to “ascend (higher) into heaven... exalt my throne above the (other) stars of God” (:13). Because of this, the star is cast down to the earth. The star represents the king of Babylon. Daniel chapter 4 explains how Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, proudly surveyed the great kingdom he had built up, thinking that he had conquered other nations in his own strength, rather than recognizing that God had given him success. “Thy greatness (pride) is grown, and reacheth unto heaven” (:22). Because of this “he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws” (:33). This sudden humbling of one of the world’s most powerful men to a deranged lunatic was such a dramatic event as to call for the parable about the falling of the morning star from heaven to earth. Stars are symbolic of powerful people, e.g. Gen. 37: 9; Is. 13:10 (concerning the leaders of Babylon); Ez. 32: 7 (concerning the leaders of Egypt); Dan. 8:10, cp. v. 24. Ascending to heaven and falling from heaven are Biblical idioms often used for increasing in pride and being humbled respectively - see Job 20: 6; Jer. 51:53 (about Babylon); Lam. 2 :1; Mt 11:23 (about Capernaum): “Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell” (the grave). Adam Clarke's commentary rightly notes: "The truth is, the text speaks nothing at all concerning Satan nor his fall... but of the pride, arrogance and fall of Nebuchadnezzar".

Lucifer was to be “cut down to the ground” - implying he was a tree. This provides a further link with Daniel 4: 8-16, where Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are likened to a tree being cut down.

The passage about "Lucifer" is alluding to and deconstructing a contemporary myth, in a manner which is common to much Biblical literature. "An ancient myth told how Heylel, the morning star (Venus), tried to climb the walls of the northern city of the gods to make himself king of heaven, only to be driven from the sky by the rising sun. In Isaiah 14:12-20 this myth is given a historical application" (G.B. Caird, *The Revelation Of St. John The Divine* (London: Black, 1966) pp. 114,11). Isaiah is mocking the myth, and saying that the King of Babylon was acting like Heylel in the myth- but would be thrown down not by another planet, but by God Himself.

H.A. Kelly- one of the leading historians of religious ideas of recent times- observed from much research that "It was not until post-Biblical times that Lucifer was associated with Satan, or that Satan was thought to have been cast out of heaven before the creation of Adam and Eve, or that Satan had some connection with Adam and Eve" (H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006) p. 1). The New Testament references to Jesus as the morning star, Venus, have been read by H.A. Kelly as a conscious allusion to the growing idea that Lucifer ['light-bringer', *heosphoros* in Greek, the dawn-bringer] / Venus, the morning star, was in fact something or someone evil (H.A. Kelly, *ibid* pp. 164,165). All the N.T. references to the morning star are positive, and all refer to Jesus (2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 22:16). It's possible to read Jn. 1:8 in this context, too. Here John the Baptist is described as "bearing witness to the light", which was language understandable with reference to Venus, the Morning Star which is seen in the East just before the Sun rises in the West.

There's a good reason why the King of Babylon is described as "the morning star", or Venus. The Babylonians believed that their king was the child of their gods

Bel and Ishtar, both of whom were associated with the planets- they thought that their King was the planet Venus.

Isaiah 14:13 You said in your heart- There is a juxtaposition here between a man thinking something in his heart, and the huge scale of his fall, like a star from heaven to earth (:12). This is the significance to God of the state of the heart. Nebuchadnezzar had been warned by Is. 14:13 that the King of Babylon would be brought down because he would say *in his heart* "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God". Yet the promised fall of Babylon's King only happened when he said out loud: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?". The record continues: "While the word was in the king's mouth (i.e. he spoke this out loud), there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken" (Dan. 4:30,31). What was the "it" that was spoken about him? Surely the prophecy of Isaiah 14, which was a prediction waiting for a king of Babylon to come along and fulfill it. So the king's self-talk was that he would rise up to Heaven; but his actual words were an admiration of *his* Kingdom as opposed to God's. And yet he was judged for the self-talk behind his words. And this is the kind of relentlessly analytical judgment which a loving Father applies to us too. The culture of nicespeak comes crashing down before His piercing eyes; for the world teaches us that it's all about *how we put it over*, the words we choose, the image we cut; and yet God looks upon the heart.

I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God!- see on Rev. 1:20. Verses 13 and 14 have connections with 2 Thess. 2: 3,4, which is about the "man of sin" - thus Lucifer points forward to another man, perhaps another king of latter day Babylon- but not to an angel. Note that "the stars of God" can refer to the leaders of Israel (Gen. 37:9; Joel 3:15; Dan. 8:10), above whom the King of Babylon wished to arise. Any reference to the Angels would be because the people of God have their representatives in the court of Heaven.

The Ras Shamra texts include a section on the fall and death of Baal. Although written in Ugaritic, this section has amazing similarities with the poem of Isaiah 14 about the fall of Babylon – e.g. "The death of Baal" includes lines such as "From the throne on which he sits... how hath Baal come down, how hath the mighty been cast down!". Isaiah's message was therefore: 'Forget those stories about Baal being cast down; what's relevant for us is that mighty Babylon, which tempts us to trust in her rather than Yahweh God of Israel, is to be cast down, let's apply the language of Baal's fall to the kingdoms of this world which we know and live amongst'. Another such example is to be found in Is. 47:1: "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne". This is almost quoting [albeit through translation] from the 'Death of Baal' poem.

"Lucifer" wishes to ascend into Heaven. This is somewhat different from the scenario traditionally assumed- which is that Lucifer was in Heaven already, wanted to rise higher, and was therefore thrown down to earth because of his prideful intentions. But the text actually says that he wished to ascend into Heaven- so he was not there originally. The point has been made by that "heaven" was often how the capital city of a nation or people was perceived; for in that city the national god supposedly lived, thus making the city "heaven". The "Hymn to the City of Arbela" is an example in the Assyrian context- because of the gods who supposedly lived there, "Arbela is as lofty as heaven... O lofty sanctuary... gate of heaven!" (M. Nissinen, "City as lofty heaven: Arbela and other Cities in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy" in L. L. Grabbe and R. D. Haak, eds., *Every City shall be Forsaken* (JSOTSup 330)

(Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) pp. 172-209). The desire to ascend into 'heaven' would therefore speak of the king of Babylon or Assyria's desire to capture Jerusalem and supplant her God- Yahweh- with their own gods. This idea of Jerusalem as "heaven" is continued in later Isaiah, where the Divine revival of Jerusalem is spoken of as the creation of a new or renewed 'heaven' (Is. 51:6,16; 65:17,18).

I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north!- AV "on the sides of the north", the very phrase used of Jerusalem in Ps. 48:2. The mount of assembly or "solemn feast" is clearly Zion. But "The mount of the congregation in the sides of the north" is surely also an allusion to "the Babylonian Olympus, the [supposed] dwelling place of the gods, which was considered to be situated somewhere in the high Asiatic mountain range which forms the boundary or the Plain of Mesopotamia on the northern side, and is also the region of the source of the Euphrates and Tigris" (H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 206). This location was *on earth*- not in Heaven. The King of Babylon, the morning star, didn't aspire to greatness in Heaven, but rather to establishing mount Olympus on the temple mount in Jerusalem. The point of the prophecy is that it is Yahweh alone who is the ultimate and only God-King, reigning on *His* mount, the mountain of God, which is mount Zion, not Olympus. This idea of mount Zion being taken over by an apostate religious system of the neighbouring nations is repeated in the Olivet prophecy, Revelation and 2 Thess. 2 (about the "man of sin"). The final fulfilment will be in the last days.

Isaiah 14:14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds! I will make myself like the Most High!- This was the root reason why Babylon and Assyria were condemned. They were Yahweh's servants, judging Judah as He commanded, but they went far beyond that commission; the axe boasted itself against the Divine hand that wielded it, and played God Himself. The clouds could be an intensive plural referring to the great cloud, the shekinah glory in the temple on mount Zion.

Isaiah 14:15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit- I noted on :9 that the Babylonian concept of *sheol* is alluded to there, but that doesn't mean that this is correct. Here *sheol* is defined as God and the Bible know it to be- "the pit", the grave.

Isaiah 14:16 Those who see you will stare at you. They will ponder you, saying, Is this the man who made the earth to tremble, who shook kingdoms- Clearly the person in view is a "man" and not an Angel or cosmic being; his corpse will be in full view of those he had abused. As noted on :9,15, the Babylonian concept of *sheol* is alluded to but it was incorrect; the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23) and not consciously surviving death in an underworld situation.

Isaiah 14:17 who made the world like a wilderness, and overthrew its cities; who didn't release his prisoners to their home?- This accuses Lucifer of making the "world as a wilderness, (destroying) the cities thereof; that let not loose his prisoners to their home... (that did) fill the face of the world with cities... the exactress of gold" (:17 & 21 R.V.; :4 A.V. margin). These are all descriptions of Babylonian military policy - razing whole areas to the ground (as they did to Jerusalem), transporting captives to other areas and not letting them return to their homeland (as they did to the Jews), building new cities and taking tribute of gold from nations they oppressed.

Thus there is emphasis on the fact that Lucifer was not even going to get the burial these other kings had (:18,19), implying that he was only a human king like them, seeing his body needed burying. The condemnation for not releasing prisoners would apply to Babylon and Assyria, who took God's people into captivity. The prophecies in later Isaiah about the opening of the prison house therefore had their primary fulfilment in the release of the exiles from Babylonian captivity, which was potentially possible through a Messiah figure.

Isaiah 14:18 All the kings of the nations sleep in glory, each one in his own house- This again shows that the reference in :9 to dead kings arising in the underworld to greet the king of Babylon is just alluding to their mythical beliefs. The reality was that for all their glory, they were asleep in their tombs ["houses"]; for death is unconsciousness.

Isaiah 14:19 But you are cast away from your tomb like a hated branch, clothed with the slain, who are thrust through with the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit; like a dead body trodden under foot- The corpse of the king of Babylon would be trodden under foot and displayed for all to see, especially those he had abused. There is no evidence that actually happened. Nebuchadnezzar repented, to a degree, according to the book of Daniel. So this outcome was precluded by that, in line with the principles of Jer. 18:8-10. It may be that there will be a latter day fulfilment of this, or perhaps this is simply a prophecy (like the destruction of Nineveh within 40 days) which didn't happen- because in the gap between the word and the fulfilment of it, there was repentance. See on :21.

Isaiah 14:20 You will not join them in burial, because you have destroyed your land. You have killed your people. The seed of evildoers will not be mentioned by name forever- This destruction of Babylon is connected to the impenitence of its king. Likewise Zedekiah of Judah was told something similar; if he didn't repent, then his land, people and family would suffer. God set these men up with a deal- if they repented, then their equally sinful people and families could have had judgment averted. So it wasn't that the innocent suffered for the sake of the sin of one leader. Rather, those sinful people could have their judgment averted if one leader repented; just as many sinners are counted righteous by the obedience of the One, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 14:21 Prepare for slaughter of his children because of the iniquity of their fathers- Asking the king to "prepare" to have his children slain could suggest he was being invited to repent. I suggested on :19 that the king of Babylon did this. And so there is no evidence that he saw his children slain.

That they rise not up and possess the earth, and fill the surface of the world with cities- This alludes to Nimrod, the founder of Babylon, who is recorded as building cities. There is no strong evidence that Nebuchadnezzar was a great builder of multiple cities, so the point of this language is to direct us back to Nimrod.

Isaiah 14:22 I will rise up against them, says Yahweh of Armies, and cut off from Babylon name and remnant, and son and son's son, says Yahweh- "Cut off" is the same word translated "lumberjack" in :8. As Babylon cut off the cedars of the temple, so she would be cut off. What we do to God's people will decide the nature of our eternal judgment. Verse 20 says that Lucifer's seed will be destroyed. Verse 22 says

that Babylon's seed will be destroyed, thus equating them. Dt. 28:7 uses the same language in saying that the judgment upon Israel's enemies, to have Yahweh "rise up against them... and cut [them] off", would come if Israel were obedient to the covenant. They were not. And that may account for not all of these judgments against the king of Babylon coming true at the time; although the essence of them will in the latter day judgment of Babylon.

Isaiah 14:23 I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and pools of water. I will sweep it with the broom of destruction, says Yahweh of Armies- This has been seen as a reference to the Medes diverting the water of the Euphrates into pools. But that at best was a limited fulfilment; for Babylon continued to be inhabited a long time after the Medes took it, and it didn't become "pools of water", as explained on Is. 13:20. As noted on :22, these judgments were partly dependent upon Israel's obedience to the covenant; and that condition wasn't met. And there was some repentance by Nebuchadnezzar.

Isaiah 14:24 Yahweh of Armies has sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it happen; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand- As God thought, so it would happen. It is a common Bible teaching that how a man thinks is expressed in his actions (Prov. 23:7; Mt. 12:34); a little reflection upon our own actions will confirm this. We think of something and then we do it. Our 'spirit' or mind may reflect upon the fact that we are hungry and desire food. We see a banana going spare in the kitchen; that desire of the 'spirit' is then translated into action - we reach out for the banana, peel it and eat. This simple example shows why the Hebrew word for 'spirit' means both the breath or mind, and also power. Our spirit, the essential us, refers to our thoughts and therefore also to the actions which we take to express those thoughts or disposition within us. On a far more glorious scale, God's spirit is the same; it is the power by which He displays His essential being, His disposition and purpose. God thinks and therefore does things.

With Assyria at the height of her power, Isaiah proclaimed her downfall (Is. 14:24-26). The life of faith in God is simply the very opposite of what seems humanly sensible. To give money we'd surely be better saving; risk our lives and health for another; neglect our business or career for the sake of the Lord's work. These ought to be the *normal* decisions we make, if we are walking in step with the spirit; and yet it would appear that they are the exceptions to the rule of far too many of our lives. And the point is, God's heart broke because His people were and are like this.

Isaiah 14:25 That I will break the Assyrian in My land, and tread him under foot on My mountains. Then his yoke will leave them, and his burden leave their shoulders- The prophecy against Babylon now merges with that against Assyria. I have explained on :4 and on Is. 13:1 that the prophecy against Babylon was initially intended against Assyria. But it was reapplied and transferred to Babylon. But now in these verses we have a specific prophecy against Assyria, relevant to the time of Isaiah when Judah were under the Assyrian yoke, paying tribute to them. But the intended judgment of Assyria also didn't quite happen as envisaged. Assyria was not trodden down upon the mountains of Yahweh (the one great mountain- Zion). They didn't even take Jerusalem.

"The Assyrian" is mentioned whilst "the king of Babylon" in :4. The prophecy was initially about the Assyrians, but a different prophetic program worked out. So it was applied to the Babylonians, and yet finally will come true of a latter day Babylon

/ Assyria. And the prophecy was maybe rewritten under inspiration to reflect this; see on Is. 1:1. Babylon and Assyria are often interchangeable phrases in the prophets because the prophecies about Assyria were transferred to Babylon. Thus, having spoken of the demise of the king of Babylon, v. 25 says, “I will break the Assyrian...”. The prophecies about Babylon in Isaiah 47, are repeated concerning Assyria in Nahum 3:4, 5, 18, and Zephaniah 2 :13 & 15; and 2 Chronicles 33:11, says that the king of Assyria took Manasseh captive to Babylon - showing the interchangeability of the terms. Amos 5:27 says that Israel were to go into captivity “beyond Damascus”, i.e. in Assyria, but Stephen quotes this as “beyond Babylon” (Acts 7:43). Ezra 6:1 describes Darius the king of Babylon making a decree concerning the rebuilding of the temple. The Jews praised God for turning “the heart of the king of Assyria” (Ezra 6: 22), again showing that they are interchangeable terms. The prophecy of Isaiah 14, along with many others in Isaiah, fits in well to the context of the Assyrian invasion by Sennacherib in Hezekiah’s time, hence v. 25 describes the breaking of the Assyrian. Verse 13 is easier to understand if it is talking about the blasphemous Assyrians besieging Jerusalem, wanting to enter Jerusalem and capture the temple for their gods. Earlier the Assyrian king, Tilgath-Pilneser, had probably wanted to do the same (2 Chron. 28: 20-21). Isaiah 14:13: “For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven...(symbolic of the temple and ark - 1 Kings 8: 30; 2 Chron. 30: 27; Ps. 20: 2 & 6; 11: 4; Heb. 7:26) I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation (mount Zion where the temple was) in the sides of the north” (Jerusalem - Ps. 48:1-2).

The righteous remnant were to release Judah from the yoke and burden of domination by the overpowering Assyria (Is. 10:27). But they did not fully achieve this, nor did they accept God's new covenant which was to be the basis for them never again being under yoke (Jer. 30:8; Ez. 34:27). The burden of the Assyrians was to be removed by them being trodden down upon the mountains [an intensive plural for the one great mountain] of Zion (Is. 14:25). But they never got into Zion, and were not trodden down there. And so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the victory of the Lord Jesus over sin (see on Is. 10:4) and the latter day Assyrian. His offer of *His* yoke in place of the *heavy yoke* carried by God's people surely alludes here (Mt. 11:29).

The parallel prophecy is in Nahum 1:13: "Now will I break his yoke from off you, and will burst your bonds apart". This is a reference to the Assyrian's yoke upon Judah (2 Kings 18:14; Is. 10:27). The implication of "Now..." is that Nahum may have been contemporary with the Sennacherib invasion of Judah at Hezekiah's time, having himself been one of those taken captive to Assyria from the ten tribes some years before. Some kind of Messianic kingdom could have been established then (Nah. 1:15), but Hezekiah didn't follow through on his potential, and the exiles didn't repent. The intended scenario was that Nineveh would be destroyed and the exiles return in repentance; but that didn't quite happen as it potentially could have done, although the prophetic word will ultimately come true in the last days.

Isaiah 14:26 This is the plan that is determined for the whole earth. This is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations- The idea of a "plan" is that this was a potential scenario; the hand of God was active to work out a plan whereby all the nations within the *eretz* promised to Abraham would be judged and a remnant amongst them repent, and join themselves with a repentant Israel and Judah in a reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. But that plan didn't work out fully at the time; it was reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 14:27 For Yahweh of Armies has planned, and who can stop it? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?- As explained on :26, this was the Divine plan for those times. It didn't fully come about then because various preconditions weren't met; not least that Israel and Judah didn't repent. But the ultimate plan and intention to reestablish Yahweh's Kingdom on earth was and is unstoppable.

Isaiah 14:28 This burden was in the year that king Ahaz died- This appears to apply to the subsequent prophecy against Philistia. The significance was in the fact that after Uzziah subdued the Philistines (2 Chron. 26:6,7), Ahaz had allowed them to take some cities in the southern part of Judah (2 Chron. 28:18). But Hezekiah was to crush them (2 Kings 18:8).

Isaiah 14:29 Don't rejoice, O Philistia, all of you, because the rod that struck you is broken; for out of the serpent's root an adder will emerge, and his fruit will be a fiery flying serpent- The rod that smote the nations in the context is clearly Assyria and Babylon, which was to be broken. But Philistia was not to relax because of that; after the fall of those powers, "an adder" was to emerge and crush them. The prophetic potential was that this fiery flying serpent was to be Hezekiah, for he did attack them in 2 Kings 18:8. He was to be a Messiah figure; the serpent lifted up on a pole as an ensign (s.w. Num. 21:8), as if directly connected with the seraphim of Is. 6:2,6 (s.w. "fiery flying serpent"). The Jewish targum also understands the reference here to be to Messiah: "For, from the sons of Jesse shall come forth the Messiah; and his works among you shall be as the flying serpent". But Hezekiah messed up after the Assyrian threat was removed. And so the prophecies of the Messiah conquering the Philistine areas is to be reapplied to the last days.

Another alternative is to take the Assyrian rod as a reference to Sargon who "took Ashdod" (Is. 20:1), and took Khanun, King of Gaza, prisoner, putting "all Philistia", all its various local fiefdoms (1 Sam. 6:18), into subjection. The fiery serpent who punished them even more would then refer to Sennacherib. But in what sense was Sargon smitten? And how then to understand the kingdom passages which now follow? But see on :31.

Isaiah 14:30 The first-born of the poor will eat, and the needy will lie down in safety; and I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant will be killed- Adam Clarke: "I will kill "He will slay"". The idea is that when the Messiah figure arose at the fall of Babylon (:29), there would be the Kingdom of God reestablished; with plenty of food for the poor and needy of Judah, and the destruction of the remnants of the impenitent Philistines. The "remnant" would refer to those left over after their sufferings at the hands of Babylon and Assyria.

Isaiah 14:31 Howl, gate! Cry, city!- This could be read as an appeal for them to repent, and cry to Yahweh in order to avoid the destruction that was otherwise certain (see on Jer. 18:8-10).

You are melted away, Philistia, all of you; for smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in his ranks- This recalls the prophecies of the Assyrians and Babylonians advancing in perfect order "from the north"; and I suggested on :29 that Sennacherib might have been the flying fiery serpent. But the reference equally could be to Messiah's forces coming upon them "from the north" in that as noted on :28,

what is in view is the Philistine capture of the cities in the southern part of Judah (2 Chron. 28:18).

Isaiah 14:32 What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That Yahweh has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of His people will take refuge- The idea could be that the judged, desperate and repentant Philistines send messengers to Zion asking for help, and are told that the afflicted of God's people have found refuge in the reestablished Zion- implying that the Philistines could likewise. Zion will have been founded in that the foundation corner stone of the Messiah had been laid there (Is. 28:16). These things didn't fully happen at the time, but will come to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus at His return. They could have had more fulfilment in Hezekiah, when the messengers of the nations sent to congratulate him after the victory against Assyria and his recovery from terminal illness (2 Chron. 32:23). But he let the baton drop at that stage. Later on, the foundation of Zion was again laid (Ezra 3:10; Is. 44:28; Zech. 4:9 s.w.), but again the baton was dropped.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 15

Isaiah 15:1 The burden of Moab: for in a night, Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to nothing- The idea is that Moab would be overthrown in a night. This didn't literally happen. I have noted on Is 13:1 and throughout the prophecies of the fall of Babylon that these prophecies against the nations didn't completely come to pass. The prophetic scenario was that judgment would come upon Israel, Judah and all the surrounding nations; Babylon would fall, and a repentant remnant of all the nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham would become part of the reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. And so likewise this overnight destruction of Moab didn't happen; the lay waste an entire nation overnight would require Divine intervention. It's rather like the language of Is. 13:13, suggesting there would be an earthquake and a Divine judgment on the scale of Sodom's destruction. This didn't happen. But it will in the last days, to where the prophecy has been rescheduled and reapplied. The significance of Ar is that according to Mesha's inscription on the Moabite Stone, it had been taken from Judah in the time of Ahab

For in a night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to nothing- LXX: "by night the wall of the land of Moab shall be destroyed". The great prophetic theme is that all human defences, be they the walls of Jerusalem, Babylon or Moab, would all prove powerless before the Divine judgment. And that principle applies today, where wealth, scheming and insurance policies can be felt to be a wall against Divine judgment.

Isaiah 15:2 They have gone up to Bayith, and to Dibon, to the high places, to weep. Moab wails over Nebo and over Medeba. Baldness is on all of their heads; every beard is cut off- LXX "Debon, where your altar is, shall be destroyed". The judgments were always against the idols of these nations, in the hope that a remnant would repent. Weeping over Nebo, a mountain, is strange unless we understand that there was a supernatural Divine judgment intended (see on :1) which would bring down the mountains. The order of the areas here is from south to north; the idea is that all Moab would be desolated. This didn't happen at the time; see on :1.

Isaiah 15:3 In their streets they clothe themselves in sackcloth. In their streets and on their housetops everyone wails, weeping abundantly- The LXX read this as a command: "Gird yourselves with sackcloth in her streets: and lament upon her roofs, and in her streets, and in her ways; howl all of you with weeping". In this case, we would have here a call to repentance, just as Babylon had. Because God wished them to repentant, and the Divine intention was that a minority would. They were to weep on the streets and housetops because this was where their altars were (Is. 22:1 etc.). Jeremiah lamented that Jerusalem's streets and roofs were full of such idolatry.

Isaiah 15:4 Heshbon cries out with Elealeh. Their voice is heard even to Jahaz. Therefore the armed men of Moab cry aloud- Because the Moabites would cry out and their voice would be heard, "*my* heart shall cry out for Moab" (Is. 15:4,5,8). As the Lord Jesus is a representative Saviour, we too must feel the judgment that is to come upon others, and in that sense cry out for them as they will cry out. We too will appeal to men with conviction, as Isaiah's heart cried out for Moab like a young heifer about to be slaughtered, feeling for them in what would come upon them, and desperately appealing for their repentance. Jer. 48:41 defines the crying aloud as birth pangs: "the heart of the mighty men of Moab at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs". Again the metaphor has hope of a new birth out of this calamity. The Divine hope was that Moab along with Israel would repent and form a reborn people in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel.

Their souls tremble within them- This could be a reference to their awareness that they had sinned against Yahweh; hence LXX "her soul shall know".

Isaiah 15:5 My heart cries out for Moab! Her nobles flee to Zoar, to Eglath Shelishiyah; for they go up by the ascent of Luhith with weeping; for in the way of Horonaim, they raise up a cry of destruction- As Moab cried out like a three year old heifer (Jer. 48:34), so did Isaiah for them (Is. 15:5). All this was done by Isaiah and Jeremiah, knowing that Moab hated Israel (Is. 25:10) and were evidently worthy of God's condemnation. But all the same they loved them, in the spirit of Noah witnessing to the mocking world around him. Our knowledge of this world's future means that as we walk the streets and mix with men and women, our heart should cry out for them, no matter how they behave towards us, and there should be a deep seated desire for at least some of them to come to repentance and thereby avoid the judgments to come. Passionate Christian living has such witness at its heart. Particularly is this true, surely, of the people and land of Israel. It ought to be impossible for us to walk its streets or meet its people without at least desiring to give them a leaflet or say at least something to try to help them see what lies ahead. See on Is. 16:7.

Isaiah 15:6 For the waters of Nimrim will be desolate; for the grass has withered away, the tender grass fails, there is no green thing- I suggested on :1,2 that what was in view was a supernatural Divine judgment upon Moab, rather than a drought which would produce this situation over an extended period. Again we note the destruction of physical features, such as the waters of Nimrim. This would have been due to direct Divine judgment; the destruction of all green things is likewise reflective of such supernatural judgment rather than the effects of invading armies. The desolation of the waters could have been from invaders putting stones in wells as in 2 Kings 3:25, but the impression is of a more widespread and supernatural destruction.

Isaiah 15:7 Therefore they will carry away the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have stored up, over the brook of the willows- LXX "Shall Moab even thus be delivered? for I will bring the Arabians upon the valley, and they shall take it". Whether or not Moab would be delivered was left an open question because they would be asked to repent, and accepted the deliverance of Yahweh who alone could save. The later prophecy of Jer. 48:40 says that Babylon would effect this judgment upon Moab. Just as Babylon came as an eagle against Judah, so it would against Moab (Jer. 4:13; Dt. 28:49). There was to be no avoiding Divine judgment. So we see here the reapplication of a prophecy about Moab to a later date; instead of bands of Bedouin Arab marauding over her Divinely judged wastelands, and her crossing the brook into Edom, the Babylonians were to judge her, because this earlier prophecy didn't come to its possible fulfilment at the time.

Isaiah 15:8 For the cry has gone around the borders of Moab; its wailing to Eglaim, and its wailing echoes back to Beer Elim- From the north to the south, the equivalent of the "Dan and Beersheba" of Israel.

Isaiah 15:9 For the waters of Dimon are full of blood; for I will bring yet more on Dimon, a lion on those of Moab who escape, and on the remnant of the land- LXX "I will bring Arabians upon Dimon, and I will take away the seed of Moab, and Ariel, and the remnant of Adama". As explained on :1, the prophetic scenario didn't completely work out at the time; but it will do in essence in the last days. For "Arabians", see on :7. There is an alliteration between "Dibon" and "blood". The idea is that their being full of blood was potentially possible; but again, that depended upon their repentance as to whether the potential was realized.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 16

Isaiah 16:1 Send the lambs for the ruler of the land from Selah to the wilderness, to the mountain of the daughter of Zion- Sela is Petra. This verse seems to be an appeal for Moab to repent and send an offering to Mount Zion, the temple, instead of sending lambs as a tribute to Israel as before (2 Kings 3:4). This was in order to avert the judgment coming upon them, which is spoken of as sure to come ("for it shall be...", :2). God's word was able to be fulfilled or not, according to human repentance. "The wilderness" would refer to the tract of desert between Sela and Jerusalem.

LXX "I will send as it were reptiles on the land: is not the mount of the daughter of Sion a desolate rock?". In this case the judgment of Moab and Judah, including the destruction of the temple, is envisaged as happening at the same time. This was part of the wide network of possible prophetic scenarios.

To the ruler of the land- Moab were to accept that they were living in the land promised to Abraham and were only allowed there in God's Kingdom by grace. Under David they had given him tribute (2 Sam. 8:2), and the tribute they paid to later kings of Israel was in lambs (2 Kings 3:4), so we can assume they sent their tribute to David in the form of lambs; they were being asked to accept that the throne of David had been re-established (see on :5). This tribute was to be given "from Selah to the wilderness", from the frontier city to the other side of the country. The whole of Moab was to accept from the heart that they were living by grace in the territory of God's Kingdom and to give tribute to the Messiah King of Israel, recognizing that Israel's

God was ruler of the whole land / earth.

Isaiah 16:2 For it will be that as wandering birds, as a scattered nest, so will the daughters of Moab be at the fords of the Arnon- The daughters of Moab could refer to the provincial towns of Moab. The idea may be that the scattered Moabites would be restored if they repented by worshipping Yahweh (:1); and their remnant would then be restored to their land. All this of course was a prophetic scenario that depended upon the repentance of both Judah and Moab in response to the judgments to come upon them at the hands of the Assyrians or Babylonians. But they didn't respond.

Isaiah 16:3 Give counsel! Execute justice! Make your shade like the night in the midst of the noonday! Hide the outcasts! Don't betray the fugitive!- This is an appeal for repentance, made clearer in the LXX: "take farther counsel, and continually make thou a shelter from grief: they flee in darkness at mid-day; they are amazed; be not thou led captive". As explained on :4, if they had accepted the refugees from Judah and turned to Yahweh, the intended judgment would have been averted, in line with the principles of Jer. 18:8-10. Or it could be that this verse is an exhortation to Judah to accept the repentant remnant of Moab into Zion; for the reestablished Kingdom was intended to be a place of refuge for the remnants of the surrounding nations (Is. 4:6).

Isaiah 16:4 Let My outcasts dwell with you! As for Moab, be a hiding place for him from the face of the destroyer. For the extortioner is brought to nothing. Destruction ceases, the oppressors are consumed out of the land- As explained on :3, if they had accepted the refugees from Judah and turned to Yahweh, the intended judgment would have been averted, in line with the principles of Jer. 18:8-10. The LXX have: "The fugitives of Moab shall sojourn with thee [the change of one accent reverses the sense]; they shall be to you a shelter from the face of the pursuer: for thine alliance has been taken away, and the oppressing ruler has perished from off the earth". This then would be an address to Judah. They were to accept refugees from Moab and Moab would accept their refugees; perhaps that idea is reflected in the ambiguity of the text here. The "alliance" with Egypt would end, and Babylon would fall. In God's restored Kingdom which would then be established (:5), the remnants of Moab and Judah would then have an equal place by grace. But the refusal to repent meant that this possibility didn't happen, and so in essence the scene has been reapplied to events of the last days.

But the Hebrew is obscure, and we note the term 'outcasts' occurs in :3 also. The NIV, ESV and other versions suggest the idea is that the Moabite outcasts should be allowed to dwell in Israel, as if in expectation that some (the Moabite 'remnant' of :14?) would respond to the call of Moab to repentance and would want to become part of the covenant people- and they were to be accepted: "Let the outcasts of Moab sojourn among you" (ESV). This certainly makes most sense in the context. The prophecy is about Moab and the possibility of Moab's repentance at the time of Judah's restoration; to suddenly start talking about the outcasts of Israel would be out of context in the chapter. It was David who was famed for letting the outcasts come and dwell with him (s.w. 2 Sam. 14:13,14), so this could be another hint that Moab were to accept the grace of a Davidic king in Israel (see on 16:1). The double appeal for Israel to let the outcasts of Moab dwell amongst them was perhaps because God

had earlier said that Moabites were not to enter into the Israelite congregation (Dt. 23:3). God emphasis that they are *His* outcasts. By grace, foreseeing Moab's awful judgment, He urges Israel to accept repentant Moab amongst them. This all goes to show that in wrath He remembers mercy, and at the time of judging others His dominant emotion is concern for them- and He truly has tried all possible ways to avert the tragedy.

"Let mine outcasts dwell with thee Moab", God pleads in Is. 16:4. But the rest of Is. 16 is about the awful judgment that will fall upon Moab (Is. 16:12,14). The text doesn't say so, but it's apparent enough- that if Moab was not merciful to the Jews fleeing the Assyrian invasion, then they would face a like judgment. But that judgment was conditional upon Moab's behaviour.

Isaiah 16:5 A throne will be established in grace, one will sit on it in truth, in the tent of David, judging, seeking justice, and swift to do righteousness- It was possible, and envisaged by Isaiah, that a Messianic King would sit upon the re-established throne of David and would provide safety and salvation to the Gentile world who wished to accept Him. See on :4. The same words are used for the eternal establishment of the Messianic throne in the promise to David in 2 Sam. 7:13,16; and Isaiah also uses the phrase in this connection (Is. 9:6). This didn't happen in his time, but the potential was there- in the same way as his son of chapter 9 could have been a Messiah King with an eternal Kingdom in Israel.

"Grace" is also translated "mercy". This would then be seen to have been God's intention through all the judgments. David's enthusiasm for the coming of judgment reflected his understanding that it will be a day of the display of Divine mercy. Is. 16:5 speaks of it as "a throne shall be established in mercy, and one [the Lord Jesus] shall sit thereon judging in truth". It will be the ultimate moment of truth, and yet it will be established in mercy.

Isaiah 16:6 We have heard of the pride of Moab, that he is very proud; even of his arrogance, his pride, and his wrath- This is juxtaposed next to the wonderful possibility of the restored Kingdom of God which they could have a part in (:5). It was their pride which precluded their repentance and the establishment of the Kingdom then.

His boastings are nothing- The ambiguity of the original is perhaps because we are dealing with various possible scenarios; the fulfilment of the prophetic word was conditional upon various scenarios of repentance. Hence LXX here: "thy prophecy shall not be thus, no not thus".

Isaiah 16:7 Therefore Moab will wail for Moab, all of them will wail- It was Moab who would howl for Moab- but Isaiah, feeling for them so strongly, also howled for them; "*my* bowls shall sound like an harp for Moab" (Is. 16:11). And he felt the same for his own people, Israel. See on is. 15:4,5.

You will mourn for the raisin cakes of Kir Hareseth, utterly stricken- The mourning for the raisin cakes, part of the idol rituals (Hos. 3:1), may be mourning in repentance. Hence LXX: "but thou shalt care for them that dwell in Seth, and thou shalt not be ashamed". The ambiguity of the original is perhaps because we are dealing with various possible scenarios; the fulfilment of the prophetic word was conditional upon various scenarios of repentance.

Isaiah 16:8 For the fields of Heshbon languish like the vine of Sibmah. The lords of the nations have broken down its choice branches which reached even to Jazer, which wandered into the wilderness. Its shoots were spread abroad, they passed over the sea- The vines of Moab were famous, known even "over the sea" (although this could refer to the vineyards spreading to the Dead Sea). They stretched from Sibmah, in the outskirts of Heshbon, all the way to Jazer and even to the desert; and even to the Dead Sea. This again is a feature of Divine judgment; all that secular man boasts and rejoices in will be brought down.

Isaiah 16:9 Therefore I will weep with the weeping of Jazer for the vine of Sibmah. I will water you with my tears, Heshbon, and Elealeh: for on your summer fruits and on your harvest the battle shout has fallen- Isaiah was to weep for Moab, even though Moab wept for herself (:7). He so believed the prophecy about Moab and like God, took no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The same "I" who wept for Moab's judgment was to be the One who brought the judgments: "for I will trample on thy harvest and on thy vintages" (LXX), the classic language of Divine judgment. Through Isaiah, He wept for these Gentiles, so wishing their repentance.

Isaiah 16:10 Gladness is taken away, and joy out of the fruitful field; and in the vineyards there will be no singing, neither joyful noise. Nobody will tread out wine in the presses; I have made the shouting stop- The context is of Isaiah speaking (:11). He realized the power of the words he was uttering. He was manifesting God here; as noted on :9, the same "I" who wept for Moab's judgment was to be the One who brought the judgments. "Shouting" is as AV "vintage shouting". Their joyful treading of the vintage was to be replaced by Yahweh treading them in the winepress of judgment; see on :9. The Hebrew noun is used for both the joyous shout of the grape-treaders and for a battle-cry (Jer. 25:30; 51:14).

Isaiah 16:11 Therefore my heart sounds like a harp for Moab, and my inward parts for Kir Heres- The very core of Isaiah's being wept for his national enemies, so sure was he that the words flowing from his tongue and pen were true. And yet Isaiah was speaking on God's behalf, for it was God ultimately who brought the judgments (:10), and so Isaiah's weeping over Moab's impenitence was in fact God's weeping. He is not indifferent to the billions who have refused His offer of repentance and salvation.

Isaiah's heart cried out for Moab like a young heifer about to be slaughtered, feeling for them in what would come upon them, and desperately appealing for their repentance. Because the Moabites would cry out and their voice would be heard, "*my* heart shall cry out for Moab" (Is. 15:4,5,8). As the Lord Jesus is a representative Saviour, we too must feel the judgment that is to come upon others, and in that sense cry out for them as they will cry out. "Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab" (Is. 16:7)- but Isaiah, feeling for them so strongly, also howled for them; "*my* bowls shall sound like an harp for Moab" (Is. 16:11).

Isaiah 16:12 It will happen that when Moab presents himself, when he wearies himself on the high place and comes to his sanctuary to pray, that he will not prevail- Moab was intended to have realized that the gods of their high places would not save them; but they refused to perceive that, wearying themselves in endlessly begging the gods for help as in 1 Kings 18:26; and then still went to their sanctuary to pray to their idols. They thereby refused the possibility of their judgment being averted. The

sanctuary sounds like the sanctuary Mesha writes about on the Moabite stone, Beth-Bamah. However there is again an ambiguity in the text which could hint at the possibility of their repentance; Ewald translates it: "...and prevails nothing, then he shall be ashamed of Chemosh, and turn to Jehovah".

Isaiah 16:13 This is the word that Yahweh spoke concerning Moab in time past- AV "long ago". But surely not that long ago- the prophecy against Moab was in chapter 15. But the three years grace (:14), the gap between statement and fulfilment, was a relatively long time in the sense that God was allowing for repentance when repentance had already been refused by Moab. Or the 'long ago' prophecy could be Balaam's in Num. 24:17. All that time, Moab had had the opportunity to repent and make history work out a different way to that prophesied. But still they would not. But "in time past" can refer to the recent past (2 Sam. 15:34) and the distant past (Ps. 93:2).

Isaiah 16:14 But now Yahweh has spoken, saying, Within three years, as a worker bound by contract would count them, the glory of Moab shall be brought into contempt, with all his great multitude; and the remnant will be very small and feeble- Perhaps the sense is that as a hired hand counts the days of required service exactly, so this calamity would happen within exactly three years. I noted on the prophecies of Isaiah's children in Is. 7:16; 8:1,18 that there was the potential of a very speedy fulfilment of the prophecies, before the newborn child could even speak; and we have a similar period in Is. 21:16. And out of all those judgments, a repentant "remnant" were envisaged as emerging, who could join with Judah in the reestablished Kingdom of God. But the complex network of possibilities alluded to be Isaiah were precluded by the lack of repentance by both Judah and Moab.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 17

Isaiah 17:1 The burden of Damascus: Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap- I have commented through Is. 13-16 upon the conditional nature of these prophecies. They envisage a situation in which Babylon and / or Assyria will judge Judah and the surrounding nations, and a repentant remnant from all of them will unite in a multi-ethnic, reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. But this scenario was precluded by various factors, not least the impenitence of all the peoples; and perhaps foreseeing this, God did not bring about all the judgments to the extent spoken of. The essence of the prophecies however will come true in the last days. Here we have an example- Damascus continued as a city and does to this day, being one of the oldest continually occupied cities on earth.

Isaiah 17:2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken. They will be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid- See on :1. The LXX make this read on as part of the burden upon Damascus in :1. There is no "Aroer" near Damascus.

Isaiah 17:3 The fortress shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria. They will be as the glory of the children of Israel, says Yahweh of Armies- And that glory was to be brought down (:4). Here there is

envisaged the judgment together of Israel, Syria and Judah. This was the Divine perspective on Judah's fear of a confederacy against them by Israel and Syria- they were all to perish together (Is. 7:1-5). I explained on Is. 8:8 that it was one of the various prophetic potentials that Assyria would destroy these three nations together during the same campaign. This didn't come about; partly because there was enough response in Judah to Isaiah's prophecies that the Assyrians were stopped short and destroyed. Or it could be that the overweening pride of Assyria and their revolt against Yahweh was such that He destroyed to destroy them anyway and not allow them to destroy Jerusalem. Hence LXX: "And she shall no longer be a strong place for Ephraim to flee to, and there shall no longer be a kingdom in Damascus, or a remnant of Syrians; for thou art no better than the children of Israel". The Syrians did remain and the kingdom of Damascus did continue, because the potential scenario was precluded from happening. We also note that Israel are again presented as no better than the Gentiles, and therefore shared similar judgments.

It could be argued that this chapter is largely about the judgment of "Jacob", but Damascus is mentioned because Syria would no longer be a fortress or "bulwark" / source of strength for them. The idea is that Damascus and the ten tribes were to be destroyed together in the same campaign by Babylon or Assyria. Whilst this scenario didn't quite work out as it could have done, the abiding reality is that all human sources of strength fade to nothing before Divine judgment. This is the same situation as in Is. 7, where Israel and Syria united against Judah and their judgment by Assyria / Babylon is prophesied. Syria was not so strong; Damascus had recently been ransacked by the Assyrians (2 Kings 16:9). But still they seemed to Israel such a relative source of strength.

Isaiah 17:4 It will happen in that day that the glory of Jacob will be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh will become lean- The fatness of the Assyrians was to become lean (Is. 10:16); but here, fatness becoming lean is the very language used of what was to happen to the glory of Jacob. By their arrogance they proclaimed themselves as no better than Gentiles, meriting the same judgment. See on :3.

Isaiah 17:5 It will be like when the harvester gathers the wheat, and his arm reaps the grain. Yes, it will be like when one gleans grain in the valley of Rephaim- This is the language of judgment day, a harvest in a valley. But from that judgment there was intended to be a gleaning, a remnant of good corn would emerge. This reflects the continual Divine hope that a remnant of Syria as well as of Ephraim and Judah would repent (:5). For the subject of the prophecy merges from Syria to Ephraim and now to Judah- the valley of Rephaim or giants was just south of Jerusalem in Judah (Josh. 15:8; 18:16). The idea was that remnants of all these peoples would unite in repentance in the reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah.

Isaiah 17:6 Yet gleanings will be left there, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outermost branches of a fruitful tree, says Yahweh, the God of Israel- The idea is that the tree was "fruitful" [potentially] but only a very few bits of fruit would be found. This finding of this tiny remnant "there", in a valley near Jerusalem (see on :5). This didn't happen at the time, Mic. 7:1 says that actually no gleanings of the vintage were found; but all this will be transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to the outcome of the final judgment in a similar valley near Jerusalem at the Lord's return. Olives were struck down from the higher branches with a stick, and that rod or stick which was to beat

Judah and the nations is clearly defined as Babylon / Assyria in Is. 10. Is. 24:13-15,21-23 clearly applies this scenario to the last days.

Isaiah 17:7 In that day, a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes shall perceive the Holy One of Israel- This envisages the remnant of the Syrians, Israel and Judah turning to Yahweh, God of Israel. At their nadir, like men today, they will reflect on the most basic fact of human existence- that they were created by God. Man cannot see God, and yet eyes can perceive Him- if they are penitent. The contrast is with how they had previously focused their mental attention on what they had 'made', their idols (:8); rather than upon their personal maker. This is the wonderful imperative of believing that we were made, created; the works of *our* hands become less appealing.

Isaiah 17:8 They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands; neither shall they respect that which their fingers have made, neither the Asherim nor the incense altars- The Syrians, as well as God's people, would repent of their idolatry and turn to Yahweh alone (:7). And this shall come supremely true in the last days. When a man looks to his maker, "he shall not look to the altars [of] the work of *his* hands, neither shall he have respect to that which *his* fingers have made". God's fingers made the stars and all of creation (Ps. 8:3). By focusing upon *God's* works in creation, we will not be focused upon *our* works, but rather trust in God's creative grace.

Isaiah 17:9 In that day their strong cities will be like the forsaken places in the woods and on the mountain top, which were forsaken from before the children of Israel; and it will be a desolation- "Strong" is the same word used in :10 of how God was to be their strength. Instead, Israel had trusted in the strong cities of the Syrians such as Damascus. This is the trouble with trusting in human strength and even having access to it; our trust in God's strength is thereby so easily diminished.

Isaiah 17:10 For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not remembered the rock of your strength- They saw salvation in an alliance with Syria to destroy Judah with Egypt's help and thus form a united buffer against Assyria. All these kinds of petty politics and desperate dreams are just as much a part of our thinking today. And it is all a forgetting of Yahweh as the rock of our strength and salvation. Syria was not so strong; Damascus had recently been ransacked by the Assyrians (2 Kings 16:9). But still they seemed to Israel such a relative source of strength.

Therefore you plant pleasant plants, and set out foreign seedlings- RVmg. "thou plantest plantings of Adonis". This was a Syrian god. The alliance between Israel and Syria against Judah (Is. 7) required Israel to accept Syrian gods. And therefore they had effectively resigned their belief in Yahweh although they would never have admitted that in so many words. We can not serve two masters.

Isaiah 17:11 In the day of your planting, you hedge it in; in the morning, you make your seed blossom, but the harvest flees away in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow- The idea is that no matter how successful the alliance with Syria appeared to be initially, it would not prosper when it came to term, and the harvest of it would be a day of terrible judgment. This is the end of all ways around problems which are anything less than a complete falling upon Yahweh in our hearts. "Desperate sorrow" and "grief" in Hebrew mean incurable illness; the tragedy was that the opportunity for

healing had been given but they had refused it, and therefore so many potentials were thereby disallowed.

Isaiah 17:12 Ah, the uproar of many peoples, who roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rushing of nations, that rush like the rushing of mighty waters!- The judgment upon Syria and Israel (and probably Judah is also in view here (see on :5), would be like the rushing of waters- representing the various nations in the Assyrian or Babylonian confederacy. But this strange rush of nations against them would be strangely stopped (:13), by grace. "The roaring of the seas" is the term used for the Babylonian invasion of Judah (Jer. 5:22; 6:23). What began as a prophecy of judgment against Syria and Israel at the hands of the Assyrians now morphs into judgment against Judah at the hands of the Babylonians; see on Is. 13:1. The phrase is also used of Yahweh's victory at the roaring Red Sea (Is. 51:15; Ps. 65:7), implying again that this invasion is going to be destroyed as the Egyptians were. This didn't happen at the Babylonian invasion, although potentially it could've done had Judah repented.

Isaiah 17:13 The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters: but He will rebuke them, and they will flee far off, and will be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like the whirling dust before the storm- LXX "as a storm whirling the dust of the wheel". This is the language of the cherubim, implying God would intervene directly. The Assyrian invasion of Israel and Syria (see on :12) could have been averted, but it wasn't, because they didn't repent. But it was averted against Judah because a minority repented; the same word for "rush" is used of the tumult of that invasion (2 Kings 19:25; Is. 6:11). But the Babylonian invasion of them some time later wasn't, although it would've been had they repented. The chaff being blown before the wind recalls the vision of Dan. 2, whose primary potential fulfilment was in the fall of Babylon and the little stone of the repentant exiles returning to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land. See notes on Dan. 2. But that too was precluded by Judah's impenitence. And so it will come to fulfilment in the last days, when again the nations will "rush" to their judgment (Is. 13:4 s.w.).

Isaiah 17:14 At evening, behold, terror! Before the morning, they are no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us- LXX "that robbed you of your inheritance". The primary allusion is to the robbery of Judah by the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:13-16), resulting in the Angel smiting their army so that "before the morning" they were all dead corpses (Is. 37:36).

ISAIAH CHAPTER 18

Isaiah 18:1 Ah, the land of the rustling of wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia- I have commented through Is. 13-17 upon the conditional nature of these prophecies. They envisage a situation in which Babylon and / or Assyria will judge Judah and the surrounding nations, and a repentant remnant from all of them will unite in a multi-ethnic, reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. But this scenario was precluded by various factors, not least the impenitence of all the peoples; and perhaps foreseeing this, God did not bring about all the judgments to the extent spoken of. The essence of the prophecies however will come true in the last days. Here we have an example- the people of Cush didn't respond to their judgment by coming to Zion in repentance (:7).

The land shadowed by wings may again be a cherubim allusion, suggesting that God's purpose was potentially with them too if only they would respond; for it was His intention that the reestablished Kingdom should include repentant remnants of all the surrounding nations. Or perhaps there is simply a reference to the swarms of buzzing flies, especially the tsetse, which Cush was famous for. Those swarms might also represent their hosts of warriors (cp. Is. 7:18).

We can also read this as a reference to God's land of Judah, shadowed by the wings of the cherubim. The rivers of Ethiopia would then refer to the armies of the Ethiopians, upon which Judah were tempted to trust against the Babylonian threat. The idea would be that they were "beyond" those rivers of human help, because they were surroudned by the wings of God's cherubim, with their associated Angelic chariots.

Isaiah 18:2 That sends ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of papyrus on the waters, saying, Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people awesome from their beginning onward, a nation that measures out and treads down, whose land the rivers divide!- "The sea" is the Nile (Is. 19:5; Nah. 3:8). The reference is apparently to the huge power of the Ethiopian army (2 Chron. 14:9-13). The terms used here for this nation are legitimately translated otherwise by the AV: "That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!". The language here would be more appropriate to Judah. See on :7. The ambassadors in this case would then be representatives of Cush coming to the restored remnant of God's people in Zion, seeking Yahweh of Israel. See on :3,4. And if we read the verse as the modern versions, we appear to have Cush sending ambassadors to her own people which makes little sense.

But if (as discussed on :1) the land shadowed with wings is Judah- then the reference here is to the people of Judah sending messengers to Ethiopia and Egypt, asking for their help against Babylon. When in fact they should have trusted instead upon the shadowing of the wings of the Angel cherubim. They were in any case appealing to a nation "scattered and peeled" (AV), a nation that was to be destroyed, so certainly that their future destruction was spoken of in the past tense. This is the theme of Jer. 46- that Babylon was going to decimate the Egyptian-Ethiopian army at Carchemish. And that indeed happened. Judah's hope was to be in Yahweh, not in the armies of north Africa.

Isaiah 18:3 All you inhabitants of the world and you dwellers on the land, when a banner is lifted up on the mountains, look! When the trumpet is blown, listen!- The ensign or banner set up on mount Zion in Is. 13:2 would refer to the "pole" upon which the serpent was lifted up, representing the crucified Lord Jesus (Num. 21:8 s.w.). In the latter day application, this is to be the spiritual rallying point for the repentant remnant of both Judah ("the land") and the surrounding nations of the "world" (s.w. Is. 11:10,12; 18:3; 30:17; 31:9; 49:22; 62:10). Although this was precluded from happening at the time because those remnants didn't repent, it will become gloriously true in the last days. Cush at the time could have repented and come to Zion; see on :7.

We could also read this as an appeal to Judah; not to look to Egypt and Ethiopia for help (see on :2), but to realize that their help was right next to them, in Zion, where Yahweh's banner or ensign was to be lifted up.

Isaiah 18:4 For Yahweh said to me, I will be still, and I will be seen in My dwelling place, like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest- The reference may be to the cloud of glory which was to appear over Zion in the reestablished Kingdom when Yahweh would literally dwell in Zion (Ez. 48:35) and men would see His face (Rev. 22:4) after the final "harvest" of judgment; this was intended to be a place of refuge for the remnants of the surrounding nations (Is. 4:6). The "clear heat" would refer to the full reestablishment of David's Kingdom in the time off a Messianic descendant of his (2 Sam. 23:4). In Is. 16:3, Moab had been invited to come to this refuge, and the envisioned outcome here was that the repentant remnant of Cush would also respond to their judgment by coming to Zion in repentance (:7). So very much was precluded from fulfilment by their impenitence.

Or we can read this as meaning that if Judah had eyes of faith, and stopped trusting upon Egypt-Ethiopia for help against Babylon (see on :2), then Yahweh would visibly appear. The heat of harvest refers to His judgmet of His people; but He would appear like a cloud of dew to save them. In some form this happened, by grace, when Yahweh's Angel saved Zion from the Assyrians- although they generally didn't have faith. Perhaps He saved them by grace anyway. Or maybe the faith of the small remnant was accepted, and salvation was given to them because of that.

Isaiah 18:5 For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, He will cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and He will cut down and take away the spreading branches- Here and in :6 we are reading of how the situation of :3,4 will come about. Firstly there must be a gleaning of the potentially fruitful tree, and only after that the remnant would be harvested (both of Cush and Judah), after the rest of the branches are destroyed by the wild beasts of the earth / land (:6). The Lord may allude here when He taught that the blossom on the fig tree (Judah) and all the trees (such as Cush) would be the sure sign that the final harvest is about to begin (Lk. 21:29-31). The latter day application is to the "pruning hooks" of the surrounding nations ranged against Israel (Joel 3:10 s.w.). The cutting off of the twigs and branches implies they had been unfruitful (cp. Jn. 15:2; Rom. 11:18).

I discussed on :4 the reference here to the gracious deliverance of Zion at the time of the Assyrian invasion. But ideally, that deliverance was to be predicated upon faith and spirituality in Zion. This was not generally forthcoming; and so the vine of God's people were pruned before the harvest, the coming of judgment, so they would repent and the full extent of judgment need not come upon them. These things will have their latter day equivalent in Israel.

Isaiah 18:6 They will be left together for the ravenous birds of the mountains, and for the animals of the earth. The ravenous birds will summer on them, and all the animals of the earth will winter on them- See on :5. This devastation was to be necessary so that the final harvest could come (:5). The ravenous birds would have been the Babylonian confederacy (s.w. Jer. 12:9), along with the beasts of the *eretz* promised to Abraham; but Judah weren't repentant and neither were the Cushites as a result of that. And so the fulfilment is in essence transferred to events of the last days. It would be a tiny harvest; but that small remnant would be enough for the reestablishment of the Kingdom of God in Judah. The reference to summer and winter could suggest that there is a one year period in view, after which Cush would repent (:7).

Isaiah 18:7 In that time, a present will be brought to Yahweh of Armies from a people tall and smooth, even from a people awesome from their beginning onward, a nation that measures out and treads down, whose land the rivers divide, to the place of the name of Yahweh of Armies, Mount Zion- The envisioned outcome here was that the repentant remnant of Cush would also respond to their judgment by coming to Zion in repentance (:4). This didn't happen at the time, but it has a deferred fulfilment in the last days, when repentant Jews are sent to call in to Zion these peoples; those who make tall the bow (Is. 66:19, s.w. "tall"). But I noted on :2 the alternative translation and interpretation of this nation as referring to Judah. In this case the "present" brought to Yahweh in Zion would be the Cushites / Ethiopians bringing their Jewish remnant back to Zion- the latter day fulfilment of this would then perhaps have a foretaste in the return of the Falasha Jews from this area to the state of Israel. Gentiles bringing presents to Zion is the language of the reestablished kingdom (Ps. 68:29 s.w.). It could have come about then, when the surrounding nations brought presents to Hezekiah; but human pride and impenitence precluded it. And Hezekiah and his descendants adopted the ways of those nations rather than ruling over them and helping them toward Israel's God.

Another take on this verse would be that as a result of Yahweh's chastening of His people (see on :5), they would become "smooth", the Hebrew meaning 'polished'. And a repentant Judah would be an acceptable sacrifice to Yahweh in Zion. Despite the terrible beginnings of God's people in the furnace of Egypt, they would eventually be perfected through suffering and repentance.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 19

Isaiah 19:1 The burden of Egypt: Behold, Yahweh rides on a swift cloud, and comes to Egypt- The Old Testament describes Yahweh, the one true God, as riding through the heavens on chariots to the help of His people Israel (Dt. 33:26; 2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10; 104:3; Is. 19:1; Hab. 3:8). But Baal was known as the *rkb 'rpt*, the one who rides upon the clouds. We noted on Is. 17:13; 18:1 that the language of the cherubim is used in these judgments upon the nations, because God was potentially at work with them to move them towards a position whereby His Kingdom would be reestablished, including the repentant remnants of Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations like Egypt. I have commented through Is. 13-18 upon the conditional nature of these prophecies. They envisage a situation in which Babylon and / or Assyria will judge Judah and the surrounding nations, and a repentant remnant from all of them will unite in a multi-ethnic, reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. But this scenario was precluded by various factors, not least the impenitence of all the peoples; and perhaps foreseeing this, God did not bring about all the judgments to the extent spoken of. Here we have an example- Egypt didn't suffer all the things prophesied in this chapter. The essence of the prophecies however will come true in the last days.

The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence; and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst- “Even the demons believe and tremble” (James 2:19) may allude here. The idols of the first century Middle Eastern world were made to demons; and the ultimate non-existence of idols therefore proves the non-existence of demons. See on Is. 65:3.

Isaiah 19:2 I will stir up the Egyptians against the Egyptians, and they will fight each

one against his brother, and each one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom- God prefers to use the wicked to punish themselves; the Lord maybe alludes here in speaking of how kingdoms divided against themselves will fall, whereas His Kingdom stands because it is ultimately undivided. This is a powerful exhortation to unity; disunity in the community makes us as Egypt. God worked directly on their hearts, causing fallout between them, as He did in Jud. 9:23. He can work directly on the human heart, even on the hearts of Gentiles like Egypt, to bring about His purpose. And He can work positively too, to create the unity of the Spirit. All these things are done by His Spirit working directly upon the human spirit.

Isaiah 19:3 The spirit of Egypt will fail in its midst; I will destroy its wisdom. They will seek the idols, the charmers, those who have familiar spirits, and the wizards- The allusion may be to how Pharaoh's spirit was troubled at the failure of his magicians to explain the dreams (Gen. 41:8); with the implication that if they accepted the Hebrew Joseph / Jesus as Saviour and source of wisdom, then far better times could come. See on :7.

Isaiah 19:4 I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel lord; a fierce king will rule over them, says the Lord Yahweh of Armies- Presumably a reference to the Assyrian domination of Egypt under Esarhaddon in BC 672 and again by Asshurbanipal in BC 662. He ravaged the country but only as far as Thebes; and in BC 645 Psammetichus succeeded in shaking off the Assyrian yoke and uniting Egypt under his rulership. The permanent nature of Egypt's destruction was not therefore fulfilled at the time, and Egypt survives as a nation to this day. As explained on :1, the potential prophetic scenario was that the Assyrian crushing of Egypt could have led to their repentance and participation in a restored kingdom of God in Judah. This was the same potential scenario for the other surrounding nations, as noted throughout Is. 13-18.

Isaiah 19:5 The waters will fail from the sea, and the river will be wasted and become dry- "The sea" may refer to the Nile as in Nah. 3:8; but the LXX has "And the Egyptians shall drink the water that is by the sea, but the river shall fail, and be dried up". This total drying up of the Nile suggests direct Divine intervention; see on :6. :

Isaiah 19:6 The rivers will become foul; the streams of Egypt will be diminished and dried up, the reeds and flags will wither away- There is no evidence that the Assyrian invasions produced this result (see on :4). The implication is that there would be direct supernatural judgment upon the physical land of Egypt as at the time of Joseph (see on :7). It was God who would directly dry up the Nile (Ez. 30:12). As explained on Is. 13:13, what was in view was judgments on the scale of Sodom's destruction coming upon the surrounding nations to bring them to Yahweh and to join with a repentant Judah in a restored Kingdom of God. But this didn't come about at the time, not only because the Gentiles were impenitent, but because Judah were too, and the Kingdom was not to be restored at the time. See on :16.

Isaiah 19:7 The meadows by the Nile, by the brink of the Nile, and all the sown fields of the Nile, will become dry, be driven away, and be no more- LXX "everything sown by the side of the river, shall be blasted with the wind and dried up". Blasting by the wind recalls Pharaoh's dreams of Egyptian corn blasted by the wind (Gen. 41:6); with

the implication that if they accepted the Hebrew Joseph / Jesus, then far better times could come. See on :11,20.

Isaiah 19:8 The fishermen will lament, and all those who fish in the Nile will mourn, and those who spread nets on the waters will languish- A drought would damage the flood plains upon which Egyptian agriculture depended. But in drought, the Egyptians depended on fishing. It's not that there would simply be no fish in the river; there would be no river at all. That is the implication, implying major Divine intervention with supernatural judgments. This was the potential envisaged, but it didn't happen because various preconditions weren't fulfilled; see on :1.

Isaiah 19:9 Moreover those who work in combed flax and those who weave white cloth will be confounded- Egyptian linen was renowned (1 Kings 10:28; Ez. 27:7). But all her glory was to come to an end.

Isaiah 19:10 The pillars will be broken in pieces. All those who work for hire will be grieved in soul- "Pillars" alludes to the Egyptian idea that their nation was held up by special pillars. The judgments of the nations in Is. 13-19 are often expressed in terms understood by them; but the concepts they held are not necessarily correct. But no correction is offered in the text, because it is assumed we understand that God uses the language of the day in talking to people.

Isaiah 19:11 The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish, the counsel of the wisest counsellors of Pharaoh has become stupid. How do you say to Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?- This may continue the similarities with the situation in Joseph's time (see on :7), when the Egyptian wise men were unable to provide wisdom, and Joseph had to teach these wise counsellors Divine wisdom (Ps. 105:22. Always in these judgments there is the hope that spiritual reformation will come out of them, in this case that a Hebrew Joseph / Jesus figure would be accepted by the Egyptians as their saviour; see on :16,20. They believed that wisdom was inherited, and they were the sons of the wise; and the priesthood and royal family were related. Hence Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife from the priesthood. The point is clearly made here, as it is in Matthew's genealogy of the Lord, that spirituality and wisdom is not inherited, but is a personal matter.

Isaiah 19:12 Where then are your wise men? Let them tell you now; and let them know what Yahweh of Armies has purposed concerning Egypt- These rhetorical questions can be read not as sarcasm but as an actual appeal for the Pharaoh to repent. For that was the intention of the judgments, as this prophecy later makes clear.

Isaiah 19:13 The princes of Zoan have become fools, the princes of Memphis are deceived. They have caused Egypt to go astray, they who are the cornerstone of her tribes- The "tribes" may refer to the ruling castes, or to the cantons of the empire. They were "deceived" by Yahweh. He confirms sinful people in the way they wish to go, and likewise opens the eyes of those who genuinely look towards Him. See on :14.

Isaiah 19:14 Yahweh has mixed a spirit of division in the midst of her; and they have

caused Egypt to go astray in all of its works, like a drunken man staggers in his vomit- The princes of Zoan became fools because of the "perverse spirit" (LXX "spirit of error") the LORD had mingled in their hearts- presumably through the work of His Angels, seeing that God makes His Angels spirits. Through the work of the Angels or directly, God can work directly on men's hearts, and sometimes he does send an "evil spirit" (an "Angel of evil"?) on men, like He did to Saul. See on Ez. 14:9. Intellectual confusion is therefore a judgment from God. God acted upon their minds and perceptions to confuse them. "The spirit of error" is a phrase used in 1 Jn. 4:6 as being given today. When we read that God gave His *good* spirit (Angel?) to instruct Israel, the implication perhaps is that He was and is just as capable of giving an evil or confusing spirit to others (Ex. 9:20). The same language of judgment is used about Judah in Is. 29:10; they acted and thought like Egypt, and so they received Egypt's judgment; just as the unfaithful of the new Israel will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

Isaiah 19:15 Neither shall there be any work for Egypt, which head or tail, palm branch or rush, may do- The same words are used for God's judgment upon His people in Is. 9:14; as noted on :14, they acted and thought like Egypt, and so they received Egypt's judgment.

Isaiah 19:16 In that day the Egyptians will be like women, they will tremble and fear because of the shaking of the hand of Yahweh of Armies which He shakes over them- The trembling of women may imply they are about to give birth; always in these judgments there is the hope that spiritual reformation will come out of them; see on :7,11. The trembling suggests literal earthquakes, confirming my suggestion on :6 that what was in view was judgments on the scale of Sodom's destruction coming upon the surrounding nations to bring them to Yahweh and to join with a repentant Judah in a restored Kingdom of God. But this didn't come about at the time, not only because the Gentiles were impenitent, but because Judah were too, and the Kingdom was not to be restored at the time.

Isaiah 19:17 The land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt. Everyone to whom mention is made of it will be afraid, because of the plans of Yahweh of Armies which He determines against it- The allusion is to the effect of the plagues at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 10;7; 11:3; 12:33,36). There could have been supernatural divine judgments upon Egypt at this time, to result in the deliverance of Judah and the repentance of a remnant amongst the Egyptians as happened at that time. But there were not those supernatural judgments at the time because the repentance was not going to be forthcoming; see on :1,6,16.

Isaiah 19:18 In that day, there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan, and swear to Yahweh of Armies- Five is a number simply representing a remnant or small number (Is. 30:17; Lev. 26:8; 2 Kings 7:13). The great prophetic theme is that a remnant shall repent and turn to Israel's God. However what could also be in view is the repentance of the Jewish communities in Egypt (Jer. 44:1) who were starting to forget Hebrew and assimilate into Egypt. This would be the situation of :25 LXX "Blessed be my people that is in Egypt, and that is among the Assyrian".

The potential here would connect with that spoken of in Jer. 12:14-17: "Thus says Yahweh against all My evil neighbours, who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit: behold, I will pluck them up from off their land, and will pluck up the house of Judah from among them. It shall happen, after that I have plucked them up, I will return and have compassion on them; and I will bring them again, every man to his inheritance, and every man to his land. It shall happen, if they will diligently learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, As Yahweh lives; even as they taught My people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built up in the midst of My people. But if they will not hear, then will I pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying it, says Yahweh". Sadly this didn't happen at the time; for neither God's people nor the nations like Egypt repented. The Jews mixed with the people of the land of their exile, they didn't teach them the Name, and so the prophecy didn't come true- they weren't built up in the midst of Israel as intended. Prophecies like Is. 19:18,24 were thereby disabled from fulfilment at that time- "In that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt that… swear to the Lord… in that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria". Is. 2:2-4, Zech. 8:21-23 etc. speak of how Gentile nations would desire to learn the ways of God and come up to a temple in Zion for this purpose. Could it not be that these passages are to be read in the context of Jer. 12:14-17- that all this was only possible if at the time of the restoration the nations had learnt God's ways from the Jews?

One will be called The city of destruction- Another reading is "the city of the Lion," i.e. Leontopolis, where a Jewish Temple was built in BC160. Perhaps at that time there was a potential for the fulfilment of the prophecy. But the LXX has "city of Righteousness".

Isaiah 19:19 In that day there will be an altar to Yahweh in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to Yahweh at its border- Josephus claims that this verse was used by the Egyptian Jews as justification for building a Jewish temple at Leontopolis in Egypt in BC160. But this would have merely been an attempt to force the fulfilment of a Kingdom prophecy, and as such it was irrelevant. As explained on :18, this was to happen when Judah was penitent and the Kingdom of God had been reestablished there. But that potential didn't work out as was possible. And so the detail of this prophecy wasn't fulfilled, although the essence of it will be in the last days. Under the Mosaic law, there was to be only one altar to Yahweh, in Jerusalem. And under that law, "pillars" were forbidden (Dt. 16:22). This therefore envisages a situation when Zion's temple would be rebuilt but the law of Moses would not be in force. The potential was that the temple and worship system of Ez. 40-48 would have been built and operated by the Jews; and although that system included sacrificial worship, it is clearly not the law of Moses. It was all part of a new deal offered to Judah, a new covenant to replace the old which they had broken; and they refused that.

Isaiah 19:20 It will be for a sign and for a witness to Yahweh of Armies in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them- The historical saviour of Egypt had been Joseph, Zaphnath Paaneah, 'saviour of the world'. Their judgments were intended to lead them to accept him; see on :7,11. Egypt were intended to turn to Yahweh as saviour due to their oppression at the hands of the Assyrians (:4). But they didn't. In the latter day application this refers to the acceptance of the Lord Jesus by the nations around Israel after their experience of judgment.

Isaiah 19:21 Yahweh will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know Yahweh in that day. Yes, they will worship with sacrifice and offering, and will vow a vow to Yahweh, and will perform it- The process of Egypt's conversion is planned here in detail. The Jewish exiles in Egypt were to repent and make known the Yahweh Name to those around them in Egypt; then the Egyptians would respond to their oppression by quitting their idols and turning to Yahweh in prayer (:20), making animal and vegetable offerings to Him ("sacrifice and offering") as a result of His making Himself known to them (RVmg.), then undergo further discipline (:22), and then they would fully turn to Yahweh. Likewise God has prepared detailed potential scenarios for repentance in trillions of lives, and the tragedy is that as here, the majority of those scenarios never come about. He must watch with great joy as we at least show willingness to respond to those plans for us.

Isaiah 19:22 Yahweh will strike Egypt, striking and healing. They will return to Yahweh, and He will be entreated by them, and will heal them- See on :21. As in Hos. 6:1, the striking of them was in order to heal them. This was the intention of the Assyrian invasions of Egypt (see on :4); but Egypt didn't spiritually respond to the striking, and so the Divine healing didn't happen.

An indication that all men who hear the Gospel have the potential to respond to it is perhaps seen in the parable of the prodigal son. His ‘coming home’ to the Father is just that- a coming home, a being received back, to all we were created to be from the very beginning. And perhaps this explains the odd reference to how ultimately, Egypt shall "return unto the Lord" (Is. 19:22). For Egypt were never 'with' the Lord. But in prospect, Egypt along with all humanity were redeemed, and they have to be brought by us to Him in actuality.

Isaiah 19:23 In that day there will be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians- A highway from Egypt to Assyria would have to pass through Judah, and Jerusalem in particular. This was the Divine potential at the time- that a remnant from Assyria and Egypt would repent, and would come to Zion to worship. The Jerusalem temple was to be the central point of their fellowship with each other. This highway is alluded to in Is. 40:3; the highway was to be prepared in a spiritual sense in that the people would repent and be spiritually levelled out, so that the glory of Yahweh in Messiah could come over it to Zion. That would then be reflected in a literal highway leading the nations and repentant exiled Jews to Zion (Is. 49:11; 62:10; Jer. 31:21).

This prophecy clearly connects with Is. 11:16: "There will be a highway for the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria [LXX "Egypt"], like there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt. Egypt was always attractive for the Jews; they trusted in Egypt and some even fled there, seeking help from Egypt rather than from their God. The significance of the highway is therefore that God would give the opportunity for spiritual repentance and return to Him; playing on the idea that the Hebrew word for "return" is also used for repentance. Just as He could dry up the Euphrates for the return to happen from there, so He could build a highway in the desert. But there was no literal highway built for Israel when they left Egypt. Yet they had God's guidance, and therefore the unchartered desert was in fact a direct highway- for those with faith to perceive it. And the apparent random twists and turns

of our lives must be understood by us in that same way. It's all in fact a direct highway.

Isaiah 19:24 In that day, Israel will be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth- The idea of each having a third is to demonstrate that ethnic differences will not be significant in the restored kingdom. Israel would have an equal part with the repentant remnants of Egypt and Assyria. This would have been hard to swallow for nationalistic, xenophobic Jews who hated the Assyrians. See on :25. "The midst of the land" often refers to Jerusalem and the temple; this was the point at which there would be no Jew nor Gentile but all would be united in the Messiah. These things didn't happen at the time but look forward to their essential fulfilment in the things of the Lord Jesus Christ in future times.

Isaiah 19:25 because Yahweh of Armies has blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance- LXX "Blessed be my people that is in Egypt, and that is among the Assyrian". The idea is that the exiled people of God in Assyria and Egypt would repent and join with their captors in repentance and acceptance of Yahweh. This was the potential possible at the time, but as explained on :1, it didn't happen because they refused to repent. But in essence it will do so in the last days. The same possibility is alluded to in :18, where what could have been in view was the repentance of the Jewish communities in Egypt (Jer. 44:1) who were starting to forget Hebrew and assimilate into Egypt. It was Israel who are called the work of God's hands, but now the repentant remnant of the Egyptians and Assyrians were to be called that too. All this would have been hard to swallow for nationalistic, xenophobic Jews who hated the Assyrians. And perhaps that was one reason why they didn't preach to them. Jonah's refusal to preach to Nineveh is the parade example of their attitude.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 20

Isaiah 20:1 In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it- Tartan took Ashdod just east of Judah on his way down to attack Egypt. This prophecy was therefore given when the power of Egypt was about to fall to the Assyrians. Judah were trusting in Egypt for help against the Assyrians, and so Isaiah's message is that Egypt were not to be trusted upon in any case, as they were about to fall. They were to trust in Him alone. Tartan was also sent against Judah, later; although "Tartan" may be a title rather than a personal name.

Isaiah 20:2 At that time Yahweh spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go, and loosen the sackcloth from off your waist, and take your shoes from off your feet. He did so, walking naked and barefoot- This extraordinary effort was not only to warn Judah that Egypt was going to fall and therefore should not be depended upon for help against Assyria (:1). It was also to appeal to Egypt to repent and turn to Israel's God; for it was the Divine intention that the reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah would include a repentant remnant from all the surrounding nations.

LXX "loose thy sandals from off thy feet" is what was spoken to Moses at the burning bush, because he was on holy ground. The implication could be that if Egypt repented and trusted in Israel's God, then their land too would be incorporated in the

holy land of God's reestablished Kingdom, as envisaged at the end of the previous chapter.

God spoke “by Isaiah” when he walked naked and barefoot. Who he was, was to be their example and thereby God’s message. Receipt of God’s true revelation involved dialogue with God, even disagreement with Him for a moment, response, pleading, speech and counterspeech. It wasn’t a case of merely passively hearing a voice and writing it down. Part and parcel of hearing the word of God and being inspired with it was to react to it in daily life- hence Ezekiel couldn’t mourn for his wife, Hosea had to marry a whore as a reflection of God’s love for Israel, Isaiah had to walk naked, reflecting how Zion would be stripped naked, the punishment for a whore (see on Is. 3:17). Truly “The prophet threw his whole self into his prophecy, and made not his lips alone, but his whole personality, the vehicle of the divine ‘word’” (H.H. Rowley, *The Servant Of The Lord* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) p. 118.). The inner accord which the prophets had with the mind and word of God led to their personalities being like God’s. And mankind’s laughing them off as crazy, as mentally disturbed, was effectively their rejection and mocking of God Himself. We’re reminded of how the suffering Son of God in His time of dying, the highest and most intense expression of God’s love, was “the song of the drunkards” (Ps. 69:12). The prophets "spoke from the mouth of Yahweh" Himself; and yet the people scoffed at them (2 Chron. 36:12,16 RV). The power of inspiration was and is so great; and to not heed God's word is therefore a personal affront to Him.

Isaiah 20:3 Yahweh said, As My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder concerning Egypt and concerning Ethiopia- LXX "As my servant Esaias has walked naked and barefoot three years, there shall be three years for signs and wonders to the Egyptians and Ethiopians". This would imply that they had a period of three years to repent. As explained on Is. 19:1, the prophetic scenario here with Egypt didn't exactly fulfill at the time. This three year period will perhaps have some fulfilment in the last days, when there appears to be a period of three and a half years testing before the Lord Jesus is revealed.

Isaiah 20:4 so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, young and old, naked and barefoot, and with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt- This predicted captivity of Egypt was that which would come upon Judah at the hand of the Assyrians. But a minority did repent and so this was averted; Isaiah's appeal therefore did achieve something. This mass captivity of Ethiopians and Egyptians didn't really happen at the hands of the Assyrians; as explained on Is. 19:1, the prophetic scenario here with Egypt didn't exactly fulfill at the time.

Isaiah 20:5 They will be dismayed and confounded, because of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory- The grammar is ambiguous. For how could Egypt and Ethiopia be ashamed of trusting in themselves? The ambiguity is because this is an appeal to Judah not to trust in those nations because they would fall, and Judah would be ashamed of their trust in them. The LXX has "And the Egyptians being defeated shall be ashamed of the Ethiopians, in whom they had trusted; for they were their glory". In this case the lesson would be that as Egypt had trusted in Ethiopia and been ashamed, so if Judah trusted in Egypt they would be ashamed.

Isaiah 20:6 The inhabitants of this coast land will say in that day, ‘Behold, this is our

expectation, where we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria. And we, how will we escape?'- The Philistines were the inhabitants of the coast land, and they had trusted in Egypt to save them from Assyria. But now Ashdod had fallen (:1). The men of Judah had likewise fled to Egypt and Ethiopia for help against Assyria (Is. 10:3)- rather than to their God. They had ignored 'Hezekiah', 'Yah is my help'. In other words, Judah gave in to the temptation which we acutely face today- to deal with our fears in the same way as the surrounding world does, rather than fall upon our God. For they had tried to meet their fears of Assyria in the same way as the Philistines had.

A desire to escape but having no place to run is a feature of all Divine condemnations (Heb. 2:3, quoting Is. 20:6 concerning the inability of men to escape from the approach of the invincible Assyrian army). The rejected will see that the Lord is coming against them with an army much stronger than theirs, and they have missed the chance to make peace (Lk. 14:31).

ISAIAH CHAPTER 21

Isaiah 21:1 The burden of the wilderness of the sea- Babylon is clearly referred to; the plain of Babylon was as it were covered with the water of the Euphrates so that it could appear as a sea (Jer. 51:13,36). When the Euphrates was diverted to dry up the river protecting Babylon, the water flooded into the area, turning it into a huge "sea" of marshland.

As whirlwinds in the South sweep through, it comes from the wilderness, from an awesome land- A whirlwind coming from the desert, sweeping up sand before it, recalls the cherubim. I have noted that often the visions of judgment allude to the cherubim obliquely, whereas Ezekiel states their presence specifically. The idea is that God's Angelic chariots were at work preparing and moving the nations; in this case bringing the Medes across the desert area between Elam and Babylon. This whirlwind would be similar to those experienced in "the south" of Israel, the Negev (as in Zech. 9:14). So this prophecy of Babylon's fall was largely for the benefit of the Jews who could recall the whirlwinds in the Negev.

Isaiah 21:2 A grievous vision is declared to me. The treacherous man deals treacherously, and the destroyer destroys. Go up, Elam; attack!- The vision reads as if Isaiah is the sufferer, as if he feels the grief and tragedy of this judgment to come upon Babylon; he so identifies with the object of the prophecy, even though they are Gentiles being judged for their sin. Our identity with this world and the objects of judgment should be the same; for this was the essence of the cross, where the sinless Lord Jesus identified with every sinner, to the death. This is clear in :3, and in this verse 2 is clearer in the LXX: "The Elamites are upon me, and the ambassadors of the Persians come against me: now will I groan and comfort myself".

GNB has "a vision of betrayal". There is good evidence that when Darius took Babylon, this was as a result of betrayal from within. Layard reports inscriptions which report the pro-Darius supporters within Babylon opening the gates. The scenario here and throughout Jer. 50 concerning Babylon didn't come true as [potentially planned. Her judgment was partly dependent upon Judah's repentance. And there were various other factors which preclude the scenario being fulfilled at the time it could have been. The scale of devastation and "grief" intimated here, rather like Jer. 50:26 saying that the Medes would turn Babylon into "heaps", just didn't happen when the Medes took the city. It was only some time later that Cyrus further

demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. Apart from the murder of Belshazaar and a few others, it seems that there was little bloodshed and many within Babylon welcomed the Medes. But the impression is given that all this grievous judgment happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

I have stopped all of Media's sighing- At the burden imposed by Babylon (Is. 14:7,8).

Isaiah 21:3 Therefore my thighs are filled with anguish, pains have taken hold on me, like the pains of a woman in labour. I am in so much pain that I can't hear; I so am dismayed that I can't see- In the same way as Moab would weep for their slain sons, so God says that *His* heart would cry out for Moab, "therefore I weep [along] with the weeping of Jazer... my soul moans like a lyre for Moab" (Is. 15:5; Is. 16:9,11). God "pitied" Nineveh- a Hebrew word meaning to pity with tears (Jonah 4:11). The mourning of the prophets over Tyre (Ez. 27:1) and Babylon (Is. 21:3,4) was an embodiment of God's grief even over those not in covenant with Him. And how much more does He weep and suffer with His people Israel in their sufferings (Jer. 12:12; 23:10; Hos. 4:2,3); "my heart yearns / moans for him" (Jer. 31:20). Perhaps there was indeed some remission of the full extent of Babylon's potential judgment at the time; see on :2. The image of a woman in labour again implies that new birth could still come out of the judgments; the hope was that a remnant of Babylon would repent, and that a reborn Judah would emerge. Neither of these things happened and so perhaps foreseeing that, God didn't bring the full extent of the judgments at the time.

Isaiah 21:4 My heart flutters. Horror has frightened me. The evening of my pleasure has been turned into trembling for me- The LXX speaks as if Isaiah totally identified with them to the point of feeling their sin as his; just as the Lord did supremely on the cross: "My heart wanders, and transgression overwhelms me; my soul is occupied with fear". In speaking of "the night of my pleasure" Isaiah is totally identified with Belshazzar, who was dethroned by Darius on the night of his pleasure, probably his birthday celebration.

Having prophesied the fall of hated, pagan Babylon, which was to happen well after his death, Isaiah responded: "Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me... I am pained so that I cannot hear [the message he had to tell]... my heart panteth, horror hath affrighted me" (Is. 21:3,4 RV). Such was his sensitivity for his enemies, and for things which would happen in the future. It would be rather like us grieving deeply for the fact that within 200 years, millions of human beings may die because of global warming.

Isaiah 21:5 They prepare the table, they set the watch; then they eat and drink! But 'Rise up, you princes, oil the shield!'- The GNB seeks to clarify how Isaiah was as it were projected forward to the feast of Belshazzar in Dan. 5: "In the vision a banquet is ready; rugs are spread for the guests to sit on. They are eating and drinking. Suddenly the command rings out: "Officers! Prepare your shields!"".

Isaiah 21:6 For the Lord said to me, Go, set a watchman. Let him declare what he sees- LXX "declare whatever thou shalt see". Isaiah was the watchman, for the prophets are the watchmen.

Isaiah 21:7 When he sees a troop, horsemen in pairs, a troop of donkeys, a troop of camels, he shall listen diligently with great attentiveness- LXX "And I saw...". As noted on :6, Isaiah is as it were a watchman on the walls of Babylon; he the Hebrew prophet had a heart that bled even for the enemies of Judah, and he imagines himself on the walls of Babylon seeing the attack coming. The Medes apparently used donkeys and camels to transport their generals and military hardware.

Isaiah 21:8 He cried like a lion- This prophecy didn't come fully true at the time and so it has been reapplied to the last days; and so this phrase is quoted in Rev. 10:3 in a latter day context.

Lord, I stand continually on the watchtower in the daytime, and every night I stay at my post- Crying on the watchtower is the language of prayer; perhaps Isaiah was as it were praying Babylon might repent so that this grievous situation and the human tragedy of it all need not happen. This is the heart that bleeds for humanity. But the idea may be that the prophetic watchman feels that he has been carefully watching for the fall of Babylon, and it hasn't come. But then it does.

Isaiah 21:9 Behold, here comes a troop of men, horsemen in pairs. He answered, Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the engraved images of her gods are broken to the ground- The claim is made that the Persians apparently despised images and therefore broke them. But that is questionable. The Pulpit Commentary notes: "Cyrus was not an iconoclast; he did not break into pieces, or in any way destroy or insult the Babylonian idols. On the contrary, he maintained them in their several shrines, or restored them where they had been displaced; he professed himself a worshipper of the chief Babylonian gods—Bel, Nebo, and Merodach—he repaired the temple of Merodach; he prayed to Bel and Nebo to lengthen his days; he caused his son, Cambyses, to take part in the great religious ceremony wherewith the Babylonians opened the new year". So this is yet another aspect of the prophecy which was not literally fulfilled at the time. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

Isaiah 21:10 You are My threshing, and the grain of My floor! That which I have heard from Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, I have declared to you- This could be addressed to the righteous remnant, those who had come through the threshing experience as grain. Hence LXX "Hear, ye that are left, and ye that are in pain". Or GNB "My people Israel, you have been threshed like wheat, but now I have announced to you the good news". The good news was the fall of Babylon; the Gospel is the good news of God's reestablished Kingdom, which could then have been established at the time Babylon fell. But most of the Jews preferred to remain in Babylon, and they didn't repent; so that possibility was precluded and delayed until the last days, as the descriptions of "Babylon" being judged and God's Kingdom being established in Rev. 18 makes clear. The language is applied to the repentant remnant of Jewry in Mt. 3:12.

Isaiah 21:11 The burden of Dumah. One calls to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?- The theme of the prophecies upon the nations beginning in Is. 13 is that after the judgment they experienced from the Assyrians or Babylonians, a remnant of them would repent and join repentant Judah in a reestablished, multi ethnic Kingdom of God in Judah; see on Is. 13:1. So the LXX here reads simply "Call to me out of Seir", as if this is an invitation for Seir or Edom (GNB) to repent. "Turn back" in :12 would then also be an invitation to repentance. "Dumah" means "silence" and implies a total destruction of Edom; but this kind of total wiping out, presumably by supernatural Divine judgment such as came upon Sodom, didn't happen at the time. Again, the scenario presented here is a potential, but the various human preconditions didn't allow it to happen then.

Isaiah 21:12 The watchman said, The morning comes, and also the night- The idea may be that the morning for Judah was to be the night for her enemies like Edom; just as Yahweh was a light to Israel and darkness to the Egyptians. Or we could paraphrase with GNB "I answer, "Morning is coming, but night will come again. If you want to ask again, come back and ask"". The idea might be that Edom's judgment could have come, but it was deferred due to the various preconditions discussed on :10 and Is. 13:1 not being fulfilled. Judah's morning, in the sense of the light of Zion rising as the dawn, also didn't come at that time. When it does, in the last day, then "Edom" will be destroyed and have its "night".

What hour of the night will it come?- God's purposes at the time were open ended; see on Is. 13:1. Many human variables were preconditions for the various prophetic scenarios which could have come about. The hour of judgment, as in the last days, was therefore variable. So, appropriate to that, we could have here a reference to the meaning of time being collapsed around the time of the Lord's return, when these prophecies shall come to their final fulfilment. Depending how one reads the Hebrew text of Zech. 14:6,7, this idea of collapsed time at the Lord's return is Biblical: "It shall come to pass in that day, that it shall not be clear in some places, and dark in other places of the world; but the day shall be one, in the knowledge of the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light" (AV mg.). The RVmg. speaks of "the planets shall contract"- the times and seasons they control would somehow contract. Is. 21:12 RV has a similar idea, again in the context of a judgment day: “The morning is come and also the night”. This collapsing of time would also explain why it is impossible to construct a chronology of events in real time for the coming of Christ; the various prophecies of the last days just don't seem to fit together in chronological sequence. If indeed time is collapsed, this would enable all these prophecies to come true, but not in real time. Babylon is to be punished with famine in one day; yet famine is a process (Rev. 18:8). In one day her judgments come, and yet also in one hour (18:10). Surely the lesson is that time is compressed.

Turn back again- I noted on :11 that this could be read as a call to Seir / Idumea to repent. Hence LXX "If thou wouldest enquire, enquire, and dwell by me", in the restored Zion; the same invitation to come dwell in Zion is made to the other nations in Is. 16:3; 18:4.

Isaiah 21:13 The burden on Arabia. In the forest in Arabia you will lodge, you

caravans of Dedanites- There are no forests in Arabia so the reference may be to brushwood scrub. Sargon did make an incursion into Arabia, but probably as noted on :12, this was part of the potential scenario which didn't fully happen then, and will be fulfilled more completely in the last days.

Isaiah 21:14 They brought water to him who was thirsty. The inhabitants of the land of Tema met the fugitives with their bread- The LXX reads this as a command to meet the fugitives with bread and water. The remnant of the Arabians who survive are significant to God because it was that remnant of all the nations who are envisaged as repenting and turning to Yahweh.

Isaiah 21:15 For they fled away from the swords, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the heat of battle- But no trace of such a battle or war has been found on the Assyrian inscriptions. So probably as noted on :12, this was part of the potential scenario which didn't fully happen then, and will be fulfilled more completely in the last days.

Isaiah 21:16 For the Lord said to me, Within a year, as a worker bound by contract would count it, all the glory of Kedar will fail- Perhaps the sense is that as a hired hand counts the days of required service exactly, so this calamity would happen within exactly three years. I noted on the prophecies of Isaiah's children in Is. 7:16; 8:1,18 that there was the potential of a very speedy fulfilment of the prophecies, before the newborn child could even speak; and we have a similar period in Is. 16:14. But the complex network of possibilities alluded to be Isaiah were precluded by the lack of repentance by both Judah and the Gentiles

Isaiah 21:17 and the residue of the number of the archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, will be few; for Yahweh, the God of Israel, has spoken it- Again we note the emphasis upon the remnant or "residue". The remnant of the people of Kedar who survive are significant to God because it was that remnant of all the nations who are envisaged as repenting and turning to Yahweh.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 22

Isaiah 22:1 The burden of the valley of vision- LXX "the burden of the valley of Zion". Perhaps Isaiah gave this prophecy in one of the valleys around Jerusalem, perhaps the Kidron valley from where the water from the Gihon spring was brought into the city (alluded to in :9). But it could equally have been the valley of Hinnom, which became the symbolic place for the final judgment of the condemned. It was from a valley like this that Ezekiel saw the dry bones of Israel being revived from their condemnation (Ez. 37).

What ails you now, that you have all gone up to the housetops?- I suggest this could be Israel's question to Isaiah, as he went up on the flat roof to weep for them. And thus he replies in Is. 22:4: "Therefore said I, Look away from me, I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people". But this can also be read as being addressed to the people of the city. There is a strong association between their housetops and idolatry. As they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Hence LXX "that now ye are all gone up to the housetops which help you not?".

Isaiah 22:2 You that are full of shouting, a tumultuous city, a joyous town; your slain are not slain with the sword, neither are they dead in battle- This is the idea of Lam. 4:9, that the people of Zion died by famine and disease rather than the quick death of the battlefield. Isaiah is complaining that the people were feasting instead of fasting in repentance (as in Is. 32:13 and cp. Is. 23:7), and he juxtaposes their present feasting with the painful and slow death threatened. But it seems there was repentance amongst a minority and so the threatened destruction of Zion's population at the hands of the Assyrians was averted; but it was actually only deferred to the time of the Babylonians. This explains the connections between this prophecy and Jeremiah's lamentations, as he weeps for what was then done to Zion.

Isaiah 22:3 All your rulers fled away together. They were bound by the archers. All who were found by you were bound together. They fled far away-LXX "All thy princes have fled, and thy captives are tightly bound". This didn't happen at Isaiah's time because there was some repentance; and so the words were reapplied to the destruction by the Babylonians and the fleeing of Zedekiah and the rulers.

Isaiah 22:4 Therefore I said, Look away from me. I will weep bitterly. Don't labour to comfort me for the destruction of the daughter of my people- Jeremiah in his prophecy and Lamentations often uses this phrase "daughter of my people". The whole verse sounds like Jeremiah mourning the Babylonian destruction of Zion (Lam. 1:4 etc.). But it is actually Isaiah lamenting the threatened and envisaged destruction of Zion by the Assyrians. Due to the intercession and repentance of the remnant, the Assyrian destruction was averted; but it was actually deferred to the time of the Babylonians. So the feelings of the prophet Isaiah are transferred to the prophet Jeremiah; just as prophecies whose fulfilment was deferred or averted at the time were transferred to other persons, entities, times and contexts.

When it came to prophesying the doom of Jerusalem, people came to comfort Isaiah in his grief and breakdown, not perceiving the heart that bled within him. He wept, because of how they would weep in future (Is. 22:4,5). Such was his passionate identity with them. The prophets weren't merely informing men ahead of time that God's judgments were coming; rather were they sharing with the people the Divine pathos, His feelings and sense of tragic rejection; and they were deeply aware of His openness to changing His plans in response to human repentance (Jer. 18:8-10). The prophets were therefore not mere fax machines; their own feelings were involved in the act of transmission of God's feelings to men through words. Even despite the special psychological strengthening which they received, sometimes the whole prophetic experience seemed too much for them, as it does for us. The prophets believed their own message, to the point that it overcame them with grief that men wouldn't heed them. Is this how we feel at the rejection of our message? Is our testimony to Jesus really in the spirit of these prophets…?

Isaiah 22:5 For it is a day of confusion and of treading down and of perplexity from the Lord Yahweh of Armies, in the valley of vision; a breaking down of the walls, and a crying to the mountains- This clearly had application to the Assyrian invasion; Hezekiah may allude to this prophecy when he says that "This is a day of trouble... rebuke... and of blasphemy" (Is. 37:3). But he looked up from the valley where he was (:1) and foresaw the breaking down of the walls above him, and the valley echoing with the crying of the people to their gods of the high places. But all that was averted

by some measure of repentance. The day of "treading down" was in order to humble their pride (as in Is. 2:12), but it seems there was some humbling before Isaiah's words and so humbling by condemnation was therefore not seen as necessary at the time.

Isaiah 22:6 Elam carried his quiver, with chariots of men and horsemen; and Kir uncovered the shield- These were part of the Assyrian alliance which came against Jerusalem. But not an arrow was fired by these archers against Jerusalem (Is. 37:33); the catastrophe was averted. But it was deferred until these same nations came with the Babylonians against Jerusalem at a later date (Jer. 49:35). See on :7.

Isaiah 22:7 It happened- The idea may be that Isaiah is transported in vision to see these things happening.

That your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen set themselves in array at the gate- In reality, the Assyrians didn't "come before" the city (Is. 37:33). But it was deferred until the Babylonians against Jerusalem at a later date. It is all a great lesson in the power of the repentance and intercession of a minority.

Isaiah 22:8 He took away the covering of Judah- This idea is repeated in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who speak of Judah being stripped naked and judged as a whore, stoned to death by her lovers after gang raping her. This could have happened at the time of the Assyrian invasion, but it was averted by repentance and deferred to the Babylonian time.

And you looked in that day to the armour in the house of the forest- To trust in weapons, foreign powers etc. rather than on God alone was something about which Isaiah wailed and lamented (Is. 22:8,11). In our terms, this may translate into situations like what we do when we feel the first onset of an illness; when our car won't start… do we trust on human strength, on the pretensions of science, and turn to God if all else fails? There can scarcely be one of us who doesn't see this pattern of response in our lives. And yet, in prophetic terms, this is *awful*! That we don't first and totally turn to our God.

LXX "they shall look in that day on the choice houses of the city". Perhaps they looked to those wealthy families for help; or that they looked to break down those houses "to fortify the wall" (:10). But the same lesson emerges, of not trusting in human strength. The records stress that at the time of the Babylonian invasion, it was these great houses which were also destroyed along with the temple (Jer. 52:13).

Isaiah 22:9 You saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many; and you gathered together the waters of the lower pool- See on :1. LXX "And they shall uncover the secret places of the houses of the citadel of David: and they saw that they were many, and that one had turned the water of the old pool into the city". The person who did this was Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20). But here it appears to be criticized as a trusting in human strength. Perhaps this is why 2 Kings 20:20 says it was done in *his* might- not Yahweh's.

Isaiah 22:10 You numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall- This appears to be cited in the context of criticizing Hezekiah and Shebna for fortifying the city in human strength rather than in trust in God. See on :8. Numbering the houses recalls David's numbering of Israel rather than trusting in the Angelic armies. Jer. 33:4 likewise criticizes the breaking down of the houses to fortify

the city wall. Jeremiah elsewhere criticized the building of these great houses on the walls of Jerusalem- for they were built on the back of abusing the poor for material and labour. They were finally torn down by the Babylonians (Jer. 52:13), but even before that, the owners themselves broke them down and the materials were used to shore up the breaches in the city walls. Likewise there are foretastes of judgment ahead of time in the lives of all God's people.

Isaiah 22:11 You also made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool- This would have been in the Kidron valley, perhaps the scene of this prophecy (:1). The person who did this was Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20). But here it appears to be criticized as a trusting in human strength. Perhaps this is why 2 Kings 20:20 says it was done in *his* might- not Yahweh's.

But you didn't look to Him who had done this- Perhaps the one they didn't "look to" who had done this was Hezekiah, who had made the pool / reservoir. They didn't accept his spiritual leadership and purge of idolatry. But of course it may be that the "Him who had done this" was God. They did not look to / regard Yahweh, and so He rejected them by no longer regarding or looking at them (s.w. Lam. 4:16). As so often in the prophets, condemnation was articulated in language which showed it to be but a continuation of attitudes and positions the condemned had already adopted in their lives.

Neither did you have respect for Him who purposed it long ago- The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence "The Lord has both planned and done what He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 51:12; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; Is. 37:26; Zech. 1:6; Zech. 8:14). This 'gap' is significant when we come to consider the idea of God's 'repentance' or change of mind- stating something is going to happen, but then changing His mind because of human behaviour during the 'time gap' between the statement and its' execution.

Isaiah 22:12 In that day, the Lord Yahweh of Armies called to weeping and to mourning and to baldness and to dressing in sackcloth- The call to repentance was apparently not being heard (:13). But the Assyrian destruction of Jerusalem was still averted. We can conclude that this therefore was due to God's extreme sensitivity to the intercession and repentance of a minority. And this is a challenge and encouragement to us today.

Isaiah 22:13 and behold, joy and gladness, killing cattle and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die- See on :12. Esau's desperate pleading for Jacob's pottage at the cost of his birthright seems to be the background for 1 Cor. 15:32 which quotes this verse; those without the hope of covenant resurrection are described as saying "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die", just as the faithless in Israel did in Hezekiah's time. Instead of weeping in repentance, their attitude was "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die". This category is associated with Esau, craving for the things of today at the cost of an eternal tomorrow. And it is the spirit of our age, although as Paul shows, the resurrection of Jesus guarantees ours and therefore this should not be our attitude.

Isaiah 22:14 Yahweh of Armies revealed Himself in my ears, Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you until you die, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies- The implication is that what Yahweh discreetly and intimately told Isaiah, he was preaching. It seems the

Lord Jesus alludes to this in Mt. 10:27 and asks us each one to live in the spirit of prophets like Isaiah: "What I am telling you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight, and what you have heard in private you must announce from the housetops". The death of these sinners was required; and yet the Assyrian destruction was averted by the repentance of a minority. But although these sinners didn't die when and as potentially planned, they still died. The idea however may be as in 1 Sam. 3:14; their sin could not be purged by sacrifice. If they were truly penitent, then like David they would be drive to throw themselves upon God's grace outside of the Mosaic system.

Isaiah 22:15 Thus says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, Go, get yourself to this treasurer, even to Shebna, who is over the house, and say- LXX "Go into the chamber" suggests Isaiah was sent to meet Shebna in the burial vault he was preparing for himself (:16). "Shebna" is an Egyptian name and may have been installed in office by Hezekiah as part of his deal with Egypt, upon whom he trusted rather than solely in Yahweh. He had the office of being "over the house" but by the time of the Assyrian invasion Shebna had been replaced in this office by Eliakim (:20; Is. 36:3; 37:2). However, Shebna had not been completely 'hurled away' as required by :17, because he is mentioned there as being the "scribe", a senior secretary, although Eliakim was "over the household". This seems typical of the partial response made to Isaiah's prophecies. But it seems Yahweh accepted that partial response and repentance of a remnant, and so the invaders were destroyed and the awful outcome threatened upon Jerusalem in this chapter was averted or at best deferred. For more condemnation of Shebna, see on Is. 32:5.

The idea of prophecies and scripture being re-written under inspiration shouldn't come as strange to us. Many of the Psalms are clearly relevant to David, and yet just as clearly relevant to Hezekiah and other Kings. Thus Ps. 41 is David's reflection on the situation of 2 Sam. 15- but evidently it's been re-written with reference to Hezekiah, also afflicted with an "evil disease"; and Ahithophel's part in David's life was perhaps played out in Hezekiah's life by Shebna (Is. 22:15).

Isaiah 22:16 'What are you doing here? Whom do you have here, that you have dug out a tomb here?'. Cutting himself out a tomb on high, chiselling a habitation for himself in the rock!- As explained on :15, Isaiah was sent to meet Shebna in the burial vault he was preparing for himself. To be buried in a specially dug tomb in Jerusalem was for the kings of Jerusalem; the force of "what are you doing *here*" [asked twice] may be that he was preparing a tomb for himself amongst those of the former kings; so perhaps by preparing his tomb there, Shebna was politically asserting himself as the effective king of Judah, although he was likely an Egyptian (see on :15,17). Perhaps he was planning on acting like this during Hezekiah's sickness. "On high" would then refer to the choice of the highest tombs- amongst the former kings.

The question "What are you doing here?" was that asked of Adam and Elijah in their moments of weakness. In each case, the question was intended to elicit repentance; and the same here. See on :19. Presumably Shebna made no response, and so his condemnation is stated in :17. Shebna was happy to die in glory; he had the attitude explained on :13, that he was happy to live for today and then eternally die. Sadly despite the warning from the example of Shebna and the specific command not to just live for today and resign ourselves to an eternal death (:13), Hezekiah at the end of his life gave in to just this same mentality (Is. 39:8).

Isaiah 22:17 Behold, Yahweh will overcome you and hurl you away violently. Yes, He

will grasp you firmly-This is effectively a command to hurl Shebna out of his position of power. As explained on :15, this was only partially obeyed. But at least there was some response, and even that partial response was so pleasing to God that the Assyrian invasion was averted. We too should not despise the partial response of others to God's word. The LXX offers: "And will take away thy robe and thy glorious crown". This would connect with the suggestion made on :16, that the Egyptian Shebna was pretending to the throne, and perhaps in Hezekiah's weakness and illness he was even wearing the crown; or a crown and robe which signalled his pretension to the throne.

Isaiah 22:18 He will surely wind you around and around, and throw you like a ball into a large country. There you will die, and there the chariots of your glory will be, you shame of your lord's house- LXX: "And he will bring thy fair chariot to shame, and the house of thy prince to be trodden down". Shebna was pretending to the throne (see on :15-17) and was acting as if he was the effective king; perhaps riding in the royal chariot whilst Hezekiah was indisposed. Shebna's prince would have been Pharaoh of Egypt as he was an Egyptian (see on :15). Perhaps part of the political deal for Egyptian support was that Shebna would come to Jerusalem and be the effective ruler on Egypt's behalf, and a "house", perhaps an idol temple, built on behalf of the Egyptians. There is no evidence however that Shebna was taken captive into Assyria. It could be that he was to thrown out by the leadership of Judah- and they didn't do this. The prophetic scenario here was however ameliorated by the repentance of a remnant in Judah.

Isaiah 22:19 I will thrust you from your office. You will be pulled down from your station- As explained on :17, this is effectively a command to hurl Shebna out of his position of power. As explained on :15, this was only partially obeyed. There is no evidence however that Shebna was treated like this; the prophetic scenario here was however ameliorated by the repentance of a remnant in Judah. The LXX has "And thou shalt be removed from thy stewardship"- quoted by the Lord in His parable of the unjust steward (Lk. 16:4). It seems He saw Shebna as a bad man, who all the same could have repented. This would explain why "What are you doing here?" was a call for him to repent (:17).

Isaiah 22:20 It will happen in that day that I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah- Eliakim is being set up as a potential Messiah figure according to the following verses. See on :15. He was to replace Shebna, and as noted on :15, this was obeyed by the leadership of Judah; although they did not expel Shebna as they were intended to. "My servant" may imply Eliakim was one of the school of prophets headed by Isaiah (Is. 20:3).

Isaiah 22:21 and I will clothe him with your robe, and strengthen him with your belt. I will commit your government into his hand; and he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah- During Hezekiah's indisposition and illness, Shebna angled to take over the kingship. But God wanted Eliakim to do so. The language here is exactly that of Is. 9:6. Eliakim could have become a Messiah figure at the time, but he failed (Is. 22:25). So the prophecies were reapplied to the Lord Jesus. "Belt" is the word for the High Priest's girdle (Ex. 39:29). Shebna had blasphemously set himself up as a king-priest; but this was to be the characteristic of Messiah, and God wanted Eliakim to be that figure.

Isaiah 22:22 I will lay the key of the house of David on his shoulder. He will open, and no one will shut. He will shut, and no one will open- Again, the Messianic language of Is. 9:6 is applied to Eliakim. In the same way as Solomon *could have been* the Messiah, so perhaps could men like Eliakim; for the language of Is. 22:20-25 is later transferred to the Lord Jesus. For all God's foreknowledge otherwise, so the Messianic Kingdom *could have come* at the time of the restoration from Babylon. But Eliakim failed (:25), and so this verse is quoted about the Lord Jesus (Rev. 3:7) to whom the Messianic hope was reapplied. See on Is. 26:2.

Isaiah 22:23 I will fasten him like a nail in a sure place. He will be for a throne of glory to his father's house- God would have established Eliakim, fastening him like a nail. He could have been the "pin" (s.w. "nail") of Ez. 15:3 who although weak was strengthened by God to be able to bear any weight. "Sure" is the word for faith or belief; the place of belief or faith was surely the Jerusalem temple. Eliakim as a descendant of David could have been the fulfilment of the prophecies that David's throne was to be made glorious. But he snapped (:25). But there were later possibilities too- who also likewise failed. I submit that the Messianic prophecies of the restoration prophets *could* have had their fulfilment in Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel, or some other Messianic figure at that time. Everything was made possible to enable this- Joshua, who couldn't prove his Levitical genealogy, was given "a place of access" amongst the priesthood, those who "stood" before the Lord (Zech. 3:7 RV). Ezra thanked God that they had returned and that they had "a nail in his holy place" (Ezra 9:8), a reference surely to a Messiah figure whom he felt to be among them, the "nail in a sure place" of Is. 22:23. According to Mt. 1:12 and Lk. 3:27, Zerubbabel was the Prince of Judah, and the rightful heir to David's throne. But due to his weakness, the fulfilment was deferred to Jesus.

Isaiah 22:24 They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, every small vessel, from the cups even to all the pitchers- The Hebrew word for "glory" is literally "weight", that which is heavy. He could have been the promised seed of David, "his father's house", who reigned on David's glorified throne. But the idea is that even the lightest small vessels caused him to snap (:25). He was fastened and strengthened by God to bear the glory; but he snapped at the slightest load.

Isaiah 22:25 In that day, says Yahweh of Armies, the nail that was fastened in a sure place will give way. It will be cut down, and fall. The burden that was on it will be cut off, for Yahweh has spoken it- LXX "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, The man that is fastened in the sure place shall be removed and be taken away, and shall fall; and the glory that is upon him shall be utterly destroyed". I suggest that the idea is that a potential Messiah figure would be raised up, but he would fail, and would not function as intended. This was what happened to Eliakim, Hezekiah, Zerubbabel and others who were set up as the potential Messiah figures. The impression is given that an awful lot 'hung' on that one individual; the reestablishment of the Kingdom was going to depend upon this one individual because the people generally were spiritually weak. But all would fall, because he would not be strong enough. And so this all will come to fulfilment in Messiah Jesus. He would be cut down and would fall- the language of the invasion and destruction of Zion (Is. 9:10). But that was not

how Eliakim came to his end; the idea may simply look forward to how the true Messiah would never be cut down or fall but would last eternally.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 23

Isaiah 23:1 The burden of Tyre. Howl, you ships of Tarshish! For it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in. From the land of Kittim it is revealed to them- LXX has "Carthage" for "Tarshish". Carthage was a colony of Tyre, and so they would mourn the fall of their mother city; and therefore as LXX "men no longer arrive from the land of the Citians".

This chapter seems to imply that if Tyre had howled in repentance and then been silent and ashamed, she would be 'forgotten' 70 years and then become devoted to Yahweh. This never happened. Yet the 70 year period is of course analogous to Judah's 70 years in captivity, also without repentance; see on :17.

It's impossible to choose which of the various sieges of Tyre this chapter may refer to. And the later references to a 70 year period don't fit anything [so far as we currently know]. Such prophecies as this could be an example of apocalyptic imaging, whereby a picture is presented of a panorama of events, although each element of the panorama may be fulfilled at a different time. This would mean that the entire prophetic picture presented here never happened all together at one time to Tyre. However I discern in many prophecies elements which simply were never fulfilled and by their nature, will not be. And so I prefer to consider these prophecies as conditional, and they present potential scenarios which factor in a whole range of human responses, both obedient and disobedient. Not all of them will therefore fulfill, according to the principle of Jer. 18:8-10, that God's stated intentions about the nations may not come about if there is repentance.

Isaiah 23:2 Be still, you inhabitants of the coast, you whom the merchants of Sidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished- Tyre was originally a colony of Sidon; the terms are at times interchangeable (:4). Ethbaal is called "king of Tyre" by Josephus (*Antiquities* 8.3.2), but "king of the Sidonians" in 1 Kings 16:31. Some of Tyre's coins celebrate it as "the metropolis of the Sidonians".

Isaiah 23:3 On great waters- Or, "by the great waters", the Mediterranean.

The seed of the Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, was her revenue. She was the market of nations- The seed in view is the grain of Egypt, transported to the mouth of the Nile [here called the Sihor] where the Phoenicians bought it and then sold it throughout the nations.

Isaiah 23:4 Be ashamed, Sidon- The reference is still to Tyre; see on :2.

For the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying, I have not travailed, nor brought forth, neither have I nourished young men, nor brought up virgins- Their pride was in the claim that they were full of young men and women and wealth which they hadn't had to labour for. This is effectively a denial of the curse in Eden; but judgment would come for them all the same. And :10 LXX says that the collapse of trade would mean they would have to "till thy land", returning to working the land in the sweat of their face as prophesied in Genesis, rather than boasting that they had avoided that aspect of the curse. This is strangely relevant to our society, where again every effort is vainly made to try to overcome that ancient curse.

Isaiah 23:5 When the report comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish at the report of Tyre- Perhaps because there were colonies of Tyre there, or because the Egyptian merchandise of :3 was no longer being bought by the Tyrians. And the fall of Tyre would be a message to the Egyptians that the northern invader would soon reach them. In Isaiah's context he is teaching Judah the weakness of Egypt, upon whom they were always inclined to trust.

Isaiah 23:6 Pass over to Tarshish! Wail, you inhabitants of the coast!- LXX "Depart ye to Carthage". The people of Tyre fled to their colonies such as Carthage when the city was besieged. There is historical evidence for this. We see here that "Tarshish" referred to the colonies of Tyre, reached by the long distance ships called "ships of Tarshish" just as fast British merchant boats were known as "Indiamen"; and was where they fled to by ship when they were besieged. This ought to close down all speculation that "Tarshish is Britain". This fleeing of refugees by ship from Tyre is noted in history, especially when Alexander finally ruined Tyre. And Layard found representations of it on the monuments of Nineveh, suggesting this also happened when the Assyrians of Isaiah's time besieged the city. We see the prophecy having multiple fulfillments over time; see on :1.

Isaiah 23:7 Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days, whose feet carried her far away to travel?- The sense may be a mixture of the Hebrew and LXX, in that she was to flee into exile in her own ships, which had once been her pride: "Was not this your pride from the beginning, before she was given up?". The condemnation of Tyre as being a joyous city which would be ruined is intended to connect with Isaiah's condemnations of Jerusalem for feasting rather than fasting (Is. 22:2; 32:13). He intends them to look at the fall of others for the same behaviour; and we too can look at the fall of others contemporary with us as well as in history, and take warning.

Isaiah 23:8 Who has planned this against Tyre, the giver of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth?- The answer of "Yahweh" is given in the next verse, but the question is perhaps posed in this way in order to elicit repentance. For in all the oracles against the nations which began in Is. 13, there is always an appeal for repentance. For it was God's hope that a remnant of repentant Gentiles would join a remnant of His repentant people in His reestablished Kingdom in Judah. She was to understand that her giving of crowns to her colonies and declaration of her merchants as royal princes was all just playing around at creating a kingdom. She needed to humble herself beneath the reality of Yahweh's Kingdom.

Isaiah 23:9 Yahweh of Armies has planned it, to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth- We note that the primary issue with the king of Tyre in Ez. 27,28 was not his idolatry, but his pride and playing God. This is what is so utterly abhorrent to God. And we must have that same perspective. Throughout Ez. 27 and Ez. 28 Tyre is portrayed as having a fake tabernacle and temple, an imitation Zion; and her prince was therefore enthroned there as if he were Yahweh. He consciously "set his heart" on this fantasy. The Ugaritic documents reveal that the kings of that time considered themselves to be Divine, the human reincarnation of a god who had died and was now rising again. But the king of Ez. 28,

perhaps Itobaal II or Azemilcus, was consciously impersonating the Yahweh religion of Zion. Isaiah begins his prophecy with the statements that all pride in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was to be brought down- whether in Judah or in the Gentile nations such as Tyre within that territory. But this bringing down of pride was in the hope that they might repent.

Isaiah 23:10 Pass through your land like the Nile, daughter of Tarshish. There is no restraint any more- The text is very obscure here, and the LXX makes more sense: "Till thy land; for ships no more come out of Carthage". They could no longer rely upon trade between Tyre and her colonies, so they must till their own land, returning to agriculture for their basic needs. This would then connect with my suggestion on :4 that the people of Tyre were boasting they need not "till their land" in the spirit of the curse in Eden, but rather considered they had rather cleverly got around that curse by their trading. It would also make sense why the fall of the king of Tyre in Ez. 28 is described with allusion to the fall of Adam in Eden; Tyre was to suffer the same judgment as Adam, for all their boasting that they had avoided it.

Isaiah 23:11 He has stretched out His hand over the sea, He has shaken the kingdoms. Yahweh has ordered the destruction of Canaan's strongholds- "Canaan" can be translated as AV "the merchant city", referring again to Tyre. Or it could be that Tyre is being likened to one of the cities of Canaan, all of which were to fall before Joshua-Jesus. Note that the "Syro-Phoenician woman" of Mk. 7:26 is "a woman of Canaan" in Mt. 15:22. The shaking of the kingdoms may have in view an earthquake from Yahweh which would destroy Tyre (rather than a protracted siege); and Yahweh's stretching out His hand over the sea recalls the Red Sea and His miraculous intervention to judge Egypt. This kind of thing features in all the prophecies against the nations from Is. 13 onwards. There was the potential that they would be destroyed by supernatural Divine judgment as Sodom was. This didn't happen, because the potential prophetic scenario didn't come about; not least because Judah didn't repent and the Kingdom of God was not reestablished there as potentially possible. Judgment still came upon Tyre but in a somewhat reduced and different form to that originally intended.

Isaiah 23:12 He said, You shall rejoice no more, you oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon. Arise, pass over to Kittim. Even there you will have no rest- As explained on :2, Tyre was the "daughter of Sidon" in that originally she had been a colony of Sidon. With the city besieged, the people of Tyre would flee by boat to their colonies in Kittim (Cyprus) and also Carthage (see on :6). But they had no rest on Cyprus because Sargon and Esarhaddon both conquered it; and when Abdi-Milkut, King of Sidon, fled there, Esarhaddon had him beheaded. There are inscriptions which call it "the usual refuge of the Phoenician kings". But Cyprus was included in the dominions of Asshurbanipal and so was never a stable place of rest for Tyrians.

Isaiah 23:13 Behold, the land of the Chaldeans. This people was not until the Assyrians founded it for those who dwell in the wilderness. They set up their towers; they overthrew its palaces, they made it a ruin- Although Babylon later conquered Assyria, initially Assyria conquered Babylon. It was made 'not a people' by the Assyrians, and they made Babylon deserted, a place for the wilderness dwellers, i.e. the wild animals. This judgment of Babylon by Assyria was to be repeated when Babylon fell much later (Is. 13:21; 34:14). "They set up their towers" in the sense that

they 'made them bare' (as in Hab. 3:9) and overthrew it until it was just a ruin. The implication is that the Assyrians were to do this to Tyre, and would move on from there to do the same to Jerusalem, who should likewise not trust in its apparently impregnable defences. But Assyria didn't destroy Tyre as envisaged here. This didn't happen, because the potential prophetic scenario didn't come about; not least because Judah didn't repent and the Kingdom of God was not reestablished there as potentially possible. Judgment still came upon Tyre but in a somewhat reduced and different form to that originally intended. Various Assyrians besieged Tyre at different times (Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal); as did the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar II, and then Alexander of Macedon. As explained on :1, elements of this prophecy came true in those various invasions, but the intended scenario was the direct destruction of Tyre by Yahweh. And this didn't happen. See on :14.

Isaiah 23:14 Howl, you ships of Tarshish, for your stronghold is laid waste!- The destruction of Tyre was tragic for the people in the ships of Tarshish, for they were the people of Tyre who had used their ships to flee into exile (:6,12). There is no way that these ships of Tarshish refer to the shipping of the British empire. The context here makes them clearly refer to the vessels belonging to Tyre. The language of ships and mourning is all used in Rev. 18 of the fall of latter day Babylon. My suggestion is that the judgments upon Tyre didn't fully come about at the time and was therefore transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to latter day Babylon.

Isaiah 23:15 It will come to pass in that day that Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king. After the end of seventy years it will be to Tyre like in the song of the prostitute- As demonstrated on :17, the 70 years is meant to connect with the 70 years exile of Judah. But that 70 years was not a literal period because it was dependent upon Judah's repentance. It could be that during that same period, Tyre was to be "forgotten", also in exile in places like Carthage (:6,12). The 70 year period was also to be the length of Babylon's dominion; Judah's revival was to coincide with the fall of Babylon. "The days of one king" may refer to one dynasty or kingdom, "king" being put for "kingdom" as in Dan. 7:17; 8:21. And this may have been the intention here too; that Babylon was to dominate Tyre for 70 years and then she would revive. Their revival and turning to Yahweh in covenant relationship was intended to coincide with Judah's acceptance of the new covenant at the restoration (:18). But this was the prophetic potential; none of the parties concerned repented.

Isaiah 23:16 Take a harp; go about the city, you prostitute that has been forgotten. Make sweet melody. Sing many songs, that you may be remembered- This may be a quotation from the song or ballad of the prostitute in :15. The song of the elderly prostitute may be a song of repentance, regretting a profligate life that now cannot serve her. She had been forgotten by God as Judah were during the 70 years of exile (s.w. Is. 49:14). And Judah like Tyre was forgotten of all her former lovers (s.w. Jer. 30:14). In response to singing this song, Yahweh visits Tyre in mercy and restoration (:17); we can therefore assume that this song is one of repentance. The songs make her "remembered"- before God. For that is how the word is generally used, many times. "Sweet melody" is used of singing to God in a way He finds sweet (Ps. 33:3).

Isaiah 23:17 It will happen after the end of seventy years that Yahweh will visit Tyre-

God gave a prophecy about Tyre the generation before Judah went into exile for 70 years. He said that Tyre would be forgotten for 70 years and then would be visited by Yahweh and revived (Is. 23:17). Surely this was in order to prepare those who had ears to hear to the fact that if God could operate like this with Tyre, how much more could He revive and "visit" His beloved people after 70 years. For the same language of visiting after 70 years is used about them (Jer. 27:22; 29:10); divine visitation can be in mercy, grace and revival, and not always in judgment.

We note that the later prophecies about Tyre in Ezekiel state that Tyre is to be permanently destroyed and not revived. We can assume therefore that what we read here about Tyre's revival and entering covenant with Yahweh, donating her wealth to His people (:18 LXX) was command more than prediction. Or at best it was conditional prophecy, requiring Tyre's repentance. But this didn't happen, and the projected reestablishment of God's Kingdom in Judah under a Messianic ruler was precluded anyway by Judah's impenitence. Hence Ezekiel's later prophecies of total destruction of Tyre, with the implication in Ez. 47:20 that the territory of Tyre would be incorporated within the borders of Israel's revived Kingdom.

And she shall return to her wages, and will play the prostitute with all the kingdoms of the world on the surface of the earth- LXX "And she shall be a mart for all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth". This makes more sense, seeing that her profits are to be devoted to Yahweh (:18).

Isaiah 23:18 Her merchandise and her wages will be holiness to Yahweh. It will not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise will be for those who dwell before Yahweh, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing- Unless we read with the LXX here and in :17, we have the situation of a prostitute's earnings being devoted to Yahweh, which was forbidden under the law. So LXX: "And her trade and her gain shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be gathered for them, but for those that dwell before the Lord, even all her trade, to eat and drink and be filled, and for a covenant and a memorial before the Lord". This would then be saying that the Divine intention would be fulfilled- Tyre would repent and enter the new covenant with Yahweh which His repentant people would also enter; and they would not keep their restored wealth for themselves, but rather donate it to "those who dwell before Yahweh" in Zion. This never happened after seventy years nor at any time, because Tyre didn't want to repent and neither did Judah; and so the barest essence of it will be fulfilled in the latter day repentance of all nations around Israel, and their entering covenant relationship with Yahweh.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 24

Isaiah 24:1 Behold, Yahweh creates the earth empty, creates it waste, turns it upside down, and scatters its inhabitants- I have noted through Is. 13-23 that the judgments upon Judah and the surrounding nations all featured supernatural Divine intervention after the pattern of His judgment of Sodom; and also there is an appeal for repentance to all of them. The prophetic potential was that a remnant from all those nations including Judah was to repent, although the majority would be destroyed. Those remnants would then unite together in a multiethnic revived Kingdom of God in Judah led by a Messianic figure (see on Is. 26:15). That scenario was potentially possible, but didn't come about. Those prophecies are now brought together in what has been termed Isaiah's "little apocalypse" in Is. 24-26, a picture of judgment upon the entire *eretz* focusing upon Judah. Perhaps it was given just before

Shalmaneser destroyed Moab (Is. 25:10), before Samaria and the ten tribes were taken into captivity, and perhaps therefore delivered soon after Hezekiah became king. There were primary fulfillments but all the prophecies remained unfulfilled *in toto*. They are to be reapplied to the last days.

The earth or land promised to Abraham was to be "created" empty; there was to be a return to the "without form and empty" state of that same *eretz* or land presented in Gen. 1. There was therefore the impression given that the destructions were to clear the land for a new creation. The envisioned wide scale destruction was in fact creative.

Isaiah 24:2 It will be as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the creditor, so with the debtor; as with the taker of interest, so with the giver of interest- The judgments were to affect all of society and not just the leadership. Isaiah began his prophecy by making this same point, in saying that both heavens and earth were to be judged.

Isaiah 24:3 The earth will be utterly emptied and utterly laid waste- This utter emptying is the word used of the judgment of Egypt in Is. 19:3, as well as about Judah . As explained on :1, the various scenes of judgment on the nations in Is. 13-23 are here presented as coming upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. Likewise "laid waster" is used of both Judah and the surrounding nations.

For Yahweh has spoken this word- This may appear axiomatic until we appreciate the allusion to the Genesis creation noted on :1. As creation was performed by a word, God said and it was done, so this uncreation was to be performed by a word, and likewise that same word would bring a new creation.

Isaiah 24:4 The earth mourns and fades away, the world languishes and fades away; the proud people of the earth languish- The intention of the large scale judgments upon the entire *eretz* were in order to humble pride. Out of all the sins present in that territory, it is pride which is repeatedly stated as the parade example of their sins. We too need to perceive that in all things humility is of the essence and pride is so abhorrent to God- and it will be judged. There is a conscious parallel between the earth and the world; the reference may be to the earth / land of Israel (see on :5), and to the "world" as the nations around Israel. Those nations have been mentioned so far in the judgments of Isaiah- Assyria, Babylon, Egypt (at least from the Nile northwards), Tyre etc. They were "the world" known and experienced by Isaiah and his audience. And yet this scenario could have come about at the time of the Assyrian invasion; for it was then that the earth / land mourned and languished (s.w. Is. 33:9; see note there).

Isaiah 24:5 The earth also is polluted under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant- "The earth" therefore seems to specifically refer to Israel, both the ten tribes and Judah. For it was they who had broken God's law and the eternal covenant. We note that the "everlasting covenant" could be broken; God was willing to eternally honour it, but Israel broke it. Any claim that the Jewish laws are eternal because the covenant was eternal must factor this in. That covenant is not now operative; it was broken. But the judgment here spoken was long delayed; for the same words are used in Jer. 3:2

about Judah's pollution of the land and the judgment that was to come through the Babylonians. So the judgment scenario presented here in Isaiah didn't fulfill at least until the Babylonian invasion; and indeed even then it didn't fully. It is all reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 24:6 Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell therein are found guilty. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left- I suggested on :1 that what is in view is supernatural Divine judgment upon the entire territory, and not simply one group within it invading other areas. The burning by fire didn't happen; but the vision was that it would, and that very few would survive. And they would be the repentant remnant. This is the language of Revelation, where a series of judgments are poured out upon the earth / land, destroying everything and leaving a very small repentant remnant. The evident connections with Is. 24 suggest that what is primarily in view in Revelation is a situation in the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

Isaiah 24:7 The new wine mourns, the vine languishes. All the merry-hearted sigh- This is the language of Joel 1:10, which is in the context of Joel appealing for desperate repentance in order to avert this scenario. So it could be that the non-fulfilment of this prophecy of mass destruction of the *eretz* was not simply because Judah had failed to repent and so the reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah was not to come at that time; the suspension or delay of the judgments could also be because a minority did repent and intercede, and this led to the judgments being averted. Even if the potential of the Kingdom being restored was not then realized.

Isaiah 24:8 the mirth of tambourines ceases, the sound of those who rejoice ends, the joy of the harp ceases- Jeremiah foresaw the repentant remnant taking the tambourine again and going forth in the dance, when they enter the new covenant. But as explained on :1, this uncreation was required before that new creation could come.

Isaiah 24:9 They will not drink wine with a song, strong drink will be bitter to those who drink it- Babylon, Tyre and Judah are all condemned for feasting rather than fasting in repentance (Is. 22:2; 23:7; 32:13). And as noted on :1, they were all therefore to meet similar judgments. God's people acted as the world and were therefore "condemned with the world", as the rejected of the new Israel will be (1 Cor. 11:32).

Isaiah 24:10 The confused city is broken down, every house is shut up so that no man may come in- "Confused" is the word used in Gen. 1:2 for the *eretz* being "without form". As noted on :1, the land is being decreated, as it were, in preparation for a new creation, albeit from a very small seed which would abide the judgments. The assurance of Is. 45:18 was to be that God had not created the earth / land "in vain" (s.w. "confused"). His intention was that it would be eternally inhabited by His reformed people. But firstly it had to be made "without form" ("confused", s.w.) and this is what was to happen in the Babylonian desolation of the city of Jerusalem (s.w. Jer. 4:23). Likewise the houses being shut up spoke of the Babylonian aftermath (s.w. Ez. 3:24). So the judgment scenario presented here in Isaiah didn't fulfill at least until the Babylonian invasion; and indeed even then it didn't fully. It is all reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 24:11 There is a crying in the streets because of the wine- all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone- Jerusalem was condemned for feasting rather than fasting in repentance (Is. 22:2; 32:13). It was the wine they had drunk and abused which had led to their "crying in the streets". This was the fruit of enjoying the good life of hedonism for the moment; there would be a terrible ending. "Darkened" continues the idea noted on :1- that the earth / land is returning to the darkness and formless (:10) state before creation began. The darkness had to come before Zion's light could arise and shine upon that darkness.

Isaiah 24:12 The city is left in desolation, and the gate is struck with destruction- Desolation of the city is the very term used often about Jerusalem (Jer. 19:8; 25:18) but also about Babylon (Jer. 51:43) and the cities of Edom (Jer. 49:13) and Moab (Jer. 48:9). Again we note that the judgment scenario presented here in Isaiah didn't fulfill at least until the Babylonian invasion; and indeed even then it didn't fully. It is all reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 24:13 For it will be so in the midst of the earth among the peoples, as the shaking of an olive tree, as the gleanings when the vintage is done- Jerusalem was to be desolate (:12), and a repentant remnant of Judah "among the peoples", perhaps implying there would be a repentant remnant amongst the peoples too. That repentant remnant is what would be left after the judgment was over. Olives were struck down from the higher branches with a stick, and that rod or stick which was to beat Judah and the nations is clearly defined as Babylon / Assyria in Is. 10. This is the scenario we have in Is. 17:6: "Yet gleanings will be left there, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outermost branches of a fruitful tree, says Yahweh, the God of Israel". The idea is that the tree was "fruitful" [potentially] but only a very few bits of fruit would be found. This finding of this tiny remnant "there", in a valley near Jerusalem (see on Is. 17:5). This didn't happen at the time, Mic. 7:1 says that actually no gleanings of the vintage were found; but all this will be transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to the outcome of the final judgment in a similar valley near Jerusalem at the Lord's return. And this is the context here too (:21-23).

Isaiah 24:14 These shall lift up their voice, they will shout for the majesty of Yahweh, they cry aloud from the sea- This seems to speak of the joy of the repentant Jewish remnant as they see the majestic glory of Yahweh literally revealed. Their joy will be matched by that of the repentant Gentile remnant (:15). It will have arisen as a direct result of the judgment / vintage which will destroy the majority: "But when the vintage is done, these shall cry aloud; and they that are left on the land shall rejoice together in the glory of the Lord: the water of the sea shall be troubled" (LXX). But "the sea" is the same word translated "west", and this would match the glorification of Yahweh in the east of :15. A primary fulfilment could have come at the restoration from Babylon; the same words are used about the shouting for joy when Yahweh returned the people of Zion (Is. 52:8). But again the potential wasn't realized; the final fulfilment will be at the Lord's return."The majesty of Yahweh" will be revealed when the earth is riven with earthquakes in a theophany and 'coming down' of Yahweh greater than Sinai (s.w. Is. 2:10,19,21). This could have happened at Isaiah's time but it clearly didn't, and thus becomes the language of the last days.

Isaiah 24:15 Therefore glorify Yahweh in the east, even the name of Yahweh the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea!- The *eretz* Israel is sometimes presented as an island, surrounded by the "sea" of Gentiles, her immediate neighbours. It is they who are envisaged here as joining in with the repentant remnant of Judah in glorifying Israel's God. "The God of Israel" underlines this point. These people emerge from the judgment period on the whole *eretz*, having lost the majority of their compatriots. And it is they who turn to Israel's God.

Isaiah 24:16 From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs of glory to the righteous!- Songs of glory of Israel's God were to come from every corner of the Gentile nations within the *eretz* promised to Abraham. But this is juxtaposed against Isaiah's lamentation and complaint at 'treachery' later in this same verse. Perhaps we should understand these songs of glory to God as being hypocritical and insincere. When Isaiah grasps that, he is heartbroken that the Kingdom potential isn't going to happen. And there's in this case a lesson for us. We tend to think that if others are hypocrites, well, I'd better ensure I'm not. But this indicates a lack of perception of the glory of God, and omits the factor of how *He* must feel at all those other peoples' hypocrisies; the glory that is intended to be given to Him, that isn't. Because of hypocritical "songs of praise" to God, Isaiah felt physically ill- "I pine away, I pine away" (Is. 24:16). The prophets felt for God, seeing things from His viewpoint.

But I said, I pine away! I pine away! Woe is me!- Isaiah speaks of "My leanness… I pine away" (RV), as he spoke about Israel's future glory and the inevitable judgments upon the enemies of his people. He didn't gloat over the prospect, as some Christians appear to gloat over any defeat suffered by their nations' enemies. Isaiah's heart bled for humanity, he so believed his message that he emotionally responded to it himself. He too bled for the people whose doom he had to foretell.

The treacherous have dealt treacherously, yes, the treacherous have dealt very treacherously- It could be that Isaiah perceived that things weren't going to work out as prophesied in his lifetime. He felt deeply, therefore, a sense of betrayal and treachery from his own "treacherous" people (s.w. Is. 48:8; Jer. 3:8). Or he could simply be distraught at the degree of treachery which was being practiced, against Jew (s.w. Is. 33:1) and Gentile (s.w. Is. 21:2) alike.

Isaiah 24:17 Fear, the pit and the snare are on you who inhabit the earth- I explained on :1 that the judgments here were intended to come upon Judah and all the surrounding nations. And so we note that this very verse is applied to Moab in Jer. 48:43- although this implies that the prophecy of Is. 24 wasn't fulfilled in Isaiah's lifetime. This language is clearly reapplied to the last days. For the day of the Lord will be a snare to the unsuspecting worldling, who will suddenly find that the Lord has come and destroyed him (Is. 8:14; 24:17,18; Jer. 50:24; Lk. 21:35). Yet the materialistic believer falls into the snare of riches here and now. Surely the point is that our attitude to riches is a preview of the judgment; the materialistic believer has condemned himself, right now. Is. 8:14 has used the same word for "snare" in describing how the rejected Messiah figure would be a snare who would catch most of God's people. This is going to be the case in the last days, and is already the case- for it is literally a case of "believe or perish".

Isaiah 24:18 It will happen that he who flees from the noise of the fear will fall into

the pit; and he who comes up out of the midst of the pit will be taken in the snare- Whilst the snare could refer to the Lord Jesus (see on :17), the same word for "snare" is applied to the priests (Hos. 5:1) and false prophets of Israel (Hos. 9:8).

For the windows on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble- As noted on :1, this is language which implies more than a military invasion of one people by another. It gives the impression of direct, Divine supernatural judgment and intervention. This scenario isn't what happened at the time; it was deferred or reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 24:19 The earth is utterly broken. The earth is torn apart, the earth is shaken violently- These Hebrew words and phrases are used about the Gentile nations (Mic. 5:6 re Assyria) as well as Judah (Jer. 25:29). As explained on :1, the envisaged scenario was the judgment of Judah, Israel and all the nations within the *eretz* at the same time, involving supernatural Divine judgments such as earthquakes shaking the land, resulting in the destruction of the majority and the repentance of a minority. "Torn apart" however is a term usually used about Israel's breaking the covenant with God. Their tearing apart was because of how they had torn apart the covenant.

Isaiah 24:20 the earth will stagger like a drunken man- The whole land was to tremble or stagger under judgment when it came; the same word is used of the trembling state of Judah's unbelieving hearts (Is. 7:2). Judgment was but the articulation of the state of their faithless hearts. They were judged for the state of their hearts. Spiritual mindedness is of paramount significance to God. It seems extreme literal earthquakes are also in view (see on :1).

And will sway back and forth like a hammock. Its disobedience will be heavy on it, and it will fall and not rise again- "Hammock" is "hut". The word is only used elsewhere in Is. 1:8: "The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field ... like a besieged city". This could refer to how the Assyrians would take the whole land apart from Jerusalem. The entire "vineyard" of God's work was to be destroyed, apart from a "shelter"- which was Zion. But it is the "daughter of Zion", the faithful remnant, and not the literal Zion which is in view here. They were to be a "shelter", a place of refuge, for others (Is. 4:6 s.w.). As explained on Is. 4:6, Zion was intended to become not only a place of spiritual refuge, but the capital of a revived Kingdom of God in Judah. That didn't happen, Zion was saved by grace alone from the Assyrians; and so the "hut" was destroyed.

Isaiah 24:21 It shall happen in that day that Yahweh will punish the army of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth on the earth- LXX "And God shall bring his hand upon the host of heaven, and upon the kings of the earth". The idea may be that the kings of the earth / land are the 'heavens', the rulers. And they will be particularly judged. All the rulers of the *eretz* were not judged together at any time, although this is required here. But it will happen in the last days. Revelation is full of information about how "the kings of the earth" / land are to be judged (Rev. 6:15; 16:14; 17:2,18; 18:3,9; 19:19; 21:24).

Isaiah 24:22 They shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison; and after many days shall they be visited- This didn't happen at the time, but is transferred to the last days. The whole book of Revelation is full of allusions to the Old Testament prophecies. Rev. 20:1–3 is surely based upon Is. 24:21,22, which prophesied that the kings of the earth will be gathered

together, imprisoned in a pit and punished. It is these very human “kings of the earth” who are described in the more figurative language of Revelation as “Satan”.

Isaiah 24:23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for Yahweh of Armies will reign on Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem; and before His elders will be glory- The end result of the majority of the people being destroyed in the *eretz* was that the repentant remnants of the peoples, including Judah, would see the literal coming of Yahweh to Zion and His reigning from Zion, the temple mount. This is the Kingdom scenario of Is. 2 and many other passages. The existing 'heavens' of Judah would be confounded and ashamed, and replaced by a new set of "elders". And perhaps in a literal sense there will then be no need of sun and moon; for that is how things shall be in the Kingdom of God (Rev. 21:23).

ISAIAH CHAPTER 25

Isaiah 25:1 Yahweh, You are My God. I will exalt You!- This is an allusion to the Song of Moses; and there are many others (Is. 12:2; 25:1 = Ex. 15:2; Is. 13:16 = Ex. 15:6; Is. 47:14 = Ex. 15:7; Is. 46:5 = Ex. 15:11; Is. 8:13 = Ex. 15:16; Is. 24:23 = Ex. 15:18). Following on from the vision of a radical supernatural Divine judgment of the entire *eretz* / land promised to Abraham, Isaiah feels it is as if the world (cp. Egypt) has been permanently judged and now Israel are free to inherit the land and kingdom; see on Is. 27:1. But as explained on Is. 24, that was a potential scenario which didn't then come about. The fall of Babylon or Assyria (cp. Egypt) was intended to coincide with the freedom of Judah / Israel from captivity; but most of them didn't even want to leave.

I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things, things planned long ago, in complete faithfulness and truth- Isaiah perceived that the destruction of both Judah and the surrounding nations was to bring about the Kingdom of God in Israel which He had long planned in the promises to the fathers ("faithfulness and truth" often alludes to these); he comes to a very mature understanding of the problem of evil. All those painful judgments were the "wonderful things" of the Song of Moses (Ex. 15:11). For the judgments of Is. 24 which lead up to this hymn of praise were major and would mean the destruction of all which Isaiah and his people had once held dear. But he can wholeheartedly praise the God who was to do this, because he perceives its place in His far greater plan. They were all for the sake of the eternal salvation of the remnant who wanted that great salvation.

Isaiah 25:2 For You have made a city into a heap, a fortified city into a ruin, a palace of strangers to be no city; it will never be built- Jer. 50:26 speaks of Babylon being turned into heaps, and "never be built" again is the language of the prophecies against Babylon too. The impression is given there that the famed storehouses of Babylon were to be opened at the same time as she was turned into heaps with nothing left. But this didn't happen when the Medes took the city. It was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies

were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

Isaiah 25:3 Therefore a strong people will glorify You, a city of awesome nations will fear You- The LXX focuses upon the way that the humbled, poor remnant, even if they were injured from the judgments, would be the ones led to eternally glorify Yahweh: "Therefore shall the poor people bless thee, and cities of injured men shall bless thee". The city in view may be Babylon, which was the city of :2. What was envisaged was the repentance of a remnant from there, and this likewise was the prophetic vision of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But as Ezekiel demonstrates, the first generations of exiles were worshipping the idols of Babylon; they made no witness to Babylon. And so the potential scenario didn't work out.

Isaiah 25:4 For You have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat, when the blast of the dreaded ones is like a storm against the wall- This is the same scene as in Is. 4:6 about the restored Zion: "There will be a pavilion for a shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a refuge and for a shelter from storm and from rain". "Shade from the heat" is the same phrase. The "heat" in the last days could refer to some kind of localized nuclear holocaust. Zion will become the shelter for the repentant remnant of the Gentile nations in the *eretz*, even if they have themselves been damaged and injured during the terrible judgments poured out; hence LXX "a shelter of them that thirst, and a refreshing air to injured men". I noted on :3 the recurrence of this phrase "injured men" in the LXX. Salvation for the "poor [and] needy" was to be a feature of the Messianic Kingdom (Ps. 72:13 s.w.). This blessing of the poor and needy was to come about when Babylon fell (Is. 14:30), which was the time when the repentant exiles were supposed to leave Babylon and reestablish God's Kingdom in Judah. Babylon fell, but not as dramatically as prophetically envisaged; and Judah weren't repentant. And the Jewish leadership abused the "poor and needy" (Am. 4:1; 8:6). The storm or rivers of judgment was to that to come upon Israel at the hands of the Assyrians (Is. 28:2 s.w.). The Messianic figure of the time was to be a covert from this storm (Is. 32:2), and to bring forth a "storm" of judgment against the Assyrian (Is. 30:30,31 s.w.). The "blast of the terrible ones" uses the same word as in Is. 37:7 about the Angelic "blast" sent upon the Assyrians, outside "the wall" of Jerusalem. The collateral damage of all this was to be huge. But the restored Zion was to be the place of safety from all this. The potential fulfillments all failed; Eliakim could have been the Messianic figure at the time of the Assyrian invasion but he failed (see on Is. 22:25); Hezekiah turned away from Yahweh in his later life. And so it shall all come to final fulfillment at the Lord's return.

Isaiah 25:5 As the heat in a dry place will You bring down the noise of strangers; as the heat by the shade of a cloud, the song of the dreaded ones will be brought low- This may refer to the cloud of glory to appear over the reestablished Zion (Is. 4:6), which was to be a refuge for the repentant remnants of the various nations of the land. The reference seems to be to a supernatural heat which would be so intense that the mocking noise and songs of the invaders would be brought to nothing. I have noted through Is. 13-23 that the judgments upon Judah and the surrounding nations all featured supernatural Divine intervention after the pattern of His judgment of Sodom; and also there is an appeal for repentance to all of them. The prophetic potential was

that a remnant from all those nations including Judah was to repent, although the majority would be destroyed. Those remnants would then unite together in a multiethnic revived Kingdom of God in Judah led by a Messianic figure. That scenario was potentially possible, but didn't come about.

But the LXX has particular relevance to Isaiah and the faithful in a Jerusalem surrounded by the Assyrians: "We were as faint-hearted men thirsting in Sion, by reason of ungodly men to whom thou didst deliver us".

Isaiah 25:6 In this mountain- Sometimes the artificial chapter breaks (which were added by man) break up a parenthesis. Is. 24:23 speaks of how "the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem"; the following first five verses of Is. 25 are a parenthesis; and then Is. 25:6 continues: "in this mountain... He will destroy...". If we fail to realize the parenthesis, and if we only started reading at chapter 25:1, we would be thinking: "Which mountain?". But if we realize the parenthesis, and if we disregard the chapter division, all is plain: " ...in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem (Is. 24:23)... in this mountain... (Is. 25:6)".

Yahweh of Armies will make to all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines, of fat things full of marrow, of well refined choice wines- The future Kingdom of God was spoken of as a meal on a mountain, “a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, for all peoples” (Is. 25:6-8). Then, death itself will be on the menu and God will swallow it up (:8). It is pictured as an eternal feast which will last eternally. People from all nations of the earth are to be God’s guests. No one is to be excluded. The records of the feeding miracles are presented in terms of this Messianic banquet. The Messianic banquet was "to all peoples"- the repentant remnants of all the Gentile nations around Judah, eating together in celebration of entry into the new covenant. This didn't happen at the time, but in essence is realized in the breaking of bread service today; and will come to literal fulfilment at the Lord's return.

One of the many ways to understand the breaking of bread meeting is as a victory celebration. The parables of Luke 14 and 15 speak of eating with Jesus as being a celebration of the salvation of the lost and as a celebration of marriage. Jesus spoke of how in the Kingdom, He would dine with the faithful (Mt. 8:11; Lk. 13:28,29); and He clearly had in mind the Kingdom prophecies of a Messianic banquet found in Is. 25:6-8 and Zech. 8:7-23; 9:16. I have elsewhere pointed out that the feeding miracles, with the crowds described strangely as “reclining” as if at a feast, also has this final banquet in mind. But that banquet is a victor’s celebration; the breaking of bread clearly has elements of this within it.

Taking the cup of wine is a double symbol: of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), and of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). Why this use of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads. At the last day, the Messianic banquet will feature fine wines: "In this mountain Yahweh of Armies will make to all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines, of fat things full of marrow, of well refined choice wines" (Is. 25:6); but at the same time, the rejected will be made to drink the wine of God's wrath (Rev. 14:10). As we hold the memorial cup of wine in our hands, we make the answer now.

Isaiah 25:7 He will destroy in this mountain the surface of the covering that covers all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations- This may be a reference to the

vision for the restored temple and kingdom of God in Israel, described in more detail in Ez. 40-48. In Ezekiel's system there is no veil; as well as no Laver (see Ezekiel 36:24-27, John 15:3); no Table of Shewbread (see Micah 5:4, John 6:35); no Lampstand or Menorah (see Isaiah 49:6, John 8:12); no Golden Altar of Incense (Zechariah 8:20-23, John 14:6); and no Ark of the Covenant (Jer. 3:16, John 10:30-33). But the returned exiles didn't build that kind of temple as specified. They installed a veil- for it tore when the Lord died.

The veil and covering may be paralleled with death in :8. "Destroy" is the same word as "swallow up" in :8, and is another allusion to the Song of Moses (see on :1), as it is also the word used of how the Egyptians were 'devoured' or swallowed up at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12). And Zion will be the place where it is removed, finally because it is there the Lord Jesus will judge men and immortalize His people from all nations. The word for "destroy" or "swallow up" is also used of the 'covering' ['swallowing up' by hiding from vision] the things of the tabernacle (Num. 4:20). "Covering" is parallel with the "veil" which is "spread", a word also used for the covering of the tabernacle furniture (Ex. 37:16). The overall idea is that the swallowing up of death through the work of the Lord Jesus was the hidden message of the tabernacle, and this will then be openly revealed. It will be revealed to the nations in that no longer will the tabernacle system be solely for the Jews and their priests. It was clearly demonstrated in the rending of the veil when the Lord Jesus died, opening up the Most Holy to all men of every nation.

The LXX reflects the obvious need for Isaiah and all of us to share this good news with the nations: "they shall anoint themselves with ointment in this mountain. Impart thou all these things to the nations; for this is God's counsel upon all the nations".

Isaiah 25:8 He has swallowed up death forever! The Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces- These phrases are all interpreted in the New Testament as referring to the resurrection from the dead to immortality at the last day (1 Cor. 15:54; Rev. 7:17; 21:4). And this will be done by God through His work in His Son, the Lord Jesus. In some way, these things were all capable of fulfillment in Isaiah's time, had the judgments of Is. 24 come upon the earth. I noted on Is. 22:25 that Eliakim could have been the Messiah figure in Isaiah's day, but he failed; and his name means "God of raising / resurrection". Perhaps he could have been used for even this. Such huge potential was wasted. But God's saving plan is not to be ultimately frustrated; it will come true in the last days through the Lord Jesus.

He will take the reproach of His people away from off all the earth, for Yahweh has spoken it- This only has power if we read it as meaning that Israel's reproach was to be permanently removed. But that didn't happen in Isaiah's day. It will be fulfilled when Israel eternally enter a new covenant, and the nations who once mocked them are eternally converted to Israel's God.

Isaiah 25:9 It shall be said in that day, Behold, this is our God! We have waited for Him, and He will save us! This is Yahweh! We have waited for Him- The restored Zion would have Yahweh literally living there (Ez. 48:35), and Revelation states simply that the faithful will then see His face. "Our God" is a phrase sometimes used to contrast Yahweh with the idols of the nations (e.g. Jer. 3:23). This is the confident message of the redeemed remnants of Judah, Israel and the nations to whoever is left in the world who still hasn't accepted Yahweh. All idols of whatever kind will be

declared eternally nothing compared to Yahweh. Twice they exult that they "have waited for Him", and this was exactly the position of Isaiah's family and school of prophets (s.w. Is. 8:17). That righteous remnant would finally have their faith and expectation rewarded.

And we too by grace shall be there and feel these same things. Then our fuller mental comprehension of the Father will be reflected in our physical vision of Him. There is a parallel between physically seeing God and having the veil of our present incomprehension removed. The fuller understanding which we will then have will be reflected in our literal seeing of God.

We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation!- This situation could have arisen at the restoration (s.w. Ps. 14:7; 53:6; Is. 66:10). But the exiles returned in fear of what might meet them on the journey, and were soon disappointed and sad that there was a famine in the ruined land they had come to. Their impenitence and self-seeking precluded this joy. And so it will happen fully in the fuller salvation of the last day.

Isaiah 25:10 For in this mountain the hand of Yahweh will rest- Yahweh's hand speaks of His activity and protection; and it will "rest" permanently there, fulfilling the prophecy inherent in the Sabbath. Never again will God's people be in fear. His activity will be focused in Zion, His eternal dwelling place in the transfer of heaven to earth spoken of in the final chapters of Revelation.

But Moab will be trodden down in his place, even like straw is trodden down in the water of the dunghill- We wonder why Moab is singled out. Perhaps they were seen as the bitterest of all the enemies of the Jews (2 Kings 24:2; Ez. 25:8-11). The dunghill connects with the prophecy of Ps. 83:10 concerning the destruction of the latter day invaders of Israel, including Moab as one of the "children of Lot". The Hebrew for “dunghill” is a play on the Moabite name Madmen (Jer. 48:2); and also resembles the word for “straw”.

Isaiah’s love for the Gentiles whom he condemned (see on Is. 16:7) is remarkable. For as Moab cried out like a three year old heifer (Jer. 48:34), so did Isaiah for them (Is. 15:5). All this was done by Isaiah (and later by Jeremiah), knowing that Moab hated Israel and is singled out for His specific condemnation here. But all the same they loved them, in the spirit of Noah witnessing to the mocking world around him. Our knowledge of this world’s future means that as we walk the streets and mix with men and women, our heart should cry out for them, no matter how they behave towards us, and there should be a deep seated desire for at least some of them to come to repentance and thereby avoid the judgments to come. Particularly is this true, surely, of the people and land of Israel. It ought to be impossible for us to walk its streets or meet its people without at least desiring to give them a leaflet or say at least something to try to help them see what lies ahead.

Isaiah 25:11 He will spread out his hands in its midst, like one who swims spreads out hands to swim, but his pride will be humbled together with the craft of his hands- The idea is that Moab will desperately seek to swim to survive the lethal water of the dung-pit (:10); but in vain. All attempts to avoid Divine condemnation will fail.

Isaiah 25:12 He has brought down the high fortress of your walls, laid them low and brought them to the ground, even to the dust- The language of Jerusalem's humiliation is here applied to Moab (e.g. Is. 26:5). Finally, what was done to Zion and Israel shall

be done to those who did it, and Moab is singled out as representative of them all. This is the extended message of Revelation; the seals of judgment upon the land brought about by her invaders are then poured out upon those invaders, as the vials.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 26

Isaiah 26:1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city. God appoints salvation for walls and defences- The day in view is the time after the projected judgments on the entire *eretz* in Is. 24 which have left most dead, but the repentant remnants of the Gentiles and Jews will have come to Zion for salvation. The restored Kingdom of God is likewise described in Revelation in terms of a city, the new Zion with walls and defences which are not so much literal as spiritual. The Jews are condemned in the prophets for trusting in the physical defences of Jerusalem; Yahweh's salvation will then be perceived as their defence and strength. The physical "walls and defences" will have been destroyed, as they were by the Babylonians (s.w. Lam. 2:8)- so that they might now trust in Yahweh's salvation. This could have happened at the restoration; but the walls were rebuilt in human strength and without this faith in Yahweh. The final fulfilment therefore will be in latter day faith in Jesus, 'Yah's salvation'.

Isaiah 26:2 Open the gates, that the righteous nation may enter: the one which keeps faith- The idea is that although the physical walls and defences are destroyed (see on :1), the gates of salvation of the city will open to the returning exiles, who are described as "righteous... [keeping] faith"; see on :7. The exiles would only be described like that because their faith had led to righteousness being imputed to them (Is. 60:21) through the work of the suffering servant (Is. 53:11), "the righteous branch" (Jer. 23:5). The gates are opened by the same Messianic figure who opens and nobody shuts (see on Is. 22:22 for a possible primary application in Eliakim). "Keeps faith" is literally "keeps truth" and may be a reference to how they have held on to their faith in the covenant based upon the promises to Abraham, which imply this imputed righteousness.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in You- The LXX understands this to be a description of the "righteous nation" of :2. They are saved from their traumas by the state of their mind. And Yahweh will respond to this through the work of His Spirit on the human spirit, to keep their mind in perfect peace. This is the peace which comes from knowing sin is forgiven. "Mind" here is literally 'imagination'. We must ask what are our fantasies, our hopes, according to which we live, think and feel day by day. If they are above all for the Kingdom, then we will be 'kept' in this. "Steadfast" is literally to lean, and in Isaiah's immediate context this was in contrast to leaning upon Egypt for salvation (s.w. Is. 36:6). The great salvation of the restored Kingdom could have come apart at that time, but it was precluded by a lack of real faith and focus on the Kingdom in the majority of Israel.

Isaiah 26:4 Trust in Yahweh forever; for in Yah, Yahweh, is an everlasting Rock- The "eternal / forever age" of the Kingdom of peace could have come at that time, with the Messianic son of Isaiah as the father of that eternal age (see on Is. 9:6). But it didn't. An eternal Messianic kingdom could then have been established; here, Judah were urged to repent and believe / trust in order to allow it to happen. And the same

potential was there for the exiles who returned from Babylon (Is. 45:17; 65:18). And the "father" of that could have been a Messianic figure who arose in Jerusalem. But they preferred to look to Egypt as their rock (see on :3). But these potentials have been reapplied and rescheduled to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus to be established in Zion in the last days.

Isaiah 26:5 For He has brought down those who dwell on high, the lofty city. He lays it low, He lays it low even to the ground, He brings it even to the dust- This refers to the city dominating Jerusalem; it had short term reference to Nineveh (Assyria) and Babylon. The Jews in Zion surrounded by the Assyrians were to imagine Nineveh as already ruined, and downtrodden by themselves (:6). This was the significance of Nahum's prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh, and Isaiah's earlier prophecies of the fall of Babylon. The language here and in :6 repeats the grand prophetic theme with which Isaiah began his prophecies- that the purpose of judgment is to bring down human pride and to exalt the humble.

Isaiah 26:6 The foot shall tread it down; even the feet of the poor, and the footsteps of the needy- See on :5. As Zion had been trodden down by Babylon and others (s.w. Is. 16:4; Dan. 8:10), so the righteous remnant would tread down Babylon and the nations (s.w. Mic. 5:8). It was the poor and needy who were trodden down by the Jewish leadership; and they finally were to be exalted.

Isaiah 26:7 The way of the just is uprightness; You who are upright make the path of the righteous level- LXX "The way of the godly is made straight: the way of the godly is also prepared". This is the language of Is. 40. The way was open for the exiles to return as righteous, justified by faith, to a restored Zion; and if they made that journey, Zion's gates were open to them (see on :2). That way was potentially prepared at the restoration, but the exiles chose to remain in Babylon and Assyria, and those who did return did so without accepting the call to repentance which is part of the making straight of the path to Zion. But it was all potentially prepared. It is for us now to walk in that path likewise to Zion. In the future it seems there may be literal highways prepared leading to Zion for the repentant remnants of the nations (see on Is. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 62:10; Jer. 31:21).

Isaiah 26:8 Yes, in the way of Your judgement, Yahweh, have we waited for You. Your name and Your renown are the desire of our soul- The faithful live now according to the principles which will be openly articulated at judgment day; hence LXX "For the way of the Lord is judgment". In the final glory of salvation revealed upon Zion, they exult that they "have waited for Him" (see on Is. 25:9), and this was exactly the position of Isaiah's family and school of prophets (s.w. Is. 8:17). That righteous remnant would finally have their faith and expectation rewarded.

Isaiah 26:9 With my soul have I desired You in the night. Yes, with my spirit within me will I seek You earnestly; for when Your judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness- Isaiah personally is speaking here. As noted on :8, Isaiah and his family were the parade examples of waiting for the Lord. Continually we see the importance of spiritual mindedness, where the imagination of our innermost heart is set; see on :3.

The Kingdom, 99.99% of our future, will be purely spiritual, and therefore the Hope of the Kingdom must be the center of our present existence. Isaiah realized this when he said that the total devotion of the righteous *now* is because ultimately, devotion to God's ways will be what eternity is all about. We must come to appreciate this; that in real terms, the Lord *can't* be only part of our lives. And as we do, He will become, quite artlessly and naturally, the master passion of our souls.

God's judgments lead to the nations learning righteousness, or 'being taught righteousness'. The practical outcome of that judgment will be that therefore they will beat their swords into plough shares; and devote themselves to learning of God (Is. 2:2-4) rather than of war. His judgments are always ultimately creative in spiritual terms. But the LXX sees this as an appeal to the nations: "for thy commandments are a light on the earth: learn righteousness, ye that dwell upon the earth".

Isaiah 26:10 Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal wrongfully, and will not perceive Yahweh's majesty- LXX offers: "For the ungodly one is put down: no one who will not learn righteousness on the earth, shall be able to do the truth: let the ungodly be taken away, that he see not the glory of the Lord".

To know God is to love Him, and to want to be like Him; there is something compulsive and magnetic about who He is. The knowledge of God elicits quite naturally a merciful spirit (Hos. 6:6). To "learn righteousness" is the result of beholding [after the pattern of Moses] the majesty of the Name (Is. 26:10). And so Is. 46:5-9 appeals for Israel to repent simply because God really is God; they were to "remember this" that they already knew, and "bring it again to mind" that God is really the great eternal, and His Name is as it is. And they that know His Name will put their trust in Him, day by day, as we cough and hack our way through these few years towards His eternal Kingdom.

To commit violence to others' persons is to live a lie (Hos. 12:1). Truth is not therefore merely a set of doctrines; it refers to an obedient life. The LXX uses the phrase 'to do truth', which John uses, in passages like 2 Chron. 31:20 (about Hezekiah's obedience to commandments), or in Gen. 47:29; Is. 26:10 to describe simply doing and living what is right. The fact truth must be *done* indicates it is *not* merely correct academic interpretation of doctrine.

"Yahweh's majesty" uses the same word as in Is. 12:5, where the repentant people of Israel, Judah and their attackers would behold these things and see Yahweh in their midst (Is. 12:6). The prophetic vision was of Yahweh Himself dwelling in Zion, so that the city would be called "the Lord is there" (Ez. 48:35). But the exiles failed to rebuild Zion and operate the services there as commanded in Ez. 40-48, and so this literal dwelling of God amongst His redeemed people is alluded to in Rev. 21,22 as being only fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus to earth. This would all be the result of grace being shown; but the wicked turn down even such an amazing offer. This is the power of entrenched sinful thinking.

Isaiah 26:11 Yahweh, Your hand is lifted up, yet they don't see; but they will see Your zeal for the people, and be disappointed; yes, fire will consume Your adversaries- The idea is that they don't see / know it when they could, so they will see / know it too late, in the day of condemnation. Yahweh's lifted up hand could refer to His offer of a new covenant, by grace (:10; Dt. 32:40) which was also offered to the Gentiles at the restoration (Is. 49:22), and His offer of the Kingdom (Ez. 20:6,28; Neh. 9:15 s.w.). This uplifted hand of Yahweh in offering covenant relationship was seen but

not seen; only too late will it be perceived. The Lord Jesus died with uplifted hands, beckoning all men to accept the new covenant offered; but it is seen but not seen.

Isaiah 26:12 Yahweh, You will ordain peace for us, for You have also worked all our works for us- This is a significant statement of humility. For trust in human works is the epitome of pride. Idols are so often called the work of men's' hands, and this is the abiding idolatry of our age. Only a complete trust in Yahweh's peace which comes by grace will empower us to never trust our own works. And we will realize that any works we do are His working through us. But "the works" in view here are of salvation and the gift of eternal peace.

Isaiah 26:13 Yahweh our God, other lords besides You have had dominion over us, but by You only will we make mention of Your name- This could be read as a statement and admission of their historical submission to other gods. Or it could mean that despite the remnant's domination by others, the remnant had refused to accept their gods but had retained Yahweh as "our God" and unlike the majority of God's people, they had only made mention of Yahweh's Name.

Isaiah 26:14 Their dead shall not live, their deceased shall not rise. Therefore have You visited and destroyed them, and caused all memory of them to perish- "Deceased" is the word used in Is. 14:9 of the dead people of the nations within the *eretz*. The context is their praising the God who has resurrected the faithful dead (Is. 25:7,8). At that glorious day it will be so apparent that Yahweh alone is the God of life and resurrection. "Memory" is the word just used in :8 of how God's Name has been the memory or "renown" of the faithful. And likewise they abide in His memory. The perishing of their memory may refer to the memory of God, as well as their being left without any human memorial on the earth.

Isaiah 26:15 You have increased the nation, O Yahweh, You have increased the nation! You are glorified! You have enlarged all the borders of the land- As explained on Is. 24:1, this section of Isaiah envisages supernatural Divine judgments upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham; and then the repentant remnants of the Gentile nations there would join with those of God's people in a reestablished Kingdom of God based in Zion. God's nation would no longer live just in the coastal strip of that *eretz;* rather the nation would be enlarged to its original borders, so that Yahweh's multiethnic people were to live in the entire *eretz.*

Earlier, God had redefined the boundaries of the land in accordance to what Israel had the strength to subdue; He made account for their weakness. Thus Ephraim were given some cities within the inheritance of Manasseh (Josh. 16:9), presumably because Manasseh wouldn't drive out the tribes living there. And the Lord seems to have alluded to this by saying that *we* will be given cities, the number of which depends upon our zeal to possess them. God had clearly promised: "Your God, he shall expel them from before you… and ye *shall* possess their land, as the Lord your God hath promised unto you" (Josh. 23:5). But this promise was conditional upon them making the effort, even though that condition is not specifically mentioned. Ultimately, God will "enlarge all the borders of the land" because Israel will finally rise up to the spiritual ambition He desires of them.

Isaiah 26:16 Yahweh, in trouble they have come to You; they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was on them- The terrible judgments upon the *eretz* of Is. 24

are this "trouble" which brought a remnant of the Gentiles, as well as of God's people, to pray to Him and come to Him; "trouble" is the same word used in Is. 25:4 of how the remnants find refuge from "trouble" in Zion alone. The time of Jacob's trouble which will lead them back to Him is going to be experienced by all the nations around them. This could have come true at the time of the Assyrians, but only a minority poured out their prayers; and these resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem being averted, but the Kingdom was still not then reestablished because the remnant was so tiny. Nehemiah grasped the spirit of all this when he pours out a prayer to God in response to all the "trouble" of the Babylonian invasion (Neh. 9:27,32). But again, the majority of Judah didn't have that spirit. And so these things are reapplied to the holocaust to come upon the *eretz* in the last days.

The LXX applies this to Isaiah personally; see on :8,9 : "Lord, in affliction I remembered thee; thy chastening was to us with small affliction". The last phrase was perhaps perceived by Ezra when he acknowledged that the sufferings in Babylon had been less than their iniquities deserved.

Isaiah 26:17 Like as a woman with child who draws near the time of her delivery and is in pain and cries out in her pangs; so we have been before You, Yahweh- Again we see the creative power and intention in all the judgments. They were to bring forth new life. This was "before You", in the sense that all the travail was under His control and direction, and the fruit brought forth was "to Him". The "we" may refer to Isaiah and his family; see on :18.

Isaiah 26:18 We have been with child, we have been in pain, we gave birth, it seems, only to wind. We have not worked any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen- In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was no bringing forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. Isaiah and his personal family may also be in view here (see on :8,9,16). They perhaps felt that the child of sign born had not in fact been the signal that Judah's sufferings were over, and didn't come to be the expected Messianic seed (see on Is. 8:1,18; 9:6). Isaiah has used the same words of his own personal travail in pain in his ministry (Is. 21:3). Judah generally were to conceive in vain due to their impenitence (Is. 33:11; 59:4); and so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24).

The LXX however changes the sense entirely, as if the righteous remnant have brought forth in pain but not in vain, in that their tribulation has achieved spiritual rebirth: " We have conceived, O Lord, because of thy fear, and have been in pain, and have brought forth the breath of thy salvation, which we have wrought upon the earth: we shall not fall, but all that dwell upon the land shall fall".

Isaiah 26:19 Your dead shall live; my dead body also shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth will cast forth her dead- "My dead body" suggests Isaiah and his personal family may also be in view here (see on :8,9,16,19). He sees himself as representative of the remnant which will eventually be resurrected; his resurrection is paralleled with theirs. "Cast forth" is the language of child birth; all the pain of travail at the hands of the invaders (:17,18) would come to term in resurrection from the dead of those who perished in the *eretz* under their domination. There are similar teachings in Revelation. The idea is that dew would descend upon their graves and cause new life to come forth from the grave; and this is the picture of the Messianic Kingdom in 2 Sam. 23:4; Ps. 110:3. But it would come about because of their faith and endurance. However LXX has "but the land of the ungodly shall perish".

Isaiah 26:20 Come, My people, enter into your rooms, and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation is past- The majority of the population of Judah and Jerusalem were intended to perish (Is. 10:20). But God urges the faithful remnant in Zion (Is. 10:24) to be assured of their own safety; the destruction of the majority was to happen suddenly, in only "a very little while". This is the situation of Is. 26:20, when the faithful minority would somehow be miraculously preserved in Zion, whilst the majority of the Jewish population were destroyed. This didn't happen as planned, and the Assyrians never took Jerusalem. Likewise the "little moment" is reinterpreted in Is. 54:7,8 as referring to the time of Judah's exile in Babylon. The "rooms" could have been opened had Judah repented and Messiah Himself would have emerged from them (s.w. Joel 2:16). But that scenario likewise didn't work out, in that the people didn't repent and many never returned, they remained in their "rooms".

But the essence of it will be fulfilled in the last days. And this passage therefore has been given a spiritual application by the Lord in Mt. 6:6. He taught the intensity of the life He required by taking Old Testament passages which refer to the crisis of the last days, and applying them to the daily life of His people. And so He took Is. 26:20, which speaks of how in the final tribulation, God's people will shut the doors around them and pray. The Lord applies this to the daily, regular prayer of His people- we are to pray in secret, in our room, with doors closed (Mt. 6:6)- clearly an allusion to the Isaiah passage.

Isaiah 26:21 For behold, Yahweh comes forth out of His place- This is the coming forth of the bride in response to Judah's repentance (Joel 2:16). This didn't happen, and so it comes to be reapplied to the emergence of the Lord Jesus in the last days. "His place" may refer to Zion rather than Heaven, in that He returns to Zion. However the similar language in Mic. 1:3 seems to have Heaven in view. The Lord's visible return from Heaven to earth would fulfill this.

To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. The earth also will disclose her blood, and will no longer cover her slain- The blood of the faithful who would now be resurrected (:19) was not only shed by the Gentiles; but also by Manasseh and other Jewish leaders (Is. 1:27). The earth would disclose that blood in the sense that vengeance will now be taken for it (as in Gen. 4:10). This didn't happen at the time, but is the time when the blood under the altar calls for judgment in the last days at the Lord's return (Rev. 6:9,10). If they are to be punished at this final judgment, then they will be resurrected to this judgment. The final destruction of all

those left alive in the *eretz* along with this large class of people will take place whilst the faithful resurrected ones are somehow screened from it (:20); for they like God will have no pleasure in seeing the death of the wicked.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 27

Isaiah 27:1 In that day, Yahweh with His hard and great and strong sword- The sword of Yahweh will come down in judgment upon the peoples of the *eretz* and perhaps on the resurrected former abusers of His people (see on Is. 26:21). But His sword comes down as part of His 'pleading with all flesh' (Is. 66:16). This can be read as an allusion to judgment; but there is still the idea of pleading. The threat of the sword descending is His appeal, His pleading for repentance.

Will punish leviathan, the fleeing serpent, and leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon that is in the sea- Is. 24-27 has rightly been described as the little apocalypse. The total destruction of all on the *eretz* in Is. 24 leads to the repentance of remnants of the various Gentile nations as well as God's people. Is. 26 speaks clearly of the resurrection of the dead, and these remnants unite in a multiethnic Kingdom of God in Israel. All the persecutors of God's people are judged, presumably requiring their resurrection to judgment. Now Isaiah speaks of them as three beasts, one of which is a beast of the sea. There likewise appear to be three types of beasts in Revelation (Rev. 20:10). These ideas are developed in more detail in Daniel and Revelation. The identity of the beasts therefore morphs over time, as potential possibilities for human response to God's claims on men rise and fall. The dragon in the sea was originally Egypt (Ps. 74:13; Ez. 29:3; 32:2; Is. 51:9). What God did to Egypt in the Red Sea is to be the prototype of what He will do to all future persecutors of His people; hence Isaiah's fondness for allusions to the Song of Moses, putting his words of triumph in the mouths of God's finally triumphant people; see on Is. 25:1.

The initial application was to the Assyrians slain outside the walls of Jerusalem, and the three beasts here would then be different snapshots as it were of that power. In a restoration context, Isaiah comforted Judah that God would destroy “Leviathan the gliding serpent; He will slay the monster of the sea” (Is. 27:1). The real ‘monster’ faced by Judah in exile wasn’t a supernatural being; it was a concrete kingdom of men on earth, namely Babylon. And Job 26:13 uses the phrase for "fleeing serpent" and states that Yahweh has created this. He is in complete control. The language is intended to deconstruct pagan myths to the effect that Judah's misfortunes had been at the hands of the deities of their invaders. Baal was temporarily conquered by Mot, and the Ugaritic poem about their conflict which was found in the Ras Shamra texts speaks of how Baal was made a “slave forever”. This very language is picked up in Job 41:4, where God mocks that in no way would He become a “slave forever”. The allusion shows that the one true God is in no way Baal. He is greater than Baal. Unlike Baal, He is in no conflict with Mot nor anyone. The poem challenges Baal to “Pierce through Lotan the serpent, destroy the serpent the seven headed tyrant”. Yet this is exactly the language picked up in Is. 27:1. Yahweh’s utter supremacy over any other god is so great that it makes all ideas of cosmic conflict simply laughable.

Another interpretation would be that the dragon is Egypt, "the wriggling snake the Seleucid kingdom and the fleeing snake the kingdom of the Parthians".

Isaiah 27:2 In that day, sing to her, A pleasant vineyard!- The "day" in view is that of :13, the last day. Is. 5 has presented Judah as a vineyard that didn't work out and

failed in its potential. But "in that day" she will be a fruitful vineyard, now that the "briers and thorns" have been removed and burnt (:4). I would therefore take :3 to be retrospective upon God's continual care for that vineyard to bring it to that point of fruitfulness. To become fruitful, Judah had taken hold of God's covenant of peace (:5), and then :6 concludes the song by repeating the thought of this opening verse. She will be "a pleasant vineyard" because she has blossomed and filled the face of the earth / land with fruit. This means that the song of Is. 27:2-6 follows a chiastic structure typical of Hebrew poetry.

The LXX of :2-6 is quite different, presenting this as a repetition of the lament over the failed vineyard which was to be besieged and taken, although starting and closing with the sure hope that eventually the vineyard will function perfectly after the judgments poured out: "In that day there shall be a fair vineyard, and a desire to commence a song concerning it. I am a strong city, a city in a siege: in vain shall I water it; for it shall be taken by night, and by day the wall shall fall. There is no woman that has not taken hold of it; who will set me to watch stubble in the field? because of this enemy I have set her aside; therefore on this account the Lord has done all that he appointed. I am burnt up; they that dwell in her shall cry, Let us make peace with him, let us make peace, they that are coming are the children of Jacob. Israel shall bud and blossom, and the world shall be filled with his fruit".

Isaiah 27:3 I, Yahweh, am its keeper- In the sense that He "kept" (s.w.) covenant and mercy (Ex. 34:7), keeping His covenant people in perfect peace (s.w. Is. 26:3). The same word however carries the idea of a watchman guarding, as is translated "besieged" (Is. 1:8). Yahweh besieged them with protection even as they were being besieged- a great encouragement in Isaiah's time, when Jerusalem was besieged by the Syria-Ephraim confederacy and then by Assyria.

I will water it every moment- The contrast with the vineyard song of Is. 5 is that there, God withheld water from it (Is. 5:6). That time of judgment and exile was now over. Or perhaps this is recalling how prior to that judgment, God had watered them so carefully. He is involved "every moment" in the life of His people, even if for some moments He hides His face (s.w. Is. 54:8); Job, presented as the suffering exiles, came to realize this (Job 7:18 s.w.). And yet the prophecy here is of the eternal state of the vineyard "in that day" (:2), when Yahweh will eternally "water" His people who once were in the dry desert of exile (Is. 43:20 s.w.).

Lest anyone damage it, I will keep it night and day- "Damage" is the term usually used for 'punish' (s.w. :1 "punish"). God's people would not be further punished for their sins- God's wrath was over (:4).

Isaiah 27:4 Wrath is not in Me- I take this as meaning that God has no pleasure in the death and judgment of the wicked, but all the same He has to destroy the wicked out of the earth / land in order to save the righteous remnant and transform them and the earth into His Kingdom. At this stage He has trampled the nations in His "wrath" (Is. 63:6), but that wrath is not eternal. All ideas of "hell" as a place of God's eternally burning wrath are totally out of step with the consistent revelation of God's character- that His anger is but for a moment and does not last eternally.

Hosea dreamt or fantasized about the day when, he hoped, Gomer [cp. Israel] would return to him. And we find God through the prophets doing this often, as an expression of His love for them. He dreamt of how Israel as His vineyard would again be fruitful: “In that day: A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!... I [will] guard it day and night; I have no wrath” (Is. 27:2,3). He had wrath, and yet at the thought of Israel’s

blessed future with Him, He could say “I have no wrath”. The God who spoke of slaying Israel with thirst in Hosea could then comment: “I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man… and I will *not* come to destroy” (Hos. 11:9).

But if I should find briers and thorns, I would do battle! I would march on them and I would burn them together- Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. "Briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (Is. 9:18; 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them (Is. 5:6; 7:23-25); and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour. Sin was its own judgment. Although God's wrath has passed from Him concerning His people at this stage, this doesn't mean He has lost all moral compass. If there were to be sin in the land as there had been previously, then He would judge it.

Isaiah 27:5 Or else let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he will make peace with Me- As noted throughout Is. 13 onwards, the judgments upon the Gentiles in the land are only because they have refused to repent. God's desire was that the Gentile and Jewish "briers and thorns" upon whom He would march (:4) would "take hold" of Him and make peace with Him, entering into covenant with Him as He offered. Is. 56:6 likewise speaks of this latter day 'taking hold' (s.w.) of Yahweh by the remnant of the judged Gentiles. In the last days, this making peace with God is only through accepting His Son as Messiah (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14), although potentially it had been possible through some Messianic figure who could have appeared at the time of the Assyrian invasion (Mic. 5:5).

Isaiah 27:6 In days to come, Jacob will take root- Or as AV "He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root". The returned, repent exiles would be caused by God to take root; whereas previously they had been sown but hadn't flourished to harvest (Is. 17:11). But now God as it were will force through His plan with any who come to Him.

Israel will blossom and bud; they will fill the face of the world with fruit- Isaiah foretold that when Israel know their forgiveness and salvation, they will therefore quite naturally “declare his doings among the people” (Is. 12:1-5). This will be the motivation for Israel’s witness to the world. They will fill the face of the world with spiritual fruit – and this will be the fruit of the taking away of their sin, and their experience of repentance (Is. 27:6,9 RV). This is the 'budding' of the waste places of the land foreseen in the Kingdom prophecies of Is. 35:1,2; 66:14.

Sometimes God speaks as if He has rejected Israel, and other times as if they will eternally be His people. Such is the extent of His passionate feelings for them. And the Son of God entered into this- He said that no man would eat fruit of the tree of Israel for ever (Mk. 11:14), when in fact Israel one day will fill the face of the earth with fruit. We too, in the spirit of the prophets, are to enter into these feelings of God. God’s threats to punish His people and His desire to forgive them don’t somehow cancel each other out as in an equation. They exist within the mind of God in a terrible tension. He cries out through Hosea of how His many ‘repentings’ are “kindled together” as He struggles within Himself to give up His people as He has threatened (Hos. 11:8). And this struggle was reflected within the emotions and through the speeches / writings / poetry of Hosea. Hosea’s speeches have an air of

turbulence and struggle about them, which reflected the spirit / mind of the God who inspired him.

Isaiah 27:7 Has He struck them as He struck those who struck them? Or are they killed like those who killed them were killed?- The "them" I suggest refers to God's people. He did not strike Israel as hard as He struck those who abused them. The death of God's people was not such a hard death as that of the Gentiles who had attacked them. So it was not 'measure for measure'; Judah were punished less than their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13), although God counted it as if they had been punished double for their sins (Is. 40:2). The balance of things was weighted in Israel's favour because of God's grace.

Isaiah 27:8 In measure, when You send them away, You contend with them. He has removed them with His rough blast in the day of the east wind- God's people had been judged, Yahweh had contended with them in judgment; that was to be the point in God's summary conclusions at the last day. He had "sent them away... removed them" into exile, He corrected them "in measure" but didn't leave them "altogether unpunished" (Jer. 30:11; 46:28).

Isaiah 27:9 Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be forgiven, and this is all the fruit of taking away his sin: that he makes all the stones of the altar as chalk stones that are beaten in pieces, so that the Asherim and the incense altars shall rise no more- The very terms iniquity taken away and sin forgiven are found in Is. 6:7; Isaiah is set up as representative of Judah. His cleansing could have been theirs. These things would happen if Judah were repentant and destroyed their idols. But they didn't, and so the vision of glory and of the glorified suffering servant couldn't save them.

Israel are often called 'Jacob' in passages concerning idolatry. The historical Jacob and idolatry go together. Jacob's destruction of his idol altars, pounding them back to the surrounding chalk stone from which they were constructed, permanently destroying the Asherim so that they would never be revived... this was the fruit of Jacob's sin being taken away. Note the sequence. Forgiveness of sin doesn't come after repentance and the bearing of fruit. It comes first, by grace, and then the fruit of destroying idols in response comes as a result of that gracious forgiveness. Repentance and not just forgiveness is therefore "given" by grace (Acts 5:31; 11:18). This is the grace of the new covenant God will offer to Israel and the world in the last days, and it is offered to us today.

Isaiah 27:10 For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness. The calf will feed there and there he will lie down and consume its branches- This continues the theme stressed in :8. God had not allowed His people to escape judgment. Justice was in that sense done. It seems the desolation of Jerusalem is in view here, with so few people that there weren't even shepherds for the animals, and the flocks would be left to wander freely over the desolated city. LXX: "The flock that dwelt there shall be left, as a deserted flock; and the ground shall be for a long time for pasture, and there shall flocks lie down to rest". But this didn't happen at the time of the Assyrian invasion; for Jerusalem didn't fall. And at the time of the Babylonian invasion there was not this level of absolute desolation. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah

were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. We could say that this prophecy of total destruction looks forward to a latter day fulfilment; or in terms of Jer. 18:8-10 it could be that there was enough repentance and intercession for God to as it were change the extent of His intended judgments.

Isaiah 27:11 When its boughs are withered, they will be broken off. The women will come and set them on fire, for they are a people of no understanding- As noted on :10, the people of Judah were indeed judged. The breaking off of the branches of the tree is clearly alluded to in Rom. 11:17-20, applying it to the Divine rejection of an unbelieving Israel in favour of a new Israel, comprised of the minority of Israel who accepted Jesus as Christ, and the Gentiles who also did so. The rejected majority had "no understanding", not in the sense of simply intellectual failure, but in the Hebraic sense of relationship. All other wisdom and understanding is as nothing compared to the ultimate and surpassing "understanding", which is of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their burning by "women" would be an example of their condemnation being expressed in terms which they could relate to, even if they were not literally true. Thus I noted on Is. 13:21 that the mythical creatures called satyrs were spoken of as if they existed, and would judge Babylon; Babylon's judgment was described there in terms she would have understood, even if those terms reflected ideas which were not literally true. For satyrs don't exist in the form the Babylonians believed. And as explained on Is. 14:9 too, their concept of the underworld is used in describing their condemnation.

Therefore He who made them will not have compassion on them, and He who formed them will show them no grace- But the very fact that God did form and make Israel is the reason God gives for appealing to them to receive His ever-available mercy (Is. 43:1; 44:2; 49:15). And the paradox of this grace when there was to be no grace highlights the grace of it all.

Isaiah 27:12 It will happen in that day, that Yahweh will thresh from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, you children of Israel- Euphrates to the brook of Egypt is exactly the definition of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. I explain on Is. 35:2 how the deserts and dry areas of that *eretz* were in the areas inhabited by Israel's Gentile enemies. A remnant of these peoples was to repent, and then they and their territory would be incorporated into the Kingdom of God in Israel, covering the full extent of the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. Those territories will be materially transformed, those desert areas will be like Israel "proper", as fruitful as Carmel and Sharon. The complete fulfilment of the Divine promises about the *eretz* would only be achieved by 'threshing' in judgment. And the repentant remnant would be gathered "one by one", each one would be so significant to God. And likewise true Christianity places a remarkable value on the

worth of the individual person. This gathering every single individual and valuing them is that spoken of in Is. 13:12: "I will make people more valuable than fine gold, even a person than the pure gold of Ophir". The repentant remnant is in view; the intention of the judgments, both on God's people and the Babylonians, was that a repentant remnant would be produced; and each one of those people would therefore be of extraordinary value to God, representing the ultimate success of His lengthy plan.

Isaiah 27:13 It will happen in that day that a great trumpet will be blown; and those who were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and those who were outcasts in the land of Egypt, shall come; and they will worship Yahweh in the holy mount at Jerusalem- Some Jews had taken refuge in Egypt at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. In the Babylonian context, they did this in conscious disobedience to Jeremiah's command not to go there; they were as LXX "the lost ones". So the idea was that they could have repented and returned to Zion and the reestablished Kingdom there. This didn't happen, there was no such repentance; and so it will come true in the repentance of the Jewish diaspora in the last days. The trumpet blast in the last days would be that of Mt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16. The allusion is to the trumpet blast announcing the day of atonement (Lev. 25:9). Those who respond to it are therefore those who are repentant and seek forgiveness. Again we see that the repentance of Israel is connected with the establishment of the Kingdom and resurrection.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 28

Isaiah 28:1 Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim- Israel had lost their hold on true doctrine, many scarcely knew the Law (Is. 57:4,5; 59:3). They got drunk at the temple feasts (Is. 36:10-12; 58:3,4), like Corinth they had an "eat, drink, for tomorrow we die" mentality (Is. 22:12,13); they committed all manner of sexual perversions, along with almost every other form of doctrinal and moral apostasy (Is. 5:11-13,24; 8:19; 9:15; 22:12,13; 24:5; 27:11; 28:7; 30:10; 31:6; 44:8-20; consider the similarities with Corinth). This list is worth reading through. And consider the terrible implications of their perversion in Is. 66:17. But the earlier chapters of Isaiah sternly rebuke Israel for their *pride*- there is not a whisper of all these other things until later (Is. 2:11-22; 3:16-20; 5:15; 9:9). And even throughout the later rebukes, there is the repeated criticism of their pride (Is. 13:11; 16:6; 23:9; 24:4; 25:11; 26:5; 28:1,3,14; 29:4; 30:25; 50:33; 57:15). This is why Isaiah's prophecies of Christ stress His humility (Acts 8:33), and the "lofty", "high", "exaltation" of God. These words, common in Isaiah, are those translated “pride" in Isaiah's condemnations of Israel's arrogance; as if to say that *God* was the only one who could be 'proud'. "The crown of pride" may refer to Samaria, the capital which Ephraim was so proud of.

And to the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fertile valley of those who are overcome with wine!- Is. 40:6-8 describe all of humanity with the very same language of fading flowers. In spiritual terms, alcoholics are the epitome of us all in our unredeemed state. Tragically, fertile valleys and much wine were part of the blessings of the covenant if Israel were obedient. Despite their disobedience, God by grace gave them the blessings for obedience, as He did as it were to the prodigal son. And that grace was abused.

Isaiah 28:2 Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one; like a storm of hail, a destroying storm- The reference is to the Assyrian (Is. 8:7,8), personified and epitomized in a singular individual (Shalmaneser, in Ephraim's context), the equivalent of the "antichrist" individual of the last days. There was however a refuge available from that storm in Zion (s.w. Is. 4:6; 25:4). The repentant remnant amongst the ten tribes were to flee to Zion, and they did this; although it seems they fled more for material safety than from a motive of repentance.

And like a storm of mighty waters overflowing, He will cast them down to the earth with His hand- The "waters" refer to the Assyrians, coming in judgment upon the ten tribes. Yet this is part of Isaiah's burden to Judah and Jerusalem. Like us, they were intended to learn from the condemnation of others and yet they did not. The humbling of men as it were from heaven to earth is a major theme of the prophets, Isaiah especially.

Isaiah 28:3 The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trodden under foot- Their alcohol inspired arrogance would be trodden down. LXX has "the hirelings of Ephraim", alluding to their prostituting themselves to the Syrians and Egyptians, accepting their gods in return for protection against Assyria.

Isaiah 28:4 The fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fertile valley, shall be like the first-ripe fig before the summer, which someone picks and eats as soon as he sees it- LXX "And the fading flower of the glorious hope on the top of the high mountain shall be as the early fig; he that sees it, before he takes it into his hand, will desire to swallow it down". The idea may be that the promise of glory and beauty was fading, the potential wasn't reached; but despite that the repentant remnant of Israel of :5 would be as the first-ripe fig, the sign of the Summer of the Kingdom of God arriving. The Lord applies this language to the repentance of a latter day Israelite remnant, along with and at the same time as that of the various "trees" of the Gentiles (Lk. 21:29-31).

Isaiah 28:5 In that day- This term is used about widely different events; the judgment of the ten tribes in :3, the latter day repentance of Israel in :4. This is because the prophetic potential was that they could all have happened at the same time at Isaiah's time. But Israel didn't repent, the Kingdom of God wasn't reestablished in Judah. And so the various elements of these prophecies are left fulfilled at different times. Another approach is to argue that because God is beyond time, His prophecies appear to jump around in time. They only appear disjointed to us who read them with a background insistence that everything must be chronological. Thus the tenses change freely throughout Isaiah 53. And throughout Isaiah, prophecies of the Kingdom are often introduced by the rubric "in that day"; and yet the preceding context is often quite different (e.g. Is. 3:7,18; 4:1; 5:30; 7:18,21; 10:20,22; 11:10; 12:1; 17:9; 19:6; 22:20,25; 25:9; 27:13; 28:5; 29:18). It makes an interesting exercise to go through Isaiah 9 and decide to which time each verse applies. Some of the verses are quoted in the NT and given specific fulfillments. They refer to Isaiah's day, the Assyrian invasion, the birth of Jesus, the beginning of His ministry at age 30, and to His future Kingdom. And yet the verses aren't presented in this order; they move from one to the other at ease, with no linking rubric or explanation. Likewise Daniel's prophecies seem to have a big hiatus in their fulfillment (Dan. 2:34; 8:23; 9:24; 11:39); and Zechariah is another good example. Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least

the book of Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfillment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then v. 12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (Is. 21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples).

Yahweh of Armies will become a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remains of His people- It was envisaged that there would be a remnant amongst the ten tribes who would accept Yahweh's kingship over them and would thus become His people in His reestablished Kingdom. Glory and beauty recalls the High Priest's garments; the crown of glory would be the High Priestly mitre, LXX "the woven crown of glory". But this priest also had a diadem; the idea is of a king-priest, a Messianic figure who would arise to save the repentant remnant of the ten tribes.

Isaiah 28:6 And a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgement- The idea is as GNB "He will give a sense of justice to those who serve as judges". This was never fulfilled in any leader of Israel and so it will come to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus (Is. 11:3); although that prophecy too could have come true in a child of Isaiah or in Hezekiah. Thus the prophecy about Israel's potential was transferred to Judah; but they too failed to fulfill it, and so it was reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

And strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate- The idea is that they repulse an enemy, and drive him back to his own city's gate. This was the possibility for Ephraim (the ten tribes) if they had repented; they could have repelled the Assyrians. But they didn't repent nor have faith as required, and so the prophecy was reapplied or transferred to how Hezekiah of Judah did this when "He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza " (2 Kings 18:8)..

Isaiah 28:7 They also- This appears to be saying that Judah "also" was just as bad as Ephraim.

Reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink. They are swallowed up by wine, they stagger with strong drink. They err in vision, they stumble in judgement- The priests were of course not allowed to drink alcohol when on duty. We get the impression here of chronic alcoholism, even amongst those who did receive genuine prophetic messages from Yahweh; hence GNB "The prophets are too drunk to understand the visions that God sends, and the priests are too drunk to decide the cases that are brought to them". The reference may be of course to the messages sent through Isaiah, but the criticism is specifically applied to the prophets who received the visions and the priests whose duty it was to faithfully teach and distribute that word.

Isaiah 28:8 For all tables are completely full of filthy vomit and filthiness- These tables were presumably the altars within the Jerusalem temple, or at best the tables used by the priests for preparation of the sacrifices. The priests were so drunk in the temple that they were vomiting on them. This sad state of things was how things were in Isaiah's time, when Hezekiah had apparently made sweeping reforms. Clearly those

reforms failed to affect the vast majority. That such behaviour could be tolerated by the masses and others in leadership says a lot about them.

Isaiah 28:9 Whom will He teach knowledge? To whom will He explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts?- This can be read as the drunk priests and prophets of :7 drunkenly talking about Isaiah, scoffing as if "Whom *will* he (does *Isaiah* presume to) teach knowledge? And whom will he (Isaiah) make to understand *instruction?* Is it those (that is, does he take us to be) just weaned from the milk".

Isaiah 28:10 For it is precept on precept, precept on precept; line on line, line on line; here a little, there a little- See on :9. They complain Isaiah keeps repeating his message as if teaching very small children. The repetition of sounds in the Hebrew reflects their scorn of Isaiah, perhaps because he stammered (:11): *tzav latzav, tzav latzav, qav laqav, qav laquav,* as if they were imitation his stammering. We recall how God used Moses as His prophet and mouthpiece, when it seems he too had some speech impediment. This is typical of Yahweh's work with men; to choose the weakest and most humanly inappropriate for His mighty work.

Isaiah 28:11 But He will speak to this nation with stammering lips and in another language- As explained on :10, God chose Isaiah's stammering lips to witness to Israel and Judah, and in addition, He would even use Gentiles who didn't even speak Hebrew. 1 Cor. 14 is a list of commands concerning the use of the gift of tongues; 1 Cor. 14:21 quotes Is. 28:11 concerning how this gift would be used to witness against the Jews: “In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people...”. Is. 28:11 primarily refers to Israel’s invaders speaking to the Jews in languages (“tongues”) they would not have known. The parallel between “tongues” and “lips” indicates that “tongues” were foreign languages. If the Corinthians spoke to each other in foreign languages which they didn't understand, then they were actually living out condemnation; they were acting just as would happen to Israel in their condemnation. There are many other indications in 1 Cor. 14 that “tongues” refers to foreign languages. This chapter is Paul’s inspired criticism of the abuses of the gifts which were taking place in the early church, and as such it gives many insights into the nature of the gifts of tongues and prophecy.

Isaiah 28:12 to whom He said, This is the resting place. Give rest to the weary; and This is the refreshing; yet they would not hear- Is. 11:10 had spoken of how the Messianic figure possible at Isaiah's time could have restored the Kingdom, "And his resting place will be glorious". This could simply refer to a literal appearance of glory upon mount Zion, as hinted at in several prophecies. But this was precluded at the time by Judah refusing this "rest" (Is. 28:12 s.w.). Or His resting place could be the hearts of those who "trust" in Him (Is. 11:10), a resting place chosen by Him because the temple on Zion had not been rebuilt as required and therefore God chose to dwell in the hearts of individuals instead (Is. 66:1,2 s.w.). Hence GNB "He offered rest and comfort to all of you, but you refused to listen to him". The appeal of Is. 40 was that comfort was again available to the people at the time of the restoration. But again, the vast potential was wasted. Likewise Israel could’ve had honey out of the rock; but they got only water (Ps. 81:16). They could have had peace and serenity when under attack- “but you would not”(Is. 28:12; 30:15). There may be people in your neighbourhood, in your life, who would come to the life eternal if you engaged them

about the Gospel. There may be specific victories over personal failures which have been potentially enabled by God, in great detail.

Isaiah 28:13 Therefore the word of Yahweh will be to them precept after precept, precept after precept; line on line, line on line; here a little, there a little; that they may go, fall backward, be broken, be snared, and be taken- Their judgment was to be appropriate to their mocking. They would not be able to "hear the word of Yahweh" (:14) because they saw it as just disconnected sound bites, line upon line, concept after concept, but not tied together in their minds as the living word of God. We must ask if this is our perception of God's word; just disconnected bits of truth and abstract concepts, without hearing the word of Yahweh as a living dialogue with us personally. The more textual analytic tools we have, and the more we think we are on the way to totally 'true' interpretation of verse after verse, the greater our tendency to fall into this "line on line" attitude.

Isaiah 28:14 Therefore hear the word of Yahweh, you scoffers, that rule this people in Jerusalem- See on :13. Instead of just hearing the isolated words and concepts of God's revelation, they were to hear His word as a living word and conversation with themselves personally. Even those awful scoffers who mocked Isaiah's inspired preaching (:10) were still Isaiah's concern, as they were Yahweh's. We note that the Jerusalem rulership was the group addressed; evidence enough that Hezekiah's apparent reforms were not far reaching.

Isaiah 28:15 Because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol are we in agreement; when the overflowing scourge passes through, it won't come to us- As explained on :18, the covenant in view may be the agreements with Egypt for help against Assyria and then later Babylon. These nations were angry that Judah had made covenants with Egypt when they had a covenant with them. Jeremiah and Ezekiel describe this as adultery, resulting in the wrath of the lovers. And so the covenant was really sure to lead to death. The connection with Egypt is deepened when we realize that the Hebrew for "death" is *mut*, and this was the name of an Egyptian idol. However, it could be that the covenant referred to was with Assyria, who is likened to *sheol* in Is. 5:14; Hos. 13:14; and because they broke that covenant, the overflowing scourge of Assyria (Is. 8:8) invaded them and destroyed them. It was Assyria who was going to kill them, and so their making a covenant with Assyria was effectively making a covenant with death. The reasoning of the leaders of Judah (:14) was that because they had made a treaty with Assyria, when the Assyrian invasion came, it would take away Israel (:2), but not Judah, because they had made a covenant with Assyria. This gives deeper insight into Hezekiah's bravery in breaking the covenant with Assyria; the others in the leadership were trusting deeply in that which he was breaking. We too at times have to stand with our backs to the world in order to do what is right, no matter how many friends we lose.

For we have made lies our refuge, and we have hidden ourselves under falsehood'- They likely never said this, but God perceives their attitudes and what they were effectively 'saying'. These attitudes of "lies" were to be swept away by the hailstorm and waters of the Assyrian and later Babylonian invasions. But actually this didn't happen in Isaiah's time, because the waters of Assyria were not allowed to drown Zion. The Assyrians did indeed "overflow and pass over" (Is. 8:8), but not all their refuges of lies (:17) were swept away. The repentance of a minority affected the outcomes of judgment even for these sinners in Zion. The ways of Yahweh are indeed

complex because He so respects the freewill of every man. Their confident claim that the overflowing rivers of the Assyrians wouldn't come near them is stated to be false in :17 LXX: "for the storm shall by no means pass by you".

Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone- This could have had various primary fulfillments. Zerubbabel and the restored exiles did "lay... a foundation stone" in Zion (Zech. 4:9), but some wept when it was laid- because clearly the rebuilt temple was not that commanded in Ez. 40-48 (Ezra 3:10-12). This was to happen when Babylon fell (Is. 14:32 s.w.) and Cyrus ordered the laying (s.w.) of the foundation of Zion (Is. 44:28). Zerubbabel failed to be the Messiah figure. And so these things were transferred to the Lord Jesus and reapplied.

The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place" . That rock represents Christ and Him crucified, according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted Biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle.

A tried stone- Literally a stone of trial. Reactions to this stone would effectively be the judgment of those who encountered him. This passage is quoted about the Lord Jesus in 1 Pet. 2:4-6, and Peter goes on to comment in 1 Pet. 2:8 that He is "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence". He was and is the stone which tests; according to our attitude to Him, we reveal ourselves. And the Jews stumbled at Him. When Peter comments that this stone had been "rejected" by the Jews, he may have in mind not only their rejection of the Lord Jesus, but also of the previous potential fulfillments of the "foundation stone" prophecy in the time of Zerubbabel and others.

A precious cornerstone of a sure foundation. He who believes shall not be ashamed- There is a clear element of unreality here- the huge corner stone of the new temple was to be a "precious stone", something resembling a massive diamond. And this, Peter says, is a matter of our perceiving the Lord Jesus is indeed a precious stone. But this precious stone was rejected by the Jewish builders- the world's largest diamond, as it were, as big as a huge granite cornerstone, was rejected and went unperceived.

Isaiah 28:17 I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plumb line- This could imply that the new temple would be built on the basis of justice and righteousness. This is stated several times in the commands concerning the building of the new temple in Ez. 40-48. But the returned exiles didn't do this.

The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters will overflow the hiding place- see on :15. Their confident claim in :15 that the overflowing rivers of the Assyrians wouldn't come near them is stated to be false in :17 LXX: "for the storm shall by no means pass by you". And yet by grace, as explained on :15, the storm didn't sweep all of the away.

These things were ultimately reapplied to the things of the Lord Jesus and the last days. The Lord's parable of the builders on sand and rock was no doubt partly based

on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side.

Isaiah 28:18 Your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol shall not stand- See on :15. This very phrase is used of how the fleshly plans of Israel and Syria did "not stand" (Is. 8:18). Now Judah are warned not to make plans according to the flesh, because they too would not stand nor happen. They should have learnt from how the covenant of Israel and Syria had not stood. Circumstances repeat in our experiences, so that we might learn, and see the same Divine hand at work. And so the emphasis is upon "*your* covenant". As Israel had made a covenant with Syria, so Judah had made a covenant with Egypt, for help against Assyria and then later for help against Babylon. This came to nothing, as explained in Is. 33:7-9: "The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly... He has broken the covenant, He has despised the cities He regards no man". But the sense of the original could be that unless they annulled those covenants, then they would be trampled down to death by the Assyrian invaders. They didn't annul them and so they were trampled down.

When the overflowing scourge passes through, then you will be trampled down by it- The initial application is to the Assyrian invasion (Is. 8:8). Those in Jerusalem (:14) who had made agreements with Egypt were to be destroyed by the Assyrians. But in fact they weren't, as Jerusalem didn't fall. So the prophecy didn't come about because of the faith and repentance of third parties, and this lead to collateral blessings even for sinners. God's every action is so multi dimensional and carefully weighed. However I suggested on :15 that the covenant with death might refer to a covenant with Assyria, leading the eldership of Judah (:14) to the assumption that when the Assyrian invasion came, it would affect only Ephraim and not Judah. But here we have envisaged the destruction of Judah along with Ephraim by the Assyrians, as part of the same campaign. But again, by grace that was averted. And those who had wrongly thought they would escape Assyrian judgment did actually escape it. But the final tally of faith is all kept by God and will come to full term in the judgment of the last day.

Isaiah 28:19 As often as it passes through, it will seize you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be nothing but terror to understand the message- The sense may be as GNB "It will strike you again and again, morning after morning. You will have to bear it day and night. Each new message from God will bring new terror!". The reference may be to the various times that the Assyrian waters came through Judah- once under Sargon, twice under Sennacherib, three or four times under Esarhaddon, and twice under Asshur-bani-pal. Or we could also see a hint here that they were to experience the truth of these prophecies at multiple times and in various contexts; Assyria, Babylon, Rome and the last days situation would all be fulfillments of Isaiah's message.

Isaiah 28:20 For the bed is too short to stretch out on, and the blanket is too narrow to wrap oneself in- The covenant with Assyria or Egypt (:15) would not actually bring the relief expected and promised. And yet as noted on :18, in the Assyrian context, there was in fact that relief- but because of the faith and repentance of a remnant.

Isaiah 28:21 For Yahweh will rise up as on Mount Perazim, He will be angry as in the valley of Gibeon- These two locations are combined when David was given special Angelic assistance to defeat the Philistines there (1 Chron. 14:11,16).

That He may do His work, His unusual work, and bring to pass His act, His extraordinary act- The "unusual" work was in that now, what God had helped Israel do to the Gentiles, would now be done by God to Israel at the hand of the Gentiles. He was to treat His people as Gentiles, for that was how they were in their hearts. "Unusual" is AV "strange", and nearly always refers to Gentiles. Yahweh was to do a 'Gentile work' upon Israel. See on Is. 29:1.

Isaiah 28:22 Now therefore don't be scoffers, lest your bonds be made strong; for I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord Yahweh of Armies, upon the whole earth- see on Rom. 9:28,29. The frequent predictions of judgment upon Israel were effectively calls to repentance, so that the predicted judgment need not actually happen. Intended outcomes could be "cut short", the time periods changed accordance to human behaviour. Hence LXX: "I have heard of works finished and cut short by the Lord of hosts, which he will execute upon all the earth". The more Israel resisted the call, the more they were as it were tightening the bands which the prophetic word had laid around them; they would be confirmed in their way and their bands would be strengthened.

Isaiah 28:23 Give ear, and hear my voice! Listen, and hear my speech!- This reflects Isaiah's appreciation that outcomes could really be changed by response to the word he was preaching. We ought to be encouraged in our witness likewise.

Isaiah 28:24 Does he who ploughs to sow plough continually? Does he keep turning the soil and breaking the clods?- The idea is as GNB "Farmers don't constantly plow their fields and keep getting them ready for planting". God's patience in preparing the fields of the *eretz* to receive His message would not continue forever. This parallels the point made in :27, that the harvest of Yahweh's judgments would likewise not endure eternally. He has a purpose in His judgments, and they were to make the *eretz* a fertile ground for the seed of His word. And He likewise works in our lives too.

Isaiah 28:25 When he has levelled its surface, doesn't he plant the dill, and scatter the cumin seed, and put in the wheat in rows, the barley in the appointed place, and the spelt in its place?- "Place" is really "border". GNB: "Once they have prepared the soil, they plant the seeds of herbs such as dill and cumin. They plant rows of wheat and barley, and at the edges of their fields they plant other grain". The borders or edges of the field were also planted, but with different crops than in the main field. I suggest that as explained on Is. 35:2 we have the vision of the Gentiles living in the desert areas on the borders of the *eretz* also bringing forth fruit to God. But God's intention from His fields was that they would not all bear the same seed; dill and wheat aren't planted together in the same part of the field, and they are tended and harvested differently. We have here an anticipation of how unity is not uniformity, and all manner of different fruit is envisaged. The levelling of the surface in the judgments is the image of Is. 40, where an even surface is to be prepared before the coming of the Kingdom.

Isaiah 28:26 For his God instructs him in right judgement, and teaches him- LXX

"So thou shalt be chastened by the judgment of thy God, and shalt rejoice". The man who ploughs in :24 appears to be God; so the LXX makes more sense here. The end result of all the judgments was going to be joy for the righteous who allowed themselves to be instructed by the judgments.

Isaiah 28:27 For the dill are not threshed with a sharp instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned over the cumin; but the dill is beaten out with a stick, and the cumin with a rod- The idea is that the threshing of judgment was not done in a blundering, insensitive way. It was designed to bring forth a refined product which would then be of some use. The judgments are likened to a stick used to beat out dill, a plant grown on windowsills. This is how precise and relatively gentle were God's judgments; they were not broad scale and disproportionate, as is the case with human judgments.

Isaiah 28:28 Bread flour must be ground; so he will not always be threshing it. Although he drives the wheel of his threshing cart over it, his horses don't grind it- Because Divine judgment has end results in view and is not merely punishment, they will not be eternal. Nor will they be in such a form as to preclude a harvest. GNB: "They do not ruin the wheat by threshing it endlessly". LXX "I will not be wroth with you for ever, neither shall the voice of my anger crush you". Eternal threshing, like an eternal hell fire, is just not what God is about.

Isaiah 28:29 This also comes forth from Yahweh of Armies, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom- "Wonderful in counsel" uses the same words as in Is. 9:6, where Messiah is to be the Wonderful Counsellor. The idea is that the fruit of all the judgments was going to be seen in the events of the last days, when that Messiah figure would stand on earth and be the means of resolving all the judgments into a wonderful harvest. Then we will finally resolve the problem of evil; we will see that the judgments were indeed necessary and were used in the wisdom of God.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 29

Isaiah 29:1 Woe to Ariel! Ariel, the city where David encamped!- This is the theme of Is. 28:21; what David had done to Gentiles was to be done to Israel by Gentiles. God's people were to be treated as Gentiles because that was who they were in their hearts. Ariel, God's lion, was to be devoured by the Assyrians or Babylonians, who are also presented as God's lion. See on :3.

Add year to year; let the feasts come around- The idea may be that very soon, Jerusalem was to fall. Hence GNB: "Let another year or two come and go, with its feasts and festivals". But this didn't happen; Jerusalem's doom was averted by the repentance and intercession of a small minority; in accordance with the principle of Jer. 18:8-10. Perhaps the idea is that the distress of Ariel (:2) was to be at the time of a Jewish feast. And this seems to have been the case at the time of the Assyrian attack upon Jerusalem at Passover. Or the point may simply be that the feasts and sacrifices (AV) would not save Jerusalem.

Isaiah 29:2 Then I will distress Ariel- A pagan god looked after his own people against their enemies. But Yahweh of Israel sent and empowered Israel's enemies against them, and gave them victory against His own people; He encamped against His very own people (Is. 29:2-4), God 'distressed' Ariel, 'the lion of God'. The

archenemy of Israel, Assyria, was revealed as a rod in the God of Israel's hand (Is. 10:5 etc.), and the King of Babylon was Yahweh's servant who would come against Yahweh's own people (Jer. 25:9; 27:6 etc.). The will of Israel's God was that the capital city, seen by the people as the symbol and nerve center of a god's power and control, was to be destroyed by Israel's enemies (Jer. 34:1-5; 21:3-7). In the surrounding culture of Israel, capital cities were portrayed as women, the wives of the gods. They are always presented as pure and wonderful. But the prophets represent cities like Jerusalem and Samaria as fallen women, whores. It was all *so* counter-cultural. Yahweh's prophet even appealed for Israel to surrender when under siege (Jer. 21:8-10). Try to enter into how radical and counter-cultural all this was. The prophets were trying to share the feelings and positions of a God *so* vastly different to the imaginations and understandings of His very own people. The nervous stress of this, the psychological pressure, can't be underestimated. And we are asked to share the spirit / mind / disposition of those prophets. Not only was God on the side of Israel's enemies; yet through all that, He somehow *was* with Israel; quite simply, "God is with us", even though it is He who encamps against them too (Is. 8:9,10; 18:4). The God of Auschwitz is somehow still the God of Israel. The very torment, even torture, of understanding that was etched clearly in the prophets, and it will be in us too.

And there will be mourning and lamentation. She shall be to Me as an altar hearth- Another meaning of Ariel is 'God's altar'. Hence GNB "God will bring disaster on the city that is called "God's altar." There will be weeping and wailing, and the whole city will be like an altar covered with blood". This was the huge picture of potential destruction which was averted when the Assyrians were destroyed thanks to the prayer of the minority.

Isaiah 29:3 I will encamp against you all around you, and will lay siege against you with a mount; I will raise siege works against you- The LXX "And I will compass thee about like David" connects with our observation on :1, that as David had fought against Zion so now God was going to fight against it. See on :2. Yet even these clear statements were conditional; because finally, God did not allow the Assyrians to build a mount or siege works against Jerusalem (Is. 37:33). God is continually open to changing the outcomes He has specified.

Isaiah 29:4 You will be brought down, and will speak out of the ground. Your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will be as of one who has a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and your speech will whisper out of the dust- This is a common theme of Isaiah, that judgment brings down. Because humility is so critical to God and is the basis for salvation. The LXX doesn't see any allusion to witches: "And thy words shall be brought down to the earth, and thy words shall sink down to the earth, and thy voice shall be as they that speak out of the earth, and thy voice shall be lowered to the ground". Even if there is allusion to ghosts or witches, the idea would be that their words had been brought down as low as those witches were known as talking, in the same muffled way, out of the earth. And it would be a tacit reflection of the state of society that people all knew what wizards and witches sounded like- they were so common. The humbling of words suggests this category would be refined by the judgments and repent; unlike the "foes" of :5 who will be destroyed completely.

Isaiah 29:5 But the multitude of your foes will be like fine dust, and the multitude of the ruthless ones like chaff that blows away. Yes, it will be in an instant, suddenly- This sounds like the instant destruction of the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem. But then the allusion to being blown away like chaff is the language of Dan. 2:44. The final destruction of Zion's enemies could have come at different times; there is an open ended nature to God's purposes which is reflected in His prophecies, and which makes them hard to interpret.

Isaiah 29:6 She will be visited by Yahweh of Armies with thunder, with earthquake, with great noise, with whirlwind and storm, and with the flame of a devouring fire- This sounds like a major theophany; "Yahweh of Armies" suggests Angelic involvement. It was indeed a single Angel who destroyed the Assyrian army, but it would seem that this level of Divine manifestation didn't then occur. This chapter goes on to speak of the sins of Judah, and so it would seem that the full potential of deliverance wasn't realized; because only a minority of them were spiritual. And so these prophecies are transferred to the last days.

Isaiah 29:7 The multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all who fight against her and her stronghold and who distress her, will be like a dream, a vision of the night- This could refer to the mercenaries of various nations who comprised the Assyrian army. But the language seems to imply a multiethnic attack against Jerusalem which has more relevance to the last days. We note that the attack is specifically against "her stronghold", the temple of Zion. This particular focus upon the temple area is clearly going to characterize the latter day invasion. Both LXX and GNB stress that all the military strength of the invaders will come to nothing, continuing the great prophetic theme that human strength is to be brought down eternally: "then all the armies of the nations attacking the city of God's altar, all their weapons and equipment—everything—will vanish like a dream, like something imagined in the night" (GNB).

Isaiah 29:8 It will be like when a hungry man dreams, and behold, he eats; but he awakes, and his hunger isn't satisfied; or like when a thirsty man dreams, and behold, he drinks; but he awakes, and behold, he is faint, and he is still thirsty. The multitude of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion will be like that- What seemed so concrete and solid was in fact but the fantasy of dreams. And this is how we are to perceive things today. The language here suggests that the motivation for the attack on Jerusalem was material, imagining how they would feast on the spoil. This is only really relevant to the situation in Hezekiah's time; and it was the foreign mercenaries in the Assyrian army rather than Assyria who would have had these dreams and motivations. And so this verse is addressed to them, the "all nations that fight against Mount Zion". 2 Chron. 32:27 records how Hezekiah "had exceeding much riches", with store cities for gold, silver and jewels. The latter day Assyrian of Ez. 38 likewise wishes to attack Jerusalem in order to take great spoil.

Isaiah 29:9 Pause and wonder, take your pleasure and be blind. They are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink- Despite the destruction of Judah's enemies described in :7,8, they too were to be judged for their blindness. The implication would therefore be that they were saved from the Assyrians by grace and thanks to the intercession and repentance of a small remnant. "Blind yourselves and

be blind" (RVmg.); yet God had closed their eyes, confirming them in the decision for blindness which they had taken themselves. The drunkenness of these people was because God had mentally confused them in response to their desire to be blind. He waits to confirm men positively (through the Holy Spirit working on the human mind) and also negatively. In the end, we get where we really want to go.

Isaiah 29:10 For Yahweh has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, O prophets; and He has covered your heads, O seers- The language here recalls the judgment upon Egypt in Is. 19:14. They acted and thought like Egypt, and so they received Egypt's judgment; just as the unfaithful of the new Israel will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). The prophets didn't want to 'see' or 'be seers'. And so their eyes were blinded (:9). Remember that they and the priests were so drunk in the temple that they vomited on the altars (Is. 28:8).

Isaiah 29:11 All vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is educated, saying, Read this, please; and he says, I can't, for it is sealed- This is all in exemplification of how God had closed their eyes to His word (:9,10). Even the words they received were like a sealed book to them. And the sin of their own blindness was because they were unable to teach that word to others. Potentially they could read it; but it was sealed now. This appears to be God confirming Isaiah's personal attitude in Is. 8:16, where he seals the revelation just for his disciples to understand.

The Lord spoke in parables so that Israel would be deceived (unless they made specific search of the meaning of the parable) and therefore would not come to salvation. This fact is hard to get round for those who feel God *isn't* responsible for deception. Isaiah spoke likewise (Is. 6:9,10; 29:10,11). See on Is. 66:4. Thus men are confirmed psychologically in the way they wish to go.

Isaiah 29:12 And the book is delivered to one who is not educated, saying, Read this, please; and he says, I can't read- As explained on :11, the prophets were not able to understand the word given to them, it was as it were sealed. And it was their duty to teach others; even those "educated" (:11) couldn't break the seal now; and the masses of the people were illiterate anyway. So much depended upon the teachers.

Isaiah 29:13 The Lord said, Because this people draws near with their mouth and with their lips to honour Me, but they have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear of Me is a commandment of men which has been taught- The Lord quotes these words in Mt. 15:8. They honoured with their lips, but their heart was far from God; they externally kept His commandments, but they frustrated their intention by not letting them influence their essential selves (Mk. 7:6-9). They fiercely guarded the pronunciation of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name (Jer. 23:27). The Lord perceived that "your tradition… the commandments of men… your doctrines" resulted in the hearts of Israel being "far from [God]". Doctrine was intended to affect the heart; and false doctrine resulted in the heart being far from God. True doctrine, on the other hand, was and is intended to bring the heart close to God. Doctrine / teaching is therefore to affect the heart; it is not just the intellectual basis for unity in a community of believers. And the Lord goes on in this very context to talk of how "every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up" (Mt. 15:13). The Greek for "planted" is interpreted by James Strong as meaning "Figuratively, to instill doctrine". The planting of the believer is through the

instillation of Godly doctrine, rather than the doctrines of men. Note how the Lord speaks of doctrine as a command in Mt. 15:6,9: "Thus have you made the *commandment* of God of none effect by your tradition... in vain they do worship Me, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments of men". And He taught earlier that the doctrine of one God was in fact a command to action. Doctrine, *didache*, is teaching, not just theory; it is commandment towards action. For doctrine and practice are linked. In this we are helped to assess whether any idea or interpretation is indeed a 'first principle doctrine' or not. What does it inspire in practice? Or is it merely the academic interpretation of the human brain cells?

Like Israel we can seek God daily, taking delight in approaching unto Him; and yet need the exhortation to urgently seek Him (Is. 55:6 cp. 58:2). We can appear to seek unto Him in prayer and attendance at our meetings, and yet not seek Him in the real sense at all. Likewise men came to Jesus physically, at quite some effort to themselves, and yet He tells them that they have not truly come to Him at all (Jn. 6:24 cp. 35-37). We can draw near with our mouth, honour Him with our lips, “but have removed [our] heart far from me” (Is. 29:13).

Isaiah 29:14 therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the understanding of their prudent men will be hidden- The Jewish opposition to the prophets were insistent that wisdom would not perish from them (Jer. 18:18). This is stated in the context of God sealing up His word from those who blinded themselves to it (:9-13). But He would remove from them also their own wisdom so that they would as it were be left alone, without God's word and without their own word. This is the kind of psychological pain which will arise from the condemnation process- to be left both without God and without secular support.

Isaiah 29:15 Woe to those who deeply hide their counsel from Yahweh, and whose works are in the dark, and who say, Who sees us? and Who knows us?- The counsel in view was their seeking help from Egypt against Assyria and later against Babylon (Is. 30:1,2). But they thought they could somehow hide this "in the dark" from Yahweh, whom they still believed in and would have assented in theory to the truth that He sees and knows all things. It's doubtful that they said in so many words that God could not see or know. But as often in the prophets, the implication of their positions are perceived and stated as God sees them.

Isaiah 29:16 You turn things upside down! Should the potter be thought to be like clay; that the thing made should say about him who made it, He didn’t make me; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, He has no understanding?- See on :15. Their trust in Egypt (:15) and refusal to accept His condemnation of their trust in Egypt (Is. 20:5,6) was effectively accusing Him of having "no understanding". They were forgetting that He was their creator; rather they considered that God, the potter, was in fact like the clay. They considered God to exist but to have the same mentality and limitations of men; they had created God in their own image and likeness rather than the other way around. And this is a temptation for us all.

A living faith in God as our creator leads to an acceptance that He sees and knows all our ways, that life is lived utterly open before Him- and we should live it accordingly. Hence Isaiah uses the fact of God as creator to reason with those who argued (in their hearts at least) that they could hide their ways from the Lord, saying "Who sees us, and who knows?". Isaiah's answer to this was that "Shall the thing

framed (i.e. us) say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?" and therefore doesn't know nor understand what we do... (Is. 29:15,16).

Isaiah 29:17 Isn't it yet a very little while, and Lebanon will be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field will be regarded as a forest?- In a "very little while" from when these words were spoken, the Kingdom could have been reestablished, as described in the next verses. But this was conditional upon Judah seeing and hearing God's word (:18). But they didn't want to do this, and so these possibilities didn't then happen; but the essence of them will come true in the last days. The revived "fruitful field" situation would only come when the Spirit was poured upon them (Is. 32:15,16) and this would only be if they accepted the new covenant, which promised this gift of the Spirit. See on :18; Is. 32:1. Perhaps Rabshakeh was aware of this prophecy, and he swore to negate it by destroying "Lebanon" [a reference to the cedars of Lebanon in the temple] and "Carmel" (s.w. "fruitful field"; Is. 37:24). The promised revival could therefore have come "a very little while" after the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem was miraculously ended. But Hezekiah's weakness and the peoples' impenitence precluded that, resulting in the Babylonian invasion turning the fruitful field into a wilderness (s.w. Jer. 4:26).

Isaiah 29:18 In that day, the deaf will hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind will see out of obscurity and out of darkness- The blind are those just spoken of in :9- the Jews who had blinded themselves and been blinded. The deaf who will now hear the words of the book contrast with those for whom the book had been sealed (:11). Those who were so hardened, even hardened by God. would experience the psychological miracle of being again sensitized to God's word. This is the work of the Spirit on Jewish hearts promised in the new covenant of Jer. 31 and Ez. 20. See on :17,24.

The repentance of Israel must be associated with an opening of their eyes to God's word. There is no other way men can come to repentance. Jer. 30:24 prophecies Jacob's final homecoming, and then comments: "In the latter days (not now) ye shall consider (understand) it". *Then* Israel will consider and understand the words of their prophets. "The Lord hath poured out upon (Israel) the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes (quoted in Rom. 11:8 concerning Israel's blindness to Christ)... the vision of all (God's word) is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed... (but) in that day shall the (spiritually) deaf hear the words of the book" (Is. 29:10,11,17,18). This will be when the book is *un*sealed at "the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). Thus Israel's minority repentance must occur prior to the Lord's return. Therefore there must be an upsurge in Biblical activity amongst those who will become the faithful remnant in latter day Israel. This will be brought about by the Elijah prophet- remembering that the Elijah prophet is framed in Malachi as a teacher of God's word, not just an imparter of it. Likewise John, in the spirit of Elijah, *taught* the people about the Lord's advent.

The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:4,5. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes

away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life.

Ultimately, we will only truly see in the Kingdom (Is. 29:18; 42:6; 1 Cor. 13:12). Then we will know (see) face to face. We will see God face to face, i.e. understand Him. It follows therefore that in some ways we are blind, or partially sighted, now. This is indicated by the Lord's symbolic healing of the blind man in two stages (Mk. 8:23-26). Firstly, the man saw men as if they were walking trees. Probably he scarcely knew what a tree or man looked like. Yet he is described as receiving his sight at this stage (Mk. 8:24 Gk.). And then the Lord touched his eyes again, and again he is described (in the Greek) as receiving his sight (Mk. 8:25- same phrase as in v.24). This time he saw all things (Gk.) clearly. This surely represents the full spiritual vision of the Kingdom. According to this type, we are at the stage of seeing men as if they are walking trees, perhaps wildly guessing about some things, lacking the most basic sense of proportion

Isaiah 29:19 The humble also will increase their joy in Yahweh, and the poor among men will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel- Again we note that the righteous remnant are characterized above all by their humility; this is so utterly critical to God. The humble are those who will hear and see God's word (:17,18), and this category will be the materially poor and needy.

Isaiah 29:20 For the ruthless is brought to nothing, and the scoffer ceases, and all those who are alert to do evil are cut off- I noted on :17 the allusion to the scoffing of the ruthless Assyrians (s.w. Is. 13:11 about Assyria - Babylon) in Is. 37:24. Clearly in view here are the Assyrians and their destruction outside Jerusalem. But :21 speaks of these persons as if they are the Jews scoffing at Isaiah and his 'Don't trust in Egypt' message (see on :16). Again the point is made that generally the Jews were no better than their Gentile enemies.

Isaiah 29:21 who cause a person to be indicted by a word, and lay a snare for the arbiter in the gate, and who deprive the innocent of justice with false testimony- As noted on :20, the context is a condemnation of the Assyrians, who were to be destroyed outside Jerusalem. But the language is just as relevant to the Jewish leadership, the same words being used of their treatment of the poor Jews in Is. 10:2; Am. 2:7; 5:12; they too were worthy of destruction outside Jerusalem, in Gehenna. Again the point is made that generally the Jews were no better than their Gentile enemies. The salvation from the Assyrians was an example of God's great sensitivity to the faith, repentance and intercession of a minority.

Isaiah 29:22 Therefore thus says Yahweh who redeemed Abraham concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall no longer be ashamed, neither shall his face grow pale- The context is of a spiritually weak Judah being reformed and recreated by God's Spirit. This was what God did to their fathers Abraham and Jacob. Those men are not so much examples of faith, but of men willing to let God work in them to redeem them from their own unspirituality. The pale face of Jacob was surely in the "time of Jacob's trouble" when he faced apparent annihilation by the superior forces of Esau- but the situation was reversed by God's grace and his night of repentant wrestling with

God. Although God would save His people as He had Jacob, they still needed to repent in order to be like Jacob at that point. And they refused to generally be like this at Isaiah's time; they were saved therefore by grace and because a minority repented. However the potentials then possible for the reestablishment of the Kingdom were thereby precluded.

Isaiah 29:23 But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in the midst of him, they will sanctify My name. Yes, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel- The significance of "the work of My hands" is that the children referred to here are new creations of people whose blind eyes have been opened (see on :17). The Jews had mocked the idea of their being the clay and God the potter (:16); they effectively reduced Him to the clay like them. But now they would fully accept His sovereign, creative power through the Spirit. The only time when Jacob saw his children with joy was when he met the [as it were] resurrected Joseph and his children. The equivalent in the last days is when the people of Jacob see / perceive the spiritual children created through the work of the resurrected Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 29:24 They also who err in spirit will come to understanding, and those who grumble will receive instruction- This is saying the same thing as :17. Through the gift of the Spirit, those who had blinded themselves to understanding would be made to understand. Is. 29:13,24 speaks of repentance as 'learning doctrine' or being instructed; Israel went astray morally because they allowed themselves to be wrongly instructed.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 30

Isaiah 30:1 Woe to the rebellious children, says Yahweh, who take counsel, but not from Me- This follows on from the condemnation of this "counsel" in Is. 29:15: "Woe to those who deeply hide their counsel from Yahweh, and whose works are in the dark, and who say, Who sees us? and Who knows us?". The counsel in view was their seeking help from Egypt against Assyria and later against Babylon, 'counseled' by the false prophets. But they thought they could somehow hide this "in the dark" from Yahweh, whom they still believed in and would have assented in theory to the truth that He sees and knows all things. It's doubtful that they said in so many words that God could not see or know. But as often in the prophets, the implication of their positions are perceived and stated as God sees them.

And who make an alliance, but not with My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin- Through repentance, they could have entered into a new covenant or alliance which would have resulted in the gift of the Spirit working powerfully in their hearts; as also offered in Is. 29:17,18 (see notes there). By refusing the covenant, they instead would be confirmed in their sin, from "sin to sin".

Isaiah 30:2 Who set out to go down into Egypt, and have not asked My advice- The Divine cameraman as it were zooms in on them as they set out for Egypt, noting they didn't begin that journey with a prayer to Yahweh; see on :6. They had taken counsel / advice from the false prophets before the trip (:1).

To strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt!- 'Hezekiah' means 'Yah strengthens'. They had ignored him and were seeking strength not in Yahweh but in Egypt; and were ignoring the frequent

encouragement to take refuge beneath the shadow of Yahweh's cherubim; see on :4. Their trust in Egypt was more than surface level weakness, it was a studied rejection of God. And the challenge comes through powerfully to us who are tempted in myriad ways to trust 'Egypt' rather than our God.

Isaiah 30:3 Therefore the strength of Pharaoh will be your shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt your confusion- Shame and confusion is the language of condemnation. Accepting God's existence but not trusting Him was the ticket to condemnation. This comes over as a piercing challenge to us in our generation, whereby about every human eventuality apart from death is apparently covered by some secular device. But even from that shame they could be saved, just as the eyes blinded for their own wilful blindness could be opened (Is. 29:9,18). For "Jacob shall no longer be ashamed, neither shall his face grow pale" (Is. 29:22). The context is of a spiritually weak Judah being reformed and recreated by God's Spirit. This was what God did to Jacob. The pale face of Jacob was surely in the "time of Jacob's trouble" when he faced apparent annihilation by the superior forces of Esau- but the situation was reversed by God's grace and his night of repentant wrestling with God. Although God would save His people from their shame as He had Jacob, they still needed to repent in order to be like Jacob at that point. And they refused to generally be like this at Isaiah's time; they were saved therefore by grace and because a minority repented. However the potentials then possible for the reestablishment of the Kingdom were thereby precluded.

Isaiah 30:4 For their princes are at Zoan, and their ambassadors have come to Hanes- The Egyptian representatives came to meet those from Judah at the border towns. "Ambassadors" is *malak*, the word for "Angel". Judah had spurned to take refuge beneath the wings of the Angel-cherubim (see on :2); the Egyptians were offering a fake system of Angelic protection. Princes and ambassadors were later sent to Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:31) from Babylon, and he ought to have learnt not to trust in them, seeing that trust in the "princes and ambassadors" of Egypt had been proven so false just in recent history. God likewise brings situations into our lives whereby situations repeat- to test our faith and understanding. See on Is. 39:1.

Isaiah 30:5 They shall all be ashamed because of a people that can't profit them, that are not a help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach- But as explained on :5, they could be saved even from this shame. Their trust in Egypt became a reproach with which the Assyrians mocked them (2 Kings 18:21,24). But the Assyrians were destroyed by Yahweh. There was not therefore the shame afterwards which there would have been if Assyria had conquered Jerusalem. We see here how God's purposes adjust and recalculate in accordance with the changes made by the repentance even of a remnant. That minority repentance led to the Assyrians being destroyed. Therefore the faithless were not ashamed and reproached for their trust in Egypt to the degree intended. But this shall ultimately come true at the last day; that final judgment at the Lord's return will as it were balance all the prophetic books and recalculations. The sum of them will then be attained with perfect integrity.

Isaiah 30:6 The burden of the animals of the South. Through the land of trouble and anguish, of the lioness and the lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they carry their rich gifts on the shoulders of young donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to an unprofitable people- The Divine cameraman as it were zooms in on

them as they fix their packages of presents on the shoulders of donkeys and humps of camels. The focus on detail is impressive. The animals were burdened down with it all, and this is played upon by this prophetic "burden". They risked much- the way was full of lions, snakes and also the mythical creatures they believed inhabited the desert, i.e. "fiery flying serpents". But we notice that the record doesn't as it were add a footnote informing us that "these beings don't exist in reality". The people were spoken to in terms they understood and according to their own perceptions, even if they were inaccurate. And this explains the language of demons in the New Testament. They had been led through this same dangerous desert by God at the exodus (Dt. 8:15; Jer. 2:6); now they were returning through it to Egypt without His direction and protection.

Isaiah 30:7 For Egypt helps in vain, and to no purpose; therefore have I called her Rahab who sits still- GNB "The harmless dragon". The apparently impressive power of Egypt was in fact vain. And that is true of all secular power, advantage and insurance, which are the equivalent of "Egypt" to us. "Rahab", 'pride' or 'strength', was an old name for Egypt (Job 26:12; Ps. 87:4; 89:10; Is. 51:9). But the historical Rahab did repent and become part of God's people; and God always entertained that hope for Egypt (e.g. Is. 19:18-20). His hopefulness is wonderful and also inspirational in our own dealings with people.

Isaiah 30:8 Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever- The purpose of this particular written record was because God foresaw that He would deliver Judah from the Assyrians despite the rebellion of the majority. He didn't want them to therefore assume that their sinful attitudes were insignificant because He had saved them anyway. See on :13.

Isaiah 30:9 For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of Yahweh- LXX "false children". True sonship is predicated upon our attitude to our Father's word. The majority had listened to the false prophets rather than the word of Yahweh (:1,2).

Isaiah 30:10 who tell the seers, Don't see! and to the prophets, Don't prophesy to us right things. Tell us pleasant things, prophesy deceits- This was therefore how Isaiah was treated. God's grace in still saving Jerusalem from the Assyrians was the more remarkable; and it highlights therefore His sensitivity to the prayer and repentance of a minority. We wonder if they actually said these words; but these are what we are effectively saying every time we place secular advice about that of God's word.

Isaiah 30:11 get out of the way, turn aside from the path; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us- LXX adds "the oracle of the Holy One of Israel". Their attitudes to God's word were their attitudes to Him; in that sense "the word was God" as it still is. It is unlikely they actually said these words; but God read their rejection of His counsel in favour of that of the false prophets (:1,2) as being tantamount to saying this.

Isaiah 30:12 Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness and rely on it- As the context makes

clear, they had despised Yahweh's word for the word of the false prophets. To not trust God is therefore understood as despising Him. This is typical of the prophets, to show into stark relief the implications of unbelief and unspirituality. We may need to read in an ellipsis: "Trust not in the results of oppression" or the wealth gained by it; for this is a quotation from Ps. 62:8 where the construction means just that. The rulers of Judah had oppressed the poor; and stood to benefit materially from an alliance with Egypt, or so they imagined. To reject Isaiah's "no alliance with Egypt" message was perceived as not to their material benefit. And so they preferred to trust the words of the false prophets, because this allowed them to continue their oppressive ways. There is always a subconscious personal advantage to believing a false message or interpretation. It's why "false doctrine" is popular and attractive.

Isaiah 30:13 therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly in an instant- LXX "of which the fall is very near at hand". The sin of those who trusted in Egypt at Isaiah's time was to result in major judgment, and very soon. The next verse speaks of total breakage, as if the Divine potter was displeased with Judah as His vessel and was to break it and start again with another vessel. But this didn't happen, because the Assyrian destruction of the walls of Jerusalem didn't actually happen as envisaged because of the repentance of a minority. And this led to the unspiritual majority apparently 'getting away with it'. This is why their condemnation was to be written in a book (:8) as witness that ultimately they would meet their judgment.

Isaiah 30:14 He will break it as a potter's vessel is broken, breaking it in pieces without sparing, so that there won't be found among the broken pieces one piece good enough to take fire from the hearth, or to dip up water out of the cistern- See on :13. This is the language of Jer. 18:6; 19:11; the Divine potter was going to break Judah and not one piece of them would be any use for anything. He would do so "without sparing". But He did spare, and the remnant of the judged people were to again be used by Him. We have here an example of the sort of thing that goes on in Hosea; God threatens total and irreversible rejection of His people in His anger, but His core love for them means it doesn't totally happen. The pole of His love and pity is in the last analysis stronger than the pole of His anger and judgment. Or we can conclude that the final judgment has been deferred until their resurrection at the last day. Dan. 2:44 describes how the kingdoms of this world will be broken and scattered as the chaff before the wind. Yet this is exactly the language here and in Jer. 13:24 concerning Israel's latter day destruction. They will be "dashed" (Jer. 13:14) as the nations of the world will be (Ps. 2:9). Jer. 13:14 says they will be destroyed by brother being dashed against brother- again, the picture of the world's final destruction (Zech. 14:13). Rev. 2:27 speaks of the unfaithful in the ecclesia likewise being dashed to pieces. The Lord's coming will be a stone that grinds them to powder (Mt. 21:44), but perhaps in that they will destroy each other.

Isaiah 30:15 For thus said the Lord Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, You will be saved by returning and rest; your strength will be in quietness and in confidence. You refused- Their destruction was to be because they had been given the chance to repent ['returning' to God] but had refused it. As discussed on :14, they were therefore threatened with total and permanent rejection without a single survivor. But even that was changed by God's pity and grace. There was to be "quietness" after the Babylonian / Assyrian invaders were destroyed (s.w. Is. 14:7); and they were to act as

if what they believed in had come about. For this is faith, believing that what we hope for and trust in has already come.

LXX "When thou shalt turn and mourn, then thou shalt be saved; and thou shalt know where thou wast, when thou didst trust in vanities: then your strength became vain, yet ye would not hearken". As noted on :20 LXX, the repentant remnant would come to understand where they had gone wrong, they would have the ability to see themselves from outside themselves.

The reference in the primary context may be to how Ahaz had been called upon to repent of his faithlessness, and to find "calm", s.w. "quietness" (see on Is. 7:4); but he had "refused", madly trusting upon Egyptian horses for salvation (:16). But the appeal to repent was still there, for a later generation.

Isaiah 30:16 But you said, No, for we will flee on horses; therefore you will flee; and, We will ride on the swift; therefore those who pursue you will be swift- As noted on :15, this may be a reference to Ahaz trusting in Egyptian horses against Syria and Israel, as noted on Is. 7:4. Perhaps part of the package deal with Egypt was that they would provide swift horses (for which Egypt was famed even in Solomon's time) for the leadership to flee away on. We see here the selfishness and short termism of the Jerusalem leadership in making this deal with Egypt.

Isaiah 30:17 One thousand will flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five- This is the curse for breaking the covenant. Covenant relationship with God is not merely a knowing of correct things about Him; it is *trust* in Him. To not trust in Him means that we break the covenant, whether or not we maintain intellectual purity of understanding in theological terms.

You will flee until you are left like a beacon on the top of a mountain, and like a banner on a hill- The idea is as GNB "Nothing will be left of your army except a lonely flagpole on the top of a hill". But this is the very picture of how an ensign is to be lifted up on Zion, to which the nations shall come. The curse here is as always pregnant with promise in the longer term. The tiny remnant left in Zion were to become a banner or ensign for the world; and the idea is later developed in terms of the "ensign" or "pole" being applied to the Lord Jesus on the cross, who is to become the rallying point for the faithful remnant from all nations. But the Jewish remnant were to be brought to that point by the experience of their own faithlessness and repentance.

Isaiah 30:18 Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him- Having lambasted Israel for their sins and described in detail their coming judgment, God then makes a strange comment, apparently out of context with what He has just been saying. God appears to be saying that He delays His actions, that He brings judgment, that He sets Himself *so* far above us- just so that He can get to show yet more mercy to us. Perhaps Joseph was manifesting God in the way he worked out that slow and detailed scheme of dealing with his sinful brethren... it has always seemed to me that he drew out the process just so that he could lead up to a climax of pouring out his maximum grace to them. Whilst the way seems long, “blessed are all they that wait for him”. God is even spoken of as concluding (Gk. ‘shutting up the eyes’) of Israel in the sin of unbelief, “that he might have mercy” upon both them and the Gentiles (Rom. 11:32). Likewise

God delays the second coming because He waits and hopes for repentance and spiritual growth from us. But He praises the faithful for patiently waiting for Him (Is. 30:18; Ps. 37:7). Here we see the humility of God's grace.

The passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will crush Judah so that not one of them is left, He will not spare (:14); He would cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5]. God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jer. 16 goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (Jer. 16:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8).

Isaiah 30:19 For the people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you will weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the voice of your cry; when He hears you, He will answer you- These dwelling in Zion are the tiny remnant who remain on mount Zion after the rest have been destroyed or have fled (see on :17). But they will be there because they cry to God in repentance. The salvation of Zion in Isaiah's time didn't exactly fit this pattern; the human variables worked out to preclude this entire picture coming about, but it will in essence in the last days.

Isaiah 30:20 Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction- The language of minimum rations, in prison or during a siege (1 Kings 22:27). It was the 'Plan A' that Jerusalem would fall to the Assyrians and Judah join Israel in captivity in Assyria, but out of that exile, a remnant would repent. Due to the minority repentance, that scenario was deferred to the effects of the Babylonian captivity; although as Jeremiah and Ezekiel make clear in their appeals for repentance, that too could have been averted. The simple truth is that if they had responded to the prophetic appeals and repented, the whole captivity scenario wouldn't have been required. I suppose that was the ideal 'Plan A'.

Yet your teachers won't be hidden any more, but your eyes will see your teachers- This could be read as an intensive plural; their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him (s.w. Job 3:23; 13:24) just as God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally, the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family /

school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me... and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7).

LXX offers a different slant: "They that cause thee to err shall no more at all draw nigh to thee; for thine eyes shall see those that cause thee to err". As noted on :15 LXX, the repentant remnant would come to understand where they had gone wrong, they would have the ability to see themselves from outside themselves.

Isaiah 30:21 and when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, This is the way, walk in it- see on Gen. 18:19. The new covenant they were to enter according to Jer. 30 and Ez. 20 involved the gift of the Spirit working in their hearts to give them a heart which remained in the covenant. It is that same new covenant which we accept by baptism into the Lord Jesus today. The work of the Spirit in practice would be to keep them in the path, recalling them from any straying to the right hand or left. This could have been for Judah the time of Is. 29:18, when the deaf heard the words of the book. But for Judah this was not to mean they were mere puppets of the Spirit. Josiah (in their revent history) is described as experiencing this blessing, not turning to the right nor left (2 Chron. 34:2); but at the end of his life it seems he did turn aside.

Isaiah 30:22 You shall defile the overlaying of your engraved images of silver, and the plating of your molten images of gold. You shall cast them away as an unclean thing. You shall tell it, Go away!- Overlaying wooden idols with precious metals recalls the construction of the tabernacle. This was how idolatry was justified at the same time as a claim to Yahweh worship- as we are tempted to, they claimed to worship Yahweh through worshipping the idols, whose paraphernalia became as it were another tabernacle (as in Acts 7:43). Idolatry was clearly a problem at the time of both the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. Repentance involved the destruction of those idols.

Isaiah 30:23 He will give the rain for your seed, with which you will sow the ground; and the bread from the increase of the ground will be rich and plentiful. In that day, your livestock will feed in large pastures- The Kingdom blessings were to come once Judah repented (:22) and accepted the new covenant (:20,21). Yet when the exiles returned, they met famine and pests ate their harvests. They returned externally, but not to God.

Isaiah 30:24 the oxen likewise and the young donkeys that till the ground will eat savoury provender, which has been winnowed with the shovel and with the fork- The idea is as GNB "The oxen and donkeys that plow your fields will eat the finest and best fodder".

Isaiah 30:25 There shall be brooks and streams of water on every lofty mountain and on every high hill in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall- Streams bursting forth from mountain tops suggest great supernatural blessing (as streams run in valleys not on mountain tops), provided in the very "high places" where they had

worshipped idols which they had now destroyed (:22). This is grace indeed. The idea seems to be that the high places of men ("towers") will fall in the final "great slaughter" of Armageddon; but God's people will be safe on their "high places", which were formally the site of their sins and idolatry which is now forgiven. All that is elevated in secular terms ("towers") will be brought down in the last day, as in Is. 2:12. And this is indeed a principle truth to live by.

Isaiah 30:26 Moreover the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven days, in the day that Yahweh binds up the fracture of His people, and heals the wound they were struck with- This is part of the same potential prophetic scenario as in Is. 13:10: "For the stars of the sky and its constellations will not give their light, the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine", in relation to Babylon; but the opposite will be true for God's people. Darkness for Babylon would mean light for Judah, just as there was darkness for the Egyptians and light for Israel at the time of the exodus deliverance. These words are applied in the Olivet prophecy to the situation in the last days (Mt. 24:29). For this didn't fully happen at the time.

LXX has "the stars of heaven, and Orion". Orion was identified with Nimrod, founder of Assyria, and this constellation was much worshipped by the Babylonians. The prophetic potential was that Assyria and Babylon would be totally eclipsed, along perhaps with the extinguishing from sight of their favourite constellation. But this literal aspect didn't happen, just as the literal changes to the sun and moon spoken of in Is. 30:26 didn't happen at the time, with a week's worth of sunlight given in one day, because the Kingdom of God was not reestablished at that time because Judah didn't fully repent. The coming of Zion's supernaturally bright light is to come therefore when Babylon falls; and this has therefore been deferred to the latter day fall of Babylon.

Isaiah 30:27 Behold, the name of Yahweh comes from far away, burning with His anger, and in thick rising smoke. His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue is as a devouring fire- It comes "after a long time" (LXX). And yet there are indications in Isaiah that this time od judgment for the nations and deliverance for Zion was to come shortly. The ambiguity is because of the open ended nature of the prophecies. It could have come soon, but the human preconditions weren't fulfilled and so it is delayed until the last days. "Thick rising smoke" suggests that supernatural Divine judgment would come upon Assyria or Babylon akin to the destruction of Sodom. There is no mention of this kind of destruction being used when the Angel smote the Assyrian army. 2 Pet. 3:7 and other latter day prophecies (especially Ez. 39) suggest that such fire will be used in the last days. God's Name is parallel with His glory (Is. 59:19; Ps. 102:15 and often). The literal, visible coming of God's glory to Zion in the form of supernaturally bright light has just been spoken of (:26). But the intensity of that light will bring burning heat upon His enemies and the darkness they will experience (Is. 13:10 etc.) is presented as being because of the thick smoke which arises from their subsequent burning.

Isaiah 30:28 His breath is as an overflowing stream that reaches even to the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction- As the Assyrian invasion reached to the neck of Judah, right up to Jerusalem (Is. 8:8), so God's response would be likewise. What they did to Jerusalem would be done to them; which is the great theme of Revelation, where the seals of judgment on Israel become the vials of judgment upon

her abusers. All these things were to be done by the breath and tongue (:27) of God- through the word which Isaiah was speaking. Like Jeremiah, he was set up to speaks words which could destroy nations and resurrect them. This is the power of the prophetic word.

And a bridle that leads to ruin will be in the jaws of the peoples- It is God who makes the Gentile nations labour in "vanity: and a bridle that causeth to err shall be in the jaws of the peoples" (Is. 30:28 RV). Clearly enough, God causes people to err by putting a bridle in the jaws to pull them in a certain direction. The latter day Assyrian will likewise have a hook in his jaws to lead him to destruction (Ez. 38:4), just as the Assyrians of Isaiah's time did (Is. 37:29).

Isaiah 30:29 You will have a song, as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goes with a flute to come to Yahweh's mountain, to Israel's Rock- The song sung at night recalls the Passover feast (see on Is. 31:5); Judah's deliverance was to be as if Israel had been redeemed from Egypt. Perhaps the deliverance from Assyria also happened at Passover time, and perhaps Passover will be a significant time of deliverance for Israel from the latter day Assyrian or Egyptians. But going with a flute to keep the feast at Zion also sounds like the joy of the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:40). The symbolism of all the feasts spoke of Israel's final redemption, and this was to come gloriously true in the end.

Isaiah 30:30 Yahweh will cause His glorious voice to be heard, and will show the descent of His arm, with the indignation of His anger, and the flame of a devouring fire, with a blast, storm, and hailstones- The literal and final descent of God's arm will be in the descent of His Son from Heaven with the Angels. But this 'coming down' was achieved in a limited sense when the Assyrians were destroyed by an Angel (:31); a "blast" was sent upon them (Is. 37:7), but not the full outpouring of wrath spoken of here. But what happened then could have been the full reestablishment of the Kingdom in glory, as spoken of in the preceding verses. But this didn't happen at the time. The invasion was averted by the faith of a few, but there was still not strength to bring forth a spiritually reborn nation (Is. 37:3).

Isaiah 30:31 For through the voice of Yahweh - All these things were to be done by the breath and tongue (:27,28) of God- through the word which Isaiah was speaking. Like Jeremiah, he was set up to speaks words which could destroy nations and resurrect them. This is the power of the prophetic word.

The Assyrian will be dismayed- see on 2 Chron. 32:21. This is the dismaying or breaking of the Assyrians in Isaiah's time of Is. 9:4 (s.w.). But this is in the context of the Kingdom being established. It could have come; but it didn't. Hezekiah failed to be the Messiah figure as did Eliakim, and the people generally were impenitent. The latter day Assyrian, therefore, is to be "broken in pieces" (Is. 30:31 RV), just as the whole image of Daniel 2 is to be, by the return of Christ as the little stone. The Assyrian confederacy which came against Jerusalem is described as being the foes of Israel who will be swept away as chaff (Is. 29:5 RV). This was fulfilled in Sennacherib's destruction outside Jerusalem. And yet the language of being swept away as chaff refers without doubt to the image of Dan. 2 being swept away as chaff. The conclusion surely is that the Assyrian attack against Jerusalem, comprised as it was of a confederacy of local nations from within the land promised to Abraham, is typical of the final destruction of a similar confederacy by the Lord's return.

He will strike him with His rod- As Assyria had smitten Judah with the rod. The LXX brings out the parallel between the word / voice of God through Isaiah, and the rod striking Assyria: "For by the voice of the Lord the Assyrians shall be overcome, even by the stroke wherewith he shall smite them".

Isaiah 30:32 Every stroke of the rod of punishment which Yahweh will lay on him will be with the sound of tambourines and harps. He will fight with them in battles, brandishing weapons- GNB suggests "As the LORD strikes them again and again, his people will keep time with the music of drums and harps". LXX: "And it shall happen to him from every side, that they from whom their hope of assistance was, in which he trusted, themselves shall war against him in turn with drums and with harp". "Brandishing" is literally 'shaking', the language of earthquake. But it is the technical term for the "wave offering" in the Law (e.g. Lev. 7:30); in all this, Yahweh will be glorified, and the judgment of the nations will be as a sacrifice to Him, with Israel worshipping in the background now that His judgments are in the earth.

Isaiah 30:33 For his burning place has long been ready. Yes, for the king it is prepared; He has made its pyre deep and large with fire and much wood- The Assyrian army is personalized as "the king". But their king was not then killed. The destruction of the Assyrian army by an Angel was but a partial fulfilment of these words. The latter day leader of Assyria, the antichrist figure called Gog, will be destroyed in the same coming down of Divine judgment. And that has been long prepared- in these words of Isaiah.

Yahweh's breath, like a stream of sulphur, kindles it- Sulphur suggests the judgment of Sodom. There is no evidence this happened when the Assyrians were destroyed outside Jerusalem, nor was literal fire apparently used. These things will come true in the last days.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 31

Isaiah 31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they don't look to the Holy One of Israel, and they don't seek Yahweh!- The Jews of Isaiah's day turned to political alliances with the Egyptians to save them from the threat of Assyria. Isaiah insisted that "the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit" (Is. 31:3). Egypt and Assyria are likened to mere tiny insects, a fly and a bee. Yet Judah were doing what was humanly sensible and smart. To trust in politics, in what seems the usual human response to an issue rather than trust in God, is in fact something which breaks God's heart. The horses and chariots they ought to have trusted in were the Angel cherubim. This is the lesson of Ezekiel's usage of the cherubim visions. The grace and eagerness of God to work with men comes through, however; in that although just a minority trusted in Him, He used one Angel to smite the Assyrian army. Perhaps the impression is left that if the entire cherubim had been involved, not only would the Assyrians have been destroyed but the Kingdom established as discussed on Is. 30:28-30.

Isaiah 31:2 Yet He also is wise, and will bring disaster- The idea was that to trust in Egypt was the "wise" thing to do, the secular choice of wisdom. We face the same

choice. Yet we are to be fools for Christ's sake. And God's wisdom was to "bring disaster" upon those who trusted in Egypt. But how it worked out was that the faith of the minority led to the Assyrians being destroyed, despite the majority trusting in Egypt. Were they therefore not punished or had "disaster"? They appear to have got away with it. But the judgment of the last day, to which they will be resurrected, will finally resolve all these issues.

And will not call back His words- The destruction of the Assyrian army could be read as God indeed relenting. He speaks His word of judgment, but in the gap between the statement and the execution of it there is the possibility of repentance and intercession which can call back those words; see on Jer. 18:8-10. God's calling back is the same word used in the frequent appeals for Judah to "turn away" from their sin (Is. 1:16). We could conclude that they didn't, and so God didn't turn back His words; and they will be punished at the last day. Or, we can marvel that God did call back His words for the sake of a minority repenting and interceding, just as He did regarding the destiny of Israel because of Moses' intercession.

But will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the helpers of those who work iniquity- God would "arise against" Assyria and Babylon to destroy them (s.w. Is. 14:22). But the context here is of His 'arising against' the evildoers amongst His people (s.w. Jer. 44:29). For they were a family of evildoers (s.w. Is. 1:4; 9:17) just as Babylon were (s.w. Is. 14:20). His arising in judgment was therefore to be against Babylon and the sinners within Judah at the same time; they were to be "condemned with the world" as the unworthy of the new Israel will be at the last day (1 Cor. 11:32); hence the appeal to come out of Babylon so as not to share her condemnation. But when the Assyrian army was destroyed, the sinful "house of the evildoers" in Judah wasn't destroyed. Perhaps judgment was averted for the sake of the repentance of the minority, just as we who are sinners are counted righteous thanks to the work of the Lord Jesus, the one man. But it could be they are raised to condemnation at the last day, and that condemnation will be articulated at the same time as Babylon is destroyed. Likewise the 'workers of iniquity' is a phrase used of the Jews at this time (Mic. 2:1 cp. Hos. 6:8). Their "helpers" could refer to the Egyptians whose help they sought (s.w. Is. 20:6; 31:1; Jer. 37:7), just as Ahaz had sought "help" (s.w.) from the Assyrians earlier (2 Chron. 28:21). Or we can read this as meaning that those who were "helpers" of the leading sinners in Judah would be likewise punished. And here again we see a principle of contemporary relevance; for we can so easily think we are not the "workers of iniquity", but by our support of them we become vicarious sinners. And even our silence can also be 'helping' them. This concern is raised again in :3.

Isaiah 31:3 Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit- As explained on :1, the contrast was with the Angel cherubim.

When Yahweh stretches out His hand- The simple fact we are created by God means that we are responsible to God in some sense, and therefore liable to His judgment. The stretched out hand of God is used as a figure both for His judgment of man (Is. 31:3) and also for His creation of man (Is. 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13). The knowledge that we are created by Him makes us responsible to His judgment, and we have to look at our bodies, our lives which He has created … and act accordingly.

Both he who helps shall stumble, and he who is helped shall fall, and they all shall be consumed together- As explained on :2, vicarious 'helping' of sinners is

judged the same as the high profile sinners themselves. But we can read "he who helps" as referring to the Egyptians (:1 s.w.; Is. 20:6; Jer. 37:7). The idea is that the Egyptians would be destroyed together with the Jews who trusted in them. But this didn't happen at Isaiah's time. The Assyrians were destroyed by God, and neither Judah nor Egypt fell together. And the Assyrians then left Egypt and Judah alone. All these things will come to full term in the last days, when the latter day Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and impenitent Judah will be destroyed together, apart from a small repentant remnant from all of them.

Isaiah 31:4 For thus says Yahweh to me, As the lion and the young lion growling over his prey who will not be dismayed if a multitude of shepherds is called together against him, nor will he abase himself for their noise, so Yahweh of Armies will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its mount- In the context of condemning trust in Egypt, this would mean that the expected help from Egypt would be like shepherds being "called" (by Judah 'calling' to Egypt for help, Hos. 7:11) but being unable to make enough noise to stop the lions of Assyria / Babylon devouring the prey of Judah. This could only be achieved by the direct intervention of Yahweh's Angelic armies coming down to Zion. This descent of Yahweh to Zion didn't happen in Isaiah's time when the Assyrians were destroyed by an Angel. It will come finally true when the latter day lions surrounding Zion are destroyed by the return of the Lord Jesus to Zion (Obad. 21).

The LXX again offers a different slant: "For thus said the Lord to me, As a lion would roar, or a lion's whelp over prey which he has taken, and cry over it, until the mountains are filled with his voice, and the animals are awe-struck and tremble at the fierceness of his wrath: so the Lord of hosts shall descend to fight upon the mount Sion, even upon her mountains". This would mean that trust in Egypt for help against the lions of Assyria and Babylon is nothing compared to the help of Yahweh, who would act as a far greater lion, in the person of His Son as the lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5; Gen. 49:9) coming down on Zion.

Isaiah 31:5 As birds hovering, so Yahweh of Armies will protect Jerusalem- The idea is as GNB "Just as a bird hovers over its nest to protect its young". Hovering over would suggest a Passover style deliverance, as would "He will pass over and preserve it", perhaps at the very time of that feast; see on Is. 30:29.

Many of the descriptions of the Lord Jesus Christ in His own parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the chicks of Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37) is based on Is. 31:5: " As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" Heb.). Yet Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be!

He will protect and deliver it, He will pass over and preserve it- This is what God did at the time of the destruction of the Assyrians in Isaiah's time, even though the majority were impenitent of their trust in Egypt. It is this act of pure love and grace which leads to the appeal for repentance in :6. It wasn't that Yahweh would only act if the people all repented, although that indeed was His stated position. Rather He, like a parent, decided to all the same show them grace- in the hope they would be moved to

repentance by the goodness and grace shown. Indeed the grace / goodness of God, the gift ahead of time, is intended to elicit repentance (Rom. 2:4)

Isaiah 31:6 Return to Him from whom you have deeply revolted, children of Israel!- As explained on :5, this appeal to repentance was made after God has promised to save them by grace from the Assyrians. Their deep revolt was in seeking the help and solutions of the world, leaving their supposed faith in Yahweh as merely a cultural, theoretical matter. This, to God, was deep revolt. The plans they carefully devised were this deep revolt- hence LXX "Turn, ye children of Israel, who devise a deep and sinful counsel". The 'deep revolt' is the language of turning to idols (Dt. 13:5; Is. 1:5). And despite the grace of deliverance from Assyria, like their king Hezekiah, Judah continued to revolt and did not respond to grace (s.w. Is. 59:13).

Isaiah 31:7 For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold- There is a logic to wholehearted, unreserved conversion. Now, we must *turn unto* [s.w. 'convert to'] God (:6), "for in that day everyone shall *cast away* [turn back, 'convert'] his idols of silver and his idols of gold". In the day of final judgment, the rejected will go through the conversion scenario- of throwing away the things of this world, the pomp and the power and the pride of this petty life, and turning unto the things of God. But then, in the finest and acutest tragedy of the whole human experience, it will be all too late. *We must all go through the conversion process*: either now, or in the rejection experience of the judgment.

The sin which your own hands have made for you- Idols are so often called the works of human hands. And this is the abiding nature of idolatry in our age- to worship works, human achievements.

Isaiah 31:8 The Assyrian will fall by the sword, not of man; and the sword, not of mankind, shall devour him. He will flee from the sword, and his young men will become subject to forced labour- The LXX has "neither shall he flee from the face of the sword". The idea being that they would not die by the sword; the Angel destroyed them in a moment. And the judgments against them in Is. 30 stress flaming fire and sulphur being used, not literal weapons. Perhaps the allusion is again to the cherubim (see on :1) who were associated in Genesis with the flaming sword.

Isaiah 31:9 His rock will pass away by reason of terror, and his princes will be afraid of the banner, says Yahweh, whose fire is in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem- Yahweh was to be the rock of Israel. That meant, and means today, that we can have no other rock. The intention was that there would be a literal descent of Yahweh, perhaps through the cherubim, to Zion. The fire from this would destroy the surrounding enemies, as described in Is. 30, and yet that Divine fire would remain in Zion as the sign of God's presence and would form the "fire [which] burns there for sacrifices" (GNB) in the revived temple system. Yahweh's banner or ensign would be placed there, and the repentant remnants of the nations would rally to it, according to previous prophecies in Isaiah. Then the situation of Is. 4:5,6 would have come about. But all that didn't work out at the time because Judah weren't receptive to it. And so these things have been reinterpreted and reapplied; the ensign becomes the pole or cross of the Lord Jesus, to whom all true believers in Him will come, in their acceptance of the Hope of Israel. And these things shall have some literal fulfilment at the Lord's return.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 32

Isaiah 32:1 Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in justice- This king in the context of the Assyrian destruction spoken of in Is. 31 would have been Hezekiah. But he failed to do this, as did his sons, his "princes". And so these things are reinterpreted and reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 32:2 A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the storm, as streams of water in a dry place, as the shade of a large rock in a weary land- We noted on Is. 31:9 that the situation of Is. 4:5,6 could potentially have come about in Isaiah's time, but Judah's general impenitence meant that it was deferred to the last days and is meanwhile reinterpreted with reference to the Lord Jesus, the "man" who is a covert from the storm of Divine judgment. All the "coverts" of human strength would be destroyed (Is. 28:17 s.w.) leaving only "a man" as a place of defence. That "man" was to be the "king" of :1; and it now clearly refers to the Lord Jesus. To trust in an invisible Man rather than visible human strength is a big challenge to us today. In the future application, we have here the picture of the entire *eretz* being turned into a desolate wilderness with the heat of Divine judgment making it unbearable (see on Is. 24), and with the rock which will represent the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 10:4) alone offering shade. LXX "and shall appear in Sion as a rushing river, glorious in a thirsty land" confirms that this is the scene which could have developed in the redeemed Zion, but which has currently been reinterpreted to the gushing streams of the Spirit coming out of the smitten rock of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 32:3 The eyes of those who see will not be dim, and the ears of those who hear will listen- LXX "And they shall no more trust in men" would continue the theme of Is. 31, of not trusting any more in Egypt nor in idols, but in Yahweh alone. The blind in Is. 29:9 were those mentally and spiritually blinded by God because they didn't want to see. But that psychological work of God will now work in reverse, through the work of the Holy Spirit which is part of the gift of the new covenant. This was what God envisioned His repentant people accepting at Isaiah's time, and then again on their return from Babylon- and part of that covenant was that God would work on their hearts to give them spiritual vision. We are confirmed mentally and spiritually, by the Spirit's operation directly on our hearts, in the way we wish to go.

Isaiah 32:4 The heart of the rash will understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers will be ready to speak plainly- The GNB interpretation is worth considering: "They will not be impatient any longer, but they will act with understanding and will say what they mean". But these rash stammerers are those of :3 who once had blinded eyes and deaf ears, who now have them opened by the Spirit. And with those opened eyes and ears they will "understand". The "rash" or impatient were those who wished God to "make speed" His work and because of His apparent silence turned to Egypt (Is. 5:19 s.w.). So this prophecy of the Kingdom situation could have come about in Isaiah's time; those hardened disbelievers in Judah could have been converted from their blindness and superficial judgments. Such is the power of the Spirit; those who appear totally unspiritual and short termist in their judgments can be converted by the Spirit. See on Is. 35:4. The stammerers are

likewise those who spoke for God unclearly, in bursts of enthusiasm, but not in full communicative relationship with Him. His Spirit would change even those.

Isaiah 32:5 The fool will no longer be called noble, nor the scoundrel be highly respected- The LXX would refer to the way that Isaiah and the prophets had been told to cease prophesying by the fools who were in power: "And they shall no more at all tell a fool to rule, and thy servants shall no more at all say, Be silent". The same word is used of the foolishness of the false prophets (Ez. 13:3). Perhaps there was one particular Judas like figure amongst the Jerusalem leadership who was the singular "vile person" (AV). I suggested on Is. 22:15-20 that this individual in the immediate context may have been Shebna, who is described here as "noble" in that he pretended to the royal family although he was an Egyptian (see on Is. 22:15,16). He had obtained 'high respect' within the Jerusalem leadership. He was apparently "liberal" (:8 AV) offering material gifts to those who supported him, whilst advocating the evil policy of trust in Egypt (:7). But he was a "scoundrel".

Isaiah 32:6 For the fool will speak folly, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice profanity, and to utter error against Yahweh, to make empty the soul of the hungry and to cause the drink of the thirsty to fail- If Shebna's counsel was followed, he would lead to the destruction of the people. His pretension to the royal family when he was an Egyptian agent (see on :5) was profanity and folly. His pro-Egypt policy was effectively an anti-Yahweh policy. The blasphemy of Rabshakeh may also be in view. Perhaps this figure will have an equivalent in the last days within Jewish society.

Isaiah 32:7 The ways of the scoundrel are evil- LXX "For the counsel of the wicked will devise iniquity" would connect with the immediate context of condemning the Jews for trusting in the counsel of the false prophets to seek help from Egypt, resulting in huge sin against God (see on Is. 30:1). I suggested on :5 that the work of Shebna is in view.

He devises wicked devices to destroy the humble with lying words, even when the needy speaks right- Shebna's work (see on :5; Is. 22:15-18) involved lies and destroying the humble faithful who spoke against his pro-Egypt policies.

Isaiah 32:8 But the noble devises noble things; and he will continue in noble things- I suggested on :5 that the work of Shebna is in view; he was not truly noble nor liberal / generous (AV) although he pretended to be this. He was giving gifts to buy favours. But only the genuinely liberal or generous would finally stand: "“The liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand” (Is. 32:8 AV) may suggest that the generous will “stand” in the last day because of their generous spirit. Indeed, being in covenant with God may even depend upon our recognition of the fact that all human wealth is from God: “Thou shalt remember… it is [God] that giveth thee power to get wealth, *that* he may establish his covenant” (Dt. 8:18).

Isaiah 32:9 Rise up, you women who are at ease!- In society of that time, women weren't considered the significant decision makers, and were never seen as guilty or praiseworthy for any political decisions or outcomes. But the prophets, Jeremiah particularly, focus upon the guilt of the women of the times. They perceived the value of all persons, and how the women were as much ultimately a part of the decision

making as the men because of the significant background factor played by wives in the behaviour of their husbands and sons. And so here Isaiah appeals to them over several verses. The request to hear him was effectively an appeal for their repentance- at a time when religion and politics were the sphere of men and not women. The same word for "at ease" is used about the future, restored Kingdom (:18; Is. 33:20). This was the true "ease" or quietness. But this 'quietness' of the restored Kingdom was claimed to be experienced by the disbelieving wealthy women of Jerusalem who lived "at ease" (:9,11 s.w.). They believed their false prophets, imaging they had their Kingdom right then in their luxurious lives.

Hear My voice, you careless daughters, give ear to My speech!- "Careless" or 'confident' is the word used of 'trusting' in Egypt (Is. 31:1; 36:4-6,9); 'trusting' in the idols of Egypt too (Is. 42:17 s.w.). The political decisions of the men were equally those of the women in their society. That they were "careless" or confidently trusting in Egypt is three times mentioned here (:9-11).

Isaiah 32:10 For days beyond a year you will be troubled, you careless women; for the vintage shall fail. The harvest won't come- LXX "Remember for a full year in pain, yet with hope: the vintage has been cut off; it has ceased, it shall by no means come again". This would be another of those passages in Isaiah which suggest that the tribulation of Judah was going to last for a short period, here "a full year", and conclude with the Lord's coming in judgment and thereby redemption of Zion. But these short term possibilities were precluded by the lack of repentance in Judah and so the prophecies have been given other and longer term references.

Isaiah 32:11 Tremble, you women who are at ease! Be troubled, you careless ones!- See on :9. This is a twice repeated appeal.

Strip yourselves, make yourselves naked and put sackcloth on your waist- This was to happen to them anyway in their captivity. They were to act as if they realized they were worthy of such condemnation. Likewise if we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). There's something alive and passionate to the words of the prophets. They're not just droning on. Although they largely wrote in poetry, let not this delude us from feeling the cutting edge of their passion. Their poetry wasn't what Wordsworth thought poetry is- "emotion recollected in tranquility". The attack on complacency and passionlessness was full frontal: "Tremble, you women who are at ease [as you stroll the supermarkets of today], shudder, you complacent ones [as you hang out with your friends, lost in small talk]; strip and make yourselves bare" (Is. 32:11 RSV- the RSV seems to me to capture the passion of the prophetic words best of all the English translations).

Isaiah 32:12 Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine- The beating of breasts suggests this is still addressed to the women of the previous verses. But "beat" can also be translated "pluck off". And the only other two occurrences of "fruitful vine" refer to a woman and her children (Ps. 128:3; Ez. 19:10). Ez. 23:34 speaks of the women of rejected Judah plucking off their own breasts in their mental agony of condemnation. I suggest we have a similar idea here. All that they stood for as women, their deepest self-identity, they wished to destroy. The mental agony of the condemned is the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" which the Lord speaks of.

Isaiah 32:13 Thorns and briers will come up on My people's land- This was because

their potentially fruitful vineyard of :12 had not brought forth fruit and so it was to be left desolate and bring forth the curse of Genesis, thorns and briers (Is. 5:9). This and the similar prophecy of desolation in Is. 5:6 didn't happen at the Assyrian invasion; it was reapplied to the situation after the Babylonian invasion, when the land was intended to rest (Lev. 26:34,43) until Judah repented. But even that program didn't work out, and so the Lord's parable of the vineyard explained that therefore the vineyard was given to a new Israel. Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Yet "briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (Is. 9:18; 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them; and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Yes, on all the houses of joy in the joyous city- Isaiah is complaining that the people were feasting instead of fasting in repentance (as in Is. 22:2), and he juxtaposes their present feasting with the desolation threatened. But it seems there was repentance amongst a minority and so the threatened destruction of Zion's population at the hands of the Assyrians was averted; but it was actually only deferred to the time of the Babylonians.

Isaiah 32:14 For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city will be deserted- The palace wasn't forsaken in that Hezekiah and his descendants continued to reign; Jerusalem wasn't deserted, and the hill of Zion didn't become grazing for donkeys. This however was the Divine intention; and we can conclude that for all his bursts of external goodness, there were problems with Hezekiah, or at least with the ruling family- and they came to full term in his loss of faith in Is. 39.

The hill and the watchtower will be for dens forever, a delight for wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks- The hill and watchtower may allude to the figure of the vineyard discussed on :13. The Hebrew and Greek phrases which are translated “for ever” mean strictly, “for the age”. Sometimes this refers to literal infinity, for example the age of the kingdom, but not always. Here we have an example: “The forts and towers will become lairs for ever... until the spirit is poured upon us” (:15). This is one way of understanding the ‘eternity’ of ‘eternal fire’.

Isaiah 32:15 Until the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is considered a forest- Seeing as noted on :14 that Zion wasn't totally destroyed at the time, this promise of the Spirit will ultimately apply to the last days when Jerusalem falls to her enemies, and the Lord's return to redeem her will be associated with the pouring out of the Spirit. Is. 32:14-16 RV has a similar scenario to that in Joel 2:20 and the pouring out of the Spirit on Israel in Zech. 12- Jerusalem was to be depopulated, wild animals would live there, Ophel [i.e. Zion, the temple mount] would be desolate- and then the Holy Spirit would be poured out and the Kingdom conditions established in Israel. But these things didn’t happen at the restoration, because Israel didn’t want the Spirit “to be poured upon us from on high”. Even though the gift of the Spirit, a new heart, was part of the new covenant offered to them in Ez. 20,36 and Jer. 30,31.

Isaiah 32:16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness; and righteousness will remain in the fruitful field- "Fruitful field" is literally "Carmel" here and in :15, as in LXX. The focus upon Carmel may be to recall Elijah's triumph there over the idolatry of Israel, and God's manifestation in fire. These things point forward to the latter day

work of Elijah and the final repentance of Israel; but unlike then, the justice and righteousness would "remain" eternally.

Isaiah 32:17 The work of righteousness will be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever- This alludes to how Ahaz had been called upon to repent of his faithlessness, and to find "calm", s.w. "quietness" (see on Is. 7:4); but he had "refused" (Is. 30:15), madly trusting upon Egyptian horses for salvation (Is. 30:16). But the appeal to repent was still there, for a later generation. The work of righteousness was therefore repentance. It is this alone which gives peace with God.

Isaiah 32:18 My people will live in a peaceful habitation, in safe dwellings and in quiet resting places- LXX "And his people shall inhabit a city of peace", a reference to 'Jerusalem'. The 'quietness' of the restored Kingdom was claimed to be experienced by the disbelieving wealthy women of Jerusalem who lived "at ease" (:9,11 s.w.). They believed their false prophets, imaging they had their Kingdom right then in their luxurious lives.

Isaiah 32:19 Though for now hail flattens the forest, and the city is levelled completely- The LXX alludes to how hail came on the Egyptians but not on Israel; because the narrative of the exodus deliverance is always to be found in Isaiah as the template for their latter day deliverance: "And if the hail should come down, it shall not come upon you". But if we read with the Hebrew text, the flattening of the forest is parallel to the levelling of the city of Jerusalem; and there is the implication in Zech. 11:1 that we are to understand the temple as the forest, perhaps because of the extensive usage of cedars of Lebanon and other wood within it. As explained on :15, Jerusalem was not levelled completely, at least not at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions which were primarily in view here. In Jeremiah's time, Israelites still came to offer offerings on the site of the temple. Nor really was this the case after AD70. It looks forward therefore to the last days, when it seems a new and blasphemous entity will be built in Jerusalem, to be soon destroyed by the Lord's return and the new Jerusalem coming down from Heaven upon whatever is built there.

Isaiah 32:20 Blessed are you who sow beside all waters, who send out the feet of the ox and the donkey- Maybe the sense is as in GNB "How happy everyone will be with plenty of water for the crops and safe pasture everywhere for the donkeys and cattle". But earlier the Assyrian / Babylonian invasion has been likened to a flood of waters coming upon the land. Now this has receded, seed is to be sown on the rich flood plain left behind; and ox and donkey used to cultivate it. But oxen and donkeys were not to be used together under the law of Moses. Perhaps this is a hint at a change in that law; that old covenant had been broken by Israel, and they were to now be under a new covenant which didn't have this regulation.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 33

Isaiah 33:1 Woe to you who destroy, but you weren't destroyed; and who betray, but nobody betrayed you- This could imply that God understands that abusers abuse because they were abused. And He factors this in to His final judgment of them. And we marvel at such sensitivity, and assurance of righteous judgment at the end. But Assyria was not able to claim that as an excuse; this was bloodlust.

When you have finished destroying, you will be destroyed; and when you have made an end of betrayal, you will be betrayed- AV "they shall deal treacherously with thee". The idea was that Assyria would be destroyed by those she had destroyed and deceived, i.e. Judah. But this didn't happen; Sennacherib lived many years after the destruction of his army at Jerusalem, and it was an Angel and not Judah who destroyed his army. The Divinely set up potentials weren't realized at the time of Isaiah and Hezekiah. "Betrayal" is a word often used about Judah (s.w. "treachery"). This was how they had treated Yahweh, and so they were treated the same way by the Assyrians. And yet from this God still intended to save them, by such great grace. "Destroy" is the word for "spoil" and what initially was in view was the spoiling of the tents of the destroyed Assyrians by the people of Jerusalem (:4).

Isaiah 33:2 Yahweh, be gracious to us- The faithful remnant centered around Isaiah realized that Judah in general had not repented, and the salvation from Assyria was to be by Divine grace alone.

We have waited for You- In the final glory of salvation revealed to Zion, they exult that they "have waited for Him" (Is. 25:9), and this was exactly the position of Isaiah's family and school of prophets (s.w. Is. 8:17). That righteous remnant would finally have their faith and expectation rewarded.

Be our strength every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble- The time of Jacob's trouble of Jeremiah and Daniel refers to the last days; it could have come at the time of the Assyrian invasion, but Judah weren't spiritually ready for this. So Isaiah prays that God would be the strength of His people "every morning" and not just that morning when they awoke to find the Assyrian army destroyed. We too are to daily live in the same spirit of total trust which we show in extreme situations.

Isaiah 33:3 At the noise of the thunder, the peoples have fled. When You lift Yourself up, the nations are scattered- "The nations" in the first instance were the various nations represented in the Assyrian army which was destroyed by an Angel, perhaps with "the noise of thunder". They were to be scattered as they had intended to scatter Judah (Is. 11:12; Dan. 12:7 s.w.). The same words for God lifting Himself up are used of the cherubim mounting up (Ez. 10:15,17,19), and in Hezekiah's time it was an Angel (associated with the cherubim) who slew the Assyrians.

Isaiah 33:4 Your spoil will be gathered as the caterpillar gathers. Men will leap on it as locusts leap- See on :1. This envisages the people of Jerusalem crawling back and forth from the city to the scene of the destruction of the Assyrians by the Angel, gathering their spoil. Caterpillars and locusts are used as symbols of Israel's invaders in Joel. They were doing to others as had been done to them. But Hezekiah wrongly boasted of this spoil, and therefore the Kingdom potential envisaged here didn't fully come about.

Isaiah 33:5 Yahweh is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness- Zion wasn't full of righteousness of itself; God saved Zion because He imputed righteousness to them on the basis of the faith of the righteous remnant within it. This was the day when Zion could have been redeemed by "justice and righteousness" (s.w. Is. 1:27). And by doing such things to us He likewise is exalted and seen to dwell on high, as He was at the exodus in Ps. 68:18, thereby dwelling even amongst "the rebellious". The day of Yahweh's exaltation was to be the day of

His Kingdom, when Judah were humbled (s.w. Is. 2:11,17; 12:4); this could potentially have come when the Assyrians were destroyed. But Judah's pride and impenitence precluded it.

Isaiah 33:6 There will be stability in your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. The fear of Yahweh is your treasure- This was what could have happened; but instead, Hezekiah made material treasures his wealth, rather than having fear of Yahweh as his greatest treasure. Hezekiah had "peace and truth" in his days or times (Is. 39:8). But that was but a surface level fulfilment of the far greater reality that was then possible. "Wisdom and knowledge" are associated with the Messiah figure which could then have arisen, associated with "salvation" (Is. 11:2 s.w.); and "Jesus" means 'Yah's salvation'. But Eliakim, Hezekiah and other potential such figures all failed, and so these words are reapplied to the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 33:7 Behold, their valiant ones cry outside; the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly- As GNB "The brave are calling for help. The ambassadors who tried to bring about peace are crying bitterly". Verses 7-9 appear to be Isaiah reflecting how things were to be at the time of the Assyrian invasion. The ambassadors of peace were perhaps those sent from him to the Assyrians begging for peace in return for paying tribute. They now realized their work was in vain because the agreed covenant with Assyria had been broken by the Assyrian invasion (:8).

Isaiah 33:8 The highways are desolate, the travelling man ceases- Now the road toward Assyria is deserted; nobody any longer is travelling there seeking peace deals.

The covenant is broken; He has despised the cities- Judah had made a covenant with Assyria, paying tribute and accepting Assyrian idols in return for a promise they wouldn't be attacked. But Assyria broke the covenant and now the cities of Judah were in ruins. All had fallen apart from Jerusalem. This was an appropriate response to the way they had "despised" their covenant with Yahweh (s.w. Lev. 26:15,43; Is. 5:24; 30:12).

He doesn't respect man- "There is no regard for man" was the complaint of Is. 33:8- the value and meaning of the human person was disregarded. Perhaps we could say that the prophets are characterized by taking the individual seriously. We seem to have a hard enough job maintaining a sense of the value of persons ourselves, quite apart from weeping that others don't have such values. This level of sensitivity to human sin is quite something; and yet this is the spirit of prophecy. In the ancient world it was felt that , as Cicero put it, "the gods attend to great matters; they neglect small ones" (*De Natura Deorum* Vol. 2, 167). The God of Israel was and is quite different; for as the prophets show, what men may regard as small issues are to Him all and vitally important. That slightly unkind communication, that less than truthful passing comment on a brother, that exaggeration… these aren't trivialities to God. What to us are trivialities are crucial to Him; that's the message of the prophets. The spirit of the prophets cried out in pain and anguish because of that kind of thing; and their spirit is to be ours.

Isaiah 33:9 The land mourns and languishes, Lebanon is confounded and withers away, Sharon is like a desert, and Bashan and Carmel are stripped bare- The initial reference would be to the scorched earth policy of Assyria in northern Palestine. The 'little apocalypse' of Is. 24:4 (see note there) had used the same words "mourns and

languishes" for the situation in the land immediately preceding the establishing of God's Kingdom there. Joel 1:10 likewise. So the situation with the Assyrians could have given rise to the coming of the Kingdom and a Messianic figure. But such great spiritual potentials were wasted by Judah and Hezekiah. The potential could again have come true at the time of the Babylonian desolation (s.w. Jer. 14:2; Lam. 2:8). But again it was precluded by Judah's refusal to truly hear the prophetic call for repentance. And so it is all reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 33:10 Now I will arise, says Yahweh- This is the rising up of Yahweh at the last day when Babylon / Assyria would fall and all the land be judged (Is. 2:21; 14:22; 28:21 s.w.). This is what could have happened at the time of Hezekiah; but although the Assyrian army was destroyed, Assyria continued at the time, and a Messianic Kingdom wasn't established.

Now I will lift Myself up. Now I will be exalted- This is the language of the cherubim being lifted up (Ez. 1:19,20 s.w.). Clearly we have in view here the potential visible manifestation of Yahweh in His Kingdom at the time of the Assyrian invasion; and this didn't happen. It is deferred and reapplied. "Lift up" is the same word translated "forgiven" in :24. The lifting up of Yahweh in all His glory is through His forgiveness of His sinful people. This is what He exalts in; our humble repentance is His exaltation. And this will be particularly true at the last day. But Judah didn't really repent, and so His exaltation couldn't happen at the time of the Assyrian crisis as was potentially possible.

Isaiah 33:11 You will conceive chaff, you will bring forth stubble- There is a theme in Isaiah of conceiving, suffering pain in labour- but bringing forth in vain (Is. 26:18; 33:11; 59:4). And so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was no bringing forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24).

Your breath is a fire that will devour you- Wrongly gained wealth is the fire that will burn those who have it at the last day (James 5:3). James is picking up a figure from Is. 33:11, again concerning the final judgment: “Your [own] breath [i.e. words], as fire, shall devour you”. Their breath, their words, were as fire which would in the end be the basis of their condemnation. Nadab and Abihu kindled strange fire, and it was with that fire that God burnt them up, in symbol of His destruction of all the wicked at judgment day (Lev. 10:2). The "sinners in Zion" (:14) would realize too late that they had destroyed themselves; hence LXX "Now shall ye see, now shall ye perceive; the strength of your breath, shall be vain; fire shall devour you".

Isaiah 33:12 The peoples will be like the burning of lime, like thorns that are cut

down and burned in the fire- Land bearing thorns speaks of the condemnation of the last day; the same process of destruction was to destroy "the peoples" and also the "thorns" brought forth within the land, the "sinners in Zion" of :14. This didn't happen at the time; the "sinners in Zion" weren't consumed at the same time as the Assyrian army, and there is no evidence that they were "burnt". This destruction by fire of both Israel's enemies and the "sinners in Zion" has been reapplied to the last days. So much potential was missed, partly because of God's grace to the "sinners in Zion" at the time.

Isaiah 33:13 Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and, you who are near, acknowledge My might- LXX "they that draw nigh shall know my strength". This is the picture presented throughout the prophets; the Jews, those who are near, repent and acknowledge Yahweh's might instead of trusting in their own might or that of "Egypt". And at the same time, a repentant remnant of the Gentile attackers "who are far off" will also repent. On the basis of this common experience of conviction of sin, repentance and forgiveness they will then form a new, multiethnic people of God in His restored Kingdom. There was the potential for this to happen at the time, but there was not the required repentance.

Isaiah 33:14 The sinners in Zion are afraid. Trembling has seized the godless ones. Who among us can live with the devouring fire? Who among us can live with everlasting burning?- Isaiah prophesied of the fire of Divine judgment. But it was that fire which touched his lips and purged him (Is. 6:7). The message was that contact with that fire was not necessarily destructive even to man. It is possible to “dwell with devouring fire”; that is part of relationship with God. Perhaps what is in view is the burning fire of the Divine presence prophesied in Is. 4:5. The spiritual will be able to dwell with this, but it will consume the sinners.

In the Hezekiah context, the sinners in Zion did indeed tremble but were not destroyed. There is no evidence that fire literally appeared to judge them, nor that it remained as the visible symbol of Yahweh's presence as foreseen in Is. 4:5. All this is reapplied to the future destruction of a latter day Assyrian and the "sinners in Zion". At the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ the responsible will be gathered to judgement at Jerusalem. The plain Biblical evidence for this is too hard to go against. With Hezekiah in Jerusalem were "the sinners in Zion", who would equate with the unworthy who are also gathered into Jerusalem. It is largely through the Angels that the judgement is ministered; and so it was in Hezekiah's time. In the context of describing the punishment of these "sinners in Zion" we read: "The Lord will come with fire, and with His (Angel) chariots like a whirlwind (Angelic language), to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire". This is alluded to (quoted?) in 2 Thess. 1:7,8 concerning the Angelic punishment of the unworthy at the judgement: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty Angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance... ". That those punished are renegade saints who "know not God (any longer), and that obey not the Gospel" is evident from the fact that they are punished "from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power". In common with much of Thessalonians, Paul is alluding back to Matthew 24 and 25, here to the passage in Mt. 25:31-34 regarding the responsible being gathered to the judgement before "the throne of His glory". Only the responsible come into the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The description of the judgement in Jude 24 chimes in too: "The presence of His glory".

It could be argued that :14-17 are alluding to a temple tabernacle entry liturgy. Along with Psalms 15 and 24, the passage begins with the double question 'Who can enter / fellowship with God?', conditions given similar to those in Psalms 15 and 24, and then blessings of fellowship with God pronounced. See more commentary on this on Ps. 15:2.

Isaiah 33:15 He who walks righteously, and speaks blamelessly; he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands- Literally, 'shakes his hands' on refusing to take bribes. The same word is used in :9 of Carmel shaking off her fruits (AV). The ways of the righteous and the wicked are opposite and cannot be compromised.

Refusing to take a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from looking at evil- The righteous don't even want to hear plans to shed blood. We get the impression that despite all the pressure from Assyria, their consciences weren't exercised; the leadership continued plotting against others and taking bribes.

Isaiah 33:16 he will dwell on high. His place of defence will be the fortress of rocks. His bread will be supplied, his waters will be sure- The same words are used of Yahweh dwelling on high in :5. The righteous will be identified with Him. GNB "you will be as secure as if in a strong fortress". Isaiah foresees lack of bread and water as a result of the Assyrian siege. He doesn't see Hezekiah's conduit as solving the water problem within Jerusalem under siege, as elsewhere he has presented this as a work of dependence upon the flesh. But the righteous are to survive this. But by grace, all Jerusalem did at that time, including "the sinners in Zion" (:14).

Isaiah 33:17 Your eyes will see the king in His beauty, they will see the land that is distant- The idea may be that they would see to the full distant extent of the land; the entire promised land from Nile to Euphrates would now be reigned over by the new Messianic king. Hence GNB "Once again you will see a king ruling in splendor over a land that stretches in all directions". But that didn't happen in Hezekiah's time; he was content to live in Jerusalem with a few years of peace. He refused the wider vision and potential that was possible.

Our eyes too shall “behold the land that is [currently] very far off” just as Moses had been given the vision of the promised land far off. See on Jn. 3:3,5. You and me personally will be in God’s Kingdom, with our arms around each other in the rubble of Jerusalem. We will personally be there. We will see Abraham there (Lk. 13:28); as Job says, with our own eyes we will behold our Lord, and not through anyone else’s eyes (Job 19:27). Our eyes shall behold the King in the beauty which we personally perceive in Him.

Isaiah 33:18 Your heart will meditate on the terror- The idea is that the righteous remnant would look back on the trauma of the Assyrian siege and perceive God's hand.

Where is he who counted? Where is he who weighed? Where is he who counted the towers?- Assyrian inscriptions and bas reliefs show men counting and weighing the spoil and carefully counting the towers of cities under attack. Those men would be out of work or destroyed themselves. Or we could go with GNB "Your old fears of foreign tax collectors and spies will be only a memory".

Isaiah 33:19 You will no longer see the fierce people, a people of a deep speech that

you can't comprehend, with a strange language that you can't understand- The language difference is made apparent by Rabshakeh speaking unexpectedly in Hebrew, implying that this was unusual as the Assyrian language or dialect couldn't be understood by ordinary Jewish people. The description of the Assyrians, and other future invaders to whom this prophecy was reapplied, is framed in terms of the curses for breaking the covenant in Dt. 28:49. The results of their covenant breaking would be removed. But historically, Judah did see the Assyrians again; Manasseh was "taken with hooks by the captains of the King of Assyria, and carried to Babylon" (2 Chron. 33:11). This was avoidable, for the victory implied here sounds to be permanent. But it only applied to that generation, because the potential victory and establishment of Yahweh's Kingdom was precluded by Hezekiah's weakness and Judah's lack of repentance.

Isaiah 33:20 Look toward Zion, the city of our appointed festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tent that won't be removed; her stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of her cords be broken- It must have seemed impossible to believe that the eyes of Isaiah's generation would ever see this, as Zion was surrounded and besieged and the rest of Judah in ruins. But the Assyrians were destroyed in a moment and they did see this. The implication was that again the people of Judah would look to Jerusalem as the place where they could keep the feasts.

The same word for "at ease" or "quiet" is used about the future, restored Kingdom (also Is. 32:18) as about the "ease" or quietness of the disbelieving wealthy women of Jerusalem who lived "at ease" (Is. 32:9,11 s.w.). They believed their false prophets, imaging they had their Kingdom 'ease' right then in their luxurious lives. But this was not the true "ease" or quietness. Luxurious living is but a fake Kingdom of God. And the stakes and tent ropes ("cords") of Zion were removed. Again, the potential didn't come about; see on :19.

Isaiah 33:21 But there Yahweh will be with us in majesty- Here as in Is. 4:5,6 there is the implication that Yahweh Himself would be "with us", perhaps literally coming to dwell in Zion so that the name of the city would be called "Yahweh is there" (Ez. 48:35). Or perhaps the earlier prophecy of Is. 7:14; 8:8 is in view, where the Messiah who would appear at the time of salvation from Assyria would be called "God with us". These possibilities were all precluded and therefore transferred to events of the last days concerning the Lord Jesus.

A place of broad rivers and streams, in which no galley with oars will go, neither will any gallant ship pass by there- The reference is to military vessels propelled by oarsmen as well as sails. Although there is no protective river around Jerusalem as there was around Nineveh and Babylon, yet Yahweh would be the equivalent of that defensive river; and no aggressive military boats of any enemy would be able to cross it.

Isaiah 33:22 For Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our lawgiver, Yahweh is our king; He will save us- As in :21, again the earlier prophecy of Is. 7:14; 8:8 is in view, where the Messiah who would appear at the time of salvation from Assyria would be called "God with us". These possibilities were all precluded and therefore transferred to events of the last days concerning the Lord Jesus, whose name means "Yah will save us". That great salvation would be predicated upon Yahweh being the judge and lawgiver. His salvation is by grace but as explained in Rom. 1-8, it is still given justly,

with righteousness imputed rather than Divine law being winked at or injustice shown by God in achieving the salvation of sinners.

Isaiah 33:23 Your rigging is untied; they couldn't strengthen the foot of their mast, they failed to spread the sail. Then the prey of a great spoil was divided, the lame took the prey- This continues the analogy in :21 to the invaders as using military warships. They arrived as it were on the waters of the great invasion predicted in Is. 8 which would smother Judah but leave Jerusalem. The idea was that the Assyrians would be slain and the people go out of Jerusalem to gather it, even the lame. But all Judah are likened to the lame, repentant Jacob, hobbling into salvation by grace at the last day (Jer. 31:8). There is no record of the spoil of the Assyrians being taken in Is. 37:36. And we doubt whether the Assyrian soldiers had huge amounts of valuables with them whilst outside Jerusalem. Clearly these things look forward to the day when Judah shall indeed be the repentant Jacob.

Isaiah 33:24 The inhabitant won't say, I am sick because the people who dwell therein will be forgiven their iniquity- In the immediate context, the sick inhabitant of Jerusalem was Hezekiah who was cured. The implication would therefore be that he was sick because he had sinned- and his sin was clearly in ripping off the gold of the temple to try to buy off the Assyrians rather than trusting in Yahweh. But the application may also be to Gentiles: "And the people dwelling among them" (LXX), "No one who lives in our land" (GNB); these proselytes, the repentant remnant of the attackers, would be forgiven and healed of all sickness.

"Forgiven" is the same word translated "lift up" in :10. The lifting up of Yahweh in all His glory is through His forgiveness of His sinful people. This is what He exalts in; our humble repentance is His exaltation. And this will be particularly true at the last day. But Judah didn't really repent, and so His exaltation couldn't happen at the time of the Assyrian crisis as was potentially possible.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 34

Isaiah 34:1 Come near, you nations, to hear! Listen, you peoples. Let the earth and all it contains hear; the world, and everything that comes from it- The idea is, all the people born in the world, which is parallel with the earth / land of Israel. The envisaged destruction of the Assyrians in Is. 33 was potentially to be part of the destruction of all enemies of God's people in the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. But this didn't happen at the time because Hezekiah and his sons befriended the nations and followed their ways, rather than separating from them spiritually and leading them to Yahweh worship. And the people of Judah continued to act as the Gentiles.

Isaiah 34:2 For Yahweh is enraged against all the nations and angry with all their armies. He has utterly destroyed them- We have a return here to the scene in the 'little apocalypse' in Is.24. The destruction of the earth / land along with many of God's people leads to the repentance of a remnant of both Jews, Israelites and Gentiles who form a new multiethnic people of God under a Messiah figure in a reestablished Kingdom of God on earth. That is the scene in Is. 34 too, although the Gentiles are personified as Idumea / Edom, the nation against whom all the prophets record God's particular wrath. God's being "enraged" was because He had sent "all nations" to punish Judah but they had fallen into bloodlust and pride (Zech. 1:15 s.w.). The 'utter destruction' of the "all nations" supposes that this prophecy speaks of a final destruction; this could have happened in Isaiah's time, but has been deferred to the last days. But the same word for "utter destruction" is translated 'consecrate' or 'devote [unto Yahweh]'. It is used in Mic. 4:13, which states that a repentant Judah will be the means by which this happens: "Arise and thresh, daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs brass; and you will beat in pieces many peoples: and I will devote their gain [s.w. "utterly destroy"] to Yahweh, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth". This never really happened in previous judgments upon the "all nations" around Jerusalem. Always something positive is envisaged as coming out of Divine judgment.

He has given them over for slaughter- God states His intentions, and in the gap between statement and fulfilment there is the opportunity for repentance in order to change the stated outcome (Jer. 18:8-10). The implication is therefore that this scenario need not happen if the nations repented. We too live in that gap.

Isaiah 34:3 Their slain will also be cast out, and the stench of their dead bodies will come up; and the mountains will melt in their blood- This suggests a massive scale of destruction, unknown in previous judgments upon the "all nations" of the land promised to Abraham. The bodies would not be buried, and the smell of the bodies would be terrible. This is the scene presented in the prophecy of the destruction of Gog and his armies, the latter day Assyrian, in Ez. 39. It's not simply that both prophecies have the same event in view. The prophecy wasn't fulfilled as it might have been in the time of

Isaiah, so it was been transferred, rescheduled and reapplied to the last day scene of Ez. 39.

Isaiah 34:4 All of the army of the sky will be dissolved, the sky will be rolled up like a scroll- Here we have a clear parallel between the armies and controlling powers of the earth, and the stars of the heavens. "Heavens" are indeed used in the Bible symbolically, referring to the leading or controlling powers in a situation. The armies of the sky refer to how the armies of soldiers on earth had their heavenly representation before the throne of God in the heavenly courtroom. The Angels there represented situations upon earth. "Dissolved" is s.w. "consume away"; on earth, this will amount to the scene in Zech. 14:12, where the same word is thrice used: "This will be the plague with which Yahweh will strike all the peoples who have warred against Jerusalem: their flesh will consume away while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will consume away in their sockets, and their tongue will consume away in their mouth". Rolling up like a scroll could speak of how the entire prophetic word is to come to its climactic fulfilment.

And all its armies will fade away, as a leaf fades from off a vine or a fig tree- The fading leaf has been used of the judgment of God's people for their lack of spiritual fruit (s.w. Is. 1:30; 24:4; 28:1,4; 40:7; 64:6; Jer. 8:13). That catena of passages impressively applies this to Israel and Judah. The idea is that the armies of the nations will be judged at the same time as the "sinners in Zion", as in Is. 33:14. Their judgment will be in that they partake in the judgments of the world which they loved, having failed to come out of Babylon they share in her judgments. And this will be true of the unfaithful within spiritual Israel (1 Cor. 11:32).

Isaiah 34:5 For My sword has drunk its fill in the sky. Behold, it will come down on Edom and on the people of My curse for judgement- I suggested on :1 that the judgments here are upon all the nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, but they are personified as Edom as the epitome of them all. Edom is Esau, and God's especial wrath was against them because they were the brother of Jacob / Israel who couldn't and wouldn't forgive him, and who joined in with the nations in destroying Zion right down to the foundation (Ps. 137:7). They judged their brother far too harshly for his wrongdoing (see on Jer. 49:9). Jer. 49:11 is a clear invitation to Edom to repent, which they refused. Edom or Esau was singled out for such special condemnation because he was Jacob's brother (Obad. 10). This was not the case for the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines etc. Jacob and Esau were admittedly somewhat separated, and Jacob hadn't been the best brother to Esau. But they were still brothers, and God expected much better of Esau / Edom than He did of the others. And here we find a penetrating challenge. Our brethren whom we may view askance, from whom we may be separated by the way life

has gone for us, are still our brothers. And we are judged very sensitively according to our attitudes toward them, especially in the time of their distress, however justified we may feel that distress to be.

Isaiah 34:6 Yahweh's sword is filled with blood, it is covered with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams; for Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in the land of Edom- The allusion is how the blood, fat and kidneys were separated in the sacrifices to Yahweh. Lambs, goats and rams were all sacrificial animals. The implication could be that through their heavy judgment, they would become an acceptable sacrifice to Him, just as the idea of "utter destruction" also applies to being consecrated to Yahweh; see on :2.

Isaiah 34:7 The wild oxen will come down with them and the young bulls with the mighty bulls; and their land will be drunken with blood and their dust made greasy with fat- The huge amount of blood shedding (in :3 also) is not because God revels in it, but because as noted on :6, this is all the imagery of sacrifice. And the blood was to be poured out to Yahweh and the fat given to Him. Oxen and bulls were also sacrificial animals; in fact they along with the lambs, goats and rams of :6 comprise all the sacrificial animals. Hence GNB "The people will fall like wild oxen and young bulls". So as it were silhouetted over this scene of bloodshed is the impression of a huge sacrifice to God, and from this we may be justified in thinking that ultimately good comes out of the scene, and possibly the people of Esau / Edom do turn to Yahweh the God of their difficult brother Jacob.

Isaiah 34:8 For Yahweh has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion- The "cause" of Zion can be read as the judicial pleading, the pleading for legal justice made in a law case, and the Hebrew word is elsewhere translated like that. The repentant Zion will plead for justice and her prayers will be heard by God as a plea for legal action against her abusers; and so the day of recompense upon her enemies will come, but it is predicated upon her cry of repentance.

Isaiah 34:9 Her streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into sulphur, and her land will become burning pitch- The allusion is clearly to the destruction of Sodom with fire and sulphur; which was likewise threatened upon Judah and Jerusalem at multiple points in the prophetic condemnation of them. Esau is not therefore being singled out for some special punishment, as if God is taking Jacob's side; the wicked amongst Jacob / Israel are to be punished along with the impenitent amongst Esau. There may be a literal element to all this if oil reserves or the oil beneath the deserts ignites.

Isaiah 34:10 it won't be quenched night nor day, the smoke will go up forever; from generation to generation, it will lie waste. Nobody will pass through it forever and ever- God punished the land of Idumea with fire that would "not be quenched night nor day; its smoke shall ascend for ever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste... the owl and the raven shall dwell in it... thorns shall come up in its palaces" (Is. 34:9-15). Seeing that animals and plants were to exist in the ruined land of Idumea, the language of eternal fire must refer to God's anger and His total destruction of the place, rather than being taken literally. I suggest that this was the potential judgment which could have come upon Edom, and did to some extent. In its latter day application we are left wondering how there could remain some parts of the earth which will be eternally desolate and empty (:11), covered in "nettles and thistles" (13) which means that the curse of Genesis is still to be seen there- and eternally possessed by wild animals (:16). This doesn't sound like the scene in the kingdom of God on earth, anywhere on the planet. For the mountain of God's Kingdom is to spread to fill the whole earth, and the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea. So I conclude that this was a scenario which didn't fully come upon Eden and will not be literally fulfilled in the last day either; just as the temple system of Ez. 40-48 was never literally built at the time as it could have been, and by its nature will not be totally realized in the last day either.

Isaiah 34:11 but the pelican and the porcupine will possess it, the owl and the raven will dwell in it. He will stretch the line of confusion over it, and the plumb line of emptiness- "Confusion" is s.w. "thing of nothing" (Is. 29:21). The measuring line would build nothingness, "emptiness". LXX "satyrs shall dwell in it". The animals in view are all unclean. The idea is that ritually unclean animals will be there; it is a picture of condemnation of the unclean to nothingness.

Isaiah 34:12 They shall call its nobles to the kingdom, but none shall be there; and all its princes shall be nothing- The idea may be that this kingdom, unlike Judah's kingdom, shall never be revived: "and there is no kingdom there which they may proclaim". "Nothing" continues the theme of :11; see note there. The emptiness of condemnation, the nothingness when life could otherwise be so "full", is a major theme. We in this life can waste our lives on things of nothing, and by doing so we are living out our condemnation.

Isaiah 34:13 Thorns will come up in its palaces, nettles and thistles in its fortresses; and it will be a habitation of jackals, a court for ostriches- "Jackals" is LXX "monsters", as "satyrs" in :11. These mythical beings were what they believed were the ultimate signs of

condemnation. Their wrong concepts are used without correction, as is the language of demons in the New Testament, in order to speak to them in their own terms. But realizing this, we are not to look for literal fulfillments of these words.

But note Is. 35:7, which speaks of this 'eternal' desolation being revived: "The burning sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. Grass with reeds and rushes will be in the habitation of jackals, where they used to lay". These "jackals" are those here envisaged living for 'ever', for generation after generation, in the judged cities of Edom. But it seems those areas will be revived. Areas so heavily condemned and judged will in due course be brought under God's glory. The water source in Is. 35:7 is the stream envisaged as flowing from Zion in Ezekiel and Revelation. This could have happened literally had Judah built the temple system as commanded in Ez. 40-48. Hence LXX "a fountain of water shall be poured into the thirsty land; there shall there be a joy of birds, ready habitations and marshes". See on :15.

Isaiah 34:14 The wild animals of the desert will meet with the wolves, and the wild goat will cry to his fellow. Yes, the night creature shall settle there and shall find herself a place of rest- LXX "And devils shall meet with satyrs, and they shall cry one to the other: there shall satyrs rest, having found for themselves a place of rest"; GNB "The night monster will come there looking for a place to rest". These mythical beings were what they believed were the ultimate signs of condemnation. Their wrong concepts are used without correction, as is the language of demons in the New Testament, in order to speak to them in their own terms. But realizing this, we are not to look for literal fulfillments of these words.

Isaiah 34:15 The arrow snake will make her nest there, and lay, hatch, and gather under her shade. Yes, the kites will be gathered there, every one with her mate- I noted on :13 that the "jackals" also feature in Kingdom prophecies. And here too, the nesting of snakes is encountered in Is. 11:8, where the child shall safely play around the snake's nest. The overall impression, putting the scriptures together, is that the historical judgments and condemnation of Edom will be somehow incorporated into the scene of God's Kingdom. The terrible judgments upon Edom described earlier are to prepare her for a place in God's Kingdom. Never do we find God's judgments as only punitive; there is always the creative element in them, forging a better future.

Isaiah 34:16 Search in the book of Yahweh, and read: not one of these will be missing; none will lack her mate. For My mouth has commanded, and His Spirit has gathered them- GNB "Search in the LORD's book of living creatures and read what it says. Not

one of these creatures will be missing, and not one will be without its mate. The LORD has commanded it to be so; he himself will bring them together". We note the role of God's Spirit in gathering together the animals, and the parallel between God's book / words, His mouth and His Spirit. What He has stated will come about, and it did happen to Edom for a period. But it is not simply a case of Him stating things and they happen; His Spirit is reflected in His purpose and in its fulfilment.

Isaiah 34:17 He has cast the lot for them, and His hand has divided it to them with a measuring line. They shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation they will dwell in it- I have suggested in the above verses that the places where the jackals lay and the snakes nest (:13,15) are to be revived and brought into God's Kingdom. So this "from generation to generation" doesn't mean an infinite period of eternal condemnation. There is the continual hope of revival ultimately; perhaps in that Edom does finally respond to the invitation to repent which will be given her in the last days (Jer. 49: 11). See on Is. 35:1.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 35

Isaiah 35:1 The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose- I noted that the preceding pictures of desolation concerning Edom have within them the hint that even the most heavily judged and condemned areas will be revived in God's Kingdom (see on Is. 34:13,15,17). In this case, this prophecy would flow on seamlessly from that.

Isaiah 35 is an evident prophecy of the future Kingdom of God on earth. But it is replete with connections with the prophecies of Judah's restoration from Babylon in Isaiah 40-55: Water in the wilderness = Is. 41:18,19; Is. 43:19,20; Is. 44:3; Is. 50:2; Is. 51:3; God's glory revealed (Is. 35:2) = Is. 40:5,9; Time of judgment and recompense (Is. 35:4) = Is. 40:10; Strength to the faint-hearted (Is. 35:3,4) = Is. 40:9, 29-31; A highway for the return to Zion (Is. 35:8) = Is. 40:3. The conclusion from this is surely that the way home from Babylon to Judah was to be seen as the entrance into the Kingdom age. Which is why I suggest that a Messianic Kingdom could've come at the restoration. Isaiah's predictions about the return from exile in Babylon (Is. 49:6), the freedom of the land from foreign dominance (Is. 53:8,11), the repopulation of Jerusalem (Is. 54:1), rebuilding the temple (Is. 53:5) etc. all came true at the return of the exiles; but those same prophecies speak of the resurrection of the dead (Is. 42:11; Is. 45:8; Is. 49:8), Messiah teaching the Law to Israel, all the world coming to accept Israel's God and coming to worship in the new temple etc. The prophecies of the restoration of the exiles from Babylon are inextricably connected with these things. And yet they didn't happen; and even those aspects which

did, only came true to a very limited extent- solely because of Israel's indolence, and the fact the majority of the Jews remained in Babylon.

Isaiah 35:2 It will blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. Lebanon's glory will be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon; they will see Yahweh's glory, the excellence of our God- The blossoming here and in :1 is surely to be understood in the context of Is. 27:6. Israel will fill the face of the world with spiritual fruit – and this will be the fruit of the taking away of their sin, and their experience of repentance (Is. 27:6,9 RV). This is the 'budding' of the waste places of the land foreseen in these Kingdom prophecies. Is. 66:14 uses the word for the flourishing of the hearts of the repentant peoples. And here, the blossoming is related to their perception of the excellency of Israel's God, further implying that the blossoming is of Gentiles who have been converted by the witness of the repentant, forgiven remnant of Israel. There were no real deserts and dry lands in Israel; it was to be a "good land", fertile and unlike Egypt; "good land, a land of brooks of water, of springs and underground water gushing into valleys and hills" (Dt. 8:7). The deserts and dry areas were in the areas inhabited by Israel's Gentile enemies. A remnant of these peoples was to repent, and then they and their territory would be incorporated into the Kingdom of God in Israel, covering the full extent of the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. Those territories will be materially transformed, those desert areas will be like Israel "proper", as fruitful as Carmel and Sharon. See on Is. 27:12.

Isaiah 35:3 Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees- see on Job 4:3-5. "Palsied knees" (LXX); "knees that tremble with weakness" (GNB). The wonder of the Kingdom situation is that the spiritually weak will be strengthened. But we can live the spirit of the Kingdom life now; for these words are quoted in Heb. 12:12,13 about life lived in Christ and His Spirit right now. "Feeble" is s.w. "stumbled" (Is. 59:10); it generally refers to spiritual stumbling, not least for those who stumble over the rock of Christ (s.w. Is. 8:15; 28:13). The strengthening of the week or even those who have been condemned for their sins but want to repent… is one of the most wonderful experiences to behold. We will see on :3 that the same category is there in view. The good news of the Kingdom is far from just the change of earth's physical environment; more essentially is it about the change of human hearts. And this was the good news of the Kingdom which the Lord taught in His parables, which are largely about this rather than what the future Kingdom will physically be like. The good news for those in the new covenant is that they will no longer "stumble", s.w. "feeble" (Jer. 31:9). "Weak hands" carries the idea of those who are "idle" (s.w. Ex. 5:17), and the phrase "weak hands" is also translated "slack hands" (Josh. 10:6; 2 Sam. 4:1). The idea is that the spiritually weak minded, directionless and uncommitted will be mentally transformed. This is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit working upon the human spirit; and that is exactly

what the new covenant promised Judah, in Ez. 20, 36 and Jer. 31. This is what could have happened to Judah in captivity, but they refused the potential strengthening. And Hezekiah, the 'strengthener of Yah', didn't do this work of strengthening in Isaiah's time (s.w. Is. 51:18), even though he was the parade example of physical 'weakness' being 'strengthened' (s.w. Is. 39:1). The weak hands could have been strengthened at the restoration (s.w. Zech. 8:9,13), but again, the huge potential strengthening was not made use of.

Isaiah 35:4 Tell those who have a fearful heart, Be strong, don't be afraid- "Fearful" is the word for "rash" and as noted on that word on Is. 32:4 these are those who were impatient with God's apparent lack of response (Is. 5:19 s.w.). One of the greatest joys of the Kingdom will be the power of God's Spirit to transform the hearts of those who appear totally unspiritual and short termist in their judgments. See on :3. They now do not need to fear condemnation; they have been transformed by the gift of the new heart and new eyes which is part of the new covenant.

We're familiar with the references to God hardening the heart of Pharaoh (Ex. 14:8 etc.). However, the same Hebrew words occur in a positive context- for God also hardens or strengthens the hearts of the righteous (Ps. 27:14; Is. 35:4). Indeed, Is. 35:4 speaks of how the righteous shouldn't have a fearful / weak or [Heb.] 'fluid' heart, but rather a hardened one. Clearly enough, God solidifies human attitudes, one way or the other. This is a sobering thought- for He is prepared to confirm a person in their weak thinking. But on the other hand, even the weakest basic intention towards righteousness is solidified by Him too.

Behold, your God will come with vengeance, God's retribution. He will come and save you- This is the final "day of vengeance" (Is. 59:17; 61:2; 63:4; Mic. 5:15), both on the "sinners in Zion" of Is. 33:14 (s.w. Lev. 26:25), and upon the abusers of Israel (Dt. 32:41,43). The final coming of God will be in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus, at the last day. "Retribution" is s.w. "benefit in 2 Chron. 32:25; in the immediate context, Hezekiah did not render back according to the benefit or retribution given in healing him, and so the possibility of the Kingdom then didn't transpire and is deferred to the last day.

Isaiah 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped- As noted on :3,4,6, we have here language relevant to the spiritual healing of God's people, although that will be physically articulated in the healing of the physically impaired. The blind and deaf in Isaiah are the spiritually blind and deaf whose eyes will be opened so that they may "hear the words of the book" (Is. 29:18; 42:16,18; 43:8).

The teaching of the Lord Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:4,5. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life.

Isaiah 35:6 Then the lame man will leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute will sing; for waters will break out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert- As explained on :3-5, the deaf and lame are spiritually deaf, and they shall be spiritually cured; and that will be reflected in the healing of the physical environment. The waters and streams may be literal, but they essentially refer to the water of healing coming from Messiah, as mentioned in Rev. 22:2; Jn. 7:38. The lame men primarily in view are those of Is. 33:23 who went out to gather the prey of the Assyrians. But they refer also to the latter day lame of Jer. 31:8, who like Jacob bear the marks of their spiritual weakness and are repentant, throwing themselves upon Yahweh's grace. The Lord's healing of the lame who then jumped indicates that this Kingdom language started to have a foretaste in His work (Mt. 21:14; Acts 3:2-10). As noted on Is. 33:23, Judah were not then the lame repentant Jacob as they were intended to have been. And so these possible fulfillments are delayed until the last days.

The Babylonian Account of Creation claims (Tablet 4, line 137) that Marduk cleft Teammate, the ocean goddess, with his sword. The Biblical idea of Yahweh cleaving the waters clearly picks up this idea (Hab. 3:9; Ps. 74:15; 78:13,15; Ex. 14:16,21; Jud. 15:19; Is. 35:6; 48:21; 63:12; Neh. 9:11). But these passages largely refer to the miracle God did at the Red Sea, bringing about the creation of His people out of the cleft waters of the Sea. Again, pagan creation is reinterpreted with reference to a historical, actual event in the experience of God's people.

Isaiah 35:7 The burning sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. Grass with reeds and rushes will be in the habitation of jackals, where they used to lay- These "jackals" are those envisaged living for 'ever', for generation after generation, in the judged cities of Edom. But it seems those areas will be revived. Areas so heavily condemned and judged will in due course be brought under God's glory. The water

source is the stream envisaged as flowing from Zion in Ezekiel and Revelation. This could have happened literally had Judah built the temple system as commanded in Ez. 40-48. Hence LXX "a fountain of water shall be poured into the thirsty land; there shall there be a joy of birds, ready habitations and marshes".

Isaiah 35:8 A highway will be there, a road, and it will be called The Holy Way. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it will be for those who walk in the Way. Wicked fools will not go there- I noted on :3-6 that what is primarily in view is the spiritual healing of people; this highway may be literal, but it is essentially spiritual. This prepared highway is a major theme of Isaiah, e.g. Is. 26:7 "The way of the just is uprightness; You who are upright make the path of the righteous level". This is the language of Is. 40. The way was open for the exiles to return as righteous, justified by faith, to a restored Zion; and if they made that journey, Zion's gates were open to them (see on Is. 26:2). That way was potentially prepared at the restoration, as LXX clarifies: "the dispersed shall walk on it, and they shall not go astray". But the exiles chose to remain in Babylon and Assyria, and those who did return did so without accepting the call to repentance which is part of the making straight of the path to Zion. But it was all potentially prepared. It is for us now to walk in that path likewise to Zion. In the future it seems there may be literal highways prepared leading to Zion for the repentant remnants of the nations (see on Is. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 62:10; Jer. 31:21).

Isaiah 35:9 no lion will be there, nor will any ravenous animal go up on it. They will not be found there; but the redeemed will walk there- LXX "the redeemed and gathered on the Lord's behalf, shall walk in it"; GNB "Those whom the LORD has rescued will travel home by that road". The return of the exiles is clearly in view. But despite such a highway with such protection being potentially available, they chose not to make the journey, and to act as if they had not in fact been "redeemed" from the lands of their exile. The lions and wild beasts clearly refer to the aggressive nations, who will be no more; and this will be reflected in the Kingdom by the animals also being at peace with each other and with man.

Isaiah 35:10 Yahweh's ransomed ones will return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy will be on their heads. They will obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away- There was great joy at the time of the first Purim in Esther's time when sorrow was turned to joy (s.w. Esther 9:22), but the people did not return. The restoration was intended to be the time when sorrow was turned to joy (Jer. 31:13 s.w.). But as we can, they forgot the price aid for their ransom and remained in slavery. And those who did return didn't do so with the voice of joy, but with nervousness and then complaining about the famine, bad harvests and diseases they and their crops were

smitten with on returning. The eternal joy spoken of here will come true only at the return of the Lord Jesus. Joy by its nature is temporal in this life, because of our emotional structure; we cannot maintain such experiences of joy in a permanent sense. But this is the wonderful nature of salvation. "Sorrow and sighing" is the same phrase used about David's feelings because of his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 31:10). As noted throughout Is. 35, the essential theme is of internal spiritual transformation, and no longer experiencing the effects of sin; for that is the greatest "joy".

There is no account of the actual journey to Zion of the first exiles in Ezra 1:11, but the apocryphal 1 Esdras 5:1-6 speaks of the returnees playing the restored musical instruments of the temple and singing as they came. This was therefore a primary fulfilment of the restoration prophecies about God's people coming with singing unto Zion (Is. 35:10; 51:11). We note how Ezra 2:65 mentions "singers" as amongst the exiles who returned.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 36

Isaiah 36:1 Now it happened in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all of the fortified cities of Judah, and captured them- Hezekiah reigned 29 years (2 Kings 18:2), and the sickness after which he was given 15 years therefore happened in the 14th year or his reign- the very same time that Assyria invaded (Is. 38:1). Trials so often come together, in such an intense and extreme way that the situation can only be of God rather than mere bad luck or coincidence.

Hezekiah's healing came just before the miraculous destruction of the Assyrians (2 Kings 20:6 "I will add to your days fifteen years and I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria"). I suggest the healing of Hezekiah was to encourage faith in the possible deliverance of Jerusalem from a likewise humanly impossible situation. We have meetings and encounters with others in our lives, we hear their testimonies of deliverance, in order to encourage us in our situations.

Isaiah 36:2 The king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem to king Hezekiah with a large army; he came and stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool in the fuller's field highway- The washer or fuller uses the same word for 'washing' as used in the context of cleansing from sin (Ps. 51:2,7; Jer. 2:2; 4:14; Mal. 3:2). The suggestion was that they could repent and be cleansed of their sin. This location was significant, because it was there that Hezekiah's father Ahaz had been met by Isaiah and his son Shearjashub [a man of sign, 'a remnant shall return / repent'], with their demand for Jerusalem to surrender to God (Is. 7:3). So Hezekiah was intended to recall how Ahaz had been faced with Isaiah at that same spot; and the call was to repent, to be washed, to become the remnant which would triumph. Circumstances repeat in our lives and between our lives and those of others; in this case, the experience of Ahaz repeated in the life of his son Hezekiah. And we are intended to join the dots and learn the lesson.

This judgment upon Judah was because of their lack of faith and unspirituality as pointed out by Isaiah in Is. 1-35. The salvation of Jerusalem was by grace alone. And because of the faith of a very small remnant there.

Isaiah 36:3 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder came out to him- "Shebna" is an Egyptian name and may have been installed in office by Hezekiah as part of his deal with Egypt, upon whom he trusted rather than solely in Yahweh. He had the office of being "over the house" but by the time of the Assyrian invasion Shebna had been replaced in this office by Eliakim (Is. 22:15,20; 37:2). However, Shebna had not been completely 'hurled away' for his immorality of Is. 22:15-19 as required by Is. 22:17, because he is mentioned here as being the "scribe", a senior secretary, although Eliakim was "over the household". This seems typical of the partial response made to Isaiah's

prophecies. But it seems Yahweh accepted that partial response and repentance of a remnant, and so the invaders were destroyed and the awful outcome threatened upon Jerusalem in this chapter was averted or at best deferred.

Isaiah 36:4 Rabshakeh said to them, Now tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this in which you trust?- LXX "Why are you secure". GNB "the emperor wanted to know what made King Hezekiah so confident". Clearly Hezekiah did have some faith; and real faith is always evident to others. Rabshakeh's words are a tacit admission that Hezekiah did indeed trust in Yahweh.

Isaiah 36:5 I say that your counsel and strength for the war are only vain words-

"Vain words" is literally "a mere word of the lips". If the lips in view are Isaiah's, the idea is 'What good can words do? Even the words of the Bible, God's words. Hard evidenced support in visible terms is what man needs...'. And we have all given in to this so many times.

GNB "Do you think that words can take the place of military skill and might?". This is the essence of our temptations today- to think that the ideas of God's word are merely abstract and philosophical, and have no cash value in reality. But God's word is active and powerful, once spoken, it is done. The "counsel" in view is primarily the prophecies of Isaiah (s.w. Is. 5:19; 28:29), and in the last day application, the "counsel and strength" of the Messiah of Israel (Is. 11:2 s.w.). But Rabshakeh may have been mocking the "counsel" of the false prophets (see :6), which had been to trust in Egypt rather than Yahweh (s.w. Is. 19:3,11; 29:15; 30:1; Jer. 19:7). The "counsel" or prophetic word of Yahweh, however, was what could save Israel; it was that which would bring them back from captivity and reestablish Yahweh's Kingdom in the land (s.w. Is. 44:26; 46:10). Although most in Judah still refused to trust in Yahweh's "strength for the war" (s.w. Is. 30:15), yet by grace and in respect to the faith of the remnant, He still saved them from Assyria at this time.

Hezekiah had taken counsel with men in order to try to avert the fall of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:3). Isaiah had earlier warned against trust in human "counsel" (s.w. Is. 5:19; 19:3). Woe was pronounced upon those (like Hezekiah?) who took counsel from men rather than God (Is. 30:1 s.w.). Prov. 25:28 LXX advises doing things with "counsel". As explained on Prov. 25:1, this may be a justification of Hezekiah, who dealt with the Assyrian crisis by saying he trusted in God's counsel to overcome the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:20 AV). Like Solomon, Hezekiah's Proverbs are all Divinely inspired and true, but he seems to insert into them a subtext of self justification.

Now in whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me?- That Hezekiah was trusting in someone or something else apart from his own strength was so obvious; and there may have been a genuine element of curiosity in the question, as well as it being a rhetorical question. Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria was because of his trust in Yahweh; Zedekiah rebelled later against Babylon and yet Jerusalem fell (s.w. Jer. 52:3). Zedekiah attempted to copy the external behaviour of Hezekiah but without trust in Yahweh, and so it didn't work out. And so there abides a lesson for all of us who are tempted to imitate the external faith and action of others without having the same internal faith and trust.

Rabshakeh observes that Hezekiah trusts in both Yahweh and in Egypt. He wasn't wrong in his observation, and his presentation of Hezekiah as a fickle leader not worth following. He really did try to have a foot in both camps.

Isaiah 36:6 Behold, you trust in the staff of this bruised reed, even in Egypt- "Bruised reed" in Is. 36:6 is better "broken reed", and this is the very phrase used about how the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, would *not* break a "bruised / broken reed" (Is. 42:3). Egypt were a broken reed, recently broken in battle and now useless to save Israel. They were too weak to uphold the weight of Judah if they were to lean upon it for strength. God turns the figure around- He as it were is in need of man, He wishes to trust upon us; and although we are broken reeds, we will not be crushed nor will He be disappointed. He so wishes to work with us.

Which if a man leans on it, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him- "Lean" here is the same word for "steadfast" in Is. 26:3 "You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in You". The LXX understands this to be a description of the "righteous nation" of Is. 26:2. They are saved from their traumas by the state of their mind. And Yahweh will respond to this through the work of His Spirit on the human spirit, to keep their mind in perfect peace. This is the peace which comes from knowing sin is forgiven. "Mind" here is literally 'imagination'. We must ask what are our fantasies, our hopes, according to which we live, think and feel day by day. If they are above all for the Kingdom, then we will be 'kept' in this. In Isaiah's immediate context this was in contrast to leaning upon Egypt for salvation (s.w. Is. 36:6 "lean"). The great salvation of the restored Kingdom could have come apart at that time, but it was precluded by a lack of real faith and focus on the Kingdom in the majority of Israel.

Judah did as it were trust in Egypt, and so were left with pierced hands. But that was exactly what the Lord Jesus experienced on the cross. Here we have one of many

examples of where although He did not personally sin, He on the cross experienced the sufferings for sin which were due to God's people.

Isaiah 36:7 But if you tell me, 'We trust in Yahweh our God', isn't that He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar?'- Rabshakeh argues as if the high places and altars to the idols were actually used for Yahweh worship. And that was true. Judah justified their idol worship by claiming it was a form of Yahweh worship; and that is an abiding temptation for God's people of all ages. Rabshakeh mocked at the idea of a religion which had only one altar and high place; although that was indeed appropriate to the worship of the one true God who had given one specific way of approach to Him. There is plenty of archaeological evidence for Rabshakeh's claim: "The Asherah, one of the main targets of cult criticism, was closely connected with Yahweh and his cult, as shown by the inscriptions from Kuntillet Agrud and Khirbet-el-Qom".

Isaiah 36:8 Now therefore, please make a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them- Although many in Judah had fled into Jerusalem, the siege conditions and battle losses meant that there were not even 2000 fighting men within the city. But the Assyrians were destroyed by just one Angel, a member of the Angel cherubim, the heavenly horses and riders who stood for Israel. They were left with no human horses nor army, so that they might trust in Yahweh of Hosts of Angelic armies and the cherubim chariot. And this is why we too at times are stripped of all human strength.

"Make a pledge" is literally to be sweet or pleasing, and it appears to be sarcastic. But it is the word used by Hezekiah when he asks Yahweh to "undertake" or be sweet to him in the oppression of his sickness, which came at the same time as the siege of Jerusalem (Is. 38:14).See on Is. 36:1.

Isaiah 36:9 How then can you turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?- There are various translation options here. LXX "And how can ye then turn to the face of the satraps? They that trust on the Egyptians for horse and rider, are our servants"; GNB "You are no match for even the lowest ranking Assyrian official, and yet you expect the Egyptians to send you chariots and horsemen". 2 Chron. 32:21 uses the same phrase to describe the king of Assyria turning away his face in shame from Jerusalem after the Angelic destruction of his army; all was to be dramatically reversed overnight. Just as Joseph was elevated from prison rags to royal glory in a few hours, so God can work very quickly to save us from otherwise humanly impossible situations.

This was clearly wrong for the king of Israel, as the law specifically stated. Hezekiah had been repeatedly criticized for this by Isaiah in several prophecies.

Isaiah 36:10 Have I come up now without Yahweh against this land to destroy it? Yahweh said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it'- Rabshakeh appears to have been an apostate Jew, speaking fluent Hebrew, fully aware of the situation within Judah (:7,8) and of the prophetic message that Yahweh would be behind their invaders; and quoting Isaiah's prophecies in :12,16. We can look to some possible equivalent in the events concerning the latter day Assyrian.

Isaiah 36:11 Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to Rabshakeh, Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; and don't speak to us in the Jews' language in the hearing of the people who are on the wall- As suggested on :10, Rabshakeh knew Hebrew and was likely a renegade Jew. The fact the Jewish leadership knew the Assyrian language is a tacit reflection of the way they had made it their business to communicate with them in the past, in seeking ways around the Assyrian threat other than through trust in Yahweh.

Isaiah 36:12 But Rabshakeh said, Has my master sent me only to your master and to you, to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat their own dung and drink their own urine with you?- As noted on :10, Rabshakeh was aware of the prophecies of Micah and Isaiah. He was fully aware that Isaiah had opened his prophecies by insisting that his message of judgment was against both the heavens and the earth, the leadership and the ordinary people; for they were alike guilty.

Isaiah 36:13 Then Rabshakeh stood, and called out with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria!- This very loud voice becomes the prototype for the great voice of Babylon (Jer. 51:55), akin to the great voice of Goliath the Philistine / Palestinian, which is to be answered by the far greater voice of Yahweh in the last days commanding the Angels to unleash judgment upon the latter day Assyrian confederacy (Joel 2:11; Rev. 16:1; 18:2). But in the immediate context, this "loud voice" is that of Is. 29:6 bringing destruction and judgment upon Jerusalem; they were condemned, but were saved by grace and God's respect of the prayers and repentance of a small minority. The loud voice of the "great king" of Assyria is being set up as a parody of that of Yahweh, who is the supreme "great king" (s.w. Ps. 47:2; 95:3; Mal. 1:14).

Isaiah 36:14 Thus says the king, 'Don't let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to

deliver you- This was part of his narrative, that the gods of the nations were "not able to deliver" them from the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:15). He encouraged them to see the one true God as just another god, another source of secular strength as good as anything else. Yahweh the one true God is not, however, just another religious system. There is something awesomely and radically different. Rabshakeh's words recognize that Hezekiah alone was seeking to lead the people to totally trust in Yahweh. His influence was considered hugely significant. As we noted on Is. 1:1, the reforms of Hezekiah were largely ineffective in encouraging the general populace towards spirituality. In accordance with that, Rabshakeh perceived Hezekiah as effectively seeking alone to persuade the people to trust Yahweh.

Surely all those who were raised as believers have at some point wondered whether Christianity is simply another one of many religious systems which are equally useless. Here we have the answer- that there is ultimate truth and relationship with God which thereby makes the others all appear for what they are. Those who convert to Christ from atheism or non Christian backgrounds have a great advantage here and need to appreciate the difficulties for those who were raised Christian.

Isaiah 36:15 Don't let Hezekiah make you trust in Yahweh, saying, Yahweh will surely deliver us. This city won't be given into the hand of the king of Assyria'- Rabshakeh appears to know the very words of Hezekiah within Jerusalem, supporting the suggestion made on :10 that he was a renegade Jew. Hezekiah's faith that the city wouldn't fall was presumably based upon Isaiah's prophetic words; and yet Isaiah also speaks as if the city would fall, unless there was repentance in Judah. Perhaps Hezekiah really believed that the repentance of a minority would be counted by God as enough, and that their prayers would ensure the salvation of Zion. And this huge faith in Divine grace was rewarded.

Isaiah 36:16 Don't listen to Hezekiah- As noted on :14, it seems Hezekiah was singlehandedly seeking to persuade the people to totally trust in Yahweh.

For thus says the king of Assyria, 'Make your peace with me, and come out to me- LXX "If ye wish to be blessed, come out to me". Receiving peace or 'blessing' (LXX) was what comes from Yahweh; Judah were being offered covenant relationship with a false pretender to Yahweh. All this is the stuff of the latter day antiChrist; for an anti-Christ is strictly not someone against Christ but rather posing as the Christ, a fake, imitation Christ.

And each of you eat from his vine, and each one from his fig tree, and each one of you drink the waters of his own cistern- Rabshakeh promised the Jews an Assyrian Kingdom where everyone sat under their own vine and fig tree- consciously parodying Micah's

contemporary prophecies of God's future Kingdom (Is. 36:16 cp. Mic. 4:4). The Assyrian Kingdom was set up as a parody of Solomon's, which was the Kingdom of God (1 Kings 4:25; 2 Chron. 9:8). A glance through the descriptions of the beasts- the Kingdoms of this world- reveals that they are all set up in terms of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. Rabshakeh was aware of Isaiah's prophecies as he quotes from them here; see on :10. And in essence the world today offers a fake, imitation Kingdom of God.

Isaiah 36:17 Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards- As noted on :16, Assyria was presented as an imitation kingdom of God. The 2 Kings record adds: "a land of oil olive and of honey". The language all alludes to God's descriptions of the promised land, which were familiar to Rabshakeh (see on :10). The allusions are to Num. 14:7; Dt. 8:7-9; 11:11,12.

Isaiah 36:18 Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, Yahweh will deliver us. Have any of the gods of the nations delivered their lands from the hand of the king of Assyria?- "Persuade" is 'seduce', as if the Assyrians had the one true religion and Hezekiah was seducing Judah away from it. The Assyrian inscriptions describe and portray their wars as religious wars between their god Asshur and the gods of the nations they conquered. It was perhaps this very aspect to the Assyrian boasts which as it were provoked Yahweh to action. His unique victory against Asshur when all other gods and religious systems had failed was intended to help the Gentile nations see the utter supremacy of Yahweh- and to turn to Him.

Isaiah 36:19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand?- Rabshakeh, knowing the prophecies of Isaiah (see on :10), may be alluding to the common prophetic theme that Judah were in fact no better than Israel, and would face the same judgment. And he knew that Samaria, the ten tribes, had trusted in the gods of the surrounding nations. Hamath and Arpad were in Syria, and so probably Sepharvaim was likewise. Is. 8 and Is. 10:9-11 had condemned Israel for their trust in Syria against Assyria, and clearly their covenant with Syria had involved taking on the worship of their gods.

Isaiah 36:20 Who are they among all the gods of these countries that have delivered their country out of my hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?- The point of course was made: Who or what indeed were any of those gods compared to Yahweh.

Isaiah 36:21 But they remained silent and said nothing in reply, for the king's

commandment was, Don't answer him- The "they" appears to refer to 'the people on the wall' (2 Kings 18:36). Again we get the impression as on :14 that Hezekiah was in direct contact with the common people- despite being terminally ill at the time (see on Is. 36:1). It was unexpected that Rabshakeh should address the common people (:11,12), so perhaps the king urged them immediately to silence, whilst Rabshakeh was speaking.

I suggest that Prov. 26:4 alludes to this: "Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him". This verses is clearly intended to be connected with Prov. 26:5 ["answer a fool according to his folly"], the idea being that there are times when a fool should be answered according to his folly, and times when he shouldn't be. This is one of the Hezekiah Proverbs (see on Prov. 25:1), and the allusion may be to how Hezekiah commanded the people not to answer Rabshakeh, who is thereby interpreted as the archetypical "fool". But a fool must at times be answered (Prov. 26:5), and the idea may be that God will answer fools like Rabshakeh in His own way and in His own time; and we don't need to. But we then get the hint that Hezekiah, like Solomon, was using the Divine truth of the Proverbs with a subtext of his own self justification, just as we can.

Isaiah 36:22 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of Rabshakeh- This sign of sorrow was to be turned into joy. But for now, there was sorrow. Their deep grief however suggests they didn't believe Hezekiah's assurances of Divine salvation; see on :3,11. They were not part of the daughter of Zion whom Isaiah describes as laughing at the Assyrian threats.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 37

Isaiah 37:1 *It happened, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into Yahweh's house*- Instead of devising human schemes of salvation, he does as we should, turning to God's house, His presence, and His people. Although we are left wondering, especially after reading Isaiah's criticisms of Hezekiah, whether he turned to God as a last resort rather than a first resort. Because by strengthening the walls and building the water tunnel in his own strength, trusting in Egypt... he appears only to be turning to God now all that had apparently failed. He could have prayed anywhere, but he felt that God's presence was there in particular. Judah's leadership had torn their clothes but not dressed in sackcloth (Is. 36:22). Sackcloth was a sign of repentance, as witnessed by the response of Nineveh. Nineveh had repented the generation before; and it seems Hezekiah is now seeking to imitate their repentance. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria; if their repentance had been permanent, they would not have invaded Judah. Hezekiah was seeking to imitate Nineveh but make it permanent, although after the crisis passed, it seems his repentance likewise didn't hold. God knew all this from the start, and yet still so respected the repentance of Hezekiah and Nineveh in their extremity that He still changed His threatened judgment of them. Hezekiah was aware that he had sinned by trying to buy off the Assyrians with the gold of the temple, representing faith sacrificed to human expedient; and Judah had definitely trusted in Egypt for help rather than God. His words of :3 are a recognition that the invasion was a Divine rebuke and rejection of him. But a man may be rejected by God in this life, having a foretaste of condemnation ahead of time; but still change the verdict. Hence Peter went out from the Lord's presence and wept and gnashed his teeth, the very language of the rejected; but changed the verdict. This is the intensity of our situation, as Paul in Romans emphasizes; we stand condemned, and yet in this life we can change the verdict, by God's grace.

This repentance by Hezekiah may be what is in view in 2 Chron. 32:26 "Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart". He repented at the time of the Assyrian invasion, but after that was resolved and he had been healed, 2 Kings and Is. 39 leave us to understand that he slipped away from personal faith.

Is. 28:14,17-19: "hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem... the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place... when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report". This is the same idea in Hezekiah's lament that he would die by morning. His terminal illness, which was delayed by grace, represented Judah's judgment. Elsewhere the Assyrian invasion is likened to flood waters which swallowed all Judah, and left Jerusalem alone with head above water, about to be drowned. It was God's intention that Jerusalem also would fall. It didn't by grace alone, and the power of Isaiah's intercession. There is the possibility in Is. 28:22,23,26 that repentance could change the outcome: "Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth [land, including Jerusalem]. Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech... For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him". There was some repentance, shown by Hezekiah and the leadership wearing sackcloth. This and Isaiah's prayers changed the outcome.

It was in the context of the Assyrian invasion that Is. 29:13 had described the state of Judah: "this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me". Is. 31:8,9 are clear that Judah were worshipping udols right up to the Assyrian defeat: "In that day every man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you for a sin. Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited". Hezekiah's repentance, as well as the peoples', was therefore required because the great reforming zeal of 2 Chron. 30 had been on the cusp of emotion and had not bee permanent. That was why the Assyrian invasion came.

Isaiah 37:2 *He sent Eliakim who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz*- See on Is. 36:3. Humanly speaking, sending your right hand men to a prophet was not the way out of the situation. But he realized as should we, that the only ultimate recourse is to God's word. The covering of the leadership with sackcloth as noted on :1 was a sign of repentance, again imitating how the leadership of Nineveh repented in sackcloth and achieved a change of the Divinely promised judgment.

Seeing Isaiah had been so critical of Hezekiah in his prophecies, we wonder whether this sending of messages to Isaiah reflects some stress or distance in their relationship. For three years Isaiah had walked naked and barefoot to plead either Judah not to trust the Egyptians and other Gentile powers. His prophecies of doom against the surrounding nations were in the context of appealing to Judah not to trust in them. But Hezekiah and the Jerusalem leadership did just that. This too would explain Hezekiah's reticence in going directly to Isaiah.

Isaiah 37:3 *They said to him, Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of rejection*- As noted on :1, Hezekiah understood he had sinned, hence his sackcloth and desperate repentance. Isaiah has repeatedly condemned Judah for trusting in Egypt for help from the Assyrians (Is. 20:5, 6; 30:1-4; 36:6,9). Those passages all say that if Judah did this, they would be rejected by God, as they were rejecting His help. And Hezekiah realizes that now those prophecies were going to come true. But the depth of his repentance meant that they didn't; just as the destruction of Nineveh in 40 days didn't happen, all because of human repentance. See on :1,4; Is. 22:5, which prophecy Hezekiah appears to allude to here.

Yet the grace of it all is that God knew that despite this cusp of intensity in repentance, Hezekiah would later slip away from it. But it's as if He so respects human faith and repentance that when it is displayed at specific moments, it as it were melts His heart and He responds. Even though He foreknows that intensity will not be retained.

The "trouble" that came upon them was the promised judgment for persistent sin. Thus the word is used often, e.g. Dt. 31:17,21. Hezekiah's reforms had only been on the surface. His covering with sackcloth in :1 was in repentance, and this is the referent in 2 Chron. 32:26 where we learn that because he and the people humbled themselves, the wrath upon Zion was deferred: "His heart was lifted up; therefore there was wrath on him, and on Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Yahweh didn't come on them in the days of Hezekiah". I suggest

this doesn't refer to any repentance by Hezekiah after the events of Is. 39. So here we have another example of the grace praised in Neh. 9:27- God by grace saved them from the "trouble" He brought upon them, when they cried to Him.

Likewise, the word "rebuke" leads to reflection on the fact that most occurrences of the word concern God's rebuke of His people, ultimately through judgment upon Zion. His wrath against Zion was coming to a climax, again indicating that Hezekiah's reforms had been very superficial. If the "rebuke" was not from God, who was it from? Likewise "of rejection" surely refers to Divine rejection of His people. The reforms of 2 Chron. 30 and zealous keeping of Passover were therefore done on the cusp of emotion and group psychology. For the language here speaks of God's wrath coming to a peak, and only being deferred by Hezekiah's repentance.

For the children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring forth- The birth of a remnant is spoken of in Isaiah in spiritual terms; "the children" here are "the remnant" of :4. The sense may be that Hezekiah sensed there had been some spiritual reformation, which he himself had done so much to bring about through his banishing of idolatry in Judah, but the final strength for the birth was lacking; they had indeed trusted in Egypt and in gold rather than in God, despite all the purging of idolatry. This was the tragedy which Hezekiah felt, as we do; that there was some genuine spirituality, but not enough. That may be the idea in Hos. 13:13 where the imagery is used again.

However as noted above, the wrath of God had been provoked throughout Hezekiah's reign, leading to His rebuke and rejection of His people. His reforms had therefore been hollow and shallow. But Hezekiah likes to see this as the spiritual new life of Judah having come to the point of birth- but he somehow holds God guilty for now being about to slay them, when he claims they are just about to be born. Hezekiah so often comes over as self justifying, especially in his claim to God that he has lived a sinless life and therefore the judgment of death upon is unreasonable. He likewise appears here to consider God's judgments upon Judah to be unreasonable.

Is. 26:27,18 shows Isaiah's perspective: Judah had brought forth, but just wind. Her suffering had been in vain, because she had not repented: "Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth". Hezekiah however twisted this to saying that she was in labour, but God had not allowed her to bring forth because of the Assyrian invasion.

Is. 66:9 can be read as an implicit criticism of the words of Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion, who lamented that the children had come to be born but there was no strength to bring them forth: "Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? says Yahweh: shall I who cause to bring forth shut the womb? says your God". God is saying that He will certainly bring forth the new nation of Zion out of their trauma at the hands of their invaders. He is not powerless, and therefore Hezekiah was wrong to imply this. Why the children were not brought forth at Hezekiah's time was because of the lack of spirituality in the daughter of Zion, rather than because of God's limited ability.

Isaiah 37:4 *It may be Yahweh your God*- This continues the connection with Nineveh's repentance (see on :1,3); in this case, to Jon. 3:9 "Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?". However "your God" is a recognition by Hezekiah that Isaiah stood closer to

God than he did. We note that Hezekiah tries to get Isaiah to pray to Isaiah's God, rather than praying himself. This is the way of religion. When he reveives the letter from Rabshakeh, he himself goes to the temple and prays. But when he was personally sick and terminally ill, he turns to the wall away from all others and on his oen bed himself prays to God. This is God's intention, to lead us away from religion, step by step, and to personal engagement with Him.

Will hear the words of Rabshakeh- "Hear" is used at times to mean 'hear and respond to', as God in that sense 'hears' all things and there is no need to ask Him to hear anything.

Whom the king of Assyria his master has sent to defy the living God- This is not just Hezekiah trying to get God to see the situation from the viewpoint of His own glory; rather was there a real and actual spiritual dimension to the invasion. The idea of 'defying' Israel's God is stressed so much (Is. 37:4,17,23,24); although Isaiah concludes by using this word about what Judah had effectively done to their own God (Is. 65:7). Sennacherib really did despise Yahweh and wanted to impose his gods upon Judah, and this will be the dominant feature of the latter day Assyrian invasion of the land. Radical Islam would appear the obvious latter day equivalent.

And will rebuke the words which Yahweh your God has heard- "Rebuke" here is a legal word, used of legal reasoning against an accuser in court (as in Is. 1:18; 11:3,4; 29:21; Mic. 6:2). Hezekiah had a strong sense of the court of Heaven; and so the answer is expressed in terms of an Angel 'coming out' from that court room and articulating the agreed judgment (:36). This is a huge comfort; that all situations on earth are reflected in Heaven, and judged there.

Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left'- The remnant would refer not only to the fact that Jerusalem alone remained, but to the righteous remnant within the city who were now repentant. The desire to get others to pray for issues is found throughout the Bible. But we should not draw the implication that God is as it were hard of hearing and only responds if enough of us offer enough prayers. But on the other hand, the combined prayerful requests of many of God's children are not unnoticed by God.

In response to Isaiah's prayer, an Angel 'went forth' on earth and slew 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35). Hezekiah was aware of the court of Heaven responding to his prayer; for he had commented that God would there "reprove the words" of Rabshakeh (2 Kings 19:4). The Hebrew for "reprove" is a legal term, meaning to convict, judge, plead etc. Hezekiah knew that the court of Heaven was considering Rabshakeh's words, and his prayer was a plea for those words to be convicted in Heaven's court, and an answer sent out. And this is what happened. Later, we read of Hezekiah asking that same court to "remember" his good life- again using a word capable of having legal overtones, of considering witness. And God replied by saying that He had "heard" that prayer- the same Hebrew word is translated 'to make a proclamation', as if He had considered Hezekiah's 'plea' and would respond (2 Kings 20:3,5).

Isaiah's prayer was an amazing intercession. Is. 22:4,5 suggests Isaiah had been shown that there was to be no escape from the day of trouble coming upon Judah. Just as Hezekiah their representative was to die. But Isaiah intercedes and changed or delayed the judgment, just as happened for Hezekiah's terminal illness: "Therefore said I, Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people. For it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord GOD of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains". Is. 22 goes on to show that they had

refused the call to repent and so judgment had to come. We note Isaiah's criticism of Hezekiah's fortification work: "Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool: but ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago. And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the LORD of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord GOD of hosts".

Isaiah 37:5 *So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah*- The servants of king Hezekiah are contrasted with those of the king of Assyria (:6). The situation is set up as a conflict between two kings, and in the last days the scenario will be the same- King Jesus in Jerusalem facing off against the latter day Antichrist, "the king of the north", the *rosh* of Ez. 38, the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2, the little horn speaking great things of Dan. 7.

Isaiah 37:6 *Isaiah said to them, Tell your master, 'Thus says Yahweh, Don't be afraid of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me*- We too can fear words, forgetting that the only ultimate reality in all things is God. "Servants" here translates a word which is almost colloquial, the idea being "lackeys". Just as the risen Lord referred to the disciples as "guys, fellas" (see on Jn. 21:5), so His Father is able to relate to people on their language level too.

"Don't be afraid of the words..." connects with "Perhaps [the Hebrew may mean "surely"] Yahweh will hear the words of Rabshakeh" (:4). The idea is that we should not be put in fear by words, because Yahweh has heard those words. "Yahweh will [also] hear" is the response to "the words you have heard".

Isaiah 37:7 *Behold, I will put a spirit in him*- Sennacherib retreated because God "put a spirit in him". The AV has: "I will send a blast / spirit upon him". Was it not that the Angel who later destroyed his army came upon him and put a spirit / disposition of mind within him that made him want to retreat? We see how God can directly affect the human spirit / mind. He can give a holy spirit, or an evil spirit. The Old Testament sets us up to understand that God can work directly on the human spirit, and then the New Testament says that He can give us a holy spirit, working again directly on the human mind and perception.

"Send a blast" is the same phrase used in1 Kings 22:23 for how God put a spirit in the mouths of the false prophets. And of how conversely He will put a new spirit in the heart of His people as part of the new covenant (Ez. 36:26).

The connection with God putting a lying spirit in Ahab's prophets (1 Kings 22:20-23) could lead us to think this "news" was in fact a false rumour. For it was this kind of thing that led to Israel's enemies fleeing at various times. Thus 2 Thess. 2:11 says that "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie".

And he will hear news, and will return to his own land. I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land'- The "news" could have been of the destruction of Rabshakeh's army; or of the approach of Tirhakah, or some other threat to his empire. The situation points ahead to how the latter day "king of the north" will likewise hear "news" (s.w. Dan. 11:44 "tidings"). The Lord 'caused' Sennacherib to fall by the sword in that He put a spirit of jealousy in his sons, resulting in the murder of :38.

Isaiah 37:8 *So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish*- Sennacherib was aiming for Egypt and was attacking the fortresses on the route there; and Libnah was just south of Lachish, which he had destroyed. This is the scene we have in Dan. 11, where the "king of the north" attacks "the king of the south", Egypt, ransacking Palestine along the way, but then had to return to his own land after hearing the "tidings" of Dan. 11:44. The historical invasions of Israel and Judah therefore follow a pattern; and this will be repeated in the final latter day invasion which all the previous invasions point forward to. The image of Dan. 2 stands complete in the last days, and all the beasts of Dan. 7 are incorporated into the mega beast of the last days. This is to say that the final destructive entity oppressing Israel in the last days will combine features of all her historical oppressors, including the Assyrians. We note too the difference between Rabshakeh and Sennacherib, and wonder how far this points forward to the "false prophet" of Revelation who appears to be an agent of the beast.

Isaiah 37:9 *He heard news concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He has come out to fight against you. When he heard it he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying*- Tirhakah was the dominant king in Egypt at the time. We wonder if the much criticized efforts of Judah to get "Egypt" to help them were actually directed towards Tirhakah. But we wonder why therefore God still used this person to play a part in His plan to destroy Sennacherib. Or it could be that Tirhakah was the one who had destroyed the Egyptians upon whom Judah had hoped [rather than upon their God], and so it was appropriate that he and not Egypt played a part in the Divine plan to destroy "the king of the north".

Isaiah 37:10 *Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, 'Don't let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, Jerusalem won't be given into the hand of the king of Assyria*- The king recognizes that Hezekiah does indeed trust in God, and that Yahweh was indeed his God. This may have comforted him, as we noted on :4 that Hezekiah speaks of God as Isaiah's God rather than his God.

Isaiah 37:11 *Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly. Shall you be delivered?*- This is the classic challenge to faith; no other god achieved anything, therefore, the one true God can't either. But the point is that the gods of this world didn't achieve anything precisely because they are not God. The 'utter destruction' of conquered lands by Assyria is historically well attested. But the word has the sense of 'sanctified' in a religious sense; like the latter day "king of the north", the invader thought that they were serving their God by destroying people, and the barbarity of the destruction was a sign of how far they had devoted people and lands to their God. Jihadist Islam exactly fits this scenario.

Isaiah 37:12 *Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my fathers have destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the children of Eden who were in Telassar?*- These were the very cities to which the Assyrians had deported the ten tribe Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:6; 18:11). The implication is that Judah would be taken there likewise.

The historical Assyria 'destroyed utterly' the nations around Israel (:11; 2 Kings 19:11); but the Hebrew word used specifically means to consecrate or dedicate. It has a distinctly religious sense. And this is precisely the idea of *jihad*- taking land in a holy war in order to dedicate that land to Allah. In practice, the Assyrians did this by

‘destroying’ or ‘drying up’ these lands. *Charab*, ‘to dry up’, is used about their scorched earth policies (2 Kings 19:17), and Assyria threatened to ‘dry up’ Judah (2 Chron. 32:11), just as he boasted “with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places” (2 Kings 19:24); and the metaphor continues with the idea of Assyria being like a river gushing forth over the land they had dried up (Is. 8:7). This is why God’s answer to the Assyrian threat to Judah is expressed in terms of His reminding Judah that it is *He* who has ultimate power to dry up rivers and nations (Is. 44:27; 50:2; 51:10- every time, the same Hebrew word *charab* is used).

Isaiah 37:13 *Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivvah?’*- The kings of these cities are paralleled with their gods (:12). The parallel Is. 36:19 asks "Where are *the gods*" of these same cities. Truly we become like that which we worship; football fans become like their idols, in spirit. And if we worship the one true God of Israel, Yahweh, then we will become like Him.

Is. 10:9-11 speaks specifically of Rabshakeh's taunts: "Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?". It is clear that Hezekiah's reforms and the idol smashing of 2 Chron. 30, 14 years earlier, were all of a surface level. The Jerusalem under siege by Assyria in Hezekiah's time was full of idols. And Is. 2 lamented that the land of Judah was "full of idols".

Isaiah 37:14 *Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it. Then Hezekiah went up to Yahweh’s house, and spread it before Yahweh*- Hezekiah responded to the threats of Assyria by sending to Isaiah, and up to :12 we have the story of the response to that. But he also himself prayed to God, and we are now reading about that here. Hezekiah read the letter- out loud, the Hebrew definitely means, even suggesting he cried it out. This parallels his spreading it before Yahweh. It was his way of expressing transparency before God, demonstrating his trust that God really saw and heard all that he was seeing and hearing. "Spread" translates the same Hebrew word used about spreading abroad the hands in prayer (Ex. 9:29,33 etc.). It was as if the letter was the prayer. Our situation is read by God as our prayer. There are times especially in serious illness when we are too weak or mentally unclear to be able to verbalize prayer; or where the situation is so complex that we do not know what to pray for in terms of our desired outcome. And some are simply better at verbalizing than others. But the essence is our faith that God sees the situation and will respond. It was in this sense that Hezekiah spread the letter before Yahweh, as we might place an unpleasant hospital diagnosis on the kitchen table and attempt to pray, but what we are doing is bringing the situation before God and asking for His wise and powerful response.

Isaiah 37:15 *Hezekiah prayed to Yahweh, saying*- As noted on :14, the situation itself was the prayer; but Hezekiah, like us, does his best to articulate things in words.

I discuss on :15 how "before Yahweh" refers to the temple (:13). Hezekiah prayed in the temple because he thought this was how God would best 'hear' him and 'see' the problem. But he was later shown that in fact God hears sincere prayer from the heart wherever it is offered, even outside the temple. 1 Kings 8:37 envisaged Israel when sick or besieged praying to God and being heard because of the physical

temple: "If their enemy besieges them in their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer and supplication is made by any man, or by all Your people Israel, who shall each know the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear in heaven". Hezekiah was both besieged and sick. But he was to be taught that Solomon's envisioning of the physical temple as a kind of talisman was incorrect. Even after he is healed he immediately wants to go to the temple: "Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I will go up to the house of Yahweh?" (Is. 38:22). He couldn't as it were live without that temple.

The outcome of Hezekiah's loss of faith and wrong attitude to the temple was that Judah would be destroyed by Babylon, along with the temple, and go into captivity. I suggest this is one reason for this material being put into the historical interlude of Is. 36-39. The good deeds of Hezekiah in his earlier life are not dwelt upon in that interlude. The material is used at that point because Is. 40-66 is relevant to the exiles in Babylon. The anti Babylon polemic in Is. 40-45 follows straight on from the explanation in Is. 39 as to why they are suffering under Babylon. The Hezekiah material is in order to remind them why they were in exile. It was because of Hezekiah's wrong attitude to the temple and self satisfied, partial faith. Despite earlier having been of strong faith. This was exactly the position of Judah in exile. He serves as a warning to them, and an explanation as to why the temple was in ruins and they were in exile. This is surely why Isaiah alone records Hezekiah's song of praise in Is. 38:9-20; because it is full of phrases relevant to the later exiles. Thus he says that he feels as if his life is a shepherd's tent that is being taken down (Is. 38:12). But the restored Zion will be a shepherd's tent that will not be taken down (Is. 33:20). Hezekiah in sickness was therefore Zion in destruction and exile. His sin was theirs; although there is also an element to which he, like the Lord, carried their sin. Zion too is likened to a chronically sick man. And Hezekiah's judgment of death was deferred, not removed. As with Zion's. Zion likewise pleaded "Do not take me away, O God, in the midst of my days" (Ps. 102:25) in the very words of Hezekiah in Is. 38:10. "You restore me", after confession of sin (Is. 38:16), is of course the obvious connection with the restored Zion. If they did this, then like Hezekiah they would feel as in Is. 33:24 "The inhabitant won't say, I am sick because the people who dwell therein will be forgiven their iniquity". The connection between Hezekiah and the people is made clear in 1 Kings 20:6: "I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria".

Isaiah 37:16 *Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, who is enthroned among the cherubim*- Hezekiah has just "spread" the letter before Yahweh (:14), using the same word for how the cherubim 'stretched forth their wings' (Ex. 25:20; 1 Kings 8:7 etc.). He knows that God is in Heaven with the cherubim as it were around Him, and also in the Most Holy place of the temple where Hezekiah was. And he imagined that letter as being with God, spread out as the cherubic wings were spread out. Those wings were spread out over the mercy seat, the cover over the ark, which was sprinkled with the blood of atonement each year. This is a profound insight into prayer. Our situations are not unnoticed. They are placed as it were upon the blood of the Lord Jesus, in the very presence of God, with the cherubim overshadowing them, peering down into them. And we can understand the cherubim in this context as representing God's Angelic might. And appropriately enough, an Angel was sent to bring about the great deliverance sought. There over our kitchen table with the troubling letter placed

upon it, as with Hezekiah, there are the cherubim and the presence of Almighty God Himself.

You are the God, even You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made heaven and earth- Reflection upon God's power in creation should inspire our faith too; the God who could do that has made all men and their kingdoms, and is unlimited in what He can do for us. To let 'science' diminish our faith in God as creator is to remove such inspiration from us. Hezekiah states that God alone is the God of all kings or kingdoms of the earth; and yet we have just learnt that those kings were identified with their idols and were no more. Perhaps Hezekiah was using the present tense as God does, speaking of the reality of the final Messianic Kingdom as being so sure of ultimately coming about.

The appeal to God as creator was still an appeal to grace alone. Is. 26:17 had said that they were beyond the mercy even of their creator: "Therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour".

Isaiah 37:17 *Turn Your ear Yahweh and hear; open Your eyes Yahweh and behold; hear all of the words of Sennacherib, who has sent to defy the living God*- This is not to say that God is deaf and blind usually. Seeing and hearing are being used with the sense 'See, hear and respond'. God sees and hears but doesn't respond immediately, usually; He waits until judgment day. Hezekiah is asking for an immediate response in the here and now, for the essence of judgment day to come now, just as we noted on :16 that he was in expectation of the Messianic Kingdom being established.

The appeal for God to open His eyes alludes to Solomon's prayer, that God's eyes would be open towards the temple (1 Kings 8:29,52). The statement in :14 that Hezekiah prayed "before Yahweh" could suggest he went into the temple to pray. He thus betrays a 'religious' view of the temple, as if God was obligated to hear him because he was praying in the temple, or at least, because of the temple's very existence. Perhaps this is why his prayer not to die was responded to with the comment that God had indeed seen, and once healed, Hezekiah after three days would go to the temple [to praise God for His grace]. Hezekiah therefore prayed that prayer not in the temple, but on his deathbed at home, facing the bedroom wall. He was thus being taught that God opens His eyes to sincere prayer- not simply because of the religious value of the temple. I take this to be God showing that He was not particularly in agreement with Solomon's 'religious' idea that the temple of itself would obligate God to hear prayer. And that is surely why the final judgment upon Hezekiah was that the Babylonians would come and sack Jerusalem, which included destroying the temple.

Isaiah 37:18 *Truly Yahweh, the kings of Assyria have destroyed all the countries and their land*- "Destroyed" is again the word for sanctifying and devoting in a religious sense. The king of Assyria, like his latter day equivalent, was deeply religious, and saw the cruel destruction of other lands and peoples as part of his service to God, and a sign that his god was triumphant over their gods and belief systems. This exactly fits the spirit of jihadist Islam, which I suggest is the latter day equivalent.

Isaiah 37:19 *And have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them*- Here we

have an example of the Bible using language from the viewpoint of men on earth. They thought their gods were indeed "gods", but they were "no gods". Likewise the language of demons is used in the New Testament, but this doesn't mean demons exist or have power in reality.

Passages like Is. 37:19 almost define God by reason of His being uncreate. Whatever is created, is not God. And it follows that if we think that we have truly created anything, or that we are anything that God didn't create, then we are in fact playing God. Understanding God as creator, in its true, deep and thought-through sense, leads to an understanding of grace. That all we have, are, were, shall ever be, is purely His gift. Likewise, to take for ourselves what is God's is to play God. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God

Isaiah 37:20 *Now therefore, Yahweh our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are Yahweh, even You only-*

This alludes to the statement just made in: "You are the God, even You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth". Hezekiah is asking that his faith and understanding of God would be accepted by all peoples. Hezekiah wants people to understand and perceive what is potentially true for them. And this is really the function of all evangelism.

Hezekiah's confident assurance to the people that the Assyrians were an arm of flesh compared to Yahweh (2 Chron. 32:7,8) is hard to square with his own apparent lack of faith at this time. He stripped the temple of its gold [faith], made alliances with Egypt, and fortified the city in his own strength- which Isaiah strongly criticized in Is. 22. One solution is to recognize that faith and unbelief can co-exist in a "believer", and yet when speaking to others, we may give a stronger exhortation to faith than we personally believe ourselves.

The day when all earth's kingdoms shall know Yahweh is the Kingdom age, as Isaiah points out elsewhere with the same Hebrew phrase (Is. 12:5; 49:26; 61:9). Hezekiah envisaged salvation from the "king of the north" as leading directly to the establishment of the Kingdom; and that is the scenario in Dan. 11:40-12:3. Perhaps it was potentially possible; but Judah's general lack of repentance and Hezekiah's apostacy meant it was deferred in fulfilment. The desire for salvation was therefore not simply for the sake of personal safety, but for the wider glory of God in the earth.

There will come a day when all the world realizes that God is one (Is. 37:20 Heb.)- in that they will realize that He alone is God and all else is pure vanity. Because God alone is holy, only He will be worshipped then (Rev. 15:4). "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Is. 2:11,17).

Isaiah 37:21 *Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria-* Answers to prayer don't often come through bolts of revelation; in this case it was through another believer, Isaiah. And we note the power of one man's prayer- because of this prayer, God's word of :22 was uttered. See on Mk. 2:5.

The implication could be that it was Isaiah's prayer and not Hezekiah's which was answered.

Isaiah 37:22 *This is the word which Yahweh has spoken concerning him. The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you and ridiculed you. The daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you-* The remnant within the closed city of Jerusalem, likened to a

protected virgin who had not been 'opened', had hardly despised and ridiculed the Assyrians. They were terrified of them. But their faith was counted to them for more than it was; according to Ps. 2, it was God within Zion who despised and ridiculed the armies outside the walls. But His characteristics were counted to them. This is exactly the reasoning of Paul in Romans about imputed righteousness.

The idea may also be that the Assyrians had intended to enter and take Zion's virginity; but the prophetic perfect is used of how soon, the inhabitants of Zion would come out and shake their head in ridicule at the remaining Assyrians as they fled homewards. She had retained her virginity from them.

Hezekiah's perspective differed from God's. He saw the people as children whose birth was being unjustly stopped by God through not empowering the mother. Whereas Yahweh had lamented of His people at this time "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Is. 1:2). That same chapter speaks of a time when the cities of Judah had all fallen to the invader, apart from Jerusalem. So the context is precisely that of the Sennacherib invasion.

Isaiah 37:23 *Whom have you defied and blasphemed? Against whom have you exalted your voice and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel*- Sennacherib was fully aware that he had done all these things against Yahweh; the motivation for his rage against Jerusalem was his particular hatred of Yahweh. And so it shall be in the latter day invasion, which will also be strongly motivated by religion. This verse is simply restating the truth about Sennacherib. It is addressed to him, so presumably Isaiah's duty was to get the message to him. We wonder why God would, as it were, bother. But there are many points of contact with Pharaoh. God even tried to bring him to repentance, and perhaps this address to Sennacherib was to likewise give even him a chance. This is great encouragement to us, to never consider anyone not even worth trying with.

Isaiah 37:24 *By your servants have you defied the Lord and have said, With the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the innermost parts of Lebanon*- The intensive plurals here refer to the great mountain, of Zion. Sennacherib spoke in the present tense because he was certain he would achieve it. His intention was to desecrate the innermost parts of the cedar-of-Lebanon decorated temple.

I will cut down its tall cedars and its choice fir trees. I will enter into its farthest height, the forest of its fruitful field- This could continue the allusion to the cedar-of-Lebanon covered temple. Or the whole verse may be simply as GNB: "You sent your servants to boast to me that with all your chariots you had conquered the highest mountains of Lebanon. You boasted that there you cut down the tallest cedars and the finest cypress trees, and that you reached the deepest parts of the forests". However, an obsession with destroying the temple would fit the theme of Sennacherib's rage against Yahweh and particular desire to destroy the temple and gain the temple mount. This would match the similar motivations of the latter day Assyrian.

Isaiah 37:25 *I have dug and drunk water, and with the sole of my feet I will dry up all the rivers of Egypt*- Rabshakeh tried to cut off water from Jerusalem (hence Hezekiah's tunnel of 2 Kings 20:20). Sennacherib considered victory against Egypt as just as certain; although he was clearly fazed by Tirhakah's approach. In fact the

Assyrian army was to never set foot in Egypt at this time. Perhaps the idea is that despite this, the Assyrians had dug wells and found new water sources for their army. Isaiah had criticized Hezekiah for doing this rather than trusting in God. And it would seem that Hezekiah's efforts didn't succeed anyway.

Isaiah 37:26 *Have you not heard how I have done it long ago, and formed it in ancient times? Now I have brought it to pass, that it should be yours to destroy fortified cities, turning them into ruinous heaps*- This is the Divine response. Understanding predestination helps us see the frailty of all human strength and device; and Paul introduces it into his argument in Romans to likewise demonstrate that salvation is of grace and not by works. "Destroy" is literally to rush upon, and the word is used of how the rushing of the nations against God's people would be turned back (see on Is. 17:13).

Isaiah 37:27 *Therefore their inhabitants had little power; they were dismayed and confounded, they were like the grass of the field and like the green herb, like the grass on the housetops, and like a field before its crop has grown*- Similar language is used in Is. 40:6 of how "all flesh" is like this. The reference is to the "all flesh" of the nations around Israel whom the Assyrians had conquered, who trusted in their own human strength.

Isaiah 37:28 *But I know your sitting down, your going out, your coming in, and your raging against Me*- This reflects David's awareness that God knows our every physical movement, standing or sitting. God knew Sennacherib's going out from his homeland and how he would return there. Sennacherib's rage was against Yahweh; he intended to utterly subvert the true faith; see on :29.

Isaiah 37:29 *Because of your raging against Me*- There was a specifically religious, spiritual aspect to the invasion; the idea was that the claims of this Yahweh were to be shown false. The motivation of the latter day Assyrian will be the same. Dan. 11:40 [see note there] envisages the "king of the north" likewise raging against the God of the fortress of Zion.

And because your arrogance has come up into My ears, therefore will I put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came- This is the language of the latter day invasion by Gog (Ez. 38:4), which has this Assyrian invasion as its prototype. The Gog confederacy, of 10 nations headed by a *rosh*, a charismatic leader, will likewise be unsuccessful.

The languuage of coming up to God's ears usually refers to the prayers of the righteous - in the Hezekiah context, "their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy habitation, even to heaven" (2 Chron. 30:27). What came up to His ears was the blasphemy of His enemies. But perhaps the idea is that the situation of His people is read by Him as their prayer. Hezekiah spread the blasphemous letter "before Yahweh"and prayed over it. This reflected faith and trust that God did in fact see and hear what was written there, and here we have confirmation of that.

Isaiah 37:30 *This shall be the sign to you. You will eat this year that which grows of itself, and in the second year that which springs from the same; and in the third year sow and reap and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit*- They were besieged in Jerusalem. This sign was a medium term sign, not the short term indication of salvation they perhaps wanted. The sign was that there was the potential for the house

of Judah to bear fruit "upward", to God (:31); the fruit of repentance. But there are hints later in Isaiah that this sign was not believed; they did not respect the Jubilee year, they did sow instead of trusting that the land around Jerusalem would miraculously bring forth its own fruit. And this reflects how they did not bring forth the fruit of the Spirit "upward" to God but rather of their own strength (:31). See on :32. The language here seems to suggest that the events of the Assyrian invasion and deliverance happened around a year of Jubilee, which later in Isaiah is alluded to as a type of the time of the Lord's return and the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come then; but Is. 58 and other hints in later Isaiah are that the Jubilee year was not respected, they did plant instead of trusting in the Lord's provision, and so the Kingdom was precluded from coming then. The idea of planting vineyards and eating their fruit is used in Is. 65 of the Messianic Kingdom; it is kingdom language.

The verse has been translated: 'Ye did eat (the first year) such as groweth of itself, and in the second year that which springeth of the same, but in this third year sow ye'. This would mean that they were now in the third year of the Assyrian invasion. Perhaps there was a three and a half year domination of Judah by the Assyrians, just as there shall be in the last days.

Isaiah 37:31 *The remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah will again take root downward, and bear fruit upward*- See on :30,32. Apart from Jerusalem, Judah had been overrun by the Assyrians, so this remnant who escaped could refer to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; or it could be that "the remnant" refers to the spiritually faithful minority.

Is. 4:2 had spoken of how this "remnant" (s.w.) would be the basis of a revived kingdom of God in Judah, based around a Messianic "Branch", "in that day"- the day of Is. 4:1, when Jerusalem would be overcome and left in ruins with hardly any men left. These "survivors" are those saved from the ruins of a desolated Jerusalem, those who "escaped" the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 10:20); the same word is used in Joel 2:32; Obadiah 17, the "remnant" of Ez. 14:22 (s.w.). The destruction of Jerusalem was intended to elicit repentance and to lead seamlessly into a revived Zion and reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel, when again all things would be "glorious" (s.w. Is. 24:23; 35:2). But this didn't happen. Jerusalem was saved by grace, and yet Hezekiah failed to act as "Yahweh's branch", and Judah were impenitent, unmoved by their salvation by grace.

Isaiah 37:32 *For out of Jerusalem a remnant will go forth, and survivors will escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will perform this'*- This is the language of Obadiah about the final establishment of Messiah's Kingdom. As noted on :30, this could have happened then, if Judah had kept the year of Jubilee as intended and brought forth spiritual fruit "upward" to God.

Isaiah 37:33 *Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria, 'He will not come to this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither will he come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against it*- This is in contrast to Sennacherib's first approach to Jerusalem, when according to his own inscriptions he did cast up a mound: 'Because Hezekiah, king of Judah, would not submit to my yoke, I came up against him, and by force of arms, and by the might of my power, I took 46 of his fenced cities, and of smaller towns scattered about I took a countless number. And I carried off as spoil 200,150 people. And Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital city, like a bird in a cage, building towers round the city to hem him in. Then upon this Hezekiah

there fell the fear of the power of my arms, and he sent out to me the chiefs of Jerusalem, with 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver'. The fact not an arrow would be fired must be compared with how Is. 22:6 had predicted the presence of the archers of Elam around Jerusalem at the invasion, who would overthrow her. It was deferred until this same nation came with the Babylonians against Jerusalem at a later date (Jer. 49:35). Likewise Is. 22:7 foresaw the Assyrians 'coming before' the city; but this too was averted by the repentance and intercession of a minority. It is all a great lesson in the power of the repentance and intercession of a minority.

The promise that the Assyrians would not build forts against Jerusalem alludes to Is. 29:1-3: "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow... And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee". This was averted or delayed by repentance and intercession. Is. 29:4 continues: "And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust". This is the language of Hezekiah's prayer when he was terminally ill,, again showing he represented Jerusalem.

Isaiah 37:34 *By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come to this city', says Yahweh*- This unsuccessful invasion is like that of Ez. 38 and Ps. 2; the nations surround Jerusalem but fail to capture it because of the Lord's presence there. Jerusalem will indeed fall in the last days and be desecrated, but the Lord will return and save Israel, establish Himself in Zion- and then there will be this unsuccessful invasion which He crushes.

Isaiah 37:35 *'For I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake'*- The implication could be 'not for the sake of your righteousness, but by grace alone; for My sake, and because I respect the covenant of grace I gave David'. Perhaps this is why 2 Kings 20:6 reminds Hezekiah that his other prayer, for personal healing, is likewise because God is the God of David his ancestor: "Thus says Yahweh the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you". This was by grace, and not because of Hezekiah's allusions to praying towards the temple and thereby being saved, both nationally and personally.

Isaiah 37:36 *The angel of Yahweh went out*- He went out from the throne room of heaven, where the case had been as it were considered; see on :4. Isaiah 37 is shot through with allusions to the Angel cherubim destroying the Assyrian host. The Angel went out- perhaps referring to Him physically going forth out of the temple where He dwelt to slay the Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem. This phrase 'went out' is nearly always used about literal physical movement, which we have seen is what Angels literally do. Thus in the Ezekiel visions of the cherubim, they and the lightnings "went forth", physically and literally, in performing God's work. "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence (Angelic language); let Thine eyes (Angels) behold the things that are equal", seeing they are involved with the 'coming forth', according to the parallelism of this verse. Similarly Job's satan Angel "went forth" from the presence of the Lord (Job 1:12). And so it happened that there were Angels on earth, as it were. Zech. 2:3 also has an Angel going forth to answer the prayers concerning restoring the fortunes of Jerusalem (see Zech. 5:5 too). Ps. 81:5 describes

the Angel going out through the land of Egypt in order to "remove (Israel's) shoulder from the burden". Ps. 81 is 'Angelic', following Ps. 80, which is another such Psalm. Heb. 1:14 also offers support: the Angels are "sent forth" to minister to us- by answering prayers offered in the spirit of Hezekiah's prayer here?

And struck one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the camp of the Assyrians. When men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies- The bodies were spoiled by the Jerusalem Jews (Is. 33:4). The agent of destruction appears to have been fire and hail (Is. 29:6; 30:30), both of which may be used in the last days too.

We observe that this major event was never specifically prophesied by Isaiah in all the previous material we have in Isaiah. Hezekiah's illness and healing was intended to be programatic for Judah. Just as Hezekiah's death was determined but was delayed for 15 years by God's response to his prayer, so it could be that it was indeed God's intention to destroy Jerusalem at this point. But it was deferred, just as Hezekiah's death had been, because of the faith of a very few. We again see the openness of God.

Isaiah 37:37 *So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, went away, returned to Nineveh, and stayed there*- This was due to the "tidings" he received (:7), presumably of the destruction of his army outside the walls of Jerusalem. His murder by his sons is recorded in Assyrian inscriptions, but a a space of about 20 years after his withdrawal from Judah. We enquire why God waited so long, by human standards. Surely it was because He sought this man's repentance, as with Pharaoh.

Isaiah 37:38 *It happened that as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons struck him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Esar Haddon his son reigned in his place*- As noted on :7, this was caused by God putting a spirit / attitude of mind in these sons to do this. His Spirit, as today, confirmed the human spirit.

We note the contrast between the two kings. Both go into the house of their God but with different outcomes. Likewise the three delegated representatives of the king of Assyria, Tartan, Rabshakeh and Rabsaris, are paralleled with the three representatives of Hezekiah king of Judah, Shebna, Eliakim and Joah (2 Kings 18:18). The Angelic horses and chariots thus correspond to the much vaunted horses and chariots of Assyria. In this context we understand how Rabshakeh offers a fake Kingdom of God, alluding consciously to the descriptions of God's Kingdom in Mic. 4 and Isaiah.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 38

Isaiah 38:1 In those days was Hezekiah sick and near death. Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, came to him, and said to him- Hezekiah reigned 29 years (2 Kings 18:2), and the sickness after which he was given 15 years therefore happened in the 14th year or his reign- the very same time that Assyria invaded (Is. 36:1). Trials so often come together, in such an intense and extreme way that the situation can only be of God rather than mere bad luck or coincidence. The full title of Isaiah is given perhaps because the theme is that Hezekiah was to live because of the prophetic word.

It could be that Hezekiah shared the smiting of the Assyrians, so that his suffering [the basis of Isaiah 53] was on account of suffering the judgment upon Israel's enemies- all so looking forward to the Lord's death. And his recovery from certain death at this time was intended to encourage the people to have faith that they too could be saved from certain destruction by the Assyrians, against all odds. We likewise are often given encounters with others whose experiences are to encourage us as we pass through the same, in essence.

Thus says Yahweh, 'Set your house in order, for you will die, and not live'- we should not assume too quickly that Hezekiah had no family at this stage; for he is commanded here to put in order his household ("house" is so often 'family' rather than the bricks of a house). Indeed the very same phrase is used of how Abraham would "command his household" to keep God's laws (Gen. 18:19). Perhaps that was the idea. He was to urgently teach his household more of God's ways as he was to soon die.

Isaiah 38:2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Yahweh- The divans, which were also beds, were arranged next to the walls. We are left with the impression of a man utterly alone with God, turning his face away from Isaiah when he had delivered the message, facing the wall- and praying to Yahweh. This contrasts with how he had gone into the temple and prayed to God regarding the Assyrian threats. He now was unable to enter the temple, he was alone, Isaiah had gone out of the room (2 Kings 20), he was alone, back to the wall, alone with God.

Isaiah 38:3 And said, Remember now, Yahweh, I beg You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Your sight- Hezekiah claimed to have lived with a good conscience but was at the same time aware of his sins (Is. 38:3 cp. 17); and his cutting off the gold of the temple to try to buy peace was surely a failure. Yet the conscience can be cleansed of sin, through the depth of the power of God's forgiveness. This is not the same as forgetfulness, self-righteousness or minimization of personal failings. Paul must surely have had twinges of guilt over his behaviour at times (not least over the bust up with Brethren Barnabas and Mark, Acts 15:39 cp. 2 Tim. 4:11); and yet he insists that he always had a good conscience. Paul likewise claims that the Jewish forefathers served God with a pure conscience (2 Tim. 1:3 NIV). Yet the Jewish fathers, dear Jacob particularly, must have had plenty of twinges of guilt over their years.

Walking in truth is the term used to characterize the seed of David (1 Kings 2:4; 3:6), as David personally walked in truth (Ps. 26:3; 86:11), and may not of itself mean that Hezekiah is saying he has not sinned; it's as if Hezekiah assumed that because he was the seed of David, he therefore ought not to die. As will be explained on :5, the adding of

days to his life was a way of saying that he was being accepted as the seed of David; and yet he failed to use those years to save his people. It could be argued that by refusing to die when asked to, Hezekiah was disallowing his being the fulfilment of the Messianic suffering servant who was to die for his people.

Hezekiah is clearly over rating his own spirituality. But to say these things at such a desperate point, facing death, indicates how strongly he was persuaded of his own righteousness. His claim to have "done good" was true (2 Chron. 31:20) but he also uses the words of Ecc. 7:20 "There is not a man that does good and sins not" [possibly written by Hezekiah in later life]. And David had said the same, that there is none that does good (Ps. 14:1,3; 53:3). Paul quotes that as evidence we need salvation by grace. The problem with the righteous is that they fail to see that they are still sinners and deserve death. Isaiah may allude to Hezekiah by saying that all our righteousness is as filthy rags before God and is only relative. Deuteronomy several times uses the term in saying that if Israel did what was good, they would not be invaded. But Hezekiah had been invaded...

Throughout Isaiah 1-35, Isaiah has strongly criticized Hezekiah. For his materialism, his stripping of the temple gold and giving some of it to Assyria and some to Egypt to send horses and chariots, for trusting in Egypt, for having the Egyptian proxy Shebna in his inner cabinet, for fortifying the city in his own strength, for being proud and turning a blind eye to abuse of the poor. Isaiah had walked naked and barefoot three years trying to appeal to Hezekiah and Judah not to trust in Gentile powers. Isaiah's various prophecies against the surrounding nations are all in the context of appealing to Hezekiah not to trust in them, because they are going to be judged and rendered powerless by Assyria. Hezekiah offers no repentance to God for all this when faced with the judgment of premature death, although when saved by grace, he does marvel at God's forgiveness of him without his formal repentance. His insistence that he had served God well may therefore refer to the huge spiritual reforms and keeping of Passover which he did 14 years previously when he first became king. Rather than to a lifetime lived in that spirit.

Hezekiah doesn't specifically request healing. But this is how his prayer was interpreted by God, and that was the answer given. We have here another example of how God understands the essence of our thinking and treats that as prayer. Romans 8 is clear that we know not how to pray for as we ought, but the Lord Jesus as "the Lord the Spirit" intercedes according to our spirit. Those who can't verbalize are not therefore any weaker in prayer than those to whom verbalization comes much easier.

We note that earlier, Hezekiah had prayed for those who kept the Passover whilst unclean, and they had been "healed" according to his prayer (2 Chron. 30:20 "Yahweh listened to Hezekiah, and healed the people"). Hezekiah is here "healed" (s.w. 2 Kings 20:5,8). We wonder why he doesn't specifically request his own healing? Perhaps he

was too depressed. Or just willing to accept God's will. Or perhaps it was that the peoples' plague was due to infringement of Divine law, whereas he wrongly felt he had not sinned. He therefore felt he didn't deserve his death, and pleads with God to remember his spotless life. Something is clearly wrong here in his thinking, as it is in the thinking of all who consider death to be somehow unfair.

This is another allusion to Solomon's prayer. Solomon's idea was that if Israel walked before God with a perfect heart, then their prayers would be heard because of the physical temple; for Yahweh "keeps covenant and grace with Your servants who walk before You with all their heart" (1 Kings 8:23). But Hezekiah was to be shown that this was far too simplistic. God hears prayer by grace and not because of the existence of any temple. And so Hezekiah prays this prayer not in the temple; for the answer he gets assures him that in three days he will be able to enter the temple.

Hezekiah wept bitterly- Perhaps in prayer, asking God to change the outcome. For as with Nineveh, in the gap between Divine statement and its fulfilment, we can repent and change the word which otherwise would have come true (Jer. 18:8-10). His bitterness was apparently because, as he later reflects, he felt it was unfair to cut him off prematurely, in middle age. He didn't perceive the wages of sin are death, and like many, felt wrongly entitled to life.

In 2 Chron. 30 we read of Hezekiah having to make decisions at the great Passover which he organized. Some ate it on the second month, and others ate it unclean or with priests unclean. Numbers 9 allowed for those who were distant or travelling to keep the Passover a month later. But that legislation doesn't cover the eventuality here- that the priests were unclean. Likewise in 2 Chron. 30:18, "yet they ate the Passover otherwise than it is written". So we see how God's laws were not seen as a leash, as a letter that had to be literalistically obeyed. By contrast, contemporary Hittite laws condemned any failure to keep a festival on its specified day. The law of Moses is hereby shown to be open to interpretation and obedience according to spirit and not letter. Perhaps it was this perception of Divine flexibility that led Hezekiah to reason with God to change His plan that Hezekiah should die.

The bitterness may have been because he perceived, as most then did, that premature death was a judgment from God because of sin. The Psalms ask for wicked men to be cut off in their prime (Ps. 54:23; 89:45); and long life was a blessing of keeping the covenant (Dt. 6:2; 32:47). Perhaps indeed Hezekiah had sinned. And had to repent of his pride. He considered himself righteous- when measured against men. But his later psalm of gratitude, recorded in Is. 38, shows him appreciating that his sins had been cast behind God's back in forgiveness. We too experience things which help us to perceive our sinfulness, and to stop justifying ourselves by our relative righteousness

when compared to men. We also could note that Hezekiah seems to have little conception of a future resurrection. He wants to be healed so he can return to the temple and do his music...

Isaiah 38:4 Then the word of Yahweh came to Isaiah, saying- It seems from 2 Kings 20:4 that once he reached the middle court of the palace, he was told by God to "turn again" and give Hezekiah assurance of healing. The whole incident shows the speed with which God responds to prayers, and His sensitivity to human prayer and repentance.A relatively few words from Hezekiah [unlike Moses' 40 days intercession to change God's mind] triggered this change. He is so sensitive to us. Just half an hour's prayer at the most [the time it took Isaiah to leave Hezekiah's room and walk out of the palace] triggered a Divine *volte face*.

Isaiah 38:5 Go, and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says Yahweh the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life-

"The God of David your father" is mentioned because the death of Hezekiah childless would have meant that the Davidiv line of kings would have died out. God intended to end the line at this point. But He relented, deferring it until the death of Zedekiah some generations later.

Hezekiah doesn't specifically request healing. But this is how his prayer was interpreted by God, and that was the answer given. We have here another example of how God understands the essence of our thinking and treats that as prayer. Romans 8 is clear that we know not how to pray for as we ought, but the Lord Jesus as "the Lord the Spirit" intercedes according to our spirit. Those who can't verbalize are not therefore any weaker in prayer than those to whom verbalization comes much easier.

We note that earlier, Hezekiah had prayed for those who kept the Passover whilst unclean, and they had been "healed" according to his prayer (2 Chron. 30:20 "Yahweh listened to Hezekiah, and healed the people"). Hezekiah is here "healed" (s.w. 2 Kings 20:5,8). We wonder why he doesn't specifically request his own healing? Perhaps he was too depressed. Or just willing to accept God's will. Or perhaps it was that the peoples' plague was due to infringement of Divine law, whereas he wrongly felt he had not sinned. He therefore felt he didn't deserve his death, and pleads with God to remember his spotless life. Something is clearly wrong here in his thinking, as it is in the thinking of all who consider death to be somehow unfair.

We frequently read of a man's "days" as if there is a Divinely appointed number of says to each human life. But God can cut short a wicked man, so that he doesn't live out half his days (Ps. 55:23). With Hezekiah, God added to his days. Just as Dt. 27:20 promised that the good king would "prolong his days". Dt. 4:26 warns Israel that if they sinned, they would not prolong their days- as if the idea of prolonging was potentially there for them, but they might miss it. The very idea of years being "added" to Hezekiah suggests that an original plan was amended. So again we see God's openness and sensitivity to human prayer and behaviour, modifying plans accordingly.

Kings adds more detail, denoted here in italics: "*Behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord.* And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the King of Assyria; and I will defend this city *for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake*" (2 Kings 20:5,6 AV). The defence of Zion at this time was predicated upon God's grace; judgment was intended to come unless they repented, and most of them hadn't. And so God stresses He will save Zion by grace, for His own sake and not that of His peoples' prayer or repentance. This says something about the effectiveness of Hezekiah's prayers. The cure was not instant, it took three days; for the same reason as there will be the process of judgment between our resurrection and entrance to the Kingdom. The period between God's pronouncement of blessing and the realization of it is for our benefit, that we might grow in appreciation. The healing enabled Hezekiah to enter the temple; from God's perspective, the most significant aspect of his illness was that its uncleanness precluded him from entering the temple. We notice the parallel between Hezekiah's prayer and his tears; God reads situations as prayers. Prayer is understood by Him far wider than simply words as lexical items. Otherwise those more able to verbalize would pray 'better'; and acceptable prayer is not related to our ability to verbalize. The healing coming after three days was perhaps to test Hezekiah. For this is why answers to prayer don't come immediately.

See on 2 Kings 19:15. I suggest there that in his prayer for national deliverance, Hezekiah had prayed in the temple, thinking that God "saw" things uttered there. But he is being taught that God 'sees' sincere prayer regardless of the temple building. And after three days, Hezekiah was to go to the temple just to praise God for His grace.

The years 'added' to the king's life are expressed in the words of Ps. 61:6, where David felt that God would "prolong [s.w. "add to"] the king's life [s. w. "days"]. The clear allusion to David's words was perhaps to show that God considered Hezekiah to be the Davidic king who could have been the Messianic Son of David. But Hezekiah despised that and wasted those years in self-satisfaction. There is also a theme in Solomon's teaching that his son would have 'days added' (the same Hebrew phrase) to his life, because of his obedience to wisdom (Prov. 3:2; 9:11; 10:27). Again, the idea is that the adding of days to Hezekiah's life was confirming him as the seed of David.

Isaiah 38:6 I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city- Yahweh had earlier stated that He would not "deliver" (s.w.) Jerusalem from the Assyrian lion (Is. 5:29). But as in Hosea, God speaks in wrath but then His grace is such that He doesn't carry out what He threatens. He has emotion and speaks and acts in that fire of passion. That was normal in the Middle East; it is the western obsession with nicespeak and measured responses which make outburst behaviour and language appear inappropriate. Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and he spoke of the 'deliverance' (s.w.) of the city from the Assyrians as being due to the appearance of a Messianic figure (Mic. 5:6). Here in Is 38:6, the deliverance of Hezekiah personally from inevitable death is tied up with the deliverance of Jerusalem from inevitable judgment. He surely could have been one of the possible fulfillments of the Messianic figure, which makes his failure to rise up to it all the more tragic.

We learn here that although Hezekiah's sickness and the deliverance from the Assyrians happened at about the same, Hezekiah's healing from sickness happened before the deliverance of the "sick man" of Judah from the Assyrians. It was all by grace, and Hezekiah's healing was intended to give inspiration to others to believe that the Assyrian "death" would also be removed. We likewise encounter people whose expriences of God's grace are designed to inspire us in our issues.

Isaiah 38:7 This shall be the sign to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do this thing that He has spoken- 2 Kings is clear that Hezekiah asked for a sign- for there *were three days before he would be able to go into the temple. This could be read as weak faith on his part- and he utters no immediate gratitude, bearing in mind that he felt at the time that by evening he would be dead [according to his later prayer of thanks]. His comment that God sending the shadow forward ten degrees would be 'too easy' rather sounds as if his request was from scepticism and unbelief. But it can be argued another way- that his request for a sign was intentionally learning from his father Ahaz's mistake in refusing a sign. The difference in possible interpretation is intentional. We can only ponder whether Hezekiah showed faith or unbelief by requesting a sign. Just as we ponder our own actions and ask the same.* It seems that unlike his father Ahaz, Hezekiah had asked for this sign (:22). It is apparent that the experiences of believers are often suggestive of those of other believers. Insofar as we appreciate this, we will find strength to go the right way. Consider how Hezekiah was intended to see the similarities between himself and the earlier king Ahaz his father, and learn the lessons. They were both threatened by invasion and tempted to turn to human help (Is. 7:2; 37:1); Visited by Isaiah and told to not fear (Is. 7:4-9; 37:6,7). Ahaz was unfaithful by “the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller’s field” (Is. 7:3); and in just the same place Hezekiah’s faith was tested and he learnt the lessons of Ahaz’ failure (Is. 36:2). Both were given a sign by God and promised deliverance (Is. 7:14; 37:30). Ahaz refused to ask for a sign when offered

one (Is. 7:11); whereas Hezekiah learnt, and asked for a sign (Is. 38:7,22). Thus his asking for a sign was not a sign of faithlessness but rather his seeking to not be like Ahaz. “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it” was spoken to both Ahaz (Is. 9:6) and Hezekiah (Is. 37:32).

Isaiah 38:8 Behold, I will cause the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down on the sundial of Ahaz with the sun, to return backward ten steps. ’ So the sun returned ten steps on the sundial on which it had gone down- "The stairway built by King Ahaz", Hezekiah's father, was part of his idolatrous sun worship which Hezekiah ought to have destroyed. It was a kind of small ziggurat. It was the Babylonians who had begun telling the time in this way; there is no mention of "hours" of the day in the Hebrew Bible until the time of Daniel. Here we have another hint at the incomplete spirituality and reformation of Hezekiah. The "songs of degrees" were written or rewritten to apply to this experience of the sun returning ten degrees or steps. There are 15 of them, matching the 15 extra years of life given to Hezekiah.

It seems that 10 of the 15 songs of degrees were written by Hezekiah, perhaps connecting with how the shadow returned 10 degrees. We enquire however why the shadow returned ten degrees to symbolize how Hezekiah was being given fifteen years. One possibility is to consider that the Hebrew term for "fifteen" is two distinct words, the words for 'five' and 'ten'. God's openness is such that perhaps He is hinting that He would add five or ten or fifteen years.

It could also be that the sundial of idolatrous Ahaz had probably been brought from Assyria, as such things were common there and had pagan associations. Hezekiah had not destroyed his father's idol- another hint that his devotion to God was far less than ideal.

Shadows can go back if a light brighter than the sun shines upon the object causing the shadow. This was observed during the meteorite incident in Chelyabinsk, Russia, which was brighter than the sun. It is Isaiah who speaks of God's glory in Zion appearing brighter than the sun (Is. 60:19; 62:21). The intention of this was to be that Gentiles came to this light and brightness (Is. 60:3). The Babylonian ambassadors came to enquire of the sign done in the land. So it seems that the bright light of Yahweh's glory appeared in the land and changed the shadow. This is far preferrable to speculation that the earth, and the entire solar system, reversed its direction of travel. This was a foretaste to Judah, in their dark hour surrounded by their enemies, of what potentially could happen. The Kingdom of God could then have been established in some form. But Hezekiah let the ball drop. Instead of converting the Babylonians, he boasted to them. And brought judgment upon Zion. We reflect that if Hezekiah had asked to bring the shadow forward, then God had another option in view. We see here the interplay between human freewill and Divine openness.

Is. 30:26 again parallels Hezekiah's sickness with Jerusalem's woeful state [as does Is. 33:24 "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity"]. The healing was to be associated with a bright light, and that is what made the shadows go back: "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound".

"Gone down" is the word used by Hezekiah in speaking of how he feels he had "gone down" into the grave (:18). It is as if Hezekiah has died, the sun gone down those degrees, and then resurrected, brought up the same amount. He could have been a Messianic figure in a reestablished kingdom of God in Judah. The "return backward" of the sun is a phrase often used of the return of the exiles from Babylon to be part of that reestablished Kingdom. Hezekiah's revival / resurrection was to be seen as that of his people. How the miracle happened is not the essential question; but it could have been caused by the glory of Yahweh bursting forth so that the shadow was chased back.

We must factor in the additional information from 2 Kings 20:10*: "Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go forward ten steps. Nay, but let the shadow return backward ten steps".* Hezekiah's attitude in asking for a sign, and the way he responds to the offer for the shadow to go forward, all hardly indicates firm faith and trust. And yet he had earlier had such faith. The Hebrew word translated "light" can mean two things, and neither of them read very nicely for Hezekiah to say this. It can mean 'easy'; and to say it was easy for the light to go forward, involving the apparent manipulation of the sun and therefore the entire cosmos, was no "light" thing for God to do. The word can by extension mean "despised" or "cursed", and is often translated like that. Hezekiah is saying that for life to be 'fast forwarded', for him to be cut off in the midst of his days by the sun advancing forward, is easy for God. But it would be harder, surely, for God to make the sun as it were go backward, to create time, to reverse the time of his life by giving him more time. And despite that unpleasant, bitter attitude to God, God responds by giving him more life. Hezekiah had faith, but so did Elijah; but faith without hope and love is nothing, as Paul says. And Elijah was removed from his ministry despite having so much faith. The reversal of time spoke only of a delay; Hezekiah's death was not removed, but delayed by 15 years. The time shift would have reminded the perceptive of Joshua's long day, when again time was as it were tampered with- in order to enable a military victory. And a similar victory was given against Assyria at this time.
Hezekiah asks for a sign “to prove” that God’s predicted cure of him was going to happen. And when given the option of the shadow of the sun jumping forward by ten degrees, he almost mocks that as too ‘easy’. Yet this is the man with the accolade at one point that no King believed in God like he did..

Isaiah 38:9 The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and had recovered of his sickness- LXX "The prayer of Hezekiah". "Recovered" here translates a common word for 'to make to live'. If recovery or healing was in view, another word would have been used- that used in Is. 39:1. Hezekiah uses the word in :16 "cause me to live". The idea is that he had effectively died. Whether he literally did or not is not the ultimate issue; his sickness is framed as a living death, from which he resurrected. The same word is used in :1; Hezekiah would "not live" or "not recover". But he does, such is God's openness to change His plans in response to human prayer. The recovery was clearly a Divine 'Plan B' and not necessarily what God had ideally wanted. Perhaps He wanted Hezekiah to die and be resurrected. Or perhaps indeed Hezekiah did not recover; he died, but was resurrected, and in that sense he recovered. The word is definitely used about resurrection in Is. 26:19 and elsewhere.

Isaiah 38:10 I said, In the middle of my life I go into the gates of Sheol. I am deprived of the residue of my years- Hezekiah understood *sheol* as the place where there is no "living" (:11); the grave. "The middle" is literally 'the meridian', an allusion to the sundial which he perhaps viewed from his bed of sickness, and which was the appropriate sign to give him seeing as he watched the sun climb and decline on the steps. If it indeed was an idolatrous import from Assyria as suggested earlier, he would have had time to reflect on the incomplete nature of his purges and perhaps his own repentance. Hezekiah's reasoning seems based around the supposition that this life is all he had to enjoy, and at 39 he felt he was in the midst of it. The perspective of eternity doesn't seem to figure. The language of 'deprivation' likewise seems to presume that he has a right to life, whereas sinners deserve only death. Like Job, Hezekiah is made self-centered by the reality of pain, depression and illness; and yet is saved at the same time. Those things are understood by God and seen through as surface level issues. Preemature death is clearly seen as a punishment, and all Hezekiah did was to protest how unfair that was. He failed to perceive that the wages of sin is death, and we have no right to life.

Isaiah 38:11 I said, I won't see Yah, Yah in the land of the living. I will see man no more with the inhabitants of the world- This may be a lament that he would not live to see Yahweh destroying the Assyrians and establishing His Kingdom; hence LXX "I shall no more at all see the salvation of God in the land of the living: I shall no more at all see the salvation of Israel on the earth". Several of Isaiah's prophecies had suggested the literal coming of Yahweh to Zion in the restored kingdom (Is. 4:5,6). The Old Testament faithful feared death because it meant no communion with God. For them, life was all about daily fellowship and engagement with God; anything else was death. It was a wonderful life, and any state without that was to be feared. So their view of death reflected their

view of life. Their mental lives were therefore full of communion with Him, as ours should be.

Isaiah 38:12 My dwelling is removed, and is carried away from me like a shepherd's tent- LXX " I have parted with the remainder of my life: it has gone forth and departed from me, as one that having pitched a tent takes it down again: my breath was with me as a weaver's web, when she that weaves draws nigh to cut off the thread". AV "Mine age is departed"; the Hebrew for "age" is strictly 'a revolution', again reflecting how he had been watching the revolution of time on the sundial from his bed of sickness. The reference to a tent being taken down connects with the descriptions of the permanence of the restored Zion, as a tabernacle which would not again be taken down (Is. 33:20). He believed that he would not see this; he felt his destiny was that of the "tabernacle" in Zion. We could argue that he thereby failed to perceive the role of bodily resurrection, so that he would ultimately see this. Or that he doubted that Is. 33:20 was to come true. On the other hand, it could be that his identification of himself with the fortunes of Zion was positive, and was resolved by the message that he would be healed at the same time as the tabernacle would be permanently established through the destruction of the Assyrians. But he failed to live according to this faith in the final 15 years of his life.

I have rolled up, like a weaver, my life. He will cut me off from the loom- The same word for 'weaving' is used in Isaiah of those who weaved unspiritual plans to try to avoid the Assyrian judgment (Is. 19:9; 59:5). Perhaps he reflected upon his agreements with the Assyrians and cutting off the gold from the temple to pay for them. And he felt he was to be judged for that.

From day even to night You will make an end of me- He was at the gates of the grave (:10), feeling that he would die by the end of that night, in the morning (:13). "Make an end" is more strictly 'recompense' (s.w. Is. 59:18; 65:6; Jer. 16:18). Perhaps he felt he was being judged for sin and was to receive the recompense for iniquity, in death. And yet he protests he has not sinned. We could read this as self-righteousness; or see him as the representative of God's sinful people, the just suffering for the unjust in the spirit of the Lord Jesus, the ultimate "suffering servant".

Is. 28:14,17-19: "hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem... the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place... when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report". This is the same idea in Hezekiah's lament that he would die by morning. His terminal illness, which was delayed by grace, represented Judah's judgment. Elsewhere the Assyrian invasion is likened to flood waters which swallowed all Judah, and left Jerusalem alone with head above water, about to be drowned. It was

God's intention that Jerusalem also would fall. It didn't by grace alone, and the power of Isaiah's intercession. There is the possibility in Is. 28:22,23,26 that repentance could change the outcome: "Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth [land, including Jerusalem]. Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech…For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him". There was some repentance, shown by Hezekiah and the leadership wearing sackcloth. This and Isaiah's prayers changed the outcome.

Isaiah 38:13 I waited patiently until morning. He breaks all my bones like a lion. From now until tonight You will make an end of me- See on :12. Assyria was the lion, and yet Yahweh was behind that lion. He feels his destiny is tied up with that of Judah. He suffered as their representative. Therefore he is assured that his healing is tied up with the salvation of Zion from Assyria. LXX gives the sense: "I was given up as to a lion until the morning: so has he broken all my bones: for I was so given up from day even to night". The Assyrians were the lion, and Hezekiah feels that his death is as it were giving Assyria the victory. He fails to see the glory and purpose of God in wider terms, seeing his own living as indispensible to the purpose of God. See on :15.

Isaiah 38:14 I am chattering like a swallow or a crane, moaning like a dove. My eyes weaken looking upward- He admits that his faith in the God above is weakening as he faces death. "Chatter" is the word used in Is. 29:4 of how Judah are to be brought down in condemnation and chatter out of the dust; he feels condemned although he is not, bearing Judah's sins and condemnation, exactly as the Lord Jesus did. But there is no mention of faith in resurrection, as there is with Job when he feels the same, and also is presented as the suffering servant. Perhaps he alludes to Ps. 84:3, where the Psalmist is also excluded from the temple, and is jealous of the swallows who can fly in there despite their uncleanness. Perhaps too Hezekiah uses this idea of birds moaning and chattering as if to say that he didn't know how to verbalize and express himself in prayer. He was just making a noise. Indeed we are not specifically told what Hezekiah prayed for, at least not whether he asked for healing and a longer life; perhaps because he didn't ask in so many words. But God saw what his spirit was and responded to that, rather than his actual words. He was given 15 years extra because God heard his prayer, in that He counted his unexpressed thoughts as his prayer. Yet we all know not how to pray for as we ought. And like Hezekiah, our prayer is heard because the spirit of it is perceived. Indeed the emphasis is that God heard Hezekiah for *His* sake, for the sake of His purpose with David and His grace; rather than simply for the sake of Hezekiah's prayer. "For *My* sake" contrasts with any idea that Hezekiah was being saved for *his* sake. Again we note that Hezekiah represents all Judah- for Isaiah will later state that

"We all… moan bitterly like doves, for we look for salvation, but it is far from us" (Is. 59:11).

Lord, I am oppressed- This is the word used in Is. 30:12; 59:13 of Judah's trust in Egypt and clever political alliances. Hezekiah is bearing Judah's sins, but he is also aware of his own sin in cutting off the gold of the temple and allowing those sinful alliances to go ahead in his name.

Be my salvation- "Be my salvation" or AV "undertake for me" is the word used by Rabshakeh when he sarcastically asks Hezekiah to surrender to the Assyrians (see on Is. 36:8). His sickness came at the same time as the siege of Jerusalem; see on Is. 36:1.

Isaiah 38:15 What will I say?- As the seed of David, he feels like David did when the great promises of the Messianic seed were given to him. This is the point of awe at God's grace which we should all come to. The feeling of "wow!".

He has both spoken to me, and Himself has done it- The word of Isaiah promising healing was God's word, and had been done. It is the language of new creation, common in later Isaiah; God spoke and it was done. But Hezekiah was to later waste that wonderful potential. He marvels that God Himself had responded to his prayer so quickly. God Himself had personally been involved in the whole thing. The God who speaks through the prophets ["has spoken to me"] is the God who Himself deals with me. He is moving towards personal relationship with God, whereas he had earlier spoken to Isaiah of "Yahweh your God".

I will walk carefully all my years because of that anguished experience of my soul- Hezekiah saw Jacob's watershed experience that night of wrestling as analogous to his own experience during his sickness: "I reckoned till morning, that as a lion he would break all my bones (cp. Esau's approach)… I shall go softly (cp. "I will lead on softly", Gen. 33:14)… for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Is. 38:13,15). Tragically, Hezekiah didn't keep Jacob as his hero. He succumbed to the very materialism which Jacob permanently rejected that night. Hezekiah, typical of all men, was on a cusp of gratitude and spirituality, whereby he felt sure he would live like this the rest of his days, "all my years". But he didn't. No spiritual peak is automatically retained but must be consciously retained. Hezekiah and Judah had made the same mistake at the time of the reforms of 2 Chron. 30.

Isaiah 38:16 Lord, men live by these things; and my spirit finds life in all of them: You restore me, and cause me to live- The revival he felt was not simply of physical healing, but in spiritual restoration. This again suggests he was not in fact a stellar example of

spirituality beforehand. But he didn't render again according to the grace given, and he didn't keep this natural undertaking to live spiritually "by these things", as a result of the healing and national deliverance given. LXX "Yea, O Lord, for it was told thee concerning this; and thou hast revived my breath; and I am comforted, and live"; GNB " Lord, I will live for you, for you alone; Heal me and let me live". Paul appears to apply Hezekiah's experience and insights here to each of us: "For we who live are always being delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh." (2 Cor. 4:11).

When we are seriously ill or in great calamity, we focus upon very simple ideas. God truly loves me and cares for me. My Lord Jesus will come again. He will raise me. Judgment lies ahead, but He wants me in His Kingdom. He died for me. He has a plan for me. He loves me and wishes only my eternal good. Hezekiah was driven to this when he was terminally ill. Afterwards he felt as a little child, and concluded: “by these things men live…”. Yet we are all terminally ill, if only we would know it. Paul quotes from the experience of Hezekiah at this time and says that this should be the keynote of our witness (2 Cor. 4:13 cp. Ps. 116:10). He was “delivered from death” and therefore promised to walk before the Lord “in the lands of the living”, believing in salvation and therefore speaking to those lands of it (RV). We all face the day when we shall be as water spilt on the ground, that cannot be gathered up; when the delicate, beautiful chandelier of human life will come crashing to the ground, when the rope holding the bucket snaps, and it falls into the well. In all these Biblical images of death, we face the tragic irreversibility of it all. Our bodies are already riddled with the cancer of inevitable decay. *Today*, while it is still today, we must focus ourselves upon the vital and essential realities of our faith, and away from all the peripheral issues upon which our flesh would far rather dwell.

Isaiah 38:17 Behold, for peace I had great anguish, but You have in love for my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for You have cast all my sins behind Your back- This again suggests that Hezekiah's previous life had not been of totally stellar obedience. Hezekiah didn't have "peace" before his suffering, so we must go with other translations. LXX "For thou hast chosen my soul, that it should not perish: and thou hast cast all my sins behind me"; GNB "My bitterness will turn into peace. You save my life from all danger; You forgive all my sins". Hezekiah had simply told God of his upright life. God healed him for His Name's sake, and for David's sake- for the sake of the sure mercies / grace promised to David. Yet when he received the healing, Hezekiah realizes his sins. His prayer changed him, but not God, who was aware of Hezekiah's sins before Hezekiah was, and responded to his need by grace and not because of Hezekiah's righteousness. God healed him, instead of turning away from him because of his self righteousness and lack of confession of sin. But it was this grace which elicited within

him an awareness of his sin and God's forgiveness.Our forgiveness of others can achieve the same. And yet they like Hezekiah can not render again according to the grace given.

To cast behind the back means to despise, to take lightly and to not take seriously. It doesn't mean to totally forget. It is the term used for how Judah had cast God and His law behind their backs (1 Kings 14:9; Neh. 9:26; Ez. 23:35). This gives some window onto how God feels about our sins once He has forgiven them. He is historically aware of the sins He has forgiven but He despises them and doesn't take them seriously. The same ideas are found in how Moses "took your sin, the calf you had made… and I cast the dist thereof into the brook" (Dt. 9:21).

Isaiah 38:18 For Sheol can't praise You. Death can't celebrate You. Those who go down into the pit can't hope for Your truth- That death is truly unconsciousness, even for the righteous, is demonstrated by the repeated pleas of God's servants to allow their lives to be lengthened, because they knew that after death they would be unable to praise and glorify God, seeing that death was a state of unconsciousness. Hezekiah (Is. 38:17-19) and David (Ps. 6:4,5; 30:9; 39:13; 115:17) are good examples of this. Death is repeatedly referred to as a sleep or rest, both for the righteous and the wicked (Job 3:11,13,17; Dan. 12:13). And yet Hezekiah reasons as if he has no hope of future resurrection; in the grave he could have hoped for God's truth, the fulfilment of the promises to David which were clearly in his mind at this time. It was the lack of this future perspective which led him to his final failure, of considering that "peace and truth" in his last years was a good enough reward (see on Is. 39:8). Paul warns against the misery of thinking that "in this life only we have hope in Christ". It is a malaise that affects many claiming to be Christian- they have no clear idea of any future hope, and live today according to Christian tradition but with little longer term perspective. Whereas the Bible continually emphasizes the hope of personal bodily resurrection and eternity at the Lord's return.

Isaiah 38:19 The living, the living, he shall praise You, as I do this day. The father shall make known Your truth to the children- LXX "for from this day shall I beget children, who shall declare thy righteousness". This is not to say that at 39 he had no children, for he was commanded to arrange the affairs of his household / family (:1). And yet he vows to teach the "truth" of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenant to his children in future. Is. 39:7 suggests he would now have [more?] children. His children were a remarkable failure. He apparently didn't do this. His having children after his recovery and figurative resurrection would look forward to the Lord's spiritual achievement. But again he is focused upon the life that now is, and assumes he will have children who will take

forward God's truth- rather than any mention or implication of a faith in resurrection and a future Kingdom. David had such a faith and understanding, as did Job; Hezekiah clearly didn't.

Hezekiah presents as childless, and now promises to tell his future children God's "truth". But this was on a cusp of emotion, because when he is told in Is. 39:7 that his sons were to be eunuchs in Babylon, he makes no appeal for this to be changed. He is just relieved that there will be peace during his 15 years. Again we see, as in the lesson of the zealous reforms of 2 Chron. 30 that didn't last, that true spirituality is not on the cusp of emotion nor the passion of a moment. Men may do fine things and make huge sacrifice at one point- but it's the long run, in spiritual terms, which God looks at. And that is also true for the high profile sins of some.

Isaiah 38:20 Yahweh will save me- This is the idea of the Hebrew word for "Jesus", 'Yehoshua'.

Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of Yahweh- The "songs of degrees" were written or rewritten to apply to this experience of the sun returning ten degrees or steps. There are 15 of them, matching the 15 extra years of life given to Hezekiah. There are ten of those 15 songs written by Hezekiah, perhaps alluding to the ten degrees the shadow went backward. "Our life" may refer to his children (:19). But as discussed on Is. 39:8, he still sees service to God as limited to his lifetime, "all the days of our life", clearly referring to the 15 years 'added to your days'.

Isaiah 38:21 Now Isaiah had said, Let them take a cake of figs, and lay it for a poultice on the boil, and he shall recover- The poultice of fig leaves didn't heal him nor could it specifically give him 15 years of life. Indeed, fig leaves were an inadequate covering in Eden. God's grace saved from judgment, not fig leaves. There was no need for this, because his salvation was by a miracle. But it was perhaps given in reflection of his weak faith and needing something visible; hence :22 begins "Hezekiah *also* had" asked for a sign, as if the cake of figs was likewise associated with his needing visible assurances. We note it was done on Isaiah's initiative, who perhaps perceived Hezekiah's need for something visible.

Whatever Hezekiah's illness was, it is presented as being the result of a boil which was causing the invasion of his body with an illness which would kill him. This is analagous to the situation with Judah. An invasion was rapidly spreading which was to destroy them, and so Hezekiah's illness and the delay in his death [for he was not saved from death, but just from death at that time] speaks of the delay in Judah's judgment. Although the essence of the prophecy remained true, the fulfilment was changed in

channel- from the Assyrians to the Babylonians. Perhaps Isaiah has this in view when he says in Is. 55:11 that God's word shall not return to Him empty but will achieve its intention, finally. And this is how so many prophecies are fulfilled- through a process of recaluclation and reapplication, with the essence coming true but not the letter. Likewise the judgment upon Nineveh was delayed- Nahum is clear that it did come, but much later than initially planned.

Isaiah 38:22 Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I will go up to the house of Yahweh?- Or as LXX "This is a sign to Ezekias, that I shall go up to the house of God". The request for this sign could be read as a lack of faith; or an attempt to learn the lesson of his father Ahaz, who was condemned for not asking for a sign. See on :7. The chronology in 2 Chron. 20:7-9 appears to suggest that after he was healed, Hezekiah asked for a sign that he really was healed: "Isaiah said, Take a cake of figs. They took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. Hezekiah said to Isaiah, What shall be the sign that Yahweh will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of Yahweh the third day? Isaiah said, This shall be the sign to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?".

ISAIAH CHAPTER 39

Isaiah 39:1 At that time, Merodach Baladan the son of Baladan king of Babylon sent letters and a present to Hezekiah; for he heard that he had been sick, and had recovered- Gentiles bringing presents to Zion is the language of the reestablished kingdom (Ps. 68:29). It could have come about then, when the surrounding nations brought presents to Hezekiah; but human pride and impenitence precluded it. See on Is. 18:7. And Hezekiah and his descendants adopted the ways of those nations rather than ruling over them and helping them toward Israel's God. 2 Chron. 32:31 describes these people as "the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon", but an unusual word is used there for "ambassadors"; it is the word usually translated "scorner" or "mocker". The idea is clearly that these men had an agenda and were not sincere. And Hezekiah was willfully duped by them, falling for their agenda and being blinded by their gifts, rather than seeking to share the ways of Yahweh with them. Hezekiah ought to have learnt not to trust in them, seeing that trust in the "princes and ambassadors" of Egypt had been proven so false just in recent history (Is. 30:4). God likewise brings situations into our lives whereby situations repeat- to test our faith and understanding.

The "letters" and 'ambassadors' recall the 'letter' from the ambassadors of Assyria in Is. 37:14. He didn't respond spiritually to this 'trial by prosperity'. Hence: "However concerning the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31). "The wonder" could refer to the miracle on the sundial, or to the miraculous revival of the land physically in line with Isaiah's prophecies.

Hezekiah had been warned at the start of his reign that Babylon was to become an evil empire whom Yahweh would destroy. The oracle against Babylon was given just as He became king (Is. 14:28 "In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden"). But the years had blunted the power of God's word, perhaps he had not re-read or regularly listened to Isaiah's prophecies. Babylon then would have been very small and distant, and he didn't pay attention to the prophecy- probably. And so when ambassadors from Babylon came to him, Hezekiah was easily flattered and he sought to impress them. When he should have remembered their predicted sad end.

*Isaiah 39:2 Hezekiah was pleased with them- "*Pleased" is s.w. "joy", "to rejoice". It is used of how Hezekiah previously had rejoiced in spiritual things (2 Chron. 29:36; 30:25). Now he rejoices in material things, and being respected by Gentiles rather than God. His "joy" or 'pleasure' ought to have been solely in Yahweh's salvation (Is. 25:9 s.w.). Hezekiah rejoiced "with them"; the Hebrew text is emphatic about this joy "with them". But the whole land had been charged not to rejoice at the fall of Assyria because it

would revive in another form (s.w. Is. 14:29). Hezekiah is presented as totally ignorant of all this.

Hezekiah's problem was pride. Isaiah had repeatedly criticized Judah for being proud, and for their land being "filled with silver and gold" as well as full of idols and pride. Hezekiah was not an idolater, but he was caught up in the materialism and associated pride of the society in which he lived. This really is a warning to us. The Assyrian inscriptions even note his pride, e.g. "I overthrew the wide region of Judah. Its king, Hezekiah, a proud rebel, I made submit at my feet".

And showed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, the spices, and the precious oil, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah didn't show them- LXX "the houses of his treasures". This sounds as if his kingdom had become like that of Egypt and Solomon, where treasure cities were associated with gross materialism and refusal of the things of God's Kingdom. The Babylonians had revolted against Assyria, and they wanted help from Judah to form a political alliance against Assyria. But Hezekiah was taken in by the presents and attention paid to him, responding in pride rather than telling them he had nearly died because of his alliances; he ought to have told Babylon to accept Yahweh as their God, and thus be saved from Assyria as Judah had been. Presumably he agreed to the alliance; hence the judgment given, that his people would go into captivity in Babylon. He had recently been so lacking in gold that he had stripped the temple's gold and given it to the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:16). This sudden abundance of wealth may well have come from nations such as Babylon, who were eager to have Judah onside with them as a now significant and respected ally against Assyria. The wealth of the Gentiles flowed in to the liberated Zion, but only as a very weak foreshadowing of the things of the Kingdom. Human "armour" ought not to have been gloried in; for the entire message of Zion's deliverance was that it was achieved by God's power and grace and not at all by human strength. But the same Hebrew word is used repeatedly of the temple vessels which Hezekiah had earlier sanctified for usage (2 Chron. 29:19,26,27; 30:21). But now he had removed them out of temple service in Yahweh's house into his *own* house. His focus was upon *his* kingdom ["dominion"], rather than the things of Yahweh's Kingdom. It was these very vessels which were to be carried to Babylon (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:7).

Both Hezekiah and his father Ahaz had emptied the king's treasure house in attempting to buy off the Assyrian enemies (2 Kings 16:8; 18:15). But so soon after the Assyrian destruction, Hezekiah's treasure house is amazingly and impressively full. The surrounding nations had brought huge wealth to him, and he had likely spoiled the camp of the Assyrians. Which may have been full of high value metals they had looted from other nations they had recently defeated. And Hezekiah spiritually falls flat on his

face when faced with the temptation brought about by sudden wealth. His poor response, being lifted up in pride, is so psychologically credible.

Is. 22:8 condemned Judah for looking to the armour in this house, rather than looking to God: "you looked in that day to the armour in the house of the forest… But you didn't look to Him who had done this, neither did you have respect for Him who purposed it long ago". Just as Hezekiah had earlier looked to Egypt rather than exclusively to God. And Isaiah had condemned him for this. His attention to Isaiah's word was therefore superficial. He wanted Isaiah to pray for him, but he himself presents as not responding to Isaiah's word, and wanting the benefit of Isaiah's intercession rather than taking seriously God's word through Isaiah.

Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, had stripped the Temple of all its silver and gold, as well as all the gold and silver in the palace treasury, and sent it to Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings 16:8,9). We see how he reacted against his father's idolatry, but followed the same faithless script of his father in other ways. This again is so psychologically credible. It's how sons are with their fathers, unless they are born again and made free of all the ties that bind. But only 30 years later, Hezekiah was able to give 30 talents (or 900 kg) of gold and 800 talents (or 24,000 kg) of silver to Sennacherib. He had built up considerable wealth quite quickly- especially bearing in mind he is recorded as undertaking huge building and fortification projects, repairing the Temple, providing huge numbers of sacrificial animals for the Passover, funding a campaign against the Philistines and having enough wealth to try to buy Egyptian military support against Assyria.
This suggests Hezekiah was materialistic and on the look out for wealth. He believed his wealth could save him- he offered money to Egypt to help him, and paid a huge amount to Assyria to leave him alone. All of which was criticized by God through Isaiah. When his wealth revived after the Assyrian defeat, again it was his undoing- because he boasted of it to the Babylonians, who clearly were covetous and thence planned to come and take it by force. Which Isaiah says, God would empower them to do because of Hezekiah's pride. That pride arose from his great and sudden wealth, which was given to him by God: "Hezekiah enjoyed immense riches and honour. He built himself treasuries for gold, silver, precious stones, spices, jewels and every kind of desirable object, as well as storehouses for his returns of grain, new wine and olive oil, and stalls for all kinds of cattle and pens for the flocks. He also provided himself with donkeys in addition to his immense wealth of flocks and herds, since God had made him immensely wealthy" (2 Chron. 32:27-29). The promised blessing upon the land, producing "of itself", seems to have been responsible for the agricultural prosperity. The lands around him had been ravaged by the Assyrian scorched earth policy. They perhaps traded their wealth for food. But we note that this wealth led him to proudly show it off to the Babylonians, who came to find out about "the wonder that was done in

the land" (2 Chron. 32:31, i.e. the amazing agricultural blessing). We now understand better why God is careful about giving wealth; because it typically leads to pride and loss of spirituality.

The Rassam Cylinder and the Taylor Prism lists what the Assyrians claim Hezekiah gave them. It includes "thirty talents of gold" as also stated in 2 Kings 18:14, but also lists many high luxury items made of ivory, and also Hezekiah's daughters. The list would suggest Hezekiah was living a high luxury life and was a lover of wealth. The Cylinder and Prism also claim the Assyrians took not only gold and silver, but also spices, precious oil and the contents of Hezekiah's well stocked armoury, "the house of his armour". But in 2 Kings 20:13 and Is. 39:2, these are the very things which Hezekiah has in abundance after the Assyrian destruction, and shows off to the Babylonians. So we can better imagine psychologically what happened. Hezekiah had amassed great wealth before the invasion, probably from transit taxes on the trade routes he had gained control of through taking the territory around Gaza [there is archaeological evidence of this]. But he gives it all to the Assyrians and Egyptians through lack of faith. But he amazingly receives it all back, and more, after the miraculous defeat of Assyria. And this lead to his pride. How often is this proved true, that wealth brings pride and lack of faith. It is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. Assyrian records show how much tribute was demanded and paid by various nations over their history- records of tribute from 26 countries have been preserved. The tribute demanded from Judah was one of the highest- indicating the relative wealth of Judah under Hezekiah. This wealth was what led him to lack of faith, and is criticized by Isaiah repeatedly. Archaeological evidence, especially from Lachish, likewise indicates that Hezekiah ruled over a very prosperous and wealthy society.

Isaiah 39:3 Then Isaiah the prophet came to king Hezekiah and asked him, What did these men say? Where did they come from to you? Hezekiah said, They have come from a country far from me, even from Babylon- Surely these were rhetorical questions aimed at rebuking Hezekiah. His reply was made in pride (2 Chron. 32:25). The prophetic intention had been that the Gentiles would come from far countries to Israel's God with offerings to Yahweh, but Hezekiah sees it in terms of them coming to *him* with presents and respect for *him*. He uses the very phrase of Dt. 28:49, of how a nation "from a far country" was to come and destroy Israel.

Isaiah 39:4 Then he asked, What have they seen in your house? Hezekiah answered, They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them- Hezekiah appears to be boasting that he had boasted. His attitude is completely wrong. As in :3, these are rhetorical questions; and rather like those given to

Adam in Eden, they were intended to elicit repentance. LXX "yea, also the possessions in my treasuries". Note the emphasis on "my… my.. I". The focus on his possessions and treasuries suggests the Lord quarried the parable of the rich fool from Hezekiah, who thought he had wealth to enjoy for the remainder of his days; see on :6. "My house… your house" stands in contrast to the temple / house of Yahweh which ought to have been Hezekiah's focus. All that was in his house was to be taken to Babylon (:6). The intention was that the Gentiles "from a far country" (s.w. Is. 5:26) would come to Zion and "see" or "be shown" (s.w.) God's glory (Is. 49:7; 52:15; 60:5; 61:9; 62:2; 66:18 s.w.). But instead Hezekiah showed them his own glory. He precluded the fulfilment of these prophecies in terms of his kingdom being the reestablished kingdom of Yahweh.

Isaiah 39:5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Yahweh of Armies- "Hear" may be an appeal to repent and stop the prophesied outcome from happening in accordance with Jer. 18:8-10. Hezekiah is being asked to hear or be obedient to the threat of future judgment- by repenting, in the gap between the pronouncing of the prophecy and its fulfilment. But he doesn't. His final comment is that there will be peace in his time, and he is good with that.

Isaiah 39:6 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried to Babylon. Nothing will be left', says Yahweh- This would have seemed impossible; for Babylon was one of many apparently irrelevant small powers whom both Sargon and Sennacherib had overrun, destroyed her towns, and enforced direct Assyrian rule. That in 160 years' time Babylon would be the dominant power and would take Judah captive… appeared laughable. But God had just demonstrated that He could destroy the Assyrian army in a moment; and indeed it happened (2 Kings 24:13). 'Storing up' is surely alluded to by the Lord in the parable of the rich fool; he stored up riches only to lose them in a moment of Divine judgment, and was not rich toward God. See on :4. Just as there was "nothing" Hezekiah didn't show the ambassadors, so "nothing will be left". He showed them "all", and "all that is in your house…" would be carried away.

Isaiah 39:7 'They will take away your sons who will issue from you, whom you shall father, and they will be eunuchs in the king of Babylon's palace'- There is a theme in Isaiah of conceiving, suffering pain in labour- but bringing forth in vain (Is. 26:18; 33:11; 59:4). And so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was no bringing forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still

under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24). Hezekiah's immediate sons "who will issue from you, whom you shall father" weren't permanently taken to Babylon. Manasseh was taken there but repented and returned to Judah (2 Chron. 33:11-13); but it was in Dan. 1:3 that "the king's seed" were all deported there permanently. Again we have an example of a prophecy being delayed and suspended in fulfilment. This could have been because of the prayer and repentance of a minority, not least Manasseh; the spirituality of Josiah; or God's constant pity towards His people.

Hezekiah's 'don't care' attitude is perhaps reflected in his son Manasseh, who became one of Judah's worst kings. "Manasseh" is a name without the common 'Yah' suffix. This itself indicates that Hezekiah did not want the Yahweh Name associated with his child, who was born3 years into the extra 15 years. Manasseh means 'causing to forget', and we enquire what it was that Hezekiah sought to forget. We wonder whether it was, in a word, God. But his awareness of God could not be erased, and so he wrote Ecclesiastes.

If his sons were to be eunuchs, then the Davidic line would end. We rather hope Hezekiah's response will be similar to his response to the news that he must die without sons; we expect weeping and intense prayer as in the previous chapter, when Isaiah gives him a hard word from the Lord. But we are disappointed. Hezekiah presents as childless before his illness, and when healed he promised to tell his future children God's "truth"(Is. 38:18). But this was on a cusp of emotion, because when he is told in Is. 39:7 that his sons were to be eunuchs in Babylon, he makes no appeal for this to be changed. He is just relieved that there will be peace during his 15 years. Again we see, as in the lesson of the zealous reforms of 2 Chron. 30 that didn't last, that true spirituality is not on the cusp of emotion nor the passion of a moment. Men may do fine things and make huge sacrifice at one point- but it's the long run, in spiritual terms, which God looks at. And that is also true for the high profile sins of some.

Isaiah 39:8 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, Yahweh's word which you have spoken is good. He said moreover, For there will be peace and truth in my days-

To accept Yahweh's word as "good" doesn't have to indicate much spirituality. The wicked Eli does the same when told he and his sons shall be judged for their

wickedness: "He is Yahweh, let Him do what is good in His sight" (1 Sam. 3:18). He accepts the judgment as 'fair enough' but goes on impenitently. The 'goodness' perceived by both Eli and Hezekiah was simply that they would not immediately experience judgment. Men are the same today, willing to accept they have a few years to live and after that will face judgment. Often we read of God doing good in His own sight (2 Sam. 10:12). I suspect Hezekiah is alluding to that idea- God can do what He thinks good. Unlike when faced with death, he makes no attempt to reason with God.

To say that a "word" is "good" is a Hebraism for expressing agreement. The phrase is translated "Well said" (1 Kings 18:24; see too 1 Sam. 9:10; Dt. 1:14 "The thing [s.w. "word"] you have spoken is good" and often). It's as if Hezekiah saw God offering him personally 15 years of life in return for Judah going into captivity and Jerusalem falling. And he agrees. "He said moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my days" is surely telling us what he said within himself. Hence GNB "King Hezekiah understood this to mean that there would be peace and security during his lifetime, so he replied, "The message you have given me from the LORD is good"". He made the agreement because he thought that it was a good enough return for he himself having 15 peaceful years. This was selfishness at its acme. And so the record ends in Isaiah, inviting us to see Hezekiah as impenitent of that awful egoism. The implication is surely that instead of 'agreeing' to the word of judgment, he should have begged for a different outcome- just as he did when he was given the 'word' of his own imminent death. But he thought only of himself, not of the wider picture of God's people. His sons becoming eunuchs in Babylon (:7) would've meant the end of the direct Davidic line of kings- but he didn't care. Self interest dominated all wider issues.

Hezekiah presents as childless, and now promises to tell his future children God's "truth". But this was on a cusp of emotion, because when he is told in Is. 39:7 that his sons were to be eunuchs in Babylon, he makes no appeal for this to be changed. He is just relieved that there will be peace during his 15 years. Again we see, as in the lesson of the zealous reforms of 2 Chron. 30 that didn't last, that true spirituality is not on the cusp of emotion nor the passion of a moment. Men may do fine things and make huge sacrifice at one point- but it's the long run, in spiritual terms, which God looks at. And that is also true for the high profile sins of some.

"Peace and truth" is translated "assured peace" in the context of assurance that judgment will not come (Jer. 14:13). Or the idea may be that real peace is experienced on the basis of the truth of God's words. And he had had that Divine word of assurance, that judgment wouldn't come in his lifetime. What should he have done? Surely appeal for Judah to repent in order to change that outcome. And to repent himself. We see here Hezekiah's focus on himself. He would be saved from shame of face during his life, and that was enough for him. He had no real care for his children or grandchildren. It was all about him. Rather like when his death is announced, he basically pleads with God "I

don't want to die, I don't deserve it, I've lived a good life". He refused to accept that the wages of sin is death. And he makes no obviously discernible reference to the hope of resurrection in the future.

Sadly despite the warning from the example of Shebna (see on Is. 22:15) and the specific command not to just live for today and resign ourselves to an eternal death (Is. 22:13 "Behold, joy and gladness, killing cattle and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die"), Hezekiah at the end of his life gave in to just this same mentality. The sense is as GNB "King Hezekiah understood this to mean that there would be peace and security during his lifetime, so he replied, "The message you have given me from the LORD is good". "Peace and truth" is the language of the restored kingdom of God (Jer. 33:6); and it is the same term used by Hezekiah when he failed to grasp the potential of the Kingdom being reestablished in his times; he was content with peace and truth in his times alone (see on Is. 38:18,20). Likewise the Jews of Esther's time were content with "peace and truth" in their times, rather than seeing that what had happened was to lead them towards the eternal peace and truth with God of His Kingdom and not their own (see on Esther 8:13-16; 9:30 "with words of peace and truth"). And this is the abiding temptation for all believers; to be satisfied with some degree of "peace and truth" emotionally and intellectually in their lives now, but resign the far greater realities of the Kingdom to come when "peace and truth" shall be in eternal reality.

The lesson presented is that it's better not to have more life if during it you will turn away from God. This is a principle with massive implications. Life is to be lived for God, and we are to trust that His plan to get us to His Kingdom is in fact the best. Our struggle with death, illness and the apparent termination of our experience of what we think we should experience… is all subsumed beneath this acceptance.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 40

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort you, comfort My people, says your God- The historical interlude has demonstrated that the prophecies in Is. 1-36 of judgment at the hands of Assyria were ameliorated and deferred by the intense repentance and intercession of Isaiah's school of prophets. But the interlude concludes with the bad news that the reformation was not thorough, and that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon; and therefore the earlier prophecies of judgment by Assyria would be reapplied to judgment by Babylon. But out of that there was to come a wonderful restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel, explained in the so called 'second Isaiah' (Is. 40-55). But sadly, the Jews who returned failed to allow that amazing potential to come true; the burden of the so called 'third Isaiah' (Is. 56-66). This message of restoration and yet lack of human response to it is what the rest of Isaiah is about.

For "Comfort", see on Zech. 1:13. This comfort is that spoken of in Ez. 14:22,23, where we read that the exiles would be comforted when they recognized the evil of Judah's ways and recognized that the judgment upon her had been just. But Is. 40 appears to be a message of unconditional comfort to the exiles- without specifically demanding their repentance. But even then, they still failed to accept it and respond; they preferred to stay in Babylon. Is. 40:1,2 speaks a message of comfort to the exiles: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God”. But [in full allusion to this prophecy], the exiles were like Rachael who refused to be comforted over her loss (Jer. 31:15); they claimed they found “none to comfort” (Lam. 1:2,16,17,21). But they were willfully refusing the comfort of God’s repeated word of hope and restoration. They didn’t grasp the plain teaching of the prophetic word because they didn’t want to- it demanded too much of them, and a giving up of the comfortable Babylon life. Hence Is. 43:19 laments: “I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth [in the decree to return to Zion?], do you not perceive it?”. And do we "not perceive it?" time and again in our own lives, as to the potentials God is opening up?

According to Jewish tradition, Nehemiah’s real name was Zerubbabel, the branch (*Sanhedrin* 38a)- perhaps the same Zerubbabel as mentioned in Haggai and Zechariah. The Hippolytus Chronicle 7:3:37 even claims Nehemiah was a direct descendant of David and in the direct kingly line. His name, ‘comfort of Yahweh’, invites us to see him as the potential fulfilment of the Is. 40:1,2 prophecy about a Messiah figure arising to the exiles, giving them God’s comfort. At the time of Judah's redemption, while the temple had been trodden down by her enemies, the promised Messiah figure of Is. 63:1-3,18 was to come from Edom and Bozrah - both code names for Babylon. The words "Bozrah" and "Babylon" have similar root meanings ('high / fortified place'). And he was to lament how the people of Judah were not with him- "of the people there was none with me". But this is the very spirit of Nehemiah, when he returns to Jerusalem from Babylon and looks around the 'trodden down' city at night, not telling the people of the Jews about his inspection- i.e. the people were not with him (Neh. 2:11-16).

The appeal is to preachers to call Judah back to Zion from Babylon. The word for "comfort" is that used for "repent", e.g. "no man repented of his wickedness" (Jer. 8:6). But they are being asked to repent because they have been forgiven- and not the other way around. When John the Baptist fulfilled these words, he baptized *unto* repentance (Mt. 3:11). It was a 'repentance baptism' (Acts 19:4) in that it was to induce them to repentance through the prevenient work of the Spirit. The preacher was being asked to comfort / repent the exiles.

The various voices in Is. 40:1-11 may be a reflection of the court of Heaven. During that time, Zion had been as a forsaken woman "not comforted" (Is. 54:11). Now she was to be comforted, that the separation and suffering was over. Whether the preachers would fulfil this, or whether Israel would respond, is left open. Jerusalem or "Zion" in Isaiah can refer to geographical Jerusalem, but often "Zion" is used as a personification of God's people. Isaiah sketches "Zion" as a woman married to God, who needs comfort to accept His love and re-start her relationship with Him. And she is later comforted that her children will return, or at least, she will have many children and a wonderful, eternal life. This part of Isaiah begins with this call to "comfort" Zion (:2) and will conclude with her being a comforter to the newborn nations: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her: rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn over her; that you may nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts" (Is. 66:10,11). Paul surely has this in mind when he teaches that we use the "comfort" we receive from God to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:4). "My people... your God" immediately assures them that they are in covenant relationship with God. He has not rejected them.

Isaiah 40:2 Speak comfortably to Jerusalem- "I shall speak to her heart" (Hos. 2:16; s.w. "speak comfortably") is an idiom elsewhere used about seeking to win the heart of a woman by persuasive words (Gen. 34:3; Ruth 2:13; Jud. 19:3); Hosea dreamt of winning Gomer back to him by his words. This has a direct equivalent in the restoration context- for the same term is used in Is. 40:2, where God through the prophets seeks to speak to the heart of Zion and persuade her to return from Babylon to Him in Jerusalem and enjoy the married life of His Kingdom. And yet like Gomer, they either didn't want to hear, or responded on a merely surface level.

And call out to her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received of Yahweh's hand double for all her sins- see on Job 7:1. The impression is given that the turning point from wrath to love has arrived. The language is trying to capture that point, where wrath with a loved one reverts to an overflowing love- the love that in fact was always there. This is the good news of the Gospel. Truly "the wrath of God is the love of God"; wrath and love are related. And because God has dealt with His peoples' sin, His love flows out. And that is what each of us can perceive on a deeply personal level. This is the power of the Lord's finished work for us on the cross, dealing with sin and thus effecting a change in God's rightful wrath.

"Her term of service is over, that the debt owed for her iniquity has been satisfied" (Is. 40:2) suggests a kind of transactional approach which some find inappropriate. Zion had a debt to pay she could only deal with by selling herself as a slave for a period. But they are the terms used. A debt was paid or cleared; although not necessarily by her labour! "Without money you will be redeemed" (Is. 52:3). For the language of "redemption" will be used about Zion; someone had redeemed her, had met the debt. Is. 43:1-7; 44:22; 50:1,2; 52:3 all present Yahweh intervening and paying off the debt Himself. For that is what 'redemption' alludes to her. "He has redeemed Jerusalem" (Is. 52:9) leads in to the servant song of Is. 52 / 53 regarding the death of the Lord Jesus. God presents as both the one to whom the debt is owed, and also the redeemer from that debt. For clearly sin is presented as debt; "he cancelled the debt of all our trespasses... erasing the bond of indebtedness that stood against us" (Col. 2:14,15). Is. 50:1 is clear: "Do you think I sold you into captivity like a man who sells his children as slaves? No, you went away captive because of your sins; you were sent away because of your crimes". God did not sell them into slavery, they sold

themselves, just as Elijah said of Ahab: "you have sold yourself to do evil" (1 Kings 21:20). Indeed the captivity occurred because they sold themselves to do evil (2 Kings 17:17). We likewise are "sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). But somehow the debt had been cleared, not by Zion's slave labour, and so she need not serve any longer. The fact the Jews chose to remain in Persia is exactly for the same reasons as people prefer to remain in bondage to sin when faced with the Gospel of redemption. How that was achieved is not at this point made clear. God could simply forgive debt. But the servant song of Is. 53 surely gives the deeper answer- it was the death of the Messianic servant which provided the technical answer as to "how" this was achieved. Is. 53:5 is clear: "The penalty we should have paid was upon him". We could render Is. 40:2: “Indeed, she will receive double from the hand of Yahweh in exchange for all of the suffering on account of her sins". This double blessing is that of Is. 61:7: "Instead of your shame you shall have double; and instead of dishonour they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess double". It is in Is. 53 that we have the explanation as to how suffering for sin can lead to this double blessing- it was through the suffering servant, representative of Israel and yet morally perfect.

The idea of buying without money in Is. 55:1 connects with the entire theme of Yahweh being Israel's "redeemer", their go'el, the One who would pay the price of their debt, rather than them having to work as slave labour for a period. They were thus redeemed without money. Clearly the link is to Is. 52:3 "you shall be redeemed without money". God would pay, not them. This is why Is. 55:11 will go on to talk of how God's word shall achieve His intention- and the "word" immediately in view is the word of restoration of the Kingdom and eternal salvation of God's people.

Jer. 25:12; 29:10 had stated that Judah would have to be 70 years in exile. It could be that the message of Is. 40 was that God had cut short that time. Yet the Jewish community didn't respond; and so, according to the revelations to Daniel, the time of their exile was extended. After it had apparently been potentially cut short. It's as if God was so eager to restore the relationship that He says that the 70 years contracted time for their slave labour, working to pay the debt of their sin, was now cut short because He would as it were pay the difference. "Accomplished" is the word used in 2 Chron. 36:21: "To fulfill the word of the Lord in the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land expiated [accomplished] its sabbatical years, all the days of its desolation it rested, thus completing seventy years".

The grace of God to the exiles is a foretaste of His grace to us. Time and again God speaks of the exiles in such positive language. For all that they had willingly adopted the gods of the captors, God still fondly describes them as 'Zion who dwells in Babylon' (Zech. 6:10,11). They were the Kingdom in embryo, waiting to just be transplanted from Babylon to Judah, just as we are the temple of God prepared symbolically in Heaven and waiting to be revealed on earth. Putting that grace another way, God proclaimed that despite all their idolatry and weakness in Babylon, Judah had 'paid off' their guilt for former sins by their service there (Is. 40:2). We can only marvel at God's grace, and the tragedy was that it was wasted and unperceived by them. May we do somewhat better.

Some prophecies were delayed / rescheduled in their fulfilment. Others have their intended fulfilment changed into another form. Is. 40:2 speaks of how Jerusalem’s “punishment is accepted” (RVmg.), referring to how Lev. 26:43 had said that the land would lie desolate until her punishment was fulfilled. This passage could have come true when Judah returned from captivity. But it didn’t. It is applied to the preaching of

John the Baptist in the 1st century; but again, Judah would not hear. And so once again the land lay desolate again, until now the time has arrived for the final Elijah prophet. God is seeking to fulfill His word, but He will not force the hand and hearts of men and women. Therefore prophecies are delayed in their fulfilment, as mankind is given yet more opportunities. The briefest attention to context will show that Isaiah 40 follows straight on from the account of Zion's salvation from the Assyrian in Hezekiah's time. The command to cry unto Jerusalem that her warfare is finished (Is. 40:2) is clearly following on from the historical account of Jerusalem's salvation from Sennacherib's invasion which we have just read in Is. 37-39. The voice in the wilderness [potentially Isaiah?] preached that all flesh was grass, referring back to how the nations around Jerusalem had been "as the grass of the field" during Sennacherib's invasion (Is. 37:27 cp. 40:6). The voice crying in the wilderness to prepare Messiah's way therefore was intended to occur after the defeat of Sennacherib. But Hezekiah messed up, and his people turned to materialism and idols. And thus the prophecy was rescheduled to fulfillment in John the Baptist; but again, Israel would not hearken. If Israel would have received it, John would have been the Elijah prophet; but overall they didn't, and so the whole prophecy is again rescheduled to be fulfilled in the Elijah prophet of our last days. Micah 5 speaks of Messiah being born and being smitten upon the cheek at the same time as Jerusalem is besieged and Judah has been invaded by the Assyrians. Whatever minor fulfilment this may have had in Hezekiah, it was pathetically incomplete- he wasn't born in Bethlehem, and he wasn't smitten upon the cheek with a rod. I read all this as meaning that Messiah could have been born and then suffered in such circumstances- but it didn't happen. The prophecy was fulfilled in essence, although in a different context and in a different way, in the Lord Jesus. Likewise Is. 9:6 speaks as if the birth of Messiah would be at a time of deliverance from Israel's invaders; yet Is. 9:13 RV implies this would only happen if they were obedient: "Yet the people hath not turned / repented".

God would punish Israel at the hand of the Babylonians according to their sins, proportionate to them (Ez. 7:4,9; 5:11; 8:19; 9:10). Yet when Israel *were* punished by the Babylonians, Ezra (Ezra 9:13) realized that they had *not* been punished proportionate to their sins. But here Isaiah says that their judgment had been double what it ought to have been; and yet Ezra says it was *less* than the promised proportionate recompense for their sins. Here we have the utter, inconsistent grace of God; almost taking guilt for punishing them (cp. how God likewise takes the blame in Is. 54:6-8, as if He had forsaken Israel as a sweet innocent young wife). The way God restored double to Job at the end has echoes of how a thief had to restore double (Ex. 22:2-4)- as if God in His love for Job wished to show Himself as having been somehow 'guilty' for taking away from Job what He had?

God had outlined a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (Jer. 16:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would "cause them to know My hand… and they shall know that My name is The Lord" (Jer. 16:21). This double recompensing of Judah's sin happened in the exile in Babylon (Is. 40:2), and therefore the joyful news was proclaimed to Zion in Is. 40 that now the Messianic Kingdom could begin. But there wasn't much interest nor response to the call to return to Judah in order to share in it. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended. Despite the fact that there is little evidence that Jewish exiles suffered much in Babylon. They were told by Jeremiah to build houses and plant vineyards there, and were so wealthy that Haman wanted to kill them and expropriate

their huge wealth. Jews were queen and prime minister of Persia in Esther's time. Many Persians even became Jews.

Isaiah 40:3 The voice of one who calls out, Prepare you the way of Yahweh in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God- Isaiah begins his section on the restoration with a bold prophecy that the restoration of Zion was to be associated with a way being prepared for Israel's God to come to them (Is. 40:1-3) and also for them to come to Him over. He in a sense 'came' to them in Egypt from Sinai, He went forth to redeem them (Dt. 33:2; Jud. 5:4; Ps. 88:4,8); and would have done so again to save them from Persia / Babylon. But they refused, and so God as it were 'came down' in sending His Son as the redeemer, and will do so again in sending His Son to earth to save Israel and establish His eternal Kingdom on earth. Here it is "the way of Yahweh" that is prepared; the parallel prophecy of Is. 57:14 calls it "the way of the people": "prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of My people". The way of God is that of His people. He was going to go with them on that way from the world to Zion. They would march with Him in glory and every assurance. In a sense, He comes out from Zion to Babylon, and they come from Babylon to Zion. They travel the same path, and meet: "You meet him who rejoices and works righteousness, those who remember You" (Is. 64:5). Is. 40 opens with a picture of the triumphant march in glory from Babylon to Zion. This is a great theme in Isaiah, and it speaks of our path from the world to God's Kingdom. Yahweh goes both in front (Is. 52:12) and behind, as the vanguard (Is. 58:8). Just as He is both the one to whom Israel owe their debt, and the one who redeems them from it by paying it off. He is involved in us, including our history of sin, around and above us, all the way through.

These words are repeated in Mal. 3:1-3, where the messenger was to prepare the way of Yahweh's coming. It seems that in some sense they could have come true in the first return of the exiles along the wilderness way back to Zion, under Ezra. But over 100 years later, in Malachi's time, the prophecy was still capable of fulfilment, if the priesthood would be purged. But finally it was all deferred in fulfilment until the coming of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus.

The language of 'preparing a way' is clearly applied to John. He would "make ready a people *prepared* for the Lord" (Lk. 1:17); John came "in *the way* of righteousness" (Mt. 21:32). The way is the people. Yet the Lord's take on John's ministry was that it was largely a failure- John had offered Israel as children in the marketplace to play funerals, and they had refused. The Lord invited them to play happy weddings and they refused. The exiles had complained they were left with no "comforter" after the Babylonian destruction of Zion (Lam. 1:2,9,16,17,21; 2:13). Now they were offered a comforter- and they refused. They were as Rachel refusing to be comforted... The preparation of natural Israel as the way must therefore yet be fulfilled. But we as spiritual Israel are being prepared as that "way" now. Is. 40:3, which is quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare the way *of the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare the way *of the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25). We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25).

The message of Is. 40:3 is that before the final coming of the Lord, there will be a proclamation of this by His people: "Prepare ye [plural] the way of the Lord". As the King's servants went ahead of him to make the path he had to travel smooth and plain

[remember there were no motorways then!], so we go ahead of the returning Lord of all the earth, to prepare the way / road for Him. And yet within Isaiah, there is ample evidence that God prepares His own way: "I will do a new thing… I will even make a way in the wilderness" (Is. 43:19). Perhaps the element of unreality here, the 'new thing', is that the King Himself prepares His own way or road. Or again: "I will make all my mountains a way" (Is. 49:11). The connection with Is. 40:3 is that in the work of preparing the Lord's way, in the last great preaching appeal of all time in the lead up to the second coming, the Lord Himself will work with us to make that way plain and clear. In all the challenges of the latter day fulfilment of the great commission, the Lord Himself will work with us.

The whole restoration program appears to be predicated upon preachers calling out to Zion to return, both to their God and to their land. This will also be true in the last day fulfilment. The Isaiah 40 passage is therefore a command for our latter day witness to all the world, Israel especially, to prepare their way for the Lord's coming. We are to "cry" unto Zion that "her iniquity is pardoned", but we are also to 'cry' for her to repent, to be "made straight", for the rough places to be 'made plain'; to "cry aloud…lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression (Is. 40:2-4; 58:1). It's exactly because we have in prospect been forgiven that we are called to repent. The forgiveness has already been granted; iniquity has been pardoned. We are to 'cry' out this fact; and also to 'cry out' for repentance. But we have to respond to that. It's similar to how Saul/Paul was called 'brother' even before his conversion and baptism. The world's redemption was achieved through the cross; but we have to appeal to the world to accept it. And in our own lives we must live out what we are preaching to others; exactly because we have already been forgiven, we need to repent of what we've been forgiven of, to as it were claim that forgiveness as our very own. And the same Hebrew word translated 'cry' occurs in the same context in Is. 40:26; 43:1; 45:3,4; 48:12; 54:6, where we read that it is God Himself who calls every one of Israel back to Him, just as He calls every star by its own personal name. And so in our personal calling of men and women, in our crying out to them in these last days to be prepared for the Lord's coming, we are workers together with God. He is crying out to them, through our feeble, shy, embarrassed, uncertain words of witness. Likewise it is God Himself who makes the crooked places straight in Is. 42:16 and 45:2- whereas in Is. 40:3, it is we the preachers who are to do this.

Isaiah 40:4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The uneven shall be made level, and the rough places a plain- The whole purpose of the Gospel is to bring down the mountains of human pride and lift up the valleys of those who lack any self-respect (Is. 40:4), thereby making an equality of attitude amongst God's people. The vision of the Kingdom in Is. 2:2-4 was used as an appeal for *humility* amongst Israel (Is. 2:10-12). See on Is. 2:11. If we don't humble *ourselves* now, then God will do this to us through the process of condemnation at the judgment. In this lies the insistent logic of humility. The theme of 'bringing down' pride is a major one in the first half of Isaiah (Is. 2:17; 13:11; 25:5,12; 29:4; 32:19). These passages pave the way for the announcement that in man's response to the Gospel of Christ, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Is. 40:4). By the hills of human pride being brought down, and the giving of confidence to those so low in the valleys of hopelessness and lack of self respect, there is a leveling of all those who respond to Christ. But more than this; in this lifting up of the hopeless and bringing down of the proud, there is a foretaste of what will happen in

the future day of judgment. In essence, “we make the answer now” by whether or not we bring down our pride, or whether we summon the faith in God’s grace and imputed righteousness to believe that we, who are nothing, are lifted up in His sight. “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low” (James 1:9-10).

"Prepare the way… make straight in the desert a highway... the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" is similar to Is. 45:1,2,13 "Thus says the Lord to Cyrus... I will go before you, and make the crooked places straight... I will make straight all his ways... he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives". The preparation for the restoration in Is. 45 becomes a type of the preparation of the way to Christ.

The primary reference of the Isaiah 40 passage is to the Jews. But even more specifically, it is to be cried out “to Jerusalem”. I submit that the most specific fulfilment of the prophecy will be in our latter day preaching resulting in a remnant of Jews repenting in Jerusalem, so that the Lord’s return will be to a faithful Jewish remnant in literal Jerusalem. The ‘making straight’ is to be done in “the desert” (:3)- a description elsewhere of Jerusalem (Is. 51:3). “Every [Heb. ‘the whole, complete’] mountain and hill” (:4) which is to respond to the Gospel may refer to people on the temple mount, upon which the Lord shall “come down, to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof” (Is. 31:4; 10:32). The Hebrew words used here for ‘mount’ and ‘hill’ are identical in the passages. The Lord will return to Zion to find a repentant remnant there, converted by our preaching. Mal. 3:1, a clearly related passage, says that when the way has been prepared, then “the Lord… shall suddenly [Heb. ‘immediately’] come to his temple”. It seems that He comes as soon as, almost to the moment, that the way is prepared. Is it going too far to imagine that when the last Jews are baptized in Jerusalem, perhaps literally on the Temple Mount, then the Lord will immediately return there, “to his temple”? Then the Lord shall “come down to fight for mount Zion and for the hill thereof”.

“Made low” in Is. 40:4 is surely in the spirit of Is. 2:11, which predicts that in the day of judgment, “the lofty looks of man shall be *humbled* [s.w. ‘made low’], and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down”. The experience of condemnation in the coming day of the Lord will mean that “the proud and lofty” will be “brought low” (Is. 2:12,17; 5:15). In fact, Isaiah is full of references to the proud being ‘made low’ by judgment- the same Hebrew word is common: Is. 10:33; 13:11; 25:11; 26:5. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he said that our preaching is a bringing down of every high thing that is exalted against God (2 Cor. 10:5). Our message is basically that we must be humbled one way or the other- either by our repentance and acceptance of the Gospel today, or through the experience of condemnation at the day of judgment. We’re calling people to humility. And we must ask whether the content and style of our preaching really does that. But when John the Baptist quoted and preached this passage, he interpreted it beyond a call to humility. He said that in order to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a level passage for Him, the man with two coats should give to him who had none, and likewise share his food (Lk. 3:11). So the ‘equality’ and leveling was to be one of practical care for others. We have to ask, how often we have shared our food, clothing or money with those who don’t have… for this is all part of preparing for the Lord’s coming. It could even be that when there is more of what Paul calls “an equality” amongst the community of believers, that then the way of the Lord will have been prepared. And He will then return.

Isaiah 40 is a prophecy which didn't come true as it might have done at the restoration, and so it now essentially concerns the time of the Lord's second coming.

Verses 4 and 6 contain several references to Is. 2:10-12, which concerns this time; v. 5 = Rev. 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:13; v.10 = Rev. 22:12. Before the Kingdom comes, there must be a witness to Israel of the blessed time that is coming, comforting her (v.2) that her time of punishment for sin has now ended (this can only really have a latter day application): "O you that tells *good tidings* to *Zion*, get up into the high *mountain*; O you that tells good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength... say unto the cities of Judah, Behold *your God*! behold, the Lord God will come..." . This is the language of Is. 52:7: "How beautiful upon *the mountains* are the feet of him that brings *good tidings*... that says unto *Zion*, *Your God* reigns" . We know these words of Is. 52:7 apply to *our* preaching, according to Paul's use of them in Rom. 10; and yet they specifically refer to the latter day witness to Israel, according to Is. 40. Therefore it is us who should be making this witness in the last days. Not only Isaiah 40 but also Is. 57:14 teach that a level way must be made amongst the Jewish people, i.e. the stumbling blocks and 'valleys' must be removed from their path.

The idea is that they would travel in a direct path. This is also spoken of in Is. 43:19 ("In the desert I make a way") and Is. 49:11 "I shall turn all my mountains into a road and my highways will be raised aloft". God would make mountains low and valleys lifted up so that they had a straight route. This connects with the cherubim of Ezekiel travelling in a straight path. All obstacles to that straight path would be removed. But Judah refused this possibility, travelling along the river plains. And so the language is applied figuratively to the preparation of a people ready for the Lord Jesus, who would achieve a far greater restoration.

Isaiah 40:5 The glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it- John the Baptist perceived how eager God is to forgive, and how our acceptance of that forgiveness is His glory and His salvation. John says, quoting Is. 40:5, that if men repent and ready themselves for the Lord's coming, then "all flesh shall see the salvation of God". But he is changing the quotation- Isaiah said that all flesh shall see the glory of God. But saving men and women is the thing God glories in. Is. 40:5 had called out to a Zion about to be restored that "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed". In other words, the temple ought to have been a re-establishment of Solomon's, with God's attendant acceptance of it also. However, this didn't happen. Ezekiel saw a vision of the glory of Yahweh filling the temple (Ez. 43:5), as if to show that this, in line with Haggai's words, was what *could* have happened at the restoration. However, it's fulfilment must now await the future. And the physical coming of glory into a literal temple has been replaced by the glory of God achieved through our forgiveness and salvation.

Although the Gospels apply this language to the Lord's coming, He did not then visibly establish God's Kingdom. God's people slew their own Messiah. But the language of the Lord appearing in glory is very much applied to His second coming (1 Pet. 4:13) when these prophecies shall again come gloriously true. The literally "all flesh shall see it together". Just as Moses asked to see God's glory, so now "all flesh shall see it together". Lk. 3:6 replaces seeing the "glory of Yahweh" with all flesh seeing "the salvation of God", Yah-shua, Yah's salvation. Thus the glory of God is His salvation. He is glorified in saving us, and glories in doing so. It's what He wants to do above all things, and this should likewise be the passion of our lives- the saving of others to His glory.

As discussed on :2, God's enthusiasm for the restoration meant that He was as it were willing to cut corners in His requirements for the exiles. Ez. 43:1-5; 44:4 clearly predicate the return of the glory to Zion upon the exiles returning and rebuilding a

temple according to the specifications given. But here we sense the enthusiasm of Yahweh, speaking of letting His glory come to Zion simply if the way was prepared for it to travel over, and for the exiles to return to Zion.

Yet there were conditions. The "all flesh" who could see God's glory is the "all flesh" addressed in :6,7. "All flesh" had to recognize they were but grass, and to recognize their "glory" was but the passing flower of the field (:6)- in order to perceive God's glory.

Isaiah 40:6 The voice of one saying, Cry! Another one said, What shall I cry? All flesh is like grass, and all its glory is like the flower of the field- This is like a radio play for voices. The Divine command to cry out is met by the question from the preachers as to what should be the burden of the message. Initially, it was of the mortality of humanity and that all human glory would fade. This follows on from the way Hezekiah was duped by human glory and thus disallowed the Kingdom purpose of God in his time. We shouldn't see the mortality of man and the true meaning of the Hebrew word *nephesh* as a negative thing that we unfortunately have to tell people who believe their loved ones are alive in Heaven. "The voice" tells Isaiah to cry. "And I said, What shall I cry?" (Is. 40:6 LXX; RVmg.). What was to be the message of Isaiah's Gospel? The voice addresses Isaiah as "You that tells good tidings", and tells him the good news he is to preach. It is that "All flesh is grass… the people is grass. The grass withers, the flower fades: but the word of our God shall stand for ever". The reality of man's mortality is the backdrop against which we can see the eternity of God and the offer made to us through His abiding word that we really can escape from our condition. Christian preaching about "man is mortal" need not be bad news. The message can be turned into good news! For it was this message of mortality which prepared the way for men to accept Christ (Is. 40:3-5); the mountains of human pride are made low by this message so that we can accept salvation in Christ. 1 Pet. 1:24 RVmg. quotes these verses and concludes that we are being offered salvation through "the word of the God who lives for ever" - the Gospel that is prefaced by the message of human mortality. God's eternity and man's mortality are placed side by side- and thus the way is prepared for the wonder of the fact that through "the word" of Jesus, of the Gospel, we the mortal are invited to share in that immortality. That "word" was initially the word to restore the exiles and re-establish God's Kingdom. And the essence of that word is the same for us today.

"The flower of the field" is one of a number of connections with Ps. 103, here to Ps. 103:15. That Psalm of David was clearly rewritten with reference to what could have been the experience of Hezekiah. God took pity upon him, a fading, mortal man; and he was intended thereby to grasp fully God's eternal plan with His people. But he didn't. It is for us, along with latter day Israel, to do so.

We could see this 'play for voices' as a way of presenting an actor who at this point is anonymous; an actor who calls Zion to return / repent and to believe the good news / Gospel of God's love. This person is again referenced in :9, "You who tell good news to Zion". Perhaps we are to understand that this anonymous preacher is in fact "the servant" of whom we shall read and hear much more later in Isaiah. Initially, it could have been Cyrus, who first told the Jews to return from exile. But he failed to live up to it, and so the later "servant" songs become increasingly relevant to the ultimate servant, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 40:7 The grass withers, the flower fades, because Yahweh's breath blows on it; surely the people are like grass- see on Mt. 6:26. The blowing of breath alludes to

Hezekiah's experience in Is. 38:16 (see note there). His mortality ought to have lead him to devotion to the things of God's eternal kingdom; but it didn't. The withering grass is spoken of in Ps. 129:5,6, one of the songs of degrees written or rewritten by Hezekiah. There, it describes the Assyrian attackers who were blown upon Yahweh's breath / spirit / Angel. But "the people" of Judah were no better in that they too were mortal. Unless they repented, they would likewise perish. They too were to be as withered / dried up bones and foliage (s.w. Ez. 17:10,24; 37:11 and often).

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God stands forever- See on :7. The phrase for 'fading flower' is only elsewhere used about the people of Israel fading under judgment (Is. 28:1). Only the long term prophetic purpose of God with Israel would be eternal, and it was that word of Kingdom promise uttered through Isaiah that the people were asked to identify with. The word of God in view is that of salvation and restoration. Even though Judah disbelieved that word, it remained eternally true and we too can believe in it. The offer is still there because Judah refused it and didn't make use of it. These words of Is. 40-55 are Isaiah's equivalent of the new covenant offered through Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Judah refused it, but we can accept it now.

Isaiah 40:9 You who tell good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who tell good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength- lift it up, don't be afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold, your God!-

Telling good news is the idea as in LXX of evangelizing. This message of restoration throughout Isaiah 40-66 is so often taken over in the New Testament and applied to the Gospel. The possibilities they refused due to materialism, parochialism and lack of faith... are available to us but in an even more glorious form. There seems an intentional ambiguity in the Hebrew here. We could translate "O Zion who tells good news" or "You who tell good news to Zion". The "you" is feminine, which leads us to think that it refers to Zion herself, personified as a woman in Isaiah. Zion, the believing community, were to not only believe the good news / Gospel of their redemption- but to pronounce it to others in "Zion". This is indeed how it is- part of believing the Gospel is to announce it to others. One cannot be a passive recipient of that good news if they have personally believed it; we will naturally share it with others.

"The high mountain" (AV) is Zion. "Go up" is the same word about Judah 'going up' from Babylon to Israel. But the majority of Judah remained in Babylon. And the majority of those who did return, only did so in order for purely personal benefit- of having their own house and land. They 'went up' to the land, but not to Zion. With reference to Isaiah 40:9, Hag 1:7-9 exhorted them: "Thus says the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. *Go up to the mountain*, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says the LORD. You looked for much [i.e. they expected the promised Kingdom blessings], and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? says the LORD of hosts. Because of My house that is waste, and you run every man unto his own house". Their focus was on their own lands and farms rather than the glory of Zion (as Nehemiah 13:10,11). They stood related to the things of God's kingdom, but never ventured beyond their own personal self-interest. They would not accept that God manifestation rather than human salvation and pleasure was the essential purpose of their God.

The returnees were to lift up their voice with joy at Zion's restoration. But at the very humble dedication of the temple, the younger people lifted up their voice with joy (Ezra 3:12 same words), but the older men wept, as the temple was not even as great as Solomon's, and certainly not that commanded in Ezekiel and Isaiah. "Behold your God" will finally come to literal truth in the last days, when God shall dwell in Zion (Ez. 48:35), and in the person of His Son, He will "come" to Zion. But the same words for lifting up the voice are used of the need to show Jacob their sins (Is. 58:1). The call is joyful, advertising the Lord's coming, but it is also a call to repentance; as it is today.

Isaiah 40:10 Behold, the Lord Yahweh will come as a mighty one and His arm will rule for him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before him- When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10). he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7). But the whole prophecy is delayed and deferred until the coming of the Lord Jesus to Zion. The "reward" of God will be in the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham (Gen. 15:1 s.w.) in salvation (Is. 62:11), at the time when Judah were restored from captivity and accepted the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:16). This huge potential is all deferred to the last days, when the Abrahamic covenant will be finally fulfilled in the return of the Lord Jesus to earth.

If we translate as "His payment is with Him; His wages are before Him", we have an obvious connection to the ideas discussed on Is. 40:2- Israel's sin is their debt and they are therefore in slavery; but Yahweh steps in and redeems them by meeting the payment. This is the same idea as in Is. 62:11. It's as if Israel sold themselves into slavery to pay their debt, but their wages were paid by God and He actually pays off the entire amount owed, acting as their kinsman redeemer. But He is also the one to whom the debt is owed! He is thus presented as absolutely involved in both the debt and its resolution; in both our sin and our redemption from it.

Isaiah 40:11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs in His arm, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead those who have their young- The primary possible fulfillment was in Cyrus as Yahweh's shepherd (Is. 44:28); but he failed in this role and Judah failed to be obedient sheep. So the prophecy is reapplied to the Lord Jesus (Is. 11:12), the good shepherd, operating on behalf of Yahweh Himself, who was to shepherd the scattered flock of Israel when they are gathered into the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:10; Ez. 34:12). It is God who gathers His people (Is. 11:12; 40:11; Jer. 31:10; Ez. 34:12), whereas the Gentiles gather themselves to Him (Is. 49:18). His grace therefore appears the greater to His people, somehow forcing through His purpose with obstinate sheep. It was the responsibility of the priests and religious leaders to "gently lead" the exiles back to their God and their land, but they failed in this (Is. 51:18 s.w.); and so because their was none to guide / gently lead (s.w.), God Himself had to intervene and do this through His Son (Is. 40:11; 49:10).

The fact some sheep need to be carried suggests they couldn't walk. The image again suggests God's almost forcing of the Jews to return. If they wouldn't walk

themselves, He would carry them. In His bosom, closest to His heart are those who are weak and can't or won't walk of themselves. But most of the exiles refused even this encouragement. But the principle abides, that the weakest are closest to His lovely heart. A smoky wick He will not quench... And He leads those sheep who are nursing, unable to keep up the pace of the others... aware of their disability. Even though the potential was that they would run and not be weary all the way from Babylon to Zion. Truly an army is known by how it treats its wounded. A man is known by his compassion for and patience with his child. This is a far cry from churches known to kick out the weak or slow ones... God by contrast was eager to restore and carry the weakest of His people from Babylon; those weak both physically and spiritually.

Isaiah 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and marked off the sky with His span, and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?- The evident and immense power of Yahweh in the natural creation is often cited in Isaiah as a guarantee that His plans for a spiritual 'new creation' were just as capable of fulfilment. He was not to be seen as lacking in any possibility. "Where does my help come from? My help comes from Yahweh, who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:1,2). So often the immense power of God in creation is cited as a reason to trust Him. He who made all things could easily do the apparently impossible and restore Zion. The language of calculation, measuring, marking off and weighing is all that of building. He would rebuild Zion and rebuild His Kingdom. He would build according to plans, and those plans had now been released through Isaiah and the prophets. The same word for "measured" is used multiple times in Ezekiel 40-42, where Israel are commanded to measure the new temple system and build according to that measure. God had "measured" Jerusalem (s.w. Zech. 2:2) and Zion; but the returned exiles refused to build according to those dimensions. So God Himself would do so, although in a different way than building a literal temple in Zion. See on Is. 44:13.

Isaiah 40:13 Who has directed the Spirit of Yahweh, or has taught Him as His counsellor?- "Directed" is the same word translated "marked off" in :12. Yahweh's Spirit was available without measure, without being marked off or defined by anyone. This idea is surely behind the statement in Jn. 3:34 that the Lord Jesus had the Spirit "without measure", without limit, not just a portion marked off for Him. There was huge, unlimited Spiritual potential to enable the restoration of God's people, both physically and psychologically. But they didn't make use of it, and so it was all reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

LXX "Who has known the mind of the Lord? and who has been his counsellor, to instruct him?" is twice quoted about how those with the spirit of the Lord Jesus do in fact know "the mind of the Lord" (Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). This is the answer to the rhetorical question. The answer is not 'Nobody', but rather 'Not idolaters, but those who worship Yahweh in spirit and truth'. As the Spirit could have been given "without measure" to the exiles, so it was given to the Lord Jesus, and shall be given to all in Him.

We can note here that the Hebrew (Masoretic) text and the Septuagint (LXX) differ significantly here, as they often do; and yet both variants are quoted or alluded to in the inspired New Testament.

Isaiah 40:14 Who did He take counsel with, and who instructed Him and taught Him

in the path of justice, and taught Him knowledge and showed Him the way of understanding?- The fact God is uncreate is cited as an example of how God's grace toward His people was purely and totally of His own initiative. Our initiatives are never totally our "own" because they are subconscious responses to previous experience and stimuli. But God's initiative in saving His people is quite literally, purely, solely, His very own initiative.

There are a number of passages which associate Job with Israel in general terms. It has been suggested that the book of Job was re-written and compiled by Hezekiah's men who at the same time produced the Psalter (all under inspiration, of course). The copious connections between the suffering servant prophecies of Isaiah and the book of Job are therefore more easily understandable- the account of Job's sufferings and vindication amidst opposition was framed in language that pointed forward to the similar suffering (through the same disease?) and vindication of Hezekiah. The suffering servant of Isaiah refers to both Israel and the Lord Jesus, exactly as the parable of Job also does. The connections between Isaiah 40 and the book of Job are especially marked. Is. 40:14 = Job 21:22; 40:17 = Job 6:18; :22 = Job 9:8; :23 = Job 12:21; :24 = Job 14:8; :26 = Job 25:3; :27 = Job 3:23; :31 = Job 29:20.

Isaiah 40:15 Behold, the nations are like a drop in a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on a balance. Behold, He lifts up the islands like a very little thing- This is not to say that God doesn't care for people; rather is it saying that in the balance alluded to in :12, it is Israel who weigh heavily in God's balances far more than other people. It is another way of expressing His supreme passion for His people. "The islands" may simply mean the dry land, the land upon which the nations are located (Is. 42:15 understands "islands" as simply 'dry land'). "The nations" refers to political powers. Not individual persons.

Isaiah 40:16 Lebanon's forest is not sufficient to burn, nor its animals sufficient for a burnt offering- The context is of God protesting His especial and unique love for His people; and He may be implying that no amount of animal sacrifice would buy that love or deserve it.

Isaiah 40:17 All the nations are like nothing before Him, they are regarded by Him as less than nothing, and vanity- As explained on :15, this is not to say that God doesn't care for people; rather is it saying that in the balance alluded to in :12,15, it is Israel who weigh heavily in God's balances far more than other people. It is another way of expressing His supreme passion for His people. All the might of Assyria or Babylon would not tip the scale against Israel.

Isaiah 40:18 To whom then will you liken God?- The context implies: 'In loving His people so very much?'. But the Jews had in fact made God in the likeness of their idols, justifying idolatry as a worshipping of Yahweh. Hence LXX "To whom have ye compared the Lord?". Those who worship idols forsake that great love of Yahweh, and thereby forsake their own mercy (Jonah 2:8).

Or what likeness will you compare to Him?- "Likeness" is used in the LXX in the frequent warnings not to make an image or likeness of any god, let alone Yahweh (Ex. 20:4; Dt. 4:16-25; Ps. 106:20; Is. 40:18,19). The reason for this prohibition becomes clearer in the New Testament; the ultimate likeness of God is in His Son, and we are to create the likeness of His Son not as a mere physical icon, but within the very structure of our human personality and character. This sets the scene for

God's following condemnation of idolatry (Acts 17:29), which initially was the reason why Judah preferred to remain in Babylon.

Isaiah 40:19 A workman has cast an image, and the goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts silver chains for it- Similar language is used in Is. 30:22 of the idols which Judah were to throw away when they repented; and this is now an appeal for them to do so and leave Babylon. We have here the idols of the rich; :20 will speak of the idols of the poor. Idolatry was common to both rich and poor; reflecting how Judah in exile were idolatrous throughout society.

Isaiah 40:20 He who is too impoverished for such an offering chooses a tree that will not rot. He seeks a skilful workman to set up an engraved image for him that will not be moved- The idea is that it will not totter, unlike the idol of 1 Sam. 5:3,4.

Isaiah 40:21 Haven't you known? Haven't you heard, yet? Haven't you been told from the beginning? Haven't you understood from the foundations of the earth?- We sense here the frustration of God in Isaiah. The call to repent and return to the land had been made by all the prophets, but still Judah had not heard it. They had heard, but not 'heard' in the sense that God wants us to hear His word.

Isaiah 40:22 It is He who sits above the circle of the earth- This may simply refer to the horizon, where earth and heaven meet, and is not to be pushed as evidence that the Bible taught a curved earth at a time when generally there was belief in a flat earth. The idea would perhaps rather be that Yahweh is enthroned at the limit of human vision and understanding; a principle ever true, no matter how advanced is human science.

And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in- As explained on :15, the idea is not that the inhabitants of the planet are irrelevant to God. Their smallness is mentioned in contrast to Yahweh's purpose with His people, His tabernacle, which was to be eternally established in Zion. Israel in their faithlessness had considered themselves to be tiny grasshoppers compared to Gentile power (Num. 13:33). Now, Yahweh puts it the other way around. It is the Gentiles who are as grasshoppers compared to the 'weight' and significance of Israel before Him (:15).

Isaiah 40:23 Who brings princes to nothing; who makes the judges of the earth meaningless- Both Gentile princes, such as those who accompanied the Assyrian army to Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time, along with the rulers of the land (who are often condemned as corrupt and unspiritual) would be brought to nothing at the reestablishment of God's Kingdom. The theme of vanity or "meaninglessness" is common in later Isaiah. In contrast to the things of the Kingdom, all else is to be seen as vain and without ultimate meaning. This was hard to accept for the Jews in exile who were now becoming prosperous in the lands of their captivity, as the book of Esther witnesses.

The princes in view are those of Persia mentioned in Daniel 10, whose influence against Cyrus' decree was overcome (not without difficulty) by the work of the Angels Michael and Gabriel. There were specific laws forcing exiles to remain in captivity. One such that has been unearthed is the Beirut Decree. "The Beirut Decree is a Neo-Babylonian text meant to ensure that deportees remained in Babylonia: it decreed death on anyone who helped a deportee leave Babylonia. The removal of its

prohibition on leaving Babylonia is clearly implied in Cyrus's declaration". And Cyrus did this in the first year of his reign. All this was directly due to God's word triumphing over man's word.

Isaiah 40:24 They are planted scarcely, they are sown scarcely, their stock has scarcely taken root in the ground. He merely blows on them, and they wither, and the whirlwind takes them away as stubble- This is all in contrast to the Messianic root out of the stock of David, who would be eternal (s.w. Is. 11:1). Eternity and permanent meaning was and is only to be found by association with Him.

Isaiah 40:25 To whom then will you liken Me? Who is My equal? says the Holy One- This is another appeal for the exiles to repent of their idolatry. So much of later Isaiah is taken up with mockery and criticism of the Babylonian gods and the Marduk cult. The book of Esther, with Mordecai as the joint hero, named as he was after Marduk, demonstrates how caught up were the Jews with the Babylonian gods. Ezekiel repeatedly reveals the idolatry of the captives. Isaiah was therefore an appeal for the Jews to quit the Marduk cult and believe in the radical prophecies about the overthrow of Babylon. The situation is analogous to how the New Testament is full of references to the Roman imperial cult of empire worship. So much of the Bible is like Isaiah and the New Testament- a radical, counter-cultural call to see our present world for what it is, and to perceive that the ways of God simply can't be mixed in, watered down or compromised with the way of this world. Alexander Heidel analyzed the recovered Babylonian poem to Marduk *Enuma Elish*, discovering phrase after phrase in it which recurs in Isaiah- with reference to Yahweh exclusively (Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). The similarities are exact, and impressive. Without doubt, Isaiah was developing a major theme in his later writings- that the true Israel of God must not have any part in the Marduk cult, and must understand all the claims made for Marduk as being untrue, and solely appropriate to Yahweh God of Israel. Consider some of the claims made for Marduk (exact references given in Heidel):

- "Marduk is King alone" (cp. "*Your* [Israel's] God reigns as King!", Is. 52:7)
- "None among the gods can equal him"
- Marduk killed Tiamat in the waters and cut him in pieces [applied to Yahweh in Is. 51:9,10]
- Creator of the stars (cp. Is. 40:26; Is. 45:12).
- Marduk is without comparison (cp. Is. 40:18,25 etc.)
- Marduk was, and no other (cp. Is. 45:5,6 etc.)

There are also mocking allusions to Marduk, showing Yahweh's supremacy over him. Marduk was formed- but Yahweh had no god before Him and will have none after Him (Is. 43:10). Marduk had a counsellor, Ea, called in the inscriptions "the all-wise one". But Yahweh has all wisdom and has no such counsellor (Is. 40:13,14; Is. 41:28). All this reference to the Marduk cult was in my opinion not merely a pointless mockery and poking of fun at the Persian culture. It was a very real appeal to the Jewish exiles to quit it, to come out and be separate; remember again and again that Mordecai [and perhaps Esther too] had adopted names reflective of the Marduk cult.

Isaiah 40:26 Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these, who brings out their army by number. He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power, not one is lacking-

Bringing out the stars by number may refer to the number of times the stars have been brought out, or appeared. God knows the number of times He has brought the stars out into the sky; the number of revolutions they have made. But the allusion is clearly to the promises to Abraham, that his seed would be as the stars. Also to be noted is the term "our God" (:3,8)- for part of the covenant with Abraham was that Yahweh would be "your God". In :27 we read that "Israel" is in fact "Jacob". In this way, the exiles are being directed back to the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which were the basis of the new covenant. They had broken the old covenant, and were being offered a new covenant as explicitly stated in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This was to be the basis for Yahweh's restored relationship with Zion His estranged wife.

This language alludes to the Babylonian god Marduk; the point being that Yahweh and not the god of Babylon is supreme. See on Is. 40:25. The Jews only totally quit idolatry some time later; they liked to think, as we also tend to, that we can serve the gods of our world in the name of Yahweh worship. But Yahweh is presented as supreme, and Marduk as nothing. God knew His exiled people; just as He knew every star, so He knew every exile; "nothing has escaped thee" (LXX). They were not forgotten, and neither are we. His purpose shall work out, even if it is delayed by the refusal of the majority of His people to accept and progress it.

Ezra 2:62 records Judah being ‘reckoned by genealogies’, using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chron. 4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God’s ‘bringing out’ of Judah from Babylon with His ‘bringing out’ the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion’s fortunes: “The LORD shall count, when he writes up the people, that this man was born there”. The Kingdom of God was to be the restoration of Israel’s Kingdom- but they had to actually get on and restore it rather than wait for it to come.

Isaiah 40:27 Why do you say, Jacob, and speak, Israel, My way is hidden from Yahweh, and the justice due me is disregarded by my God?-

The double mention of "Jacob... Israel" is common in second Isaiah (Is. 40:27; 41:14; 42:24; 43:1,22,28; 44:1,5,21,23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1; 49:5-7). It was God's desire to transform the nation from Jacob to Israel as He had done with the historical Jacob- through his time of exile outside of the land. His homecoming with many children and material blessings, delivered from his enemies (Laban and Esau) is set up as the potential for the exiles returning from Babylon. But they generally preferred to stay in the soft life of Babylon.

Israel may have felt their "way" was hidden from God in that He wasn't paying attention to them. Or they may have reasoned that God was not watching their way and thus "My judgment passes away from my God", i.e. they felt that He would not judge them according to their way. The "way" connects with the preparation of "the way" in :5. Israel's way was not at all hidden or forgotten by Yahweh. He wanted to make a glorious "way" for them to return to Zion and enjoy His eternal grace and Kingdom. It could be argued that the entire appeal of Is. 40-66, certainly of Is. 40-55, is an attempt to persuade otherwise those who feel they are too distant from God [either by His fault or theirs, according to their perceptions]. God will try by all means and arguments to persuade them of His desire to save; just as He does today, but always as it were limited by His refusal to railroad man into belief and acceptance of Him. He will even set up the scenario of God being in the dock legally before Israel's

complaints and before their internal, deeply subconscious accusations. For "the justice due me..." can be rendered "My cause [a legal term] is disregarded by my God".

Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14). See on Is. 49:24. Ezekiel had to argue with the exiles in Ez. 18, insisting that God's ways were just and it was their ways which were unjust. They were not suffering wrongly, there was no injustice in their exile. The link between Is. 40:27 and Job 3:23 is most significant. These are the words of Job in 3:23: "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God has hedged in?". Thus Job represents Israel; and because "Israel" in Isaiah also refers to our Lord, we can make the equation Job = Israel = Jesus. The distancing between himself and God which Christ felt on the cross (Mt. 27:46) is thus foreshadowed by Job feeling the same- and like Christ, it was a trial from God, not a specific punishment for sin, and related to His identification with a sinful Israel who were separated from God by their sins. See on Is. 30:20.

Reasoning back from the addresses to the captives in later Isaiah, it appears they thought that Yahweh was a God who just operated in the land of Israel. The captives felt they couldn't sing the songs of Yahweh in a Gentile land (Ps. 137). They thought that now they were outside His land and far from His temple, they were forgotten by Him (Is. 49:14,15), their cause ignored by Him (Is. 40:27) and they were "cast off" from relationship with Him (Is. 41:9). Hence Isaiah emphasizes that Yahweh is the creator and the God of the whole planet, and His presence is literally planet-wide. Likewise there is much stress in those addresses on the fact that Yahweh's word of prophecy will come true. Remember that there had been many false prophets of Yahweh just prior to the captivity who predicted victory against Babylon and prosperity (Lam. 2:9,14; Jer. 44:15-19). And the 70 years prophecy of Jeremiah appeared to not be coming true, or at best was delayed or re-scheduled in fulfilment [even Daniel felt this, according to his desperate plea for fulfilment in Daniel 9]. And so there was a crisis of confidence in the concept of prophecy, and Yahweh's word and prophets generally. Isaiah addressed this by stressing the nature and power of that word, and urging faith in its fulfilment and relevance.

Isaiah 40:28 Haven't you known? Haven't you heard? The everlasting God, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn't faint. He isn't weary, His understanding is unsearchable- Quite often in Isaiah, the point is made that surely God's power is obvious. Any objection to God's saving plan is in fact speaking against what man knows subconsciously to be right and true: "Haven't you known? Haven't you heard?". It is surely sanctified common sense that God is omnipotent and capable of salvation. He is not blind nor weary to our situation. All technical arguments against atheism are pointless. I never once deployed them in my small part in the mission work of converting a few thousand former Soviet atheists in the 1980s and onwards. The truth of theism and of a powerful, saving God is obvious. All idols are just laughable- as Isaiah will go on to labour. There is no even slightly credible alternative to God. He says often in Isaiah to the effect "I am Yahweh". The undisputable creator, the Lord of history, past, present and future. And that is it. But humanity is so psychologically broken and blind that the spiritually obvious is not seen nor felt. Surrender to God and acceptance of His truth is therefore such a wonderful experience- for it means accepting the obvious truth which subconsciously we always saw, but have never come to personally realize. We thus feel intuitively assured that indeed we have the ultimate "truth".

God doesn't grow weary and faint, but the exiles felt weary and faint (:30,31; the same words are used). We tend to assume that because we feel a certain way, then that is how God does. We tend to create an image of God in our minds, which is after our own image. Whereas we were created in His image. They felt weak and faint, so they assumed God was likewise.

Because of their many years in exile, the Jews were effectively considering Yahweh to be weary, and to have made a mistake in His planning. But His power and understanding were not to be questioned. The apparent delays were due to their weakness and weariness (:30), lack of understanding and impenitence- rather than to God's. They were in exile at the ends of the earth / land promised to Abraham; but God had created those ends of the land and was not oblivious to His people there.

Isaiah 40:29 He gives power to the weak, He increases the strength of him who has no might- Very relevant to the great physical effort that had to be made by the handful who first set about the rebuilding. But the idea was that the weak exiles, especially in their spiritual weakness, could be empowered if they accepted the gift of God's Spirit implicit in the new covenant.

Isaiah 40:30 Even the youths faint and get weary, and the young men utterly fall- This can be read as a criticism. As explained on :28, the exiles considered Yahweh to be weary and limited in power, but Isaiah's point is that it is Judah who are like that. The apparent inactivity and delay in the progression of His purpose was due to their weariness and not His. These youths, the generation born in exile who ought to have been returning to the land, are contrasted negatively against those who *did* wait faithfully for Yahweh's action (:31). Or the contrast may be with strapping young, powerful Babylonian / Persian soldiers who would be weak and weary compared to the Spirit energized exiles.

Isaiah 40:31 But those who wait for Yahweh will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run, and not be weary, they will walk, and not faint-

The weariness in view surely includes spiritual weariness. The same word is used when God laments that the exiles were "weary" of Him (Is. 43:22). 'Running' is likewise used in Dan. 12 and elsewhere of 'running' in response to God's word. The picture here is of being constantly spiritually strong; not spiritually falling, fainting nor wearing; but always running the race with joy and in the eternal flight of the Spirit. Those who waited for Yahweh's word of promise and restoration to be fulfilled would renew their "strength"- so they would be able to lift up their voice with "strength" as commanded in :9, strong in belief in the things of the Kingdom. Constantly we have the impression that it is spiritual strength and energy which are in view here.

See on :30. Those who waited in faith for Yahweh's action whilst in exile would be empowered both physically and spiritually to 'return' to God and their land. As God doesn't become faint nor weary, so somehow those who identify their lives with His will also keep on keeping on- even now (Is. 40:31 cp. 29). Just as eagles renew the feathers of their wings, so David felt that his youth was renewed like the eagle's in his repeated experience of God's grace (Ps. 103:5), that his soul was restored (Ps. 23:5), and that a right spirit could be renewed by God within him (Ps. 51:10).

Those who truly waited upon Yahweh would renew their strength; they would "mount up as eagles" (Is. 40:31), the s.w. used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah for the

‘going up’ to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:3,5,11; 2:1,59; 7:6,7,28; 8:1; Nehemiah 7:5,6,61; 12:1). The idea of mounting up with wings as eagles also connects with Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, mounting up from the captives by the rivers of Babylon, and returning to the land. But the reality was as in Neh. 4:10: “And Judah said, The *strength* of the bearers of burdens is *decayed*, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall”. Examination of the context shows that they had just had plenty of strength; they lost physical stamina because of their spiritual weakness. This is in contrast to how for the idolater, “his *strength fails*” (Is. 44:12). But the same word is used also in Ezra 10:13: “But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and *we are not able to stand* [lit. ‘not strong enough to be’] without”. Both Ezra and Nehemiah encouraged the people not to make such excuses but to get on with achieving what was truly possible.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 41

Isaiah 41:1 Keep silent before Me, islands, and let the peoples renew their strength. Let them come near, then let them speak. Let’s meet together for judgement- The "islands" may refer simply to the dry land inhabited by Gentiles within the *eretz* promised to Abraham (Is. 42:15). They are invited to accept the God of Israel, to come to Zion and realize they have no legal case against God, to accept their judgment and throw themselves upon Him. Hence LXX "Hold a feast to me, ye islands". "Renew their strength" naturally follows on from the wonderful promise of Is. 40:31, the preceding verse. This is an invitation for the Gentiles to share this experience. The walking but not fainting with ever renewed strength is possible right now. But that position is arrived at by meeting with God in judgment ["Come near..." is a summons to judgment] and being condemned. Job had to go through the same in Job 38:3 "Brace yourself like a man, for I will question you, then you answer Me!". GNB brings out the legal allusions: "Get ready to present your case in court; you will have your chance to speak. Let us come together to decide who is right". The allusion continues in :21: "You gods of the nations, present your case. Bring the best arguments you have!". The whole idea of going to court against God is of itself bizarre. But that is what we are doing if we refuse His claims upon us. This legal language leads right on from that of Is. 40:27 where Israel likewise are asked to challenge God in court. "Draw near" is the word used in Is. 57:3 when sorcerers and other sinners are invited to "draw near" to judgment. It is the language of a court summons. These legal challenges are common in Isaiah- but we hardly read about the actual case being debated. There was just silence from the idols, indeed from all who might question God's purpose to save.

Or the renewing of strength may be a sarcastic challenge to the Gentile nations to prepare themselves to resist Cyrus. Likewise in :6 we read of them making idols to defend then from Cyrus' advance. They would not renew their strength for long but would faint, as Is. 40:31 has just explained.

Isaiah 41:2 Who has raised up one from the east? Who called him to His foot in righteousness? He hands over nations to him, and makes him rule over kings. He gives them like the dust to his sword, like the driven stubble to his bow-

This raising up or stirring up was done by the Spirit, as God does all things- and we seem the same today. We could render "Who has stirred up from the sun-rising

(him whom) victory meets at every step?" (lit. “at his foot” cp. Gen. 30:30). "At His [God's] foot" could suggest Cyrus was following God, at His feet. His conquests were in fact just a following of God. His victories were only because Yahweh "made him rule over kings", such as the kings of Babylon, Lydia and Cappadocia. Cyrus was called in or to righteousness, to know Yahweh's Name- but didn't live up to this. He was another failed servant of Yahweh.

The servant songs or poems of Isaiah clearly have reference to a Messiah figure who was to appear at the time of the restoration from Babylon. The early songs have potential reference to Cyrus- he is named as such. Expositors such as Harry Whittaker and J.W. Thirtle have sought to prove the naming of Cyrus as an interpolation, claiming that Isaiah has sole primary reference to the days of Hezekiah. This seems to me to be desperate. The naming of Cyrus, and the specific references to his military campaigns in the prophecies, simply can’t be gotten around. To brush all this off as uninspired interpolation and fiddling with the text of holy Scripture just won’t do. The references to Cyrus aren’t merely the mention of his name. Is. 41:1-5 alludes unquestionably to the dramatic conquest of Sardis by Cyrus in 547 BC. The ‘servant’ is described as swooping down first from the east and then from the north, trampling local rulers beneath him (Is. 41:2-5,25; Is. 45:1; Is. 46:11). This ‘servant’ was to end the Babylonian empire (Is. 43:14; Is. 48:14,15), enable the captive Jews in Babylon to return to their land (Is. 42:6,7; Is. 43:5-7; Is. 45:13), restore Jerusalem and the ruined cities of Judah (Is. 44:26-28; 45:13). There can be no serious doubt that it was Cyrus who fulfilled these things. The servant is a “bird of prey from the east” (Is. 46:11)- according to Xenophon, the eagle was the emblem of Cyrus. The servant “victorious at every step” with lightning speed (Is. 41:2) surely refers to how Cyrus conquered the Medes, the former Assyrian empire, and the Lydians before taking Babylon in 539 BC. We should have no problem with a pagan king being described as God’s “servant”, for that very term is used of Nebuchadnezzar in Jer. 25:9.

When Cyrus failed to "know" or have relationship with Yahweh, other possible fulfillments came into view. Another possible fulfilment was in Zerubbabel or Joshua. Isaiah 41 describes the Messianic saviour as coming to the land from Babylon, from the north and from the east. Babylon was east of Judah, and yet the approach road came down from the north. This was the way Zerubbabel and Joshua would have come; but the prophecies suffered a massive deferment to the coming of the Lord Jesus in a more figurative sense from the north and east. Zech. 4 contained a vision of Joshua and Zerubbabel, likened to two olive trees which emptied their oil into the seven branched candlestick, representing the ecclesia of Judah. They represented the kingly and priestly offices. The whole ‘lightstand’ depended upon these two anointed ones, these providers of oil, and the fact they both in various ways failed to deliver true faith and spirituality meant that the victory over the world which the vision also prophesied could not come about; the final fulfilment had to come through the Lord Jesus, who was the ultimate Priest (cp. Joshua-Jesus) and Prince of Judah (cp. Zerubbabel).

Isaiah 41:3 He pursues them, and passes by safely, even by a way that he had not gone with his feet- The sense is as GNB "He follows in pursuit and marches safely on, so fast that he hardly touches the ground!".

Isaiah 41:4 Who has worked and done it, calling the generations from the beginning?- The idea of calling things which don’t exist into existence (Rom. 4:17) has suggestions of creation (Is. 41:4; 48:13). The new, spiritual creation is indeed a

creation *ex nihilo*, an act of grace. Incomprehensible to the modern mind, the natural creation involved the creation of matter from out of God, and not out of any visible, concrete matter which already existed. The physical creation therefore looked forward to the grace of the new creation- creating people spiritually out of nothing, counting righteousness to them which they didn't have, treating them as persons whom they were not.

I Yahweh, the first and with the last, I am He- First and last are terms used by the Lord Jesus of those who shall be in His Kingdom (Mt. 20:16). "The last" would then refer to the last generation of God's people. Yahweh would save the exiles along with the "first" of His people such as Abraham; for at the time of the restoration of that last generation, there would be a resurrection of all God's true people, to form a new people would eternally inherit the reestablished Kingdom.

Isaiah 41:5 The islands have seen and fear. The ends of the earth tremble; they approach, and come- They have been called to judgment in Zion (:1), and all they can do is try to make idols (:6,7). But these verses can also be understood quite differently. For "idols" aren't specifically named in the Hebrew text. The idea equally could be that here we have the Divine hope that the exiles would return from the ends of the earth / land, in the territories of Assyria, Babylon and Persia, and work together in building Zion. These different interpretations are because these were the various potential possibilities or scenarios which could have come about.

The assembling and coming of the nations begs the question: Where to? The invitation in :1 is to come to court against Yahweh. Hence LXX "and came together to judgment". They assemble and come- but foolishly construct idols to help them (:6,7). Perhaps we are to imagine them doing so outside the courthouse; in practice, the description is of the nations foolishly constructing idols with which to resist the Divinely empowered lightning advance of Cyrus. Isaiah persistently demonstrates how bizarre it is to refuse God's claims.

Isaiah 41:6 Everyone helps his neighbour, they say to their brothers, Be strong!- This could be read as a condemnation of entire Gentile society, stressing how they together encouraged each other in making idols (:7). Or as noted on :5, it could also be the Divine vision for the returned exiles working together in rebuilding the things of His Kingdom in Zion. "Be strong!" is the word used multiple times in the records of the restoration of Zion (Ezra 1:6; 6:22; 7:28; 9:12; 10:4; Neh. 2:18; 3:4 and often, rendered "repair").

Isaiah 41:7 So the carpenter encourages the goldsmith. He who smoothes with the hammer encourages him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, It is good; and he fastens it with nails- This refers to the different types of people working together to build Jerusalem; the goldsmiths are mentioned specifically in Neh. 3:8,32; "carpenter" is s.w. Ezra 3:7. Yet as explained on :5, the whole passage here also has reference to those who made idols (s.w. Is. 45:16). Instead of fulfilling the possibilities in rebuilding the temple, they instead used their skills building idols and encouraging one another in that.

That it might not totter- Used about the idols made in Is. 40:20; but also of the reestablished Zion which would not move / totter (Ps. 125:1 s.w.). See on :5.

Isaiah 41:8 But you, Israel My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of

Abraham My friend- As Is. 43:10 puts it, "My servant whom I have chosen". The servant here is clearly the people of Israel. It is significant that Paul takes a passage from one of Isaiah's servant songs and applies it to us. The servant who suffered and witnessed to the world was evidently the Lord Jesus. And yet Isaiah is also explicit that the servant is the whole seed of Abraham, "Jacob", the slowly-developing people of God (Is. 41:8; 44:1), who now refer to all those in Christ. There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite "to let the oppressed go free... loose the bonds", and to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6) as Christ did (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. "He was oppressed", as Israel at that time were being "oppressed" by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory.

Isaiah's restoration prophecies are shot through with references to Abraham, directly or indirectly. Israel / Judah are called by Isaiah to be Yahweh's chosen (Is. 41:8), fetched from the end of the land (Is. 41:9), to act like the seed of Abraham (Is. 41:8)... just like Abraham. But Abraham left Babylonia and journeyed to the promised land- and Judah likewise are bidden make that journey (Is. 44:2). By refusing to do so, they were showing themselves to *not* be the seed of Abraham- they were rejecting themselves from the covenant people. I've shown at length elsewhere that Abraham initially resisted the call to leave Ur, he struggled with the challenge, it took him years actually to truly leave Babylonia behind and head out in faith to the promised land. So the relevance to the Jews in exile was pertinent. It's the same with Isaiah's allusions to Israel's leaving Egypt. The Jews in Babylon were intended to live out the type by leaving Babylon and making the wilderness journey to the land- and God helped them in it. For example, Ezra 6:4 records how God moved the local authorities to pronounce that the residents around the returning exiles should give them silver, gold and goods. This was an exact re-living of how Israel left Egypt with Egypt's gold and silver (Ex. 12:35). Yet most of the Jews didn't want to return, they didn't want to live out the type.

Isaiah 41:9 You whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth and called from its corners and said to you- Abraham had been taken hold of and called from the ends of the land; that taking hold of Abraham was because he himself didn't respond well to God's initial call. He reflects that God "made him" leave his father's house. And the same Divine stimulus and encouragement was available to the exiles, who were being offered a "new covenant" based on the promises to Abraham. Which explains all the allusions to Abraham throughout later Isaiah. The exiles were located in the very borders and corners of the land promised to Abraham, but from there they would be regathered. If they were willing to participate in the Divine plan, which sadly most of them weren't. They preferred to remain in exile from Him.

'You are My servant, I have chosen you- Because the exiles refused to be Yahweh's servant, the words were reapplied to the Lord Jesus. And so this is quoted in Heb. 2:10,14 about God taking hold of Jesus, His servant. Is. 41:10 continues concerning Jesus, therefore, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee (the Angels' words to Joshua); be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help

thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (an Angel). The right hand Angel of God strengthened, upheld and helped Jesus spiritually as it could have done the exiles and their potential Messianic leaders like Zerubbabel. His dismay which the verse implies He had was therefore at His feeling of being spiritually inadequate to fulfill His great calling- exactly like Joshua. But as with Joshua, the Angel strengthened Him.

Reasoning back from the addresses to the captives in later Isaiah, it appears they thought that Yahweh was a God who just operated in the land of Israel. The captives felt they couldn't sing the songs of Yahweh in a Gentile land (Ps. 137). They thought that now they were outside His land and far from His temple, they were forgotten by Him (Is. 49:14,15), their cause ignored by Him (Is. 40:27) and they were "cast off" from relationship with Him (Is. 41:9). Hence Isaiah emphasizes that Yahweh is the creator and the God of the whole planet, and His presence is literally planet-wide. Likewise there is much stress in those addresses on the fact that Yahweh's word of prophecy will come true. Remember that there had been many false prophets of Yahweh just prior to the captivity who predicted victory against Babylon and prosperity (Lam. 2:9,14; Jer. 44:15-19). And the 70 years prophecy of Jeremiah appeared to not be coming true, or at best was delayed or re-scheduled in fulfilment [even Daniel felt this, according to his desperate plea for fulfilment in Daniel 9]. And so there was a crisis of confidence in the concept of prophecy, and Yahweh's word and prophets generally. Isaiah addressed this by stressing the nature and power of that word, and urging faith in its fulfilment and relevance.

And not cast you away'- The exiles needed assurance of this. But it could be that as with many today in the new Israel, their conclusion that God had cast them away was an excuse for remaining in a society where they were prosperous. 'Cast away' here is the same word as 'despise'. Judah had 'despised' God's laws (s.w. Lev. 26:15,43), casting them away (Is. 5:24) and yet God had not 'cast them away' (Lev. 26:44 s.w.). He did not treat them as they treated Him. And yet God did cast them away temporarily (s.w. Is. 54:6; Jer. 7:29; Hos. 4:6); but His message was that now they were not cast away. The point is so laboured- they had been chosen, they were still God's chosen, they therefore had not been 'cast away' any more. Their "fear" which is continually addressed subsequently from :10 onwards is therefore their subconscious, unexpresseed [and never historically recorded] fear that they had been rejected by God. The good news to Zion was of release from fear of condemnation. And that is part of the Gospel- no fear of condemnation. This is the greatest truth to live by. Psychologically and subconsciously, that is an amazing meeting of man's deepest need and discomfort. And on the conscious level, it is the way to achieve "all joy and peace through believing". For if judgment day is always before our mind with the greatest question mark hanging over it, we have no assurance of peace and joy now. We like Israel were once cast away for our sins, but have been chosen again and are not now cast away. "There is therefore now no condemnation..." to Israel after the Spirit.

Isaiah 41:10 Don't you be afraid, for I am with you- Time and again, Isaiah's restoration prophecies told Judah that they should not fear, as Yahweh would mightily be with them in their work (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8,11; 54:7,14; 59:19). But Judah feared the surrounding nations- Ezra and Nehemiah are full of this theme (Ezra 3:3), and in exile they feared condemnation. Nehemiah refused to be put in fear by the Samaritan opposition because of his faith in Isaiah's promises (Neh. 6:14). And Isaiah

further spoke to Judah's heart in Is. 51:12,13: "I, even I, am He that comforts you: who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgets the LORD your maker, that has stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations [s.w. re. the foundation of the temple being laid] of the earth ['heaven and earth' often refers to the temple]; and have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?". The fact they did fear meant that they had forgotten Yahweh who was so eager to re-establish their Kingdom. And they had forgotten that He was the creator of Israel, as well as the creator of the natural heavens and earth. Did the Jews live in "fear" in exile? There is no direct evidence that they did; the evidence rather is of their popularity. The "fear" may therefore refer to how when faced with the awesome reality of eternal salvation, with all that implies for me right now- man tends to fear, and fall back from it. For that Hope demands my absolute all in the here and now. And so man tends to turn up the volume of his background music, get distracted by this or that, rather than face the awesome reality.

Don't be dismayed, for I am your God- The command not to be dismayed may be a command to not look to idols but to Yahweh as their God (s.w.:23 "Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. Yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be *dismayed*"; Is. 17:8).

I will strengthen you- Yahweh would strengthen His servant people, in contrast to the idols, which had to be strengthened by their makers (s.w. Is. 44:14). This phrase is used several times about Joshua being strengthened to enter the land and possess it; which was relevant to the exiles being encouraged to possess the same land (Dt. 31:6,7,23). If they first believed, then they would be psychologically strengthened in their path by God, just as believers are today. The word for "strengthen" is used of God strengthening the heart of Sihon ["made his heart obstinate" Dt. 2:30]; indeed the word is usually used of the strengthening of hearts / minds.

Yes, I will help you- Ezra was ashamed to ask for *help* against Judah's enemies (Ezra 8:22), the implication being that he wanted that human help but was ashamed to ask for it from the King. He had initially believed those words of Isaiah, but found it hard to maintain that level of faith. But they should have had faith in the restoration prophecy's promise: "Fear not ... I will *help* you" (Is. 41:10).

Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness- The servant, be it Israel the nation or an individual Messianic figure, would be upheld by Yahweh in order to achieve the restoration; and in the case of the likes of Cyrus and Zerubbabel, would have had righteousness imputed to them had they wished to go along with God's program. The doubting exiles would be 'upheld' if they were somehow "in" the servant- "Behold My servant whom I uphold" (Is. 42:1). We note all this language of strengthening, helping and upholding those who dared to believe that indeed God did love and accept them and restore them. The equivalent in our days is the gift of the Spirit to those who first believe. The language is very similar to Joshua / Jesus urging God's people that they could inherit the Kingdom: "Fear not nor be dismayed, be strengthened and of a good courage" (Josh. 10:25).

Isaiah 41:11 Behold, all those who are incensed against you will be disappointed and confounded. Those who strive with you will be like nothing, and shall perish- The Samaritans could have provided a fulfilment of all this, just as the prideful Assyrians were before. And yet Sanballat, Tobiah, the Ammonites and Ashdodites were "wroth" [s.w. 'incensed'] against Judah (Neh. 4:1,7). But they didn't come to nothing, nor to shame, in that those very groups were the ones who married into Jewry, to the extent

that Tobiah even shifted the tithes out of one of the chambers of the temple and set up his office there. But it was to be the makers of idols who were "confounded" (s.w. Is. 45:16) and only the true Israel would not be "confounded" (Is. 45:17; 54:4). The sinners in Israel had refused to be confounded or ashamed of their sins (Jer. 3:3 s.w.) and so they would be shamed in condemnation. Repentance involves an imagination of ourselves coming to judgment day and being condemned, and feeling shame for that; that is how we shall not be ashamed. And it is the servant alone who shall not be ashamed / confounded because of His righteousness (Is. 50:7). Our identity with Him removes that shame. If we condemn ourselves, we shall not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The enemies of Israel would perish alongside the apostate within Israel, in the same judgment.

Isaiah 41:12 You will seek them, and won't find them, even those who contend with you. Those who war against you will be as nothing, as a non-existent thing- LXX "thou shalt not find the men who shall insolently rage against thee". Just as the Assyrians had raged against Yahweh and then be slain in a moment, so would all Judah's enemies. "Contend" is the word used for how Assyria and Babylon 'laid waste' Judah (Is. 37:26; Jer. 4:7). "War against" is s.w. "the controversy of Zion" (Is. 34:8). World geopolitics has moved to a state where in our day as never before, Jerusalem / Zion is a key issue which will bring about the war against Israel and Jewish people. But this is going to be resolved finally and in a moment, at the return of the Lord Jesus. The idea is really of bringing a case or legal "cause" in court- s.w. :21. And Yahweh Himself will plead that cause or "war" with latter day Babylon when it falls (s.w. Jer. 50:34). The Gentile opposition will be as nothing in that they will weigh as nothing on the scales of final judgment concerning Zion (s.w. Is. 40:17). The idea is not at all that people do not matter to God. God's true people will have none who "contend" legally with them. The spirit of this is surely behind Paul's challenge: "Who is he that condemns?" (Rom. 8:34). There is no legal case against those in Christ. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's chosen ones? It is God that justifies" (Rom. 8:33). The idea of a court case with justification through the suffering servant who makes intercession is directly from Is. 53:11-13.

Isaiah 41:13 For I, Yahweh your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Don't be afraid. I will help you'- This Fatherly image of help offered to a nervous child was to encourage the weak minded exiles to return to Zion and accept Yahweh's helping hand, just as His hand had 'helped' Hezekiah against the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:8). At the restoration, Ezra believed this "help" would enable the restoration to the extent that they didn't need any human soldiers to help them (Ezra 8:22 s.w.).

Yet the same figure is used of God taking the right hand of His servant Cyrus (Is. 45:1). The servant was Jacob / Israel, but they failed. So God tried with Cyrus, and possibly with Zerubbabel. These servants also failed. And so the servant prophecies in Isaiah move on to His ultimate servant, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 41:14 Don't be afraid, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel-

The appeal not to be fearful is because they had Yahweh as their *go'el* / redeemer. This connection is repeated in Is. 43:1: "Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you" and Is. 54:4,5: "Don't be afraid; for... the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer". If God Almighty is our powerful next of kin and will buy us out of our debt, take vengeance on our persecutors... we have nothing to fear. "Fear not" is often used in

Isaiah and usually in the context of not fearing because we shall be saved. The Christian assurance of ultimate and eternal salvation is indeed the Gospel, the good news; and ultimately removes all anxiety and fear from us.

The sense of "you worm Jacob" may be as LXX "Israel few in number". But the idea can also be of absolute smallness and weakness (Is. 14:11; Job 25:6). The Lord as the suffering servant on the cross felt like a worm in that He totally bore Israel's feelings and sufferings (Ps. 22:6).

I will help you, says Yahweh, and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel- see on Is. 44:2. As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's go'el , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). He could also marry a widow and raise up children by her. All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. As discussed on Is. 40:2, Yahweh paid the debt. That debt was owed to Him, but He did not merely say "Forget it!". He paid it in full, ultimately through the blood of His Son. As Paul often exalts in Romans, our redemption was achieved in this sense "justly". The title "redeemer" is constantly linked to "the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 41:14; 43:14; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5). Possibly because God's supreme holiness is shown by His having redeemed / bought out Israel from the debt of their sin. He is "holy" or separate from anything or anyone else in the way He redeems in this way, and is holy or separated unto this saving redemption of His people. This is what God Almighty is all about; we are His sole passion. This amazing grace is the essence of His holiness or 'otherness'.

But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren

Isaiah 41:15 Behold, I have made you into a new sharp threshing instrument with teeth. You will thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and will make the hills like chaff- This and :16 is full of reference to Daniel 2. It was as if the prophecy of Dan. 2 could have been fulfilled by Judah and their 'Messiah' as the stone- right then. As explained on Dan. 2:44, the stone from the mountain of Babylon returning to the *eretz* could have had application to the returned exiles. LXX "I have made thee as new saw-shaped threshing wheels of a wagon" alludes to the cherubim; faithful Judah would become identified with Yahweh's Angel chariot and would become the vehicle for His operations against the Gentiles. This threshing will come ultimately true in the last days (s.w. Mic. 4:13). And yet the connection is obvious with the command in Is. 40 to prepare a way for Yahweh to bring Judah back from Babylon to Zion. The command to "Prepare the way" involved the mountains being brought down- yet God says *He* will use Israel to do this. Time and again, He presents as so eager to do the work for them.

Isaiah 41:16 You will winnow them, and the wind will carry them away, and the whirlwind will scatter them. You will rejoice in Yahweh, you will glory in the Holy

One of Israel- See on :15. This joy is presented as the joy of harvest; and the harvest will have been the judging of the nations of the *eretz* who refuse to accept Yahweh. The winnowing figure implies however that the wind would indeed take away the chaff, but the wheat would fall to the ground and be saved. Always in these figures of judgment there is an ultimately positive outcome somehow in view. Israel's joy of harvest would therefore be in that some wheat has come out of the judgment process; some will repent amongst their enemies, and they will have learnt the lesson of Jonah, and this shall be their great joy.

Isaiah 41:17 The poor and needy seek water, and there is none, their tongue fails for thirst. I Yahweh, will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them- As the book of Esther makes clear, the exiles were prosperous in their various societies. Their spiritual thirst would be met. And as food and water were provided for Israel in their wilderness journey, so everything physically necessary would be provided for their return. Their poverty and need was spiritual, and this would be met. Just as Is. 40:31 has assured the faint and weary that they would be energized- in spiritual things. Just as rivers don't flow on "bare heights" (:18), so God would provide spiritual strength as it were out of nowhere, defying all laws of nature to do so. Am. 8:11 speaks of seeking water in the sense of seeking the spiritual strength of God's word.

Isaiah 41:18 I will open rivers on the bare heights and springs in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water- Like Hosea with Gomer (see on Is. 1:26), Yahweh wanted to repeat the wilderness romance with which He had started His relationship with them. He wanted to again provide water in the desert (Is. 41:18); He wanted their return from Babylon across the desert to be like their exodus from Egypt and passage through the desert to the land. Hosea talks of starting a relationship again with his wife, a re-marriage; Ez. 37 expresses this same reality in another figure in speaking of how Israel would be resurrected, and this new person would return to Zion. Is. 41:19 speaks of how God would even line their route from Babylon to Zion with trees. In the wilderness, the place where God told Moses that Israel were not His people, there God intended to again tell them that they were His people (Hos. 2:1); God's judgment against His people involved taking them into the wilderness and slaying them with thirst (Hos. 2:5); and yet there, through that judgment, they would again become His people. God's plan therefore was to bring Judah out of Babylon / Persia, and reveal Himself to them as their God on their wilderness journey home, and then return together with joy to Zion.

Isaiah 41:19 I will put cedar, acacia, myrtle, and oil trees in the wilderness. I will set fir trees, pine, and box trees together in the desert- See on :18. God would even line their route from Babylon to Zion with trees. The myrtle was a native of Persia, the land of their exile. But it was as it were to be transplanted to Judah; it is the language of return from exile. These trees were known for their use in construction and for their use in building the temple, not for fruit. Cyrus provided all such wood for the rebuilding of the temple.

Isaiah 41:20 that they may see, know, consider, and understand together, that the hand of Yahweh has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it- They would perceive that their return to the land was part of a new creation. But they didn't at the

time of the restoration, they returned seeking their own personal benefit from it, and were met by droughts, pests, opposition from the locals- and prophetic condemnation. And so the new creation became reapplied to the work of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17) and the latter day reestablishment of the Kingdom at the Lord's return.

Isaiah 41:21 Produce your cause, says Yahweh. Bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob- This continues the legal allusions noted on :1. GNB "You gods of the nations, present your case. Bring the best arguments you have!". The following section concludes in :29 with a round condemnation of idols. The gods of the nations are arrayed in court against Yahweh. This continual polemic against idolatry is surely a tacit reflection upon the fact that idolatry continued to be a problem for the exiles in the initial generations, as the messages of Ezekiel make clear enough. It was only later that the exiles quit idolatry. The truth is that many Jews and Israelites assimilated into the areas of their captivity and accepted the gods and culture of their surrounding society.

Isaiah 41:22 Let them announce and declare to us what shall happen. Declare the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or show us things to come-

The "we" refers in the context to God and those on His side. He is connected with us. He and His people face off in court against the idols and their followers. "That we may see it together" (:23) therefore refers to God and His people, "together" in the courtroom. Statements like these in Isaiah are often interpreted as meaning that God's prophecies of the future are the ultimate proof that He is God. But I have noted throughout Isaiah and all the prophets that God's prophecies are largely conditional; in the spirit of Jer. 18:8-10, they are statements of outcomes which will happen if there is no repentance. Human repentance and intercession can change the stated outcomes; either completely precluding them, or resulting in their reapplication, amelioration, rescheduling or reinterpretation. So Bible prophecy would not be automatically fulfilled as stated, and therefore it would not be that compelling an argument. It would also require evidence that the original manuscripts existed from the required date, and the originals don't exist. In the course of my missionary work, I have been involved in literally thousands of people from atheistic or Islamist backgrounds coming to faith in the Bible and the Lord Jesus. Not one of these was persuaded by "Bible prophecy". The path from unbelief to belief is, I suggest and observe, along different tracks to that. And there is in any case no Euclidean evidence for God's existence, as faith is not based upon "seen" evidence (Heb. 11:1). There may be confirmations for faith, but faith is ultimately a step taken without these things as a safety net or motivator. It is "the word of God", the message of His love in His Son, which is in our age of itself the basis for faith. All this said, the prediction of Cyrus by name at least 150 years before his time was without doubt God staking His Divinity upon being able to make a future prophecy. And He was justified.

The first half of the verse about future things matches the second half about past things- "Explain to the court the events of the past, and tell us what they mean" (GNB). The emphasis and flavour of the words used is not upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in

personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

Isaiah 41:23 Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. Yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and see it together- LXX "declare ye to us the things that are coming on at the last time". See on :22. It could be inferred from this that what is unique about the one true God, Yahweh of Israel, is that He is responsible for both good *and* evil, as stated in Is. 45:5-7. As today, false and mistaken religious systems suggest a good God or gods, and an evil one or demons. The idea of "good and evil" being created by God goes back to the simple statement in Gen. 2:9 that it was *God* who created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The synthesis of all experience, positive and negative, as coming from one God... is what makes Him so unique amongst all religions and belief systems. The popular belief in Satan as a cosmic being separate from God, and of God as only interested in giving us prosperity... is sadly missing out fundamentally in understanding the unique nature of Yahweh. "Dismayed" is possibly sarcastic, or may just mean effectively 'to stare'.

Isaiah 41:24 Behold, you are of nothing, and your work is of nothing. He who chooses you is an abomination- The idols and their supporters have been charged in :23 and asked to "declare" their answer. But there is silence; see on :26. And so this is the judgment pronounced, and the conclusion that any who chooses them is like them, "an abomination". Their silence is connected with their judgment- they are nothing. Nothingness and vanity is a major theme in later Isaiah. As explained on Is. 40:17, the idea is not that any persons are irrelevant to God; but that their weight is insignificant in the scale of judgment. They have no argument, and so nothing to add to the scale. "Of nothing" is the phrase translated "without man" in describing the utter desolation to come upon idolatrous Judah (Is. 6:11; Jer. 4:7).

Isaiah 41:25 I have raised up one from the north, and he has come; from the rising of the sun, one who calls on My name; and he shall come on rulers as on mortar, and as the potter treads clay- The one aroused from the north could refer to Nebuchadnezzar and the one from the east would be Cyrus. Or as explained on :2, Cyrus came from both the north and the east. But evidently the intended, possible fulfilment just didn't happen; for although he was indeed used by God, he did not "call on My name". He, along with the revived, repentant community of exiles, could have come upon the feet of iron and clay of the Dan. 2 vision and destroyed it. For that image had a fulfilment as the Babylonian empire, headed up by Nebuchadnezzar. But the fulfilment has been deferred until the return of the Lord Jesus. He will come from Heaven, the figurative "north", rather than literal Persia / Babylon; the essence will be gloriously fulfilled, but not every literality. And so it may well be with the prophecies of the temple and worship system which was to be restored. "I have raised up... he has come" is an example of the prophetic perfect; Cyrus was still 150 years in the future, and the Lord Jesus yet further in the future.

The Divine hope was that Cyrus would accept the Holy One of Israel (Is. 41:25 "I have raised up one from the north... one who calls on My name...") although initially Cyrus is the one God had called who knew Him not (Is. 45:4 "I have called you by your name... I have surnamed you, though you have not known Me"). Although Cyrus initially didn't know God's Name, he would come to a point when he did "call on My name". That was the hope, but it seems it didn't happen. We could read Is. 45:4 "yet

you have not known Me" as a Divine lament that Cyrus did not respond to Yahweh and enter personal relationship with Him. It is repeated again in Is. 45:5.

Isaiah 41:26 Who has declared it from the beginning, that we may know? And before, that we may say, 'He is right?'. Surely, there is no one who declares like this. Surely, there is no one who shows, surely, there is no one who hears your words- LXX "there is no one that speaks beforehand, nor anyone that hears your words". As explained on :22, the idea is not simply that God foretold Cyrus (:25) in advance and was thereby justified as God because His prophecies came true. Rather is the force of "declared" that He had explained and given meaning to events of history, rather than simply meaning 'He has predicted this'. It is that metanarrative built into history by Yahweh which is "right" or 'righteous'. "Nor anyone that hears your words" may be a reference to the silence of the idols and their supporters in court as suggested on :24. Hence GNB "None of you said a word about it; no one heard you say a thing!".

Isaiah 41:27 I am the first to say to Zion, 'Behold, look at them;' and I will give one who brings good news to Jerusalem- LXX "I will give dominion to Sion, and will comfort Jerusalem". This is the scene of Is. 40:9; 52:7, where Zion is comforted with the message that now she can return and the Kingdom of God will be reestablished. The initial possibilities of fulfilment failed, and so it is the Lord Jesus and perhaps the latter day Elijah ministry announcing Him which is in view. But His message would only be "good news" for the humble and penitent (Is. 61:1 s.w.). "I am the first to say to Zion" may be a reference, in the context, to how God had conceived this plan "at the first". Hence GNB "I, the LORD, was the first to tell Zion the news; I sent a messenger to Jerusalem to say, 'Your people are coming! They are coming home!'". Is. 61:1-3 more precisely defines the "Zion" to whom the good news / Gospel is addressed as those who mourn in Zion: "Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the humble... to comfort all who mourn; to appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give to them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness". And the Lord surely alludes to this when He pronounces blessing upon those who mourn. The Gospel / good news is only good news to those who mourn in repentance.

Isaiah 41:28 When I look, there is no man; even among them there is no counsellor who, when I ask of them, can answer a word- "No counsellor among the idols" (LXX). This continues the legal allusions noted on :1 and :21. "None of them had a thing to say; not one could answer the questions I asked" (GNB). The idols were silent in court. We note that in the court case, God speaks directly and not through any advocate or "counsellor". There are many mocking allusions to Marduk, showing Yahweh's supremacy over him. Marduk was formed- but Yahweh had no god before Him and will have none after Him (Is. 43:10). Marduk had a counsellor, Ea, called in the inscriptions "the all-wise one". But Yahweh has all wisdom and has no such counsellor (Is. 40:13,14; Is. 41:28). All this reference to the Marduk cult was in my opinion not merely a pointless mockery and poking of fun at the Persian culture. It was a very real appeal to the Jewish exiles to quit it, to come out and be separate; remember again and again that Mordecai [and perhaps Esther too] had adopted names reflective of the Marduk cult. See on Is. 40:25.

In the context of this section, the gods / idols are being asked to answer up, and they are silent; see on :23,26. The "no man" who can answer anything may simply mean 'there was none', i.e. none of the gods who are being questioned in court. Hence

GNB "When I looked among the gods, none of them had a thing to say; not one could answer the questions I asked".

And yet another take is possible. God sent His prophets to appeal to Israel for repentance. They *could have lead them to repentance*. But Israel would not. The marriage feast was totally ready and waiting for the Jewish people; they could have had it. But they didn't want it, and so the course of human history was extended. Therefore finally God sent His Son. The Lord Jesus Himself was amazed that no other man had achieved the work which He had to; and therefore He clad Himself with zeal and performed it (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16 cp. Rev. 5:3,4). God knew that salvation in the end would have to be through the death of His Son. But there were other possible scenarios for the repentance and salvation of mankind, which no man achieved. And so, as in the parable of the servants sent to get fruit from the vineyard, there was left no other way but the death of God's only Son.

Isaiah 41:29 Behold, all of them, their works are vanity and nothing. Their molten images are wind and confusion- LXX "For these are your makers, as ye think, and they that cause you to err in vain". The idols and their supporters have been charged in :23 and asked to "declare" their answer. But there is silence; see on :26. And so this is the final judgment pronounced. Their silence is connected with their judgment- they are nothing. As explained on Is. 40:17, the idea is not that any persons are irrelevant to God; but that their weight is insignificant in the scale of judgment. They have no argument, and so nothing to add to the scale. "Confusion" is *tohu*, the word used in Gen. 1:2 of how the earth / land was "without form", and then the Spirit / wind (s.w.) moved upon it. Here we have again the presence of "wind" (s.w.). Now the idols have been declared vain and non-existent, a new creation can begin. There is always this positive hint in the Divine judgments pronounced.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 42

Isaiah 42:1 Behold, My servant, whom I uphold- "The servant" here is clearly Israel, initially. "You are my witnesses, said the Lord, and My servant whom I have chosen" (Is. 43:10). But the servant is blind and dumb (:19), useless for service. And so these servant prophecies came true in the Lord Jesus, who was the Israel whom God intended; and the later references in Isaiah [after Is. 53:10 "he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days"] are to "servants" plural, because He was representative of a new, true Israel "in Him" (e.g. Is. 54:17 "This is what YHWH will do for his servants- I will vindicate them, says the Lord"). The servant, be it Israel the nation or an individual Messianic figure, would be upheld by Yahweh in order to achieve the restoration; and in the case of the likes of Cyrus and Zerubbabel, would have had righteousness imputed to them had they wished to go along with God's program (Is. 41:10 s.w.). If God Almighty "upholds" anyone or anything- they will surely succeed in their mission. The tragedy is that the initial iterations of the servant (Israel, Cyrus etc.) failed… they disregarded such huge potential help. "Uphold" is a legal idea, for this section follows on the court room scene at the end of Is. 41. God's case to justify His people is upheld even though they are sinners.

My chosen, in whom My soul delights- The reason why there are no accusers against us, not even our own sins, is because we are "God's chosen" (Rom. 8:33 Rom 8:33 "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's chosen ones? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus that died, yes rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God; who also makes intercession for us"). The supreme chosen one of God was of course the Lord Jesus, "My elect / chosen, in whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1). And yet later on in the servant songs of Isaiah, "My elect / chosen" clearly refers to the people of Israel (Is. 45:4; 65:9,22). The true Israel of God are therefore those counted as somehow "in" the elect one, the singular servant of God, Messiah Jesus. Those baptized into Him are therefore His elect. And how do we know we are "God's elect"? If we are baptized into Christ, "My chosen", then for sure we are. And further, we have heard the call of the Gospel, we have been called- so, we are God's elect, His chosen ones. Of course the objection can be raised that the whole idea of calling or election may appear unfair. Indeed, the Greek word for "elect" can carry the idea of 'the favoured / favourite one'. There is no ultimate injustice here. The chosen One is the Lord Jesus, beloved for the sake of His righteousness, His spirit of life. Those who respond to the call to be "in Him" are counted likewise. And all this is the way, the method used, in order for God to be the one who counts us as right in the ultimate judgment- for "It is God that justifies".

I have put My Spirit on him- The Is. 42 passage concerning Jesus as preaching to the Gentiles is quoted in the Gospels from the LXX. But this reads: "Jacob is my servant, I will help him: Israel, is my chosen, my soul has accepted him... he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up his voice... but... He shall shine out, and not be discouraged" (Is. 42:1-4 LXX). The passages primarily exhorts Israel at the time of their living in Babylon to live up to their role as a missionary nation; they didn't need to cry or lift up the voice in preaching, because their own example and being would be the witness. They would "shine out" as the light of the Gentile world in which they had to live. But they failed in this; and yet the prophecy came true in the Lord Jesus, the true servant of Yahweh. But the prophecy still has to be fulfilled in us, the servants of the Lord, as those in Christ, as we live through our Babylon years. See on :5.

He will bring justice to the nations- "Justice" can be understood not as social justice but as the legal judgment arising from the court case just described at the end of Is. 41. The judgment was that the idols of the nations were vanity and Yahweh would save His people. This bringing forth of justice, or declaration of the sentence (s.w. Ps. 17:2), will be "unto truth" (:3). The result of the judgment will be "truth". Mercy and truth are associated with the Abrahamic covenant. The idea may be that through their condemnation and judgment, they will learn Yahweh's ways and accept covenant relationship with Him. That was the prophetic vision for a remnant of all the nations in the *eretz*; they were to join a repentant Israel and Judah in returning to the land to form a

multiethnic people of God in the restored Kingdom. But they didn't repent and so this has been deferred to the last days.

Isaiah 42:2 He will not shout, nor raise his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street- When Paul wrote that “the servant of the Lord must not strive” in his preaching ministry (2 Tim. 2:24), he was alluding back to how the servant song described the Lord Jesus in His preaching as not striving or lifting up His voice in proud argument (Is. 42:2 cp. Mt. 12:19). We are the servant in that we are "in Christ". All that is true of Him is to be true of us. "Shout" is always used in Isaiah of shouting or crying in distress, condemnation or disappointment in human strength (Is. 19:20; Is. 33:7; 46:7; 65:14). The idea may be that *He* will not cry like this, but rather be heard by Yahweh and bring blessing to others. Yet the verse is quoted in Mt. 12:19 about the teaching style of the Lord Jesus. The Lord didn’t shout out in the streets who He was. He wished His followers to follow His example in *showing* the message to the world just as He did- in who He was (Mt. 12:18). The Lord Himself withdrew from controversy with the Pharisees and instructed His recent converts not to spread the Gospel in an unseemly way, because it was written about *Him personally that* “he shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear *His* voice in the streets". In other words, the true preacher of Christ is solidly identified with Him by the very act of preaching. Truly "we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20) in our witnessing. His voice is our voice.

The Lord understood these words of Isaiah to mean that He should cease from controversy with the Pharisees at that point. He withdrew from the Pharisees in order that His voice not be heard in the streets, and so that He would not quench a smoldering wick: "The Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him. And Jesus perceiving it withdrew from there; and many followed him and he healed them all, and charged them that they should not make him known. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: Look at My servant whom I have chosen… He shall not strive, nor cry aloud, neither shall anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he shall not break and a smoking wick he shall not quench" (Mt. 12:14-20). He withdrew from controversy with the Pharisees at that point so that He would not quench a smoking wick. He realized that exposure to argument and controversy is carcinogenic to faith. But at other times He did engage with the Pharisees, as often recorded in the Gospels (especially Mt. 23). But at this point He "withdrew from there" and from the Pharisees, lest the weak, bruised faith of others not be destroyed completely. In the context, His miracles were powerful enough; further argument was unnecessary and would be destructive to the faith of others. We are in Him and are to act with a similar wisdom and sensitivity. For how we treat the spiritually weak, those with just the last or slightest spark of spiritual life, is a litmus indicator of spirituality and Christ-likeness. We are saved exactly because of His especial patience

with us the weak; including the smoking wicks, those who fill the house with more smoke than light or heat, the people kicked out because they are seen as a pain to the rest of us. The reed plant is easily damaged; people are weak, sensitive and vulnerable. Bruising is the language of suffering; a bruised reed is a hurt person. The servant would seek to bring them to life, to work with the hurt and the weak. The immediate context of Matthew's quotation of these words is that the Lord had cured a man with a withered hand, perhaps analogous to the bruised reed (Mt. 12:9-13). The Lord Jesus was the strongly burning light of the world; but He showed His supremacy by His patience with the smoking wick. He was the shoot that grew up strongly from dry ground (Is. 53:1); who had patience with the bruised reed that was wilting.

Isaiah 42:3 He won't break a bruised reed. He won't quench a dimly burning wick. He will faithfully bring justice- "Bruised reed" in Is. 36:6 is better "broken reed", and this is the very phrase used here about how the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, would *not* break a "bruised / broken reed" (Is. 42:3). Egypt were a broken reed, recently broken in battle and now useless to save Israel. They were too weak to uphold the weight of Judah if they were to lean upon it for strength. God turns the figure around- He as it were is in need of man, He wishes to trust upon us; and although we are broken reeds, we will not be crushed nor will He be disappointed. He so wishes to work with us.

The events of the crucifixion were so packed with fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and shadows that the Lord's discernment of them must have given Him a wonderful boost of strength, in knowing who He was and where He was destined. For example, when they put a broken reed in his hand as a mock sceptre, His mind would have flown to the Messianic Is. 42:3: "A bruised reed shall he not break…he *shall* bring forth judgment", as they mocked him for his apparent inability to do.

The Hebrew words used in Is. 42:3 suggest this is a reference to the candlestick; the words respectively mean a shaft / stem, and a wick. Little strength, little light (if the reference is to the reed which took oil to the lamps of the candlestick), little heat- but all the same, the Lord Jesus seeks to fan it into life rather than walk away in disappointment; and by doing so, sets a challenging example to many of us, whose most frequent complaint is the weak state of the brotherhood's members. If the reference is to a damaged and smoky candlestick, this becomes the more poignant- for the candlestick was a clear symbol of Israel and then of the ecclesias (Rev. 1:12,13,20; 2:1).

When judgment is finally cast out by mercy at the last day, then the dysfunctional candlestick will be quenched or destroyed in condemnation. Note how the metaphor of quenching a fire is used here for condemnation; but in another metaphor,

condemnation is spoken of as the very opposite- unquenchable fire. This is sure proof that we are not to read 'unquenchable fire' as literal.

Isaiah 42:4 He will not fail nor be discouraged until he has set justice in the earth, and the islands will wait for his law- LXX "He shall shine out"; He the perfect, brightly burning lamp would continue to shine, despite the weakness of the candlestick of God's people. The Lord's patience with the useless candlestick of Israel and the weakness of the ecclesia (see on :3) will be "until" His final victory over judgment. That happened in one sense on the cross, but in another sense it will only happen when death is swallowed up in victory at the day of judgment. Until then, both He and us are to patiently bear with the damaged and dysfunctional ecclesial candlestick. But in that day, those elements of the candlestick which refuse to give light to the house will be "broken", the Greek in Mt. 12:20 meaning 'broken in pieces'- the language of condemnation (Mt. 21:44).

Ezra, Nehemiah, Joshua, Zerubbabel… all overlooked the encouragement of Is. 42:4 concerning the servant-Messiah: “He shall not fail nor be discouraged”. Of course, the Lord Jesus Himself, along with these earlier potential Messiahs, *could* have failed and been discouraged. This was a conditional prophecy, if ever there was one. But the Lord Jesus made it real and live in His own experience; the others assumed, as we so often do, that these kind of scriptures are meant for someone other than us. Just as so many in the world assume that the good news of the Kingdom applies to us who preach it, and it must be very nice for us…but refuse to let the personal reality of it sink in for *them*.

"Justice" can easily be misunderstood as some reference to social justice. But the original word continues the frequent legal allusions in Isaiah. The word is used of a judicial decision or sentence (Num. 27:21; Dt. 16:18; 1 Kings 3:28; 20:40), the case presented for litigation (Ez. 23:24; 1 Kings 3:11; Job 13:18) and the execution of the sentence (Jer. 7:5; Ez. 18:8). Hence there is the parallel in this verse with "the islands shall wait for His law". God's judgment throughout all the judicial allusions in Isaiah is that He will save His people and judge all others. This judgment of salvation for God's people is to be effected through the Servant, who will not falter [NEV "fail"] until this has been achieved. We think of the Lord setting His face to go up to Jerusalem and die there to effect all this, unflinching and utterly determined for our salvation. "Discouraged" is the same word as "bruised" in :3. He would not falter nor be bruised or otherwise weak, in order to save those who do falter and easily bruise. And that is really the ultimate indicator of spirituality; to love and be patient with others who are weak in ways that we are strong.

Isaiah 42:5 Thus says God Yahweh, He who created the heavens and stretched them out, He who spread out the earth and that which comes out of it- The simple fact we are created by God means that we are responsible to God in some sense, and therefore

liable to His judgment. The stretched out hand of God is used as a figure both for His judgment of man (Is. 31:3) and also for His creation of man (Is. 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13). The knowledge that we are created by Him makes us responsible to His judgment, and we have to look at our bodies, our lives which He has created... and act accordingly.

He who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk in it- This is the same phrase regarding how God's Spirit is given or "put" (s.w.) in the Messianic Saviour figure of :1. The idea is that all the people in this new system will also have the Spirit put within them; and the same phrase is used of the Spirit being potentially "put" or "given" in the restored exiles (Ez. 37:6,14). They were to all have the Spirit of the servant saviour. This has now come to fulfilment in the spirit of Christ being the sustaining force in the new creation, and will be more literally manifest in the reestablishment of the Kingdom at the last day.

But the reference is also to the simple fact that God created the heavens, earth and man upon it. And this means we should use our lives to come into covenant relationship with our creator (:6). God "wrought us" as He did in order to enable us to have this longing. According to the Bible, the spirit of man is God's. He gave us that life force, and at death "the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecc. 12:7). If we seriously believe this, then we will see death as an opportunity to give back to God what He gave us, namely our very life force. If in our lives we followed this principle, realizing nothing we 'have' is really ours but His, and therefore we were open handed with our possessions and knowledge of Him, freely giving it out as it were to Him, then giving back our life force to Him will be but a natural progression from this way of living. And thus we will see immortality not as something we personally crave for our own benefit, but rather a further opportunity to reflect back to Him, to His glory. Thus understanding Bible truth about death affects how we face death and eternity, and therefore radically influences our lives now.

Isaiah 42:6 I, Yahweh, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand and will keep you, and make you a covenant for the people, as a light for the nations- The hands of God's servants were held or [s.w.] strengthened at the return from exile (s.w. Ezra 1:6; 6:22; 7:28; Neh. 2:18; 6:9). They could then have fulfilled the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:3 that the weak hands would be strengthened (s.w. "hold"). This taking by the hand would supremely have been through entering the new covenant; to give the hand was to enter covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:32). But these potentials were refused by the exiles. And so they became fulfilled in the Lord Jesus personally, who became the essence of the covenant and the light of the world.

The servant was not literally a covenant nor a light, he was to be the one who dispensed that covenant and light. He was the "messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1), the

mediator of the new covenant with Israel / God's people. This was supremely fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, as we celebrate in taking the cup of the new covenant in His blood. It was ultimately through the Lord's blood that He was made a covenant for us God's people. We note how "the people" are parallel with "the nations". The idea surely is that the new covenant mediated by the servant would redefine God's people as those of all nations who accepted that covenant. Quite possibly the Lord alludes here when declaring all His people are being both the salt of the earth [the land of Israel?] and the light of the world (Mt. 5:13-16). Salt is often connected with covenants; insofar as we are in the Lord Jesus, we too are for a covenant for the people and a light to the world.

Isaiah 42:7 to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners out of the dungeon, and those who sit in darkness out of the prison- There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The Saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite "to let the oppressed go free… loose the bonds", and to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6) as the Lord Jesus Christ did (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. Significantly, Isaiah 40-53 speak of the one servant, whereas Isaiah 54-66 speak of the plural "servants" who fulfill in principle the work of the singular servant.

Those who are thankfully redeemed in Christ, now lovingly reconciled to Him, are described as blind, starving prisoners, bound in the darkness, awaiting execution (Ps. 107:14; Is. 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Zech. 9:11). Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are "the poor" (Gk. 'the crouchers'), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). Sadly the Jewish exiles failed to perceive that the wealth and soft life of Babylon was in fact a dark dungeon. And so as many today, they failed to perceive the good news of deliverance from it. The spiritually blind would be healed, but yet the Lord would lead the blind out of Babylon to Zion (:16)- despite their refusal to be healed. Despite having resisted His efforts described here in :7 to make the blind see. Such was and is His enthusiasm to save even those who don't get it. Is. 29:19 has clearly defined blindness and deafness in spiritual terms: "In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel".

Isaiah 42:8 I am Yahweh; that is My name. I will not give My glory to another, nor My

praise to engraved images- The implication is that the Jews had tried to praise Yahweh through praising their images. They never rejected Him, and yet they accepted idol worship. They achieved this in their conscience, as we can be tempted to do, by reasoning that idol worship was done in the name of Yahweh worship. But praise of Yahweh is because of His unique characteristics or Name, which no other idol has. Therefore as His Name is, so is His praise world-wide (Ps. 48:10); beyond the barriers of distance and language, those who know the Name are united in praise. Is. 42:8 speaks as if God's Name is itself His praise, so strong and inevitable is the link between knowing His Name and praising it. Therefore "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name" (Ps. 29:2) suggests that the Name of Yahweh demands praise from us. To simply declare the Name is of itself to praise (Heb. 2:12). This explains why at least 15 times in the Psalms and often elsewhere, praise is to be given to God's Name (Ps. 7:17; 9:2; 44:8; 54:6; 61:8; 69:30; 74:21; 99:3; 113:1; 135:1; 138:2; 142:7; 145:2; 148:5,13; 149:3).

Isaiah 42:9 Behold, the former things have happened, and I declare new things. I tell you about them before they come up- As explained on Is. 41:22, the emphasis and flavour of the words used is not upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

Isaiah 42:10 Sing to Yahweh a new song- We sing the “new song” now, because we sing / meditate of the “new things” which will be in the Kingdom. In that day, we will “sing a new song” (Rev. 5:9; 14:3). And yet this is undoubtedly picking up on the way in which we can *now* sing the ‘new song’, every morning (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). Likewise, all things will be made new at the Lord’s coming (Rev. 21:5), and yet those in whom the new creation is worked out already have all things made new in their spiritual experience (2 Cor. 5:17,18). The life that He had and now lives is the essence of the Kingdom life. Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It’s why one of His titles is “the kingdom of God” (Lk. 17:21). And it’s why it can be said that we ‘have’ eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now.

And His praise from the end of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is therein, the islands and their inhabitants- The frequent mention of the ends of the earth / land is understandable, because the exiles were located, both those of Israel and

Judah. They along with the repentant remnant of the Gentiles were intended to unite together as a new multiethnic people of God in a restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 42:11 Let the wilderness and its cities raise their voices, with the villages that Kedar inhabits- The picture is of the villages along the direct path from Babylon to Zion bursting into praise as the exiles travelled that way, having accepted Israel's God. Is. 21:13-16 mentions these areas as those who will have remnants who survive and are envisaged as repenting and turning to Yahweh. Even remote Bedouin villages will accept Israel's God.

*Let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains!- '*The inhabitants of the rock"; the reference is probably to Petra, which like "Sela" means "rock". Even Edom, the sworn enemy of Israel and Yahweh, would ultimately have a remnant who turn to Yahweh; although this and :12 may be an invitation for them to do so, a call for their repentance.

Isaiah 42:12 Let them give glory to Yahweh- Connecting with Is. 42:8, the "them" is those who have now quit idolatry.

And declare His praise in the islands- The same phrase only in Ps. 51:15 about David's praise of Yahweh after his repentance; and it again is repentance which is in view here.

Isaiah 42:13 Yahweh will go out like a mighty man, He will stir up- Yet Yahweh would "stir up" Cyrus (s.w. Is. 41:2,25; 45:13), so this could have been fulfilled through that "mighty man". But he failed. The "mighty man", the *gibbor*, therefore became reapplied to the Lord Jesus (Is. 9:6 s.w.). But He will act through the stirring up of a repentant Judah (s.w. Is. 51:9,17; 52:1), seeing that no man would be 'stirred up' (s.w. Is. 64:7). All the potential candidates had refused the Divine nudges to be stirred up.

Zeal like a man of war, He will raise a war cry. Yes, He will shout aloud, He will triumph over His enemies- The Hebrew word translated " zeal" in the context of God's zeal for us (Is. 9:8) really means the jealousy which flares up in a man for a woman (the same word is in Num. 5:14,15; Prov. 6:34; Song 8:6 etc.). That jealousy burning like fire (Ps. 79:5) is His passion for us His people. He is a jealous God in His zeal for us; and therefore any other relationships with the things of this world cannot be contemplated by us. That zeal of God will be poured out upon us at the second coming, resulting in a consummation with Him as the wife of His covenant (Is. 42:13,14; 64:1). This is a figure which would be unseemly for a man to devise. But this is His passion for us, which the humility of God drives Him to use; and surely it will one day be revealed. To use this very figure of a man in love and consummating his relationship in marriage is so apparently inappropriate that it reflects the humility of God in even considering the use of it. We are God's

heritage, His reward / wages (Heb.), His recompense for all His labour for us (Ps. 127:3 Heb.).

Isaiah 42:14 I have been silent a long time, I have been quiet and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a travailing woman, I will both gasp and pant-

The "long time" refers to the 70 years exile. This is as nothing to God but due to His great sensitivity to His peoples' exile, He felt the time to have dragged. Tragically they considered He had forgotten them. But in fact this was just the warrior of :13 becoming increasingly stirred to wrath until He bursts out in power. Or, matching the male image with a female image, until a woman goes into the last stage of labour and delivers her child.

The image of a woman in childbirth is of a person at the absolute maximum extent of human possibility, physically and mentally- gasping and panting, totally focused upon the end result of giving birth. This is the amazing picture of God's efforts to give birth to His people spiritually. Our spiritual birth is His maximum focus, the focus of an otherwise unbounded God, with all mental and physical possibilities. God Almighty gasping and panting for our sakes… is an amazing figure. 'Breath' is 'spirit', the same words in Hebrew. The gasping and panting in heavy breathing involves a lot of breath going out from the woman- and that breath surely represents God's Spirit, given to us, and represented in its most extreme form in His Son dying with a conscious outbreathing of His breath towards His weak and confused people, located as it were before His cross. Within Isaiah, it is the breath of God which destroys the nations and prepares the way for Judah's exodus from Babylon (Is. 40:7,24 "He blows upon them and they wither"). The tragedy was that all this Divine effort was ignored or not used by His people. The image of childbirth is also inevitably that of pain. The pain of God for our sakes is again a hugely powerful image, again coming to full term in the physical sufferings of His Son.

Insofar as we realize that God is not passive, but has feelings toward us far more deep and passionate than we can ever know, so far we will realize that life with Him is a daily, passionate experience. It cannot be ‘the same old scene’. Consider the passion of God: “For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant” (Is. 42). “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? My heart is changed within me; All my compassion is aroused” (Hosea). The prophets are full of such passionate intensity. The prophets are not just predictions of the future. They reveal the passion of God’s feelings for His people. At the very time when He condemns them for their adultery against Him, their ingratitude, their worthlessness, He cries out His belief in the blessedness He will one day grace them with.

God's long term 'holding His peace' at Israel's sins resulted in a build up of internal forces within God: "For a long time have I held my peace... restrained myself, now will I cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant" (Is. 42:14; 63:15; 64:12). God crying out, gasping, panting... leads straight on, in the context, to the suffering servant. This is the same idea as God's heart growing warm and being kindled in internal struggle about His people in Hos. 11:8,9. And all this went on supremely at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus. We note His eagerness to compare Himself to a woman in labour, who stereotypically was veiled from male observation and identity with. There is a juxtaposition of images here; the male warrior crying a war cry in :13, and now a woman crying out in the pain of triumphant childbirth. And yet we may note that the analogy to a woman crying out in labour pains is in the first person, unlike the figure of the warrior. "I will both gasp and pant" is a far more direct identification of Yahweh with the woman- an analogy perhaps shocking to the initial audience.

Isaiah 42:15 I will destroy mountains and hills and dry up all their herbs. I will make the rivers islands and will dry up the pools- The bringing down of hills and mountains was required in Is. 40 in order to create a way for Yahweh and His people to come from Babylon to Zion. That way wasn't prepared in that the people didn't repent. Now God in His zeal to force through His plan says that He will do this. Just as in :7 the intention was to make the blind see and then lead them out of Babylon; whereas in :16 God decides to bring the people out whilst they were still blind.

This looks forward to the literal changes in the *eretz* promised to Abraham spoken of in Isaiah's 'little apocalypse' in Is. 24. Politically this will mean the collapse of all mountains or nations within that territory. God's mountain of the Dan. 2 vision is to be over all. We note that "islands", a common word in Isaiah, here simply means the dry land where non-Israelite people live within the *eretz*.

Isaiah 42:16 I will bring the blind by a way that they don't know, I will lead them in paths that they don't know. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. I will do these things, and I will not forsake them- This is the message of Is. 40; that a way would be made for the exiles to return. This is the scene of Jer. 31:8, where the blind and limping Jacob and his family are brought back to the land from exile in the east. The literal way or path was also to be a spiritual path which they had not then yet known; for the blindness here is essentially spiritual (:18). It was all by grace; they would be returned despite their unbelief and impenitence. Their crooked ways would be made straight in that God would as it were make their ways straight.

But this huge spiritual potential was unused by the few exiles who did return. And so these things are reapplied to the way of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus warned that the blind cannot lead the blind- and explained what He meant by adding that "The disciple

is not above his master: but every one when he is perfected shall be as his master" (Lk. 6:39.40). We are all learners of the one Master, and not leaders. Only if we are perfect can we be leaders of the blind- for it is Jesus personally who was prophesied as leading the blind (Is. 42:16). Hence we read in Mt. 23:10: "Nor should you be called 'Leader,' because your one and only leader is the Messiah".

Isaiah 42:17 Those who trust in engraved images, who tell molten images, 'You are our gods' will be turned back. They will be utterly disappointed- The idea may be that any who left Babylon for Zion but continued trusting in their idols would be turned back to Babylon. "Turned back" is the phrase used in Ps. 129:5 of the Assyrians who hated Zion being turned back to their own land. But it also applies to those within Judah who were idolaters. Their judgment will be at the same time as that of their national enemies. For they worshipped the same idols as their enemies. But the term essentially means 'to backslide' in moral apostasy (Is. 50:5 s.w.). How they lived in their lives will be how they are at judgment day. They will not suddenly appear as different people. "Utterly disappointed" is better 'greatly shamed', the shame of condemnation, of realizing that all human political help has come to nothing (s.w. Is. 30:5; Jer. 2:26); that the way and trust of a lifetime has come to nothing.

Isaiah 42:18 Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see- The paradox is that Israel considered Yahweh to be blind and deaf, feeling that their way was hidden or not seen by Him (Is. 40:27). God's response to this was to ask "Have you not heard?". It is blindness to think that God is blind, deafness to think that God is deaf. Hence the challenge "Do you not know? Have you not heard?" that God is in fact hugely aware of and active for His people. Isaiah began with the challenge to hear, listen and understand (Is. 1:3; 6:9,10). This highlights the grace of how God would bring the blind [spiritually blind, in the context of Isaiah] from Babylon to Zion (:16). Their blindness was willful, but still God would seek to bring them to His Kingdom despite their lack of understanding. A far cry from the typical idea practiced in many Christian denominations, that lack of understanding their doctrinal positions is a deal breaker for relationship with God. Israel was God's servant but was a blind servant (Is. 41:8; 42:19). But the Messianic servant of God, ultimately the Lord Jesus, would lead the blind and give sight to them. He was of quick understanding in spiritual things; and thus through His work as their representative, their blindness was dealt with. And yet they still had to make the effort to even want to be cured. We note that blindness and deafness are only put together like this here in Isaiah. The conditions are not particularly linked medically. It was a deafness to God's word which made them blind. And it has been observed that those who are both blind and deaf are the most difficult people to work with or care for. But this was and is Israel.

The Hebrew has the idea of 'Look so that you can see'. LXX "Look up, ye blind, to see"; if there was a desire to see, shown by looking up; then they would see. These are the spiritually blind of :16, the exiles who by grace were to experience the psychological transformation of the Spirit which is part of accepting the new covenant. But they must have the desire to see and hear; and the exiles didn't even have that (see on Is. 48:8). And so this becomes true of a new, repentant Israel in our days and the last day.

Isaiah 42:19 Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?- see on Is. 44:2. The spiritual transformation of the blind and deaf was to be on account of their identification with the servant of Yahweh who was representative of them in their blindness. This may have had potential fulfilment in Isaiah, but Judah refused this. The sending forth of Isaiah was the sending forth of God's word to His people (s.w. Is. 6:8; 9:8). Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh. The man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached. In the immediate context, Isaiah himself was the servant messenger sent forth (s.w. Is. 42:19; 48:16; 61:1); but he was largely rejected, and Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh (Heb. 11:37). And so the messenger came to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

The servant-Messiah is described as being blind and deaf (Is. 42:19)- just as those who returned from Babylon were called blind, yet having eyes; deaf, yet having ears (Is. 43:8). They had the potential to see and hear; and the servant-Messiah likewise was at that time deaf and blind, but had the potential to see and hear with the vision and words of Messiah. It is hard to understand these words otherwise. So we conclude that another reason why the restoration didn't turn into the promised Messianic Kingdom was simply due to poor leadership. Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah returned from Babylon and were intended to be leaders who would crown Joshua / Jesus as the Messiah-Priest-Branch who would rebuild Jerusalem. But nothing is heard of them further. Perhaps it is to them that Zech. 11:8 refers: "Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them...then said I [on God's behalf], I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die". They had gone into captivity because of poor shepherds, and now at their return they again lacked men willing to be their Saviours; and God is saying that He would not do the shepherding job which He had delegated to others. It could be that Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah all died in one month as a result of Zechariah's prophecy at the time of Ezra 5:1. Or it could be that the three potential shepherds who failed were Zerubbabel, Joshua and Nehemiah.

And so the blind and deaf servant came to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. Because the Lord on the cross truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye

blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see.

Jeremiah mourned Israel's lack of spiritual sensitivity and failure to live up to their potential- they had eyes, but didn't see (Jer. 5:23), they were God's servant, but a blind one; His messenger, but unable to hear any message (Is. 42:19). So the prophets weren't satisfied just because a minority responded to their message of God's love. They were heartbroken because the majority rejected it. I suspect we tend to think that 1 response in 1000 is good, 1 in 10,000 isn't bad. But what about the other 999, or 9,999, who receive our tracts, hit our websites, hear our witness- and don't respond? Is our witness in the spirit of the prophets? Are we happy that the tiny minority respond, and don't spare a thought for the tragedy of the majority who don't? Not only their tragedy, but the tragedy for God?

There is a real paradox here: a blind servant, or slave. What master would keep a blind servant? Only a master who truly loved him, and kept him on as his servant by pure grace. Yet this useless blind servant was God's servant and messenger- even though the blind were not acceptable as servants or sacrifices of God under the Law (Lev. 21:18,22)! God uses His spiritually blind servant people to proclaim His message to the world. The disciples, still blind to the call of the Gentiles, were sent out to preach to the whole world! And we too, blind as we are, are turning men from blindness to light. Paul points out the humility which we should therefore have in our preaching: there are none that truly understand, that really see; we are all blind. And yet we are "a guide of the blind, a light to them that sit in darkness" (Rom. 2:19). Therefore we ought to help the blind with an appropriate sense of our own blindness. The first century Jewish Christians failed utterly in this. And sadly much of our earlier Christian preaching was not accompanied by an awareness of our own limited spiritual horizons and vision.

The Lord Jesus was the servant who was ultimately "at peace" [AV "perfect"] with God personally. "At peace" or AV "perfect". This could as well be translated "he who has repaid / paid again". This would continue the figure of Israel's debt having now been paid by God, they are themselves counted as having paid it- and yet they were blind to this grace.

Isaiah 42:20 You see many things, but don't observe. His ears are open, but he doesn't listen- The idea is that by grace their eyes and ears had been forced open, but still they refused to perceive the obvious grace and salvation action of God. Possibly this provides the explanation and context for :21. Their eyes had been opened to how God

would make His law glorious in that they could accept the new covenant. But still they refused. LXX "Ye have often seen, and have not taken heed; your ears have been opened, and ye have not heard". If they desired to see and hear, then the gift of the Spirit would have opened their eyes and ears (see on :18). But they didn't show any desire to be spiritually perceptive. And so the opening of eyes didn't happen. The gift of the Spirit works likewise today. The Corinthians were given the Spirit, but were not "spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1) because they refused its operation. And this can be true of all who have been baptized and potentially received the gift of the Spirit.

Isaiah 42:21 It pleases Yahweh, for His righteousness' sake, to magnify the law, and make it honourable- GNB "The LORD is a God who is eager to save, so he exalted his laws and teachings, and he wanted his people to honor them. But now his people have been plundered; they are locked up in dungeons and hidden away in prisons". The context speaks of God's attempt to open the eyes of His people to His law; we could read this with GNB as meaning that God tried to make them obedient, but they refused. But we can read with AV that Yahweh "is well pleased for his righteousness' sake", and the referent would be the blind and deaf righteous servant of :19, the representative Lord Jesus, who identified with their blindness but Himself was righteous. "He will magnify the law" (AV) would then refer to His perfect obedience to the law and honouring it in His own person, whilst also representative of sinful Judah.

Isaiah 42:22 But this is a robbed and plundered people. All of them are snared in holes, and they are hidden in prisons. They have become a prey, and no one delivers; and a spoil, and no one says, 'Restore them!'- "Restore" or "Return!". None amongst their prophets or leaders grasped the message of Isaiah, and encouraged the people to "return". See on :21. They need not have remained in the holes and prisons of captivity, but they refused the saving work of the representative servant. And the exiles in Persia, as the book of Esther makes clear, didn't perceive their prosperity as actually being in holes and prisons, spiritually snared by their own materialism. See on Is. 49:24. Israel as a nation are often spoken of as being in prison in a Gentile world (Ps. 79:11; 102:20; Is. 42:7,22; 49:9); just as Joseph was. Prison and death are often associated because a spell in prison was effectively a death sentence, so bad were the conditions. Israel being in prison is therefore a symbol of a living death. And yet they were materially prosperous, so much so that Haman sought to kill them to expropriate their considerable wealth; there was a Jewish queen and prime minister of Persia, according to the book of Esther, and the Jews were popular. Jeremiah had told them to build houses and plant vineyards there. They were not literally abused and in prison- this language is clearly symbolic of their spiritual deprivation. Indeed a city called al-Yahudu, 'the city of Judah', has been unearthed which suggests the Jews were extremely prosperous in Babylon. This of course is why they generally failed to respond to the call

of Cyrus to leave and return to Judah. Just as blindness and deafness are used in spiritual terms here in Isaiah, so is the language of imprisonment and abuse: "to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness" (:7). The paradox is that they who had taken Babylon's wealth to themselves were in fact being spiritually plundered by Babylon.

Isaiah 42:23 Who is there among you who will give ear to this? Who will listen and hear bearing in mind the time to come?- In the first instance, this is an appeal to the exiles to repent. "The time to come" could refer to their further suffering, or to the wonderful Kingdom which potentially they could have a part in if they repented (s.w. Is. 41:23). But they retained their deaf ears (see on :18), refusing to have them opened. And so the appeal becomes a timeless one, for all who would seek to have a part in the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 42:24 Who gave Jacob as plunder, and Israel to the robbers? Didn't Yahweh, He against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, and they disobeyed His law- LXX "For what did he give to Jacob up to spoil, and Israel to them that plundered him? Did not God do it against whom they sinned? and they would not walk in his ways, nor hearken to his law". This is in answer to the skepticism of the exiles encountered by Ezekiel, who considered they were suffering unjustly and the entire deportation had been unfair.

Isaiah 42:25 Therefore He poured the fierceness of His anger on him, and the strength of battle; and it set him on fire all around, but he didn't know; and it burned him, but he didn't take it to heart- See on :24. The tragedy was that those taken into captivity weren't reformed by their sufferings, and now their children likewise refused to "take it to heart" and repent. Here we have another connection with Job, the book which appears to have been rewritten for the exiles with Job as representative of both the exiles and the righteous servant. "Have you considered My servant..." (Job 1:8) is the same phrase here "take it to heart". The book of Job was therefore written as a way of appealing for the repentance of the exiles and for them to contextualize their own sufferings.

The Hebrew term for not laying to heart is commonly used in lament of how Israel saw all these things, but refused to lay them to heart. The same phrase is used like this in criticism of Israel in Is. 57:1,11; Jer. 12:11; Zech. 7:12, and in the frequent pleas for them to set their heart on God's words (Ez. 40:4; 44:5; Mal. 2:2 "If you will not lay it to heart"). All these passages are in the context of the exiles. It is one thing to tick boxes and hear ideas, but faith means setting these things in our hearts as a truth to live by.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 43

Isaiah 43:1 But now thus says Yahweh who created you, Jacob, and He who formed you, Israel: Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you-

We could translate "And now thus says Yahweh the one creating you Jacob and the one forming you Israel". See on Is. 44:24. It is the new creation of Israel that is in view. So often, the fact Yahweh is creator is presented as a reason to trust Him for help (Ps. 115:15; 124:8 "Our help is in the name of Yahweh, who made heaven and earth"; 134:3; 146:5,6 "Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help... who made heaven and earth"; Is. 42:5; 45:18; Jer. 10:11,12). To minimize His creative power through faithless scientific theory simply takes away our grounds for personal faith. The restoration prophecies stress the connection between creation and salvation: Is. 42:5,6 "He who created the heavens and stretched them out, He who spread out the earth and that which comes out of it... I will hold your hand and will keep you"; Is. 43:1 "thus says Yahweh who created you, Jacob, and He who formed you, Israel: Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you"; Is. 44:24-28 "Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: I am Yahweh who makes all things". Any fears about our final salvation should be assuaged by the reflection that God can do and create anything- what He has done physically is the guarantee He can do it spiritually. The God who created the heavens and the earth is the God who created his people through His acts of salvation. This is why Isaiah's argument often mocks the gods of the nations because they were not the creators, and therefore unable to save. This is why the Psalmist of Ps. 121 looks to the mountains, each with their own supposed deity, and reflects that *his* help comes from Yahweh who is the sole creator of heaven and earth.

The exiles feared they were not good enough to be redeemed. But Yahweh desperately wanted them; He had in prospect redeemed them, but it was now for them to respond. And this is how it is with His appeal to people today. He not only created us but "formed" us for the moment at which we accept His redemption. Our entire biography and genetic prehistory, even including our own sins, was all part of that formation of a person to come to an optimal point at which they can say "Yes" to Him. By saying "Yes" we realize that nothing was random, meaning was attached to every event, leading to that moment of Divine-human encounter.

"I have redeemed you" is discussed on Is. 40:2. Yahweh Himself is the *go'el* of His people, He had paid the price to redeem them from slavery.

I have called you by your name. You are Mine- God's Name is over His people (Dt. 28:10). So to bear God's Name is to recognize His complete ownership and even conquest of us. And yet there's a significant twist to all this in Is. 43:1: "I have called you by your name, because you are mine". It seems like a slip- we expect God to say that He has called us by His Name, because we are His. But no- He wishes us to bear both His

Name and our own name, He doesn't wish to subsume us beneath His ownership and manifestation to the point that we are not significant as persons. We expect the creator, owner and redeemer of someone or something to name it with *His* name. But God dashes that expectation- He says instead that we are called by *our* name. In this we see the extent to which God has created us so that *we* might have real, personal existence and salvation, not merely to as it were extend Himself. In this we see a profound insight into the utter depth of God's outgiving grace. And the huge importance God gives to human personality and individual character- to the human person. This is profound comfort as we live out our lives in an increasingly dehumanized world, where the value of the human person is progressively negated.

Having been created and called by God is a guarantee that He will continue to work us to save us. None of us can deny either of those basic realities, and neither could Israel. To name something implied ownership- "You are mine" because He had called them and named them.

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and flame will not scorch you-

Earlier in Is. 40-42 God has envisaged the exiles travelling from Babylon to Zion over a road which goes directly as the crow flies, with any intervening valleys or hills levelled; with trees planted along the road and ample provision of food and water in the desert. Now we learn that they will calmly cross any water sources in their way, in fact they would pass through any bush fire or other barrier they might encounter. Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel “found grace in the wilderness” before, and they would do again, “When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest” (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would “cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble”. This is why Isaiah’s prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11). Daniel's friends were not burnt by the flames, and they were intended to be understood as representative of all the exiles.

Isaiah 43:3 For I am Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel your Saviour. I have given Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Sheba in your place- Sheba is LXX Syene, confining the geographical areas to what we know as Egypt. Isaiah 40-66 is full of encouragement to Judah in Babylon to “fear not” and make the move back to the land. They are

encouraged that “I have redeemed thee…thou art mine…for I am the Lord thy God… thy saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee” (Is. 43:1,3 AV). As a reward for allowing the Jews to return, the kings of Persia were given Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba. At least, that is the usual commentary. However, according to Herodotus these campaigns were failures that ended in disaster. The Jews were doubtful as to whether God would really accept them now, after all their sin; and they were trapped in the good life, and the difficulty of uprooting from the world they were in. *They were just like us!* They had to be reminded that their Saviour had paid the ransom to redeem them, and therefore they must do their part and leave. And the blood of Jesus should work a like inspiration for us, all too loaded down with our burden of sin, unworthiness, spiritual dysfunction…

Another take is that as :4 explains, "I will give people in your place"- in that other nations were not given the chance of salvation. By grace they were passed over, at this time- for unresponsive Israel.

Isaiah 43:4 Since you have been precious and honoured in My sight and I have loved you; therefore I will give people in your place, and nations instead of your life- As a reward for allowing the Jews to return, the kings of Persia were given Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba (:3). All this was by grace, for the exiles were not responsive. God's grace is prevenient in the sense that He takes the initiative, as all true lovers do. Their preciousness was "in My sight", in the eyes of the lover, imputing righteousness to them which of themselves they didn't have. To be 'precious in the sight' of someone means to save them by grace (s.w. 1 Sam. 26:21 "Then Saul said, I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes today"; 2 Kings 1:13 "Man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty your servants, be precious in your sight"; Ps. 72:14).

Isaiah 43:5 Don’t be afraid; for I am with you- This is said so often, in allusion to Joshua and Israel being encouraged to re-enter the land and possess it. It was primarily relevant to the exiles in Babylon / Persia who feared to return and doubted Yahweh's abiding presence with them. But it now is encouragement to all who wish to enter the Kingdom.

I will bring your seed from the east, and gather you from the west- The 'bringing' and 'gathering' of the exiles (Is. 43:5) would have been primarily fulfilled at the restoration (same words in Neh. 1:9). But most of the exiles remained in the lands of their captivity, just as people resist the Gospel's call today. They had to themselves bring and gather themselves (Is. 45:20 "Assemble yourselves and come. Draw near together"; 49:18 "all these gather themselves together, and come to [Zion]"; 60:4 "they all gather themselves together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far"), so that God would confirm this by bringing and gathering them (Is. 43:5; Jer. 31:8; Ez. 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; Zech.

10:10). And so today with all who wish to be in God's Kingdom; our desire to be there and first moves towards it will be confirmed many times over by God's work through His Spirit.

Isaiah 43:6 I will tell the north, 'Give them up!' and tell the south, 'Don't hold them back! Bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth- The points of the compass may just give the impression of a general regathering from all around. But we note the promise to regather the Jews from "the south", Egypt, to where they fled in faithless fear. And in Jeremiah's time, against the specific commandment of God not to go there, and with God having said that those who fled to Egypt would die there. We have here, therefore, an example of God saving people from holes which they themselves have dug.

Isaiah 43:7 each one who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, yes, whom I have made'- Yahweh speaks of the returnees as if they were a new creation, created by Him along with the heavens and earth of the temple which He had stretched out in Zion (Isaiah 43:7; 44:2). He did not form this new land / heavens of the kingdom and temple of Israel in vain- He created it to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). But the Jews acted like the old creation. And the promise of new creation was deferred until the time of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). Judah for the most part declined to inhabit / dwell in the new heavens and earth [the same word in Isaiah 45:18 is frequently used re. how the returnees *dwelt* in the cities of Judah]. Every one of the exiles was formed personally to return to the land; God's formative hand likewise has been at work in the biography and genetic prehistory of everyone who encounters the Gospel.

Paul saw more potential in the Jewish mind for Christ than other races; thus he speaks in Rom. 11 of how the natural branch which has been cut off [Israel] will be more effectively grafted back into the olive tree than the wild Gentile branches. This of course has similarities with the Lord's teaching about Himself as the vine, whose unfruitful branches had been cut off (Jn. 15:2). Israel "much more" than the Gentiles can be grafted back in, whereas Gentile converts do this "against nature" (Rom. 11:24). In the context of Israel's final repentance, God speaks of how every one of the Jewish people has been potentially created for His glory, because they carry His Name (Is. 43:7). Although Israel have been "quenched as a wick" for their sins (Is. 43:17 RVmg.), we are to realize that the wick is still smouldering, and are to follow the Lord's example of never totally quenching it but instead seek to fan the wick of Israel back into life (Is. 42:3).

Isaiah 43:8 Bring out the blind people who have eyes, and the deaf who have ears- See on Is. 42:19. The servant-Messiah is described as being blind and deaf (Is. 42:19)- just as those who returned from Babylon were called blind, yet having eyes; deaf, yet having

ears (Is. 43:8). They had the potential to see and hear; and the servant-Messiah likewise was at that time deaf and blind, but had the potential to see and hear with the vision and words of Messiah. It is hard to understand these words otherwise. They refused to allow the spiritual potential available to be unleashed upon them; see on Is. 42:18. "Bring out" is the same word in Is. 42:7, and putting the passages together we get the idea that the exiles were as blind people, who were to be both freed from prison and also given their sight.

This is the language of the court room, as GNB: "Summon my people to court. They have eyes, but they are blind; they have ears, but they are deaf!". The deaf and blind Israel were God's star witness- to His grace. His initial plan had been to open their eyes in Babylon, and for them to leave Babylon for Zion (Is. 42:7). They refused to open their eyes, or have their eyes opened. And so God decided to take them out of Babylon whilst blind and guide them by the hand over unknown [to them] roads (Is. 42:16). Yet they remained wilfully blind, as Is. 42 laments. He even forced their eyes and ears open, but still they refused to see and hear (Is. 42:18-25). And now they are presented as the star witness to His grace and power to save. They are blind and deaf; possibly we are to suppose they are dumb as well. The Hebrew word translated "deaf" essentially means 'to hold your peace', to be silent. So the idea of dumbness is also present in the word. They said nothing, but their very existence was proof of God's grace. Because according to the terms of their covenant with Him, He was to have destroyed them as a nation because of their apostasy. But He had not done so. The blind, deaf and dumb servant is Yahweh's witness. And it turns out that those taking Yahweh to court either remain silent, or their witnesses are idols which are also blind, deaf and dumb.

The summons and gathering of Israel to court as witnesses connects with their gathering from Babylon in :5,6. They were gathered from Babylon in order to appear in court as witnesses to God's gracious purpose to save them. And it was this gracious salvation which made Him unlike any of the other gods, who had no grace, patience, forgiveness nor salvation.

Isaiah 43:9 Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the peoples be assembled. Who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear, and say, That is true-

Verses 8-13 are a court scene, with God as both judge and defendant. The nations are asked to attend, and provide witnesses. The nations provide no witnesses; whereas God provides Israel as His witnesses (:10,12). He describes them as His servant (:10)- whom we have just learnt in Is. 42:18-21 is considered by God as blind, deaf and useless. But this blind and deaf servant is in fact a witness to God's grace. The idea of being God's witnesses is transferred to us; we are to witness to the whole world because we are witnesses of God's grace in the Lord Jesus (Lk. 24:48). The case to be tried is whether

God can redeem His weak and sinful people and establish them in His Kingdom- the issue echoes down to our day, in that the case is whether God can really save someone as weak as me. There are no witnesses against this, not one, throughout the whole world. Israel are God's witnesses- not simply is their existence a witness to God, as these verses are sometimes misunderstood by over eager apologists for God. Rather they are witnesses to His saving grace. Their continued existence despite their sin, and the absolute possibility of their restoration into God's Kingdom- that is the essential witness to God's grace. Not simply a witness to His existence, but more specifically, witnesses to His power to save. We miss so much if we merely read the following court scene as meaning 'Israel still exists, there are Jews on the earth today, therefore God exists'. That is not really the point. Elsewhere, God cites "the former things" as witnesses of Him and of His saving purpose for Israel. What were the former things? "The former things shall be forgotten" (see on :18; "the former things shall not be remembered", Is. 65:18)- all the sin and failure. But it was how God dealt with Israel's "former things" which were the witness to Him as He is and was and always shall be- the God who saves sinners by grace. In this sense Israel were to remember their former things, their sins and God's gracious forgiveness of them (Is. 44:20,21). Is. 46:8,9 is clear about this: "Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me". Only Yahweh would forgive so much sin, "the former things"; no other god would have done. There is none like Him in His forgiveness of His people.

His declaration of the future likewise was proof of His case- even before it was fulfilled. For the fact He even predicted a future with Him for Israel was evidence- of His saving grace to Israel. For otherwise His appeal to 'I have made prophecies about the future' makes no sense. The fact He has prophesied about the future doesn't of itself prove anything nor make Him God- because it had not been fulfilled at that point. There was no evidence provided by that of itself. But the fact He had a future with Israel, or wanted to have a future with them, was there and then a witness of His abiding, saving love toward Israel. The fact God speaks of a future with Israel was right then an evidence of the truth of the legal case against Him- He was with His people still and intended to be, whereas no other god would stick with their people and intend to do so in the future. So it is not that simply prophecy of future events makes Yahweh so distinctly "God".

The idea of these verses is not that 'Israel still exists therefore God exists, they are witnesses to His existence'. Many small nations have survived through the millennia [Latvians, e.g.], and this argument in fact makes a mockery of apologetics [not that God and His word need apologetics]. Israel is instead a witness to God's gracious power to save sinners. That is what we all need to reflect upon and believe.

The very fact God saw a future for Israel, a future with Himself, was the huge proof that He is a God who saves and forgives His people. He doesn't cut them off from being a

people, even though He legally should and could have done. And at times, as we see in Hosea, He did say in His emotional wrath that it was all over. This is in fact the same message as Jeremiah's- that after the exile, the people of God had a future. And a glorious future. The fact He had this future planned for them was and is the evidence of His unfailing grace to His people. Thus "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you *a future* and a hope" (Jer. 29:10,11). Note the gift of a future to a people who stood condemned to non-existence as a nation. This is the "future" that God has in view in later Isaiah. Likewise "Thus says the LORD: “Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears… they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for *your future*, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country" (Jer. 31:16,17). Note that these promises in Jeremiah of a "future" are specifically to the exiles, the same audience as Isaiah 40-66.

This leads us to the difficult question: 'So what is the current status of Israel with God?'. The answer is multi faceted because there are so many Bible verses to fit into the picture. Interpretations vary from those who would say God is done with Israel, having told them "You are not My people" and declared a new Israel, Israel after the Spirit, open to all who become the seed of Abraham by baptism into the Lord Jesus, Abraham's singular seed. And indeed, "they are not all Israel who are of Israel". The other end of the spectrum is Christian Zionism, arguing that Israel today are God's people and enjoy His blessings in their land, despite their rejection of His Son. My synthesis of it all is that indeed, faith and baptism into the Lord Jesus is critical for now being God's Israel, and He is not in relationship with Israel. But they are "beloved for the fathers' sakes", and "What advantage has the Jew? Much every way…". There is a major teaching in Rom. 9-11, backed by the OT scriptures Paul quotes to make his case, that finally, "all Israel [natural and spiritual] shall be saved". "Has God cast away His people?" is given a resounding "No", but partly because God has redefined His "people". At times God did speak in His wrath, "Lo Ammi", 'You are not My people'. But He relented. That was the wrath of love. His love for Israel is indeed eternal, but it is the love of a man for his former wife, despite him being now in another relationship. And Paul also goes on to argue that natural Israel will finally be returned to God- quite separately to the fact He has redefined "My people". The redeemer shall indeed return to Zion, to the remnant in Jacob who have turned from ungodliness. Finally natural Israel will be restored to relationship with God, the marriage will be re-established. As Paul exalts at the end of Rom. 11, this will be a spectacular triumph for God's saving grace. Israel do have "a future", when finally all the former things of millennia of rebellion, ingratitude and sin shall no longer come to mind. And in Isaiah, Yahweh challenges any other god to demonstrate anything similar to that level of grace, forgiveness and love. So the fact

God still ultimately has a future for natural Israel is the parade example of His grace. Yahweh shall eternally be vindicated as the God of love and saving grace.

The language of this court case has many similarities with Akkadian documents relating to court cases. There are many records of summoning others to court, and challenging them to produce witnesses. But this would be done if those being summoned were those who had made a claim against the defender. There are at times 'voices' in Isaiah, most clearly seen in Is. 40. Quite possibly :8,9 here are 'voices' calling the nations to the court case. Yahweh is as it were under accusation, and so those who were disputing Him were being asked to come to court with their witnesses that He was lying. They had taken Yahweh to court- that is why He is the defendant. The very idea of "God in the dock" is absurd, but that is what we are doing if we doubt His power to save His sinful people. The issue under dispute was whether God could save His people from their sins and the consequences of those sins- exile in Babylon. The Akkadian documents would suggest that in such a case, those summoned would have to pay a penalty if in fact they could not prove their case or if they simply failed to present any witnesses. And there was indeed a judgment penalty for them. Paul in Romans surely has this scene in mind when he too presents God in the dock… and "Let God be declared true, and every man [found] a liar". C.S. Lewis in his book *God in the Dock* gets all this so clearly.

Isaiah especially is full of restoration prophecies; but Isaiah especially carries repeated statements that God can predict the future, and that His prophetic word will surely come to pass. These repeated statements are surely to encourage Judah to believe the restoration prophecies, and to see that what was prophesied really would and could come to pass- but it required their response! And yet as discussed on Is. 41:22, the emphasis and flavour of the words used is not simply upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

The wonder of Israel's God was not so much that He declared future things in a way that could be understood before they happened, but rather that He 'declared' the meaning of past events. There is a certain enigma to Israel's history, both as history, and also sociologically, psychologically, indeed in every way. It is that enigma which is declared in God's word, enabling Israel to make sense of what happens to them by their reflection, *after the event*, upon God's word. Likewise it seems that only once the events have happened can we look back with true understanding into God's word and understand. This was in fact the case with a number of the predictions of the Lord Jesus

(Jn. 2:19; 3:14; 11:50; 21:18). They would have remained enigmas, until after the event. And then, all would have been so clear.

Isaiah 43:10 You are My witnesses, says Yahweh, With My servant whom I have chosen; that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, neither will there be after Me- This language alludes to the Babylonian god Marduk; the point being that Yahweh and not the god of Babylon is supreme. See on Is. 40:25. The Jews only totally quit idolatry some time later; they liked to think, as we also tend to, that we can serve the gods of our world in the name of Yahweh worship. But Yahweh is presented as supreme, and Marduk as nothing. God's people are here asked to believe very basic things about Yahweh; but those things would preclude belief in any other god. Their conversion was to be used to bring others to incorporation in God's new, multiethnic people. Hence LXX "Be ye my witnesses, and I too am a witness, saith the Lord God". The invitation is to be witnesses.

"That you may know" surely refers to the nations gathered at the court case, indeed, to all spectators at it of all time. God's extreme grace to Israel, witnessed in their continued existence as His servant, showed "that I am He". His grace to them helps us "understand" Him. It showed the essence of His Name, Yahweh, I am, which is essentially His personality and characteristics. "With My servant" is hard to understand; the idea seems to be that the fact Israel continued to be "with" God, still His servant although blind and deaf, was all part of their witness to His power to save. Thus CEV "My people, you are my witnesses and my chosen servant".

Isaiah 43:11 I Myself am Yahweh; and besides Me there is no saviour- No other god would or could have forgiven and saved a people like Yahweh did. And this grace, salvation and forgiveness was fundamentally a part of Him: "I Myself am Yahweh" who does this.

This continues the appeal noted on :10 to quit belief in any other god. Yahweh's Name is declared as His character- merciful, truthful, judging sin, patient etc. (Ex. 34:5-7); but above all, in being a personal saviour. This is why "Jesus", 'Yah saves', is the quintessence of what God is all about. He who will be who He will be, manifesting His characteristics as He does so, must have His way in us too. Babylon and Nineveh were condemned for having the attitude that “I am, and there is none beside me” (Is. 47:8; Zeph. 2:15). Their self-perception was a parody on the Name and being of Yahweh: He alone can say “I am, and there is none else” (Is. 43:11; 44:6; 45:6,21) and seek to be who He is. He alone can seek to articulate the characteristics that make up His Name onto the lives of others, and onto the things that comprise His Kingdom. We are not to be who we are; to ‘just be yourself’; to ‘just do it’, as foolish slogans and adverts encourage us. We are here to show forth His mercy, truth, judgment of sin, patient

saving of the weak etc., not our own personality. We are, in the very end, Yahweh manifested to this world, through our imitation of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 43:12 I have declared, I have saved, and I have shown; and there was no strange god among you. Therefore you are My witnesses, says Yahweh, That I am God- See on Is. 44:26. The allusion is to Israel's earlier salvation from Egypt. Although there were 'strange gods' carried by them, clearly it was Yahweh alone who saved and who declared / showed the meaning of their entire history; see on :9.

Isaiah 43:13 Yes, since the day was I am He- The idea may be that "from this time forth I am he", i.e. they were to repent and never again have idols, but accept "Yahweh", 'I am who I am', 'I am that I am', for who He was and is; and not just in Name only.

And there is no one who can deliver out of My hand. I will work, and who can hinder it?- Even the rumours the exiles must have heard of Samaritan opposition were to be discounted. Every conceivable encouragement was given to the people, to go up and be part of the Kingdom work; nothing could stand in their way, if only they would go forward in joyful faith. They had been redeemed, they simply had to believe this and act as if they had been saved from Babylon and translated into the Kingdom which was to be established. The similarities with us are *exact*. The dramatic story of Job thrice uses the same phrase as in Is. 43:13, concluding that "who can hinder...?" God's way (Job 9:12; 11:10; 23:13). The exiles were to understand that no human opposition or discouragement can turn back or hinder God's purpose to save His people, even if they are as Job in suffering. His saving and restorative purpose will not be hindered, if we wish to identify with it.

Isaiah 43:14 Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring all of them down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships of their rejoicing-

GNB probably has it right: "Israel's holy God, the LORD who saves you, says, "To save you, I will send an army against Babylon; I will break down the city gates, and the shouts of her people will turn into crying". Clearly the fulfilment was in the shouts of Belshazzar's party being abruptly ended by the fall of the city to Darius. The fall of Babylon was envisioned as happening so that the Jewish exiles might return to Judah. All in world geopolitics was to be for their sakes. But many of them remained there and prospered in the Persian administration which took over after Babylon's fall. LXX "and I will stir up all that flee, and the Chaldeans shall be bound in ships". Babylon fell so that Persia would take over the administration of the 127 provinces where the Jews were scattered, and would allow them to return to Judah (Isaiah 43:14). The cup of judgment

which Judah drunk for 70 years was passed to Babylon (Isaiah 51:22). This accounts for Isaiah's repeated and detailed emphasis on the coming fall of Babylon for Judah / Israel's sake (e.g. Isaiah 47). Although they had sinned, Yahweh showed His gracious love for His people by bringing down Babylon (Isaiah 48:14). "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee [Cyrus] by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me " (Isaiah 45:4). Likewise the iron curtain came down to allow preachers of God's Truth to take it to those once in darkness. And English has become the lingua-franca of the world, enabling Christian preaching to now penetrate societies literally world-wide. See on Ezra 2:1.

Isaiah 43:15 I am Yahweh your Holy One, the Creator of Israel- your King- Because Yahweh God was Israel's creator, therefore He ought to have been their King. They should not have remained in the lands of their exile under a human king. If we really believe His creative authority over us, then He will rule in every aspect of our lives. Realizing that God is a "faithful creator" should inspire us to commit the keeping of our lives to Him in time of suffering (1 Pet. 4:19).

Isaiah 43:16 Thus says Yahweh, who makes a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters- Again, the salvation of Israel from Egypt was to be believed in as a real prototype of their deliverance from exile; and when Israel refused that, of our deliverance from this world and into God's Kingdom. What seems uncharted waters and an impossible, confusing journey will in fact become pain; a path and way appears, which we are to enthusiastically follow. The impression that the path to the Kingdom is hopelessly complex and hard to discern is only because of human lack of faith. For the Christian, the fact we have been brought through the waters of baptism is proof enough that God will continue to bring us through the rest of the journey.

Isaiah 43:17 who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the mighty man (they lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinct, they are quenched like a wick)- This recalls the glorying of the Song of Moses over the Egyptians. And so it could have been for God's people in exile. No political nor military power could stand between them and restoration in God's Kingdom. And likewise in our path towards that same Kingdom which they refused. We note that Egypt was quenched like a wick, but the Lord Jesus sought to fan the smouldering wick of Israel into full flame.

Isaiah 43:18 Don't remember the former things, and don't consider the things of old- The returned exiles are encouraged to forget their former sins as God also has done. This was the basis for their lack of faith and need for constant assurance not to be afraid but to believe in God's desire to restore them. And yet Isaiah's prophecies several times

explains that only God "knows" the former things. He alone understands the real dimensions of our sins and has dealt with them. Maybe the idea is that we are to forget them, to entrust our past to God- knowing that our past includes multiple sins and failures. And yet the contrast is stark with Is. 46:9 "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else". So perhaps the idea is that Israel were not to simply focus upon their halcyon past, of God's dramatic interventions at the Red Sea and so forth. The miracle at the Red Sea and the call of Abraham are alluded to as the "former things" (Is. 43:18; 44:7). They were to in addition look forward to the glorious future when there would be the greatest Divine intervention, in the establishment of His Kingdom. And that is a challenge to the new Israel too. Grammatically, we would have here a case of "Not A but B" meaning 'Not so much A but more B'. The past has been dealt with, and that includes all our sins, all the things we cannot put the clock back for and re-live and make different choices than we did.

Isaiah 43:19 Behold, I will do a new thing. It springs forth now; don't you perceive it?-

As discussed on :9, the "former things" of :18 were Judah's sins; they are contrasted with the "new thing" being created. Surely Paul has this in mind in 2 Cor. 5:17, when he says that in the new creation, old things are passed away. Those "old things" are the things of sin and life in sin; the "new things" are their antithesis. For that is just what Is. 43:18,19 is saying.

The "new thing" promised in Is. 43:19 was the new covenant of Jer. 31:22,31, a new heart and a new spirit within them (Ez. 36:26), being called by a new name (Is. 62: 2) and the creation of a new 'heavens and a new earth' (Is. 65:17). But that "new thing… springs forth now; don't you perceive it?" (Is. 43:19). It could have happened to the exiles, indeed God made it start to spring forth then. But they refused it. It has been offered to the world now, and so few of us grasp it. Those who do and are baptized into the new covenant "walk in newness of life".

Is. 40:1,2 speaks a message of comfort to the exiles: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God". But [in full allusion to this prophecy], the exiles were like Rachael who refused to be comforted over her loss (Jer. 31:15); they claimed they found "none to comfort" (Lam. 1:2,16,17,21). But they were willfully refusing the comfort of God's repeated word of hope and restoration. They didn't grasp the plain teaching of the prophetic word because they didn't want to- it demanded too much of them, and a giving up of the comfortable Babylon life. Hence Is. 43:19 laments: "I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth [in the decree to return to Zion?], do you not perceive it?". And do we "not perceive it?" time and again in our own lives, as to the potentials God is opening up, and His desire to save us?

I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert- See on Is. 40:3. The exiles' fears about the way back were allayed: "I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (43:19). They were constantly encouraged that as God had redeemed His people from Egypt through the water, fire and desert, so He would and could redeem them from their Egypt. Water could have followed Judah through the desert journey from Babylon to Zion. But they hankered after a human army to protect them, and most of them wouldn't even begin the journey. Is. 40 had asked Israel to make that way back to Zion, through repentance. But God now goes a step further in saying that He will make the way- all they had to do was walk the journey. It's the same with us.

Isaiah 43:20 The animals of the field shall honour Me, the jackals and the ostriches; because I give water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen- The water that came from that one rock tasted as if God had opened up fresh springs and torrents in the desert (Ps. 74:15 NAS). It always tasted as if it was just gushing out of the spring; and this wonder is commented upon by both David and Isaiah (Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21). It was as if the rock had just been struck, and the water was flowing out fresh for the first time. In this miracle, God clave the rock and there came out rivers (Hab. 3:9; Ps. 78:16,20; Is. 43:20). Each part of Israel's encampment had the water as it were brought to their door. And so it is in our experience of Christ, and the blessing enabled by His sacrifice. The blessings that come to us are deeply personal, and directed to us individually. He died once, long ago, and yet the effect of His sacrifice is ever new.

This amazing redemption of Israel from exile was intended to elicit repentance from the areas of the Gentiles within the eretz promised to Abraham, whose cities were now inhabited by jackals. The intention was that they would return with God's people. This didn't happen, but will at the last day.

Isaiah 43:21 The people which I formed for Myself, that they might show forth My praise- Both as individuals and collectively, the whole biography and even genetic prehistory of God's people has been prepared by God in their formation, so that they might encounter God's salvation at an optimal point for them to give the maximum glory to Him (Is. 43:21). "Formed" is the word for the potter working on clay, used of how God fashions human hearts or psychologies, working on the deeply internal fabric of the human being (Ps. 33:15). The 'forming' in view is not only "in the womb" (Is. 44:2,24) but throughout their whole psychological and genetic formation. It is possible to strive with our former or "maker" (Is. 45:9), to be unresponsive to His touch of us the clay. The Messiah figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus, was the ultimate case of being "formed" by Yahweh's hand (Is. 49:5 s.w.), implying He too was clay, of human and not Divine nature. It is the word used

of God forming man from the dust (Gen. 2:7), and forming the earth (Jer. 33:2). What is implied here is a new creation.

The blind, deaf and dumb Israel had been formed to praise the grace of their God. "That they might..." implies intention, that may not be realized. The next verses lament that Israel had not responded to God's love, and were not praising Him as intended. So "That they might show forth My praise" is surely a statement of God's intention and hope, *that they might* respond to His formation of them for Himself. And that hopeful intention wasn't realized in them, at least not at that time nor as God had hoped at the time.

Isaiah 43:22 Yet you have not called on Me, Jacob; but you have been weary of Me, Israel- Despite all the formative handling of the Divine potter, all the stimuli and potential granted by grace (:21), Jacob had refused to respond. They were weary of God, and God was wearied with their sins and insincere worship (s.w. :23,24). We have here the language of God and Israel falling out of love, despite such love on His side, and such wonderful potentials.

Isaiah 43:23 You have not brought Me of your sheep for burnt offerings; neither have you honoured Me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, nor wearied you with frankincense-

There was no temple in Babylon, and so God seems to be saying that although He did not command sacrifices to be offered whilst they were there, He had hoped they would see through religion and offer Him sacrifice anyway, doing the best they could in the situation, rather than making excuses that they had no temple in which to sacrifice. He was disappointed they didn't.

God had not given His people wearisome laws and regulations; but they were "weary of Me" (:22 s.w.). They perhaps made the complaint many do today- that God is boring, ritualistic, imposing of unreasonable demands and ceremonies. But actually that is but an excuse for personal unbelief and lack of commitment; for He insists here that His laws and principles are not like that. And if He says they are not, then it is not for us to claim otherwise. The exiles would have justified not sacrificing by saying there was no temple. But although God did not specifically command them ['burden them'] to keep the feasts in exile, He would have accepted their offerings. And there is evidence that there was a "little sanctuary" in Babylon where they could have offered sacrifice (see on Ez. 11:16). But they didn't offer them.

Isaiah 43:24 You have bought Me no sweet cane with money, nor have you filled Me with

the fat of your sacrifices- God didn't demand incense nor offerings (:23), and yet He notes that they didn't bring them to Him. "Sweet cane" is what was burnt to create incense. It's as if God still hoped they would thus express their love for Him, even in exile and away from the temple system. But they didn't, and instead burdened Him with their sins.

But you have burdened Me with your sins- God speaks of being burdened by Israel's sins- and yet this is a prelude to the passages which speak of the Lord Jesus bearing our sins on the cross (Is. 53:4,11,12). We even read of God being wearied by Israel's sins (Is. 7:13; Jer. 15:6; Ez. 24:12; Mal. 2:17). Even though God does not "grow weary" (Is. 40:28) by nature, it seems to me that in His full entering into His people's situation, He does allow Himself to grow weary with the sins of those with whom He is in covenant relationship. It was this kind of capacity which God has which was supremely revealed in His 'sharing in' the crucifixion of His Son.

You have wearied Me with your iniquities- When Israel were weary of God, He wearied them (Is. 43:22,24). Because they turned their back on Him (Jer. 2:27), He turned His back on them (Jer. 18:17). At the very time Israel put God to the test at Marah (Dt. 6:16), God responded by testing *them* (Ex. 15:25).

Isaiah 43:25 I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions-

This eager statement of forgiveness is juxtaposed with the clear statement in :24 that God is weary with their sins and their lack of love to Him. Yet He goes right on to say that He forgives all that. "I, even I, am He" who does this- only the "I am", Yahweh, He alone would act like this. No other God would do so.

Yahweh here prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: “I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions” (Is. 43:25 LXX). "I am" alludes to the Yahweh Name. He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord’s cross. We read in Mic. 6:9 that when the Lord’s voice calls to the city demanding repentance, “the man of wisdom shall see [perceive] thy name”- i.e. repent. We come to know God's Name in practice through the cycles of sin-repentance-forgiveness by God which we all pass through. It is through this process that we come to know the very essence of God's Name. Thus Is. 43:25 LXX: "I am '"I AM", who erases your iniquities". We come to know His Name, that it really *is* ("I am") all about forgiveness and salvation of sinners. Forgetting the Name of Yahweh was associated in David’s inspired thinking with a wrong attitude in “the secrets of the heart” (Ps. 44:20,21). By contrast, remembering / being aware of the Name affects our innermost being, the secrets of our heart, the hidden self which others don’t see.

For My own sake- The idea may be that He would forgive them by grace alone, and not because they had repented or somehow compensated for their sins. He was so zealous

to almost force through His saving purpose with them that He would forgive them anyway. This kind of one sided forgiveness and outpouring of love is commonly seen in relationships where one party is far more deeply committed and loving than the other one. This is so passionately felt by God that He goes on to legally challenge Israel to prove Him wrong; the final verses of this chapter record Israel's historical failures and impenitence. But rather like intending to open their blind eyes and lead them out of Babylon, but then deciding to lead them out as blind men anyway, so here God is at the very limit of how far He can force His way upon Israel. He now declares that He forgives them purely for His own sake. And reminds them in the next verses of how impenitent they have been.

And I will not remember your sins- God imputed His righteousness to them, because He had unconditionally forgiven them. Instead of calling upon them to mourn, as in first Isaiah, second Isaiah calls upon them to rejoice and accept His grace. They are to repent because God had forgiven them- not repent so that He might forgive them: "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake [i.e. not for the sake of your repentance or righteousness]... I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud [therefore] return [repent] to me, for I have [already] redeemed you" (Is. 43:25; 44:22). This is God's grace in its essence. As they sat by the rivers of Babylon, even as they later became caught up in the politics and business of Babylon, God's heart broke for His people. And He announced this utter grace- that He had forgiven them, even though they'd not really repented, and counted them as righteous. And therefore He begged them to "return", not only to return to Him in repentance in their hearts, but to show this by 'returning' to the land. And, *so* tragically, they preferred to stay in Babylon, for the most part. His grace was poured out to them... and Israel would not. All we can resolve in our hearts is to feel for God in this tragedy, and to realize that these very same prophecies of grace have been applied to us. And it's for us to respond to them.

We read of God 'remembering' His covenant (Ex. 2:24; Lev. 26:42; Jer. 14:10,21); and of God 'not remembering' or forgetting the sins of His covenant people (Is. 43:25; Jer. 31:34). If words mean anything, this surely implies that sins which God once remembered, He then stops remembering and 'forgets'. Such language seems on one hand inappropriate to the God who by nature doesn't have to forget and can recall all things. But He has willingly entered into the meaning of time which is experienced by those with whom He is in covenant relationship. He allows Himself to genuinely feel it like it is. The 'gap' between God stating His plan and its actual fulfillment is the opportunity for men and women to plead with Him, as Moses did, as Abraham did regarding Sodom (Gen. 18:17-22), as so many have done... and He is most definitely open to human persuasion.

Isaiah 43:26 Put Me in remembrance, let us plead together. Set forth your case, that you may be justified- LXX continues the connection with God not remembering their sins in :25: "But do thou remember, and let us plead together: do thou first confess thy transgressions, that thou mayest be justified". The stress would be on the idea that although God had forgotten their sins, they were not to forget them but to remain ever aware of His gracious forgiveness. God wants them to accept His forgiveness and justification of them; but for them to do so, they needed to first of all be convicted of their own lack of justification. And so He invites them to put forth a legal case that they are not sinners and don't need justification by grace.

Is. 62:6,7 speaks of watchmen [= the prophets, Ezekiel 3:17; Jer. 6:17; Hab. 2:1] set upon Jerusalem's walls as watchmen 'putting God in remembrance', keeping no silence [in their prophesying] until Jerusalem was established. For the link between the prophets and standing on a watchtower, see Hab. 2:1. Is this not a reference to Malachi, Haggai and Zechariah prophesying as the basis upon which the newly built walls of Jerusalem would be preserved, and the city develop into the Messianic Kingdom hoped for? Note that the rebuilt Jerusalem of Ezra's time and the latter day Jerusalem are the same thing in Isaiah; the Kingdom could've come then. Watchmen upon the walls were looking for something- for the approach of the Messianic messenger with good tidings of Judah's full return from captivity, of which Isaiah had spoken in Is. 52:7,8. But most of Judah preferred to stay in Babylon, took up a collection for the few who did return... and no Messiah could appear with that news. God had promised this- but He here asked to be put in remembrance of His promises (Is. 43:26), i.e. He asked for those watchmen to be His 'rememberancers', even though He cannot in that sense forget them (Ps. 119:49; Jer. 14:21). In all this we see an exquisite picture of how God works with men, how His promised faithfulness and omnipotence all the same has built into it a requirement for human prayerfulness and response. The reality was that the watchmen / prophets of Israel were blind, ignorant and sleepy (Is. 56:10).

Isaiah 43:27 Your first father sinned, and your teachers have transgressed against Me- This is in the context of God desperately appealing to Israel to accept His forgiveness and justification. He forgives them for His own sake (see on :25), He would forgive them by grace alone, and not because they had repented or somehow compensated for their sins. He was so zealous to almost force through His saving purpose with them that He would forgive them anyway. This kind of one sided forgiveness and outpouring of love is commonly seen in relationships where one party is far more deeply committed and loving than the other one. And so in line with this, God tries to help them as it were feel less bad about their sins, blaming the situation partly upon Adam their first father, and upon their bad teachers, and then in :28 upon their princes. This is desperate argument, but God comes over as that desperate for them to accept His love.

Their "intercessors" (Heb.) were also sinful, the same point made in Hebrews regarding the Lord being the only perfect priest.

Isaiah 43:28 Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; and I will make Jacob a curse, and Israel an insult- "I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary"- put forth "as polluted from the priesthood" (Ezra 2:62). This is tacit proof enough that the restoration from Babylon failed to be the potential restoration prophesied. Indeed, the behaviour of the Jews at that time attracted further curses and judgment. LXX "And the princes have defiled my sanctuaries: so I gave Jacob to enemies to destroy, and Israel to reproach". As explained on :27, this blame of the princes is an almost desperate attempt to help Israel feel not quite so shamed for their sins and to get them by all means to accept God's forgiveness.

We must be aware how Is. 44 continues. Having cursed Jacob and threatened even more judgment than the exiles had already, experienced, Is. 44 begins "Yet…". Despite this, God would still desperately pour out His Spirit upon them to still try to win them back. They were not to fear His wrath and condemnation, for even then there was a way out: "Yet listen now, Jacob My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen. This is what Yahweh who made you and formed you from the womb, who will save you, says: Don’t be afraid, Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour My Spirit on your seed, and My blessing on your offspring" (Is. 44:1-4).

ISAIAH CHAPTER 44

Isaiah 44:1 Yet listen now, Jacob My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen-

There is huge significance in the "Yet...". For it follows right on from God's terrible condemnation of Jacob in Is. 43:28 (see notes there). We note the parallel of "Jacob... Israel", suggesting God's hope that Jacob would yet eventually mature to Israel as did the historical Jacob. "The God of Jacob / Israel" is Yahweh's most frequently used title. There is quite some stress on Israel having been "chosen" (Is. 41:8-20; 43:1-13,19-21; 44:1-5; 49:1-7). They were "chosen" not because of their goodness but simply because of Divine grace (Dt. 7:6,7; 14:2). This chosing or election of Israel is much laboured by Paul in Romans; the "chosen" are not chosen for their righteousness, in fact, quite the opposite. So many 'good' and nice secular people were not chosen, but we were. The apparently random [to human eyes] 'chosing' is to be seen as a sign of God's utter grace. We cannot doubt that we have been chosen, for whoever is chosen is called, and we have all heard the call of the Gospel. Paul connects the idea of being chosen with grace, and being counted righteous as a result of that grace. Isaiah here does the same. Israel have just been bitterly condemned by God at the end of Is. 43; "yet" they are chosen, and in :2 they will be called "Jeshurun", the upright one. This was by imputed righteousness alone, and would be effected by the gift of the Spirit (:3). Paul's argument in Romans is so clearly an exposition, or almost a repeat, of what we have in Is. 44. Conviction of sin (at the end of Is. 43), nuanced by our calling / election, after the pattern of Jacob, objects of God's sovereign love and grace, the work of the Spirit and imputed righteousness through being "in" the suffering, perfect servant.

The appeal for Jacob to "listen" is asking for the exiles to repent. They had been chosen, but only their repentance would make that calling actual. It's the same with those who hear the Gospel today, having been chosen from the beginning.

It is significant that Paul takes a passage from one of Isaiah's servant songs here and applies it to us. The servant who suffered and witnessed to the world was evidently the Lord Jesus. And yet Isaiah is also explicit that the servant is the whole seed of Abraham, "Jacob", the slowly-developing people of God (Is. 41:8; 44:1). There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite "to let the oppressed go free... loose the bonds", and to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6) as Christ did (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. "He was oppressed", as Israel at that time were being "oppressed" by Assyria. As they were

covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory.

Isaiah 44:2 This is what Yahweh who made you and formed you from the womb, who will save you, says- Again and again, the fact God created us, physically and spiritually, is the guarantee He wants to save us. He has been forming us as a potter forms clay into a vessel, and bringing us to that moment where we consciously say "Yes" to Him. The exiles were at that point, but declined. Yahweh speaks of the returnees as if they were a new creation, created by Him along with the heavens and earth of the temple which He had stretched out in Zion (Is. 43:7; 44:2). He did not form this new land / heavens of the kingdom and temple of Israel in vain- He created it to be inhabited (Is. 45:18). But the Jews acted like the old creation. And the promise of new creation was deferred until the time of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). Judah for the most part declined to inhabit / dwell in the new heavens and earth [the same word in Isaiah 45:18 is frequently used of how the returnees *dwelt* in the cities of Judah].

Heb. "Save" is more often translated "help". This Fatherly image of help offered to a nervous child was to encourage the weak minded exiles to return to Zion and accept Yahweh's helping hand, just as His hand had 'helped' Hezekiah against the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:8). At the restoration, Ezra believed this "help" would enable the restoration to the extent that they didn't need any human soldiers to help them (Ezra 8:22 s.w.).

Don't be afraid, Jacob My servant- The way God showed grace and imputed righteousness to Jacob even before his birth is shown here. From the womb, Jacob was chosen to be God's servant; and yet Jacob coolly said that only if God did what He promised, would he agree to serve Yahweh, and have Him as his master. Earlier in the same servant prophecies, the servant Jacob is described as a useless servant: "Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect (Jacob was a perfect / plain man, Gen. 25:27), and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:19). Although the servant is worse than useless (a deaf messenger), he is seen as perfect by his Divine Master. And the servant prophecies are primarily based on Jacob (note, in passing, how often they associate the servant Jacob with idol worship, which seems to have been an earlier characteristic of Jacob). Consider too the allusions to Jacob in Is. 53; a man of sorrow and grief, despised of men, who would see his seed. As Christ felt a worm on the cross (Ps. 22:6), so Jacob is described (Is. 41:14). That even in his weakness, Jacob prefigured the Lord in his time of ultimate spiritual victory, shows in itself the way God imputed righteousness to him at the time.

And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen- The uncommon title "Jeshurun", 'the upright one', is used for Israel because they were being asked to repent and thereby live up to who they were intended to be; to realize their potential to which they have been chosen

or called at the beginning. But a big theme here is of imputed righteousness; having condemned Israel at the end of Is. 43, now God is going on to pour out His eternal love for them. Many languages form the diminutive, the 'fond' form of a personal name, by adding a suffix; '-y' in English [Mark = Marky], '-chik' in various Slavic languages, '-ina' in Latvian, '-ette', '-ou', or '-on' in French. In Hebrew, this is achieved by adding '-on' or '-un'. It seems to me that 'Yisraelun' is the fond, diminutive form of 'Yisrael'. Hence LXX renders 'Jeshurun' as "Beloved Israel". The God who has just so bitterly condemned His people now calls them by their diminutive.

Isaiah 44:3 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour My Spirit on your seed, and My blessing on your offspring- Ez. 20 and Jer. 31 make it clear that the exiles were intended to accept a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. That new covenant involved the gift of the Spirit, a heart of flesh rather than of stone, the psychological working of God within them. This is symbolized here as water and streams. This is the time spoken of in Is. 32:15 when "the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is considered a forest". They were the "dry ground", and out of that dry ground there could have arisen the Messiah figure of Is. 53:1. In the end, they refused the operation of that gift and Zerubbabel, the branch from Babylon (out of the dry ground) let the ball drop. And so these things were applied to the Lord Jesus and the gift of the Spirit in Him (Jn. 7:38,39). "My Spirit" and "My blessing" are parallel. The blessing promised to Abraham was of Yahweh being their God, and not only an eternal inheritance of the land. That "blessing" is understood in Acts 3:25,26 and Gal. 3 as the gift of the Spirit, the transformation of the hearts of the seed of Abraham so that they might become like the singular seed, the Lord Jesus, and thereby be prepared and made appropriate for the blessing of eternal inheritance of the land.

Isaiah 44:4 And they will spring up among the grass, as willows by the watercourses- LXX "And they shall spring up as grass between brooks, and as willows on the banks of running water". The returned exiles, or [later] all who wished to become part of God's restored Kingdom, would be empowered by the water of the Spirit (see on Is. 44:3) to "spring up" on what had previously been dry ground (Is. 44:4). That Spirit would be articulated partly through the prophetic word (Is. 55:10 s.w. "bud" AV). This will be the restored Eden, where Yahweh had caused the vegetation to "spring up" (s.w. Gen. 2:5). This springing up or growing would be in the fulfilment of the promises to David of the establishment of the Kingdom of his seed (s.w. 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 132:17). But the springing up would be of a community of people, the plural seed who were "in" the singular Messianic seed. And this is now experienced through baptism into the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:27-29). It is "righteousness" which would "spring up" (s.w. Is. 61:11); the work of the Spirit would result in the seed becoming righteous through their spiritual

transformation. And yet it will also be on account of their status as "in" the "branch of righteousness" which will "spring up" (Jer. 33:15). The work of the Spirit will be, and is, to transform the plural seed in practice into what they are by status in the Messiah-righteous. And it is this power, this gift, this Divine 'causing' us to be righteous, which every spiritual person so thirsts for. Is. 32:15-17 likewise sees the gift of the Spirit as producing the fruits of the Spirit, arising like good fruit from the previously dry ground: "the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is considered a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness… the work of righteousness will be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever". Yet the language here clearly recalls that of Num. 24:4, where God sees Israel as willows planted by the waters; He sees them as righteous when they were not. There is also clear allusion to the description of the righteous in Ps. 1:3: "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither". But this is all imputed righteousness, given God's strong words of condemnation for them at the end of Is. 43.

Isaiah 44:5 One will say, 'I am Yahweh's' and another will be called by the name of Jacob- And another will write with his hand 'to Yahweh', and honour the name of Israel- If we apply this to the Jewish exiles, the idea may be that they quit idolatry and their Babylonians names like "Mordechai" or "Esther", and renamed themselves with Hebrew names that included "Yah". Although at the time of the restoration not all knew their genealogy, they were accepted in any case, being surnamed with the Name of Jehovah and that of Jacob. And this has been applied to us in that "The Lord knows them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). See on Is. 48:1.

It would be thanks to Cyrus that the seed of Abraham would be redefined- Gentiles could become part of the covenant seed by saying "I belong to Yahweh" or writing Yahweh's Name on their hand (Is. 44:3,5). See on Is. 45:1. This didn't actually happen- but the prophecy was reapplied to the way that Gentiles became part of Abraham's seed through baptism into the Name (Gal. 3:27-29). The later servant poems / songs in Isaiah appear irrelevant to Cyrus, but applicable to the nation of Israel as God's "servant", or to one particular "servant". Perhaps this is reflective of the way that Cyrus didn't live up to his potential, and the 'servant' prophecies became capable of other potential fulfillments? And yet Is. 44:28 states: "Of Cyrus he says, 'He is my shepherd; he will fulfill all my purpose'". This is typical of prophecy which is conditional, even though the conditions aren't stated. It is observable that all the servant songs / poems have language and terms which repeat throughout them- it's as if one person *could* have fulfilled them all, they could've been relevant to one person, but in reality this didn't work out.

The Name of Jacob / Israel is here paralleled with Yahweh. Remember how Jacob in his doubt promised God: "If God will be with me... then shall Yahweh be my God" (Gen. 28:20,21); and at the end, Yahweh was Jacob's God. God seems to recognize this by describing Himself as the God of Jacob / Israel so very often. His joy, His sheer delight at Jacob's spiritual achievement is recorded throughout the Bible. The way God describes Himself as "the God of Israel" (201 times) or "the God of Jacob" (25 times) infinitely more times than anyone else's God is proof enough that God saw His relationship with Jacob as very special. "God of Abraham" occurs 17 times; "God of Isaac" 8 times; "God of David" 4 times. Remember that whenever we read "Israel", we are reading of the man Jacob and his children. That God was the God of mixed-up, struggling Jacob is a sure comfort to every one of us. God is not ashamed to be surnamed the God of Jacob (Heb. 11:16 Gk.).

But quite possibly we have here the Divine hope and intention that the Babylonians and other Gentiles would be converted to Israel's God, and would accompany His people out of Babylon to Zion. Just as some Egyptians decided to join Israel in the exodus. GNB points up the allusion to how people of the time wrote or tatooed the name of their god on their bodies: "One by one, people will say, 'I am the LORD's.' They will come to join the people of Israel. They each will mark the name of the LORD on their arms and call themselves one of God's people". "One by one" is a fair rendering of "This one will say... another will call... another will write on his arm". It suggests no conversion *en bloc* but true conversion, which axiomatically is of individuals, one by one, entering personal relationship with Yahweh. The idea of 'inscribing his hand 'To Yahweh'' is an allusion to the practice of branding slaves with the name of their owner, and the religious custom of tattooing sacred marks on the person (Lev 19:28). Paul may allude here in saying that he bears on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus, and the faithful are presented as having the marks of the name of God on their foreheads.

Isaiah 44:6 This is what Yahweh the King of Israel and His Redeemer, Yahweh of Armies, says- The "King of Israel" title may be an allusion to how the conquering power of Babylon considered themselves as "King of Israel" and all the territories they had conquered. Just as Cyrus, servant of Marduk, was effectively "My servant". So in fact Yahweh and not the king of Babylon / Persia was the actual "King of Israel". As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's go'el , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are

slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

I am the first, and I am the last; and besides Me there is no God- The sense may be as in Is. 41:4: "I Yahweh, the first and with the last, I am He". First and last are terms used by the Lord Jesus of those who shall be in His Kingdom (Mt. 20:16). "The last" would then refer to the last generation of God's people. Yahweh would save the exiles along with the "first" of His people such as Abraham; for at the time of the restoration of that last generation, there would be a resurrection of all God's true people, to form a new people would eternally inherit the reestablished Kingdom.

Isaiah 44:7 Who is like Me? Who will call, and will declare it, and set it in order for Me, since I established the ancient people? Let them declare the things that are coming, and that will happen- The emphasis and flavour of the words used for "call… declare… set in order" is not upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

The language of the court continues; as LXX "And who is like me? Let him stand and proclaim…". The 'past' aspect of God's evidence is that He established Israel as His people long ago, despite foreknowing all their sin and rebellion. The future aspect of His evidence is that despite all that, He still accepts them as His people and has an eternal love and hope for them.

Isaiah 44:8 Don't fear, neither be afraid. Haven't I declared it to you long ago, and shown it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is not. I don't know any other Rock- LXX "ye are witnesses if there is a God beside me". The experiences with the Assyrian destruction ought to have demonstrated this. The gods of Assyria couldn't save them, neither could the local deities whom Judah had trusted in at the time. Yahweh alone is the God of salvation. As developed on :9, this is the imagery of the courtroom. Israel are called as witnesses to Yahweh, and the idols are called as witnesses for the idolaters. We note the balance of the equation. Yahweh is not parallel with the idols, with the idolaters. Israel are called as Yahweh's witnesses, and the idols are called as witnesses for the idolaters. Those idolaters were therefore making

themselves God, by creating gods (:9). The court case is over whether Yahweh can indeed save His people. There was no God like Yahweh who forgave and saved His people by grace. God was a rock to Israel in that He was faithful to them- the allusion is to Dt. 32:4 "[He is] the Rock… for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness". God's faithfulness to Israel despite their unfaithfulness is what makes Him rock like. No other god was such a "Rock" to their people.

Isaiah 44:9 Everyone who makes an engraved image is vain. The things that they delight in will not profit. Their own witnesses don't see nor know, that they may be disappointed- In the imagery of the court case, Israel are witnesses to Yahweh, and the idols are witnesses to themselves. See on :8. The witnesses, the idols, cannot see nor understand anything. As discussed on Is. 43, Israel are also a silent witness- blind, deaf and dumb. But their very existence is a testament to God's saving grace and abiding desire to save Israel. The silence of the idols is different. After all, God is in the dock, accused of being unable to save. But no witnesses can say anything to condemn Him nor prove the case- that He is in fact unable to save. Indeed the idols are mocked, along with those who make them and trust in them. We can get in the spirit of this- considering anything else than God and His salvation to be a laughable, pathetic and absurd thing. Even though the world worships such idols.

Isaiah 44:10 Who has fashioned a god or moulds an image that is profitable for nothing?- The verse runs on from :9; they are disappointed who fashion their own gods. In the context, the idols have been called as witnesses, but they are silent in the witness box. They are not profitable, they can give no helpful testimony to the case. See on :8. Yahweh is continually presented as the former, creator and moulder of His people; and Israel are thereby witnesses to Him and His work (:8). This is the problem with playing God, which is the modern form of idolatry. We set ourselves up as creator, rather than allowing His hand to form and mould us in His image and likeness rather than us creating things in our own likeness.

Isaiah 44:11 Behold, all his fellows will be disappointed; and the workmen are mere men- LXX "and all by whom they were made are withered". The reference is to the idol makers of the previous verse. There is an emphasis upon the idol maker having "fellows" and their being shamed "together", twice emphasized. The idea is that idolatry is because people group together, it is a group function; idolatry arises out of groups of people together.

Let them all be gathered together. Let them stand up. They will fear. They will be put to shame together- This continues the courtroom analogy discussed on :8. They are to stand up to receive their judgment, and then go to the shame of condemnation together.

Isaiah 44:12 The blacksmith takes an axe, works in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with his strong arm. He is hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water, and is faint- "Works" is the same word as "makes [a god]" (:15). In our days, the works of our hands are the equivalent of making gods and idols. The picture is of a man working hard to make, work, mould, shape and plan an idol. Isaiah has used all these ideas about God's formative work with His people. Their strength failed in the work, whereas God's power in working with us is limitless. His strength in working for us doesn't fail. The "strong arm" of the idol maker contrasts ironically and pathetically with the "strong arm" of Yahweh who saves His people, and the descriptions of God found in Isaiah: His strength never fails nor does He ever grow faint. Nor is He in need of food and water (Is. 40:10 etc.).

Isaiah 44:13 The carpenter stretches out a line. He marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes. He marks it out with compasses, and shapes it like the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to reside in a house-

The contrasts are not simply between Yahweh and the idols, but specifically between Yahweh and the creators of idols. The issue at stake is 'Who has creative power? And what is the nature of their creation?'. Yahweh is presented as natural and spiritual creator of His people through forgiveness and gace, and of a new heavens and new earth, a restored Kingdom of God on earth. The wonder of all that is so magnifident compared to the creation of the idol creators- a dumb piece of carved wood, which cannot speak nor save its creator.

The creation of idols was something done only under the supposed command of the gods. It seems there is extensive allusion to Marduk here, the Babylonian god whom many of the Jewish exiles had worshipped. We recall "Mordecai", named after Marduk. The ninth to the eighth century Babylonian *Erra Epic* has Marduk listing the necessary elements for the remaking of his living image: the help of the carpenter-god Nin-ildu, the smith-god Ninagal and Gushkin-banda, 'Creator of god and man', the god of gold working. The entire Babylonian mythology is being mocked here. And it was exactly the cult of Marduk which the Jewish exiles were still involved with.

"To reside in a house" refers to an idol shrine or even a "temple" (CEV). The contrast is with Yahweh who would dwell within His own temple.

The contrast is with the description of Yahweh as having planned as a workman the entire cosmos, and then made it. See on Is. 40:12. Instead of allowing Him to work on

them to make them after His mental image, they were creating gods in their own image and likeness. As they stretched out a line to plan an idol, Yahweh worked on a far grander scale, stretching out His line over the entire cosmos (Job 38:5 s.w.). But the phrase 'stretching out a line' is nearly always used about Yahweh's condemnation of people (2 Kings 21:13; Is. 34:11; Lam. 2:8; Zech. 1:16). As we will also see on :14, the idolaters were in fact measuring out condemnation to themselves.

Isaiah 44:14 He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak- I noted on :13 that the language of idol construction is also that of condemnation; their behaviour was their own condemnation. And here too, the Assyrians had threatened to cut down the cedars of the temple (Is. 37:24; 2:13; 10:34). And the Babylonians actually did this (Is. 14:8). For the Jews now to cut down cedars and make idols from them was therefore acting like the Babylonians, and ignoring the great grace shown in Yahweh's averting of the threatened Assyrian destruction of the temple by cutting down its cedars. See on Is. 48:9.

And strengthens for himself one among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir tree, and the rain nourishes it- Yahweh would strengthen His servant people, in contrast to the idols, which had to be strengthened by their makers (s.w. Is. 41:10). The tree used for idolatry had been nourished by rain from Yahweh.

Isaiah 44:15 Then it will be for a man to burn; and he takes some of it, and warms himself. Yes, he burns it, and bakes bread. Yes, he makes a god, and worships it; he makes it an engraved image, and falls down to it- This whole account of idolatry seems to be poking fun at the foolishness of the worshipper. But this is all to lead up to the statements in :19,20, that the mind of the idolater refuses to perceive the obvious. And this is because they "did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate (or, undistinguishing) mind" (Rom. 1:28; cp. Is. 29:10). This is in contrast to how the Spirit of God works to give a spiritually perceptive mind; and the promise of that Spirit has been offered earlier in this chapter. Now we are being shown the opposite process; how God works to confirm men in their blindness.

Isaiah 44:16 He burns part of it in the fire. With part of it, he eats meat. He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. Yes, he warms himself and says, Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire- The idea is that he uses part to make an idol (:17), and of the other part, he uses part of that for firewood for warmth and part for roasting a meal for himself. Or as ESV "Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat". See on Is. 46:6.

Isaiah 44:17 The rest of it he makes into a god, even his engraved image. He bows down

to it and worships and prays to it and says, Deliver me; for you are my god!- See on :16. This is the word used by Rabshakeh in saying that no god could "deliver" from the Assyrians (2 Chron. 32:13). And yet the unfaithful Jews had trusted in those very gods for deliverance. It is therefore Jewish idolaters who are in view here. They were so self deceived that they could not deliver themselves (:20 s.w.) because those who worship idols become like unto them; dumb and unable to engage with the issues of eternity.

Isaiah 44:18 They don't know neither do they consider: for He has shut their eyes that they can't see; and their hearts that they can't understand- This is the situation in Is. 6:9,10: "Make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed". But that was spoken about the Jews; the suggestion is that now it is idol makers amongst the Jewish exiles who are being addressed. And yet to daub or seal the eyes alludes to the custom of the bride having her eyes sealed or daubed, and then unsealed by the bridegroom as he stands before her. This was particularly done in arranged marriages. So again we see the silver lining; their eyes were closed in judgment, but so as to be opened to see the bridegroom before them. This is the meaning of Israel's eyes being opened to the Lord Jesus as their Christ. This is in contrast to how the Spirit of God works to give a spiritually perceptive mind; and the promise of that Spirit has been offered earlier in this chapter. Now we are being shown the opposite process; how God works to confirm men in their blindness. Such people are receiving now the essence of their condemnation, alluding to the Eastern custom of sealing up the eyes of offenders.

Isaiah 44:19 No one thinks neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire-

The idol makers of Is. 44:19 are criticized because "No one takes this to heart" [NEV "no one thinks"]. The idol makers of Is. 46:8 are asked "You transgressors, take it to heart". The appeal for repentance suggests it is the Jewish exiles who are in view; they were making the idols. Man is asked to be mindful, to take things to heart, rather than live life spiritually numb, acting and thinking without taking anything to heart. "Thinks" is literally 'to call to mind'; and it is God's people who were asked to 'call to mind' their folly in the land of their exile (Dt. 4:39; 30:1; 1 Kings 8:47). It is the exiles who were intended to see the folly of their making of idols when they had such a wonderful one true God. We are programmed to shy away from the ultimate realities, in the same way as men hid their faces from the terror and dastardly horror of the crucifixion of God's Son (Is. 53:3), and as "none considers in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding" to realize the idiocy of worshipping a piece of wood as an idol (Is. 44:19).

Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals. I have roasted meat and eaten it. Shall I make the rest of it into an abomination? Shall I bow down to a tree trunk?- The idolater failed to look at himself from outside of himself. This is an important ability to have, and it is the Biblical record which serves as a mirror, that we might see ourselves for who we really are (James 1:23). Yet the majority are so caught up in the narrative of their own lives which they spin in their own minds that they fail to achieve self-examination and self-awareness before God.

Isaiah 44:20 He feeds on ashes- From a distance, the visual impression may have been of the man apparently eating the ashes from the coals upon which his bread was baked (:19).

A deceived heart has turned him aside; and he can't deliver his soul, nor say, Isn't there a lie in my right hand?- The idol maker prayed to his idol "Deliver me!" (:17), but was not delivered. The deceived heart can't recognize that they are self-deceived. That seems to be the idea of "a lie in my right hand". See on :17.

Isaiah 44:21 Remember these things, Jacob and Israel; for you are My servant. I have formed you; you are My servant. Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me- The Hebrew more implies a desperate plea: "May you not forget Me!". The amazing offer of redemption was not to be forgotten but always remembered by God's people; and we therefore do the communion service to remember the price paid for our redemption, unlike Israel who were unmoved by the wonder of it all and forgot it. Because God has not forgotten His people, they should remember Him. The fact He is so consciously aware of us ought to bring Him back to our consciousness in the course of the day. As explained on :19, Jacob was asked to "remember" the picture of the idolater, to see himself from outside of himself.

There is perhaps a purposeful ambiguity in the Hebrew text of Is. 44:21: "O Israel thou shalt not be forgotten of me" is rendered in the RVmg and LXX: "thou shouldest not forget me". The fact God never forgets us should be inspiration to not forget Him in the daily round of life. To act as if God doesn't see all our ways is to effectively deny His existence. Babylon acted as she did because she reasoned that "None seeth me... I am, and there is none else beside me" (Is. 47:10 RV). They appropriated the language of God to themselves, they played God in that they thought their ways were unseen by any higher power. And we all have a terrible, frightening tendency to do this.

Isaiah 44:22 I have blotted out as a thick cloud your iniquities, and, as a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you-

"Blotted out" is an economic term, meaning to blot out a debt, erasing the sum from the ledger of the book keeper. It is related to the fact that "I have redeemed you", paid the debt to release Israel from their debt slavery. Again we find debt as metaphor for sin. "As a cloud" suggests something transitory (Hos. 6:4; 13:3; Job 7:9; 30:15), something that will be blown away by the wind / Spirit, so that sin is not ultimately a permanent problem.

God imputed His righteousness to them, because He had unconditionally forgiven them. Instead of calling upon them to mourn, as in first Isaiah, second Isaiah calls upon them to rejoice and accept His grace. They are to repent because God had forgiven them (as in Acts 3:18,19)- not repent so that He might forgive them: “I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake [i.e. not for the sake of your repentance or righteousness]... I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud [therefore] return [repent] to me, for I have [already] redeemed you” (Is. 43:25; 44:22). This is God’s grace in its essence. Repentance and not just forgiveness is given by the Spirit (Acts 5:31). As they sat by the rivers of Babylon, even as they later became caught up in the politics and business of Babylon, God’s heart broke for His people. And He announced this utter grace- that He had forgiven them, even though they’d not really repented, and counted them as righteous. And therefore He begged them to “return”, not only to return to Him in repentance in their hearts, but to show this by ‘returning’ to the land. And, *so* tragically, they preferred to stay in Babylon, for the most part. His grace was poured out to them... and Israel would not. All we can resolve in our hearts is to feel for God in this tragedy, and to realize that these very same prophecies of grace have been applied to us. And it’s for us to respond to them. If we do not, then once again, this amazing redemption and forgiveness remains as it were unclaimed and unused.

It is our knowledge of God's mercy to us which empowers us to confidently seek to share with others our knowledge, our relationship, our experience with God. Forgiveness inspires the preacher; and yet the offer of forgiveness is what inspires the listener to respond. God appeals for Israel to respond by pointing out that in prospect, He has already forgiven them: “I have [already] blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions... [therefore] return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Is. 44:22 AV). Likewise Elijah wanted Israel to know that God had already in prospect turned their hearts back to Him (1 Kings 18:37). We preach the cross of Christ, and that through that forgiveness has been enabled for all men; but they need to respond by repentance in order to access it. Hence the tragedy of human lack of response; so much has been enabled, the world has been reconciled, but all this is in vain if they will not respond.

The prophets appeal for their people to repent to avert God’s judgments; and yet they proclaim a message of grace, that because “I *have* swept away your transgressions [therefore] Return [repent] to me, for I *have* redeemed you” (Is. 44:22). The fact of God’s

forgiveness leads to repentance- by grace. And yet the prophets also appeal for Israel to repent *so that* they might be forgiven.

And so Isaiah urged the Jewish exiles to return to the land by saying that God had forgiven them, and on this basis He appealed for them to both 'repent' and 'return' to the land. The two terms are related. Thus He showed His grace; forgiveness preceded, not followed, repentance. Is. 44:22 is clear about this: "I have swept away your transgressions like clouds [therefore] return to me, for I have [already] redeemed you". God was angry with their sins, but kept no record of them- hence He could comfort Judah that there was actually no documentary evidence for their divorce (Is. 50:1) and therefore she could return to Him. As Paul put it, the goodness of God leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). And we are asked to show that same "goodness" of God to others, being "kind [s.w. 'goodness'] one to another... forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). We too are to show this grace of forgiveness-before-repentance; but perhaps in no other area has formalized, institutionalized Christianity failed worse. If XYZ shows us she's repented of her divorce, then we'll forgive her and accept her in fellowship [as if, in any case, we are the ones who need to forgive her]. These are graceless and yet terribly common attitudes. The Greek word translated "goodness" is rendered "gracious" in 1 Pet. 2:3- newly converted babes in Christ taste of this gracious goodness, and it leads to repentance.

Isaiah 44:23 Sing you heavens, for Yahweh has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth! Break out into singing, you mountains, O forest, all of your trees, for Yahweh has redeemed Jacob, and will glorify Himself in Israel-

This seems to be Isaiah's interjection of praise as he considers the amazing good news for Israel. "Yahweh has done it!", they were redeemed from Babylon, they would be saved. But just like "It is finished!", uttered by the Lord as He died, this amazing news that all is in fact done for man… is shrugged off because of human short sightedness and pride.

The same Hebrew words are used about the shout of joy which went up when the foundation of the temple was laid (Ezra 3:11-13). But at that same time, there was a loud sound of weeping from those who realized that what was being built was simply not the temple which Ezekiel had prophesied, and was not even as glorious as Solomon's. The shout of joy was there, but wasn't discernible (Ezra 3:13).

As the whole creation would share the joy of Hosea and Gomer's remarriage (see on Is. 1:26), so Is. 44:23 and Is. 49:13 use similar terms to describe how all creation could have rejoiced in the reuniting of Yahweh with His people on their return from Babylon.

Isaiah 44:24 Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: I am Yahweh who makes all things, who alone stretches out the heavens; who spreads

out the earth by Myself- This is in contrast to how the idol maker stretches out and spreads out his plans and materials to make his idol. Both as individuals and collectively, the whole biography and even genetic prehistory of God's people has been prepared by God in their formation, so that they might encounter God's salvation at an optimal point for them to give the maximum glory to Him (Is. 43:21). "Formed" is the word for the potter working on clay, used of how God fashions human hearts or psychologies, working on the deeply internal fabric of the human being (Ps. 33:15). The 'forming' in view is not only "in the womb" (Is. 44:2,24) but throughout their whole psychological and genetic formation. It is possible to strive with our former or "maker" (Is. 45:9), to be unresponsive to His touch of us the clay. The Messiah figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus, was the ultimate case of being "formed" by Yahweh's hand (Is. 49:5 s.w.), implying He too was clay, of human and not Divine nature.

It has been pointed out that :24-28 are full of allusion to the statements on the Cyrus Cylinder, which claims Cyrus was raised up by Marduk to do all the things which we read here that Yahweh was to do through Cyrus. To deconstruct the Marduk cult was as radical as the language of the New Testament deconstructing the Caesar cult, instead enstating Jesus as Lord of all lords, son of God and our "only saviour". We likewise are called to a radical deconstruction of the prevailing worldviews of our times. The Cyrus Cylinder claims that Marduk first creates and then redeems. This is deconstructed in :24 by the claim that Yahweh first redeems and then creates; He therefore has in view His new creation of His people and Kingdom. This has even more strength if we translate "He who formed you" as "He who is forming you". Likewise Is. 43:1 "And now thus says Yahweh the one creating you Jacob and the one forming you Israel". However Is. 43:1 has creation and then redemption. The overall idea is that Yahweh has created, redeemed and also redeemed and created. His creative power surrounds His people, physically and spiritually. The experience of redemption is the channel of the new creation, as it is for us in Christ. The outflow of blood and water from His crucified body is the image of birth. The very few believers standing before His cross, fearful, confused and misunderstanding, were the equivalent of the child born; and He breathed His Spirit towards them as He died. But the huge potential creative power of Yahweh was denied by the exiles, as it is by most men today. The God who created light out of darkness can shine in human hearts today, and create spiritual light *ex nihilo*. Contrary to Marduk, who supposedly created humans with the blood of the slain god Kingu, Yahweh forms human persons out of love, from the womb.

"Who alone stretches out the heavens" alludes to how the planets were thought to be under the control of lesser gods than Marduk. But Yahweh is the one God who controls all as He is the single creator of all: "I
am the Lord the one doing all". Time and again, the Babylonian metanarrative is deconstructed; just as God's purpose to redeem and re-create us deconstructs the metanarratives of our worlds. The exiles were surrounded by Babylonian culture and

had absorbed into it. They were being asked to break free of that and have another worldview, that of the restoration of God's Kingdom and their part in it- just as we are likewise invited.

Isaiah 44:25 Who frustrates the signs of the liars- This is s.w. Neh. 4:15 about God frustrating the Samaritan opposition. But still the exiles didn't make full use of all this help, in order to reestablish God's Kingdom.

And makes diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolish- It is the idolater who has just been portrayed as foolish and mad. But the wise men of the nations of those days were all idolaters. Possibly in view would be the word of the diviners that Babylon would never fall to Cyrus.

Isaiah 44:26 Who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; who says of Jerusalem, 'She will be inhabited;' and of the cities of Judah, 'They will be built', and 'I will raise up its waste places'-

This 'confirmation' contrasts with how He 'frustrates' the word of the magicians of Babylon in :25. This is how God works- confirming one path and frustrating another.

The word of His servant could refer to Isaiah or Jeremiah. Yahweh portrays Himself as open to the counsel or advice of His messengers. Perhaps the *malak* in view are the Angels, and those they represented. God is open to persuasion from both Angels and even men. Confirming and performing are parallel, as are "the word" and "the counsel". "His servant" (singular) is parallel with the plural "His messengers". The singular servant is equated with His "messengers", whose "counsel" to others is the word which is Jesus, the true servant. This theme of declaring the word occurs repeatedly in this part of Isaiah. Because "I have declared... and I have shewed... *therefore you* are my witnesses" (Is. 43:12). We are to witness / declare / shew, just as the Father has done. Our unity with the Father and Son is thus reflected in our witnessing in the way they witness; and thus their witness is through us. The unity between the preacher and his Lord is therefore wonderful. Truly He is with us in our life of witness, in our obedience to His command to preach world-wide, unto the end of the age.

Or the servant could refer to Cyrus and his will to rebuild Jerusalem. Yahweh "performs the *counsel*" of rebuilding Jerusalem. But the Samaritan opposition sought to frustrate Judah's "purpose" / counsel (Ezra 4:5 s.w.), and succeeded. Yahweh allowed Himself to be limited within how His people performed His purpose. His 'purpose' is therefore conditional upon those whom He allows to fulfill it. Many passages in the latter half of Isaiah exult how God has fulfilled prophecy in the decree of Cyrus and the return of the

Jews (e.g. Is. 44:7,26-28). But this fulfilment of prophecy turned out to be limited by the Jews' lack of obedience to the prophecies. Cyrus is well attested as describing himself as "servant of Marduk". God would be showing that the power of His Spirit upon His servant was such that He can totally reorientate a person; He can turn someone from servant of sin to servant of righteousness, as happens when we change masters at baptism. Perhaps Cyrus is presented as a parade example of how God can use and transform His "servant", as an example to Israel [who were His intended "servant"] as to what He could likewise do with them.

The Nabonidus Cylinder claims that Marduk through his diviners commanded the king to rebuild the temple of Sin in Harran, which had previously been laid waste becaue of Marduk's wrath with them. This is being deconstructed here; Yahweh has commanded the king to rebuild His temple in Jerusalem, destroyed for similar reasons, and that shall come to pass.

The call for Jerusalem to be inhabited is repeated in Is. 45:18 about the 'heavens and earth': "Yahweh who created the heavens, the God who formed the earth and made it, who established it and didn't create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited". God created the new heavens and earth, the restored Jerusalem, to be inhabited. He has planned His eternal Kingdom on earth to be inhabited; to have people in it. This is a profound encouragement if we doubt our own final entry into that Kingdom. The intention to fill the earth with Abraham's spiritual seed, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore, requires the salvation of a great multitude. This is why there is all this created earth around us- for it to be inhabited. Just as God carefully created a habitable world, controlling the exact temperature, proximity to the sun, revolution of the earth etc., so He has created His Kingdom to be inhabited by man.

Isaiah 44:27 who says to the deep, 'Be dry', and 'I will dry up your rivers;'- The reference is *to* the artificial irrigation canals from the Euphrates which were dried up by Cyrus, forming a lake forty miles square, in order for him to take Babylon. The prophets present the fall of Babylon as necessary for the return of the exiles. Babylon fell, but as the book of Esther makes clear, the bulk of the exiles chose to remain in exile.

But there is also allusion here to how although Marduk was the senior god, there was understood to be a trinity of gods, comprised of Marduk, Nabu and Nergal. Nergal was the god of the deep. Here he is deconstructed. Yahweh shares power with no other god. And we may note that the conception of a triune god is rooted in such tripilisms which occur in many pagan societies. Yahweh had dried up the deep at the Red Sea, and could repeat such miracles at ease.

Isaiah 44:28 who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure',

even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'- See on :5. Bullinger claims Cyrus was the son of Astyages and Esther, who named him Cyrus in conscious fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies. Ez. 34 had predicted that at the restoration, God Himself would be a shepherd to His scattered flock and through the shepherd He would use, He would "deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day" (Ez. 34:12). The cloudy and dark day was the day of judgment which came upon Judah, and which resulted in them being scattered into Babylon and Persia. The shepherd who was to deliver them and get them to return from the various places of their scattering was intended to be Cyrus. Is. 44:28 is crystal clear about this. God "says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'". It was God's intention that Cyrus repent and become a proselyte, and Yahweh would then use him to save His people "out of all places where they have been scattered". The decree of Cyrus was addressed to "Whoever is left [of the Jews], in any place where he lives" (Ezra 1:4). "Cyrus" literally means "sun" and so contrasts with the cloudy and dark day. But Cyrus let the ball drop and didn't carry through the Divine purpose as he might have done and neither did the Jews respond as they should have done. Cyrus was Yahweh's anointed (Is. 45:1), and so the essence of these prophecies is to come true in the last days in the person of the Lord Jesus. We could say that the prophecies are transferred from Cyrus to the Lord Jesus. LXX "Who bids Cyrus be wise, and he shall perform all my will" suggests Cyrus had a choice; he was commanded, and it seems he partially obeyed, but not enough to be the Messiah figure envisaged.

Isaiah elsewhere uses the same Hebrew word to speak of how Yahweh has laid the foundation of the earth in creation (Is. 48:13 "My hand also has laid the foundation of the earth"; Is. 51:13 "Yahweh your maker has laid the foundations of the earth"; Job 38:4; Zech. 12:1 etc.). As so often in Isaiah, the huge power and ability of Yahweh in creation is alluded to as the basis upon which His people can trust that He can so easily lay the foundation of the temple and re-create His Kingdom in Judah. The same words are often used in the accounts of the foundations of the temple being laid- but the returned exiles turned away from them to build their own houses. Despite Yahweh having used Cyrus as the channel for this new creation.

Cyrus was to "perform all My pleasure" or will, in restoring the temple and re-establishing God's Kingdom on earth. But this didn't really happen. And so the servant prophecy of Is. 53:10 says that the suffering servant, identified in the New Testament as the Lord Jesus, would suffer, die and resurrect so that "the pleasure / will of Yahweh shall prosper in His hand". God's will to save His people was not thwarted. The failure to realize that will by both Israel and Cyrus only enabled a far more glorious fulfilment. We see the same thing in Daniel 9; the 70 years prophecy was turned into a period of 70

times 7, but with a far more glorious outcome. Again and again we see that man's failure reveals a far more wonderful silver lining.

We wonder who is speaking when we read "Even saying of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built’". It could be Cyrus or Yahweh speaking. And the confusion is deliberate; Cyrus would be speaking Yahweh's word, totally controlled by Yahweh. The Cyrus Cylinder [lines 11-14] presents Cyrus as chosen by Marduk to he his shepherd because of his righteousness: "(Marduk) scanned and checked all the countries, looking for a righteous king, dear to his heart, and finally he
took with his very hand Cyrus… and calling his name, he appointed him to be king of the entire world… And all the people that (Marduk) had given into his hands, (Cyrus) tended most carefully like a shepherd in truth and righteousness". Yahweh is saying that He and not Marduk had used Cyrus in this way. Once we appreciate the allusions, it is easier to understand the apparent 'righteousness' associated with Cyrus in Isaiah (Is. 45:13).

We can only shake our heads in sorrow that in the second year of Cyrus, the Jewish exiles decided that the time had not come to built Yahweh's temple- because they were more interested in building their own houses (Hag. 1:1-4). God had staked His divinity on predicting Cyrus by name, and predicting his edict about Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. It came true. But God's people shrugged, because such is the power of immediate self-interest.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 45

Isaiah 45:1 Thus says Yahweh to His anointed, to Cyrus- Is. 45:1-7 concern Cyrus and really should be read as part of Is. 44. The critics struggle with God predicting someone by name ahead of time. But there are other examples of people being named by Divine prophecy before birth: Isaac (Gen. 17:19); Solomon (1 Chron. 22:9); Josiah (1 Kings 13:2). Isaiah had been told to “bind up the testimony, seal the teaching” (Is. 8:16), until the people ask whom they should ask to understand (Is. 8:19), at which time the call will go out “To the teaching and to the testimony!” (Is. 8:20). This may mean that the people would not understand Isaiah's words, read and study them as they might- until the fulfilment came. They would have wondered about this mysterious "Cyrus"- until it was fulfilled. Just as the Lord said that His prophecies about His death and resurrection would not be understood until they came true. And that is how much Divine prophecy is. Striving over its interpretation ahead of time, seeking to work out time lines of fulfilment, is largely futile.

Whilst "anointed" is a term used of anyone anointed, especially the kings of Israel, clearly Cyrus was also Yahweh's intended servant and "Christ" to deliver His people. He took over as it were from Israel who were the failed servant. He too failed, and the exiles didn't respond to his decrees to return to the land rebuild the temple; and so the Servant prophecies came true in the suffering servant of Is. 53, the Lord Jesus, who achieved a far greater restoration of the Kingdom and eternal salvation for all in Him. God's choice of the gentile Cyrus as His people's saviour may seem at variance with Jer. 31:21 "Their prince shall be one of themselves; their ruler shall come out from their midst; I will make him draw near, and he shall approach me". But we see here how God's purpose is flexible and has various potential iterations. In terms of salvation, they all failed- but came to glorious realization in His Son.

Whose right hand I have held- God had offered to hold the right hand of His servant Israel, but they had refused (Is. 41:13; 42:6). Now He attempts to do the same with Cyrus, the next iteration of His servant. The kings of Babylon were said to “take the hand of Bel” (also known as Marduk). Yahweh is saying that He in fact has taken the hand of this king. Constantly the Marduk cult is deconstructed. Cyrus’s son, Cambyses, is recorded as having supposedly done this. But again the Marduk cult is deconstructed; for Cyrus did not so much as take Yahweh's hand, as Yahweh took *his* hand. There is a juxtaposition of impressions here. Holding the right hand of a person suggests they are feeble (Is. 42:6). And so Cyrus for all his might was but a feeble person empowered by Israel's God.

To subdue nations before him, and strip kings of their armour; to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut- see on Is. 40:3,4. Isaiah 40-55 is packed full with allusion to the Marduk cult. All that Marduk claimed to do and be, Isaiah explained as actually true, and solely true, of Yahweh God of Israel. The descriptions of Cyrus as having been anointed etc. are allusions to the way Cyrus was held to have been

anointed and raised up by Marduk. Yahweh is saying that actually He, and not Marduk, had done this. The Abu-Habba collection in the British museum actually has an inscription that claims Nabonidus dreamt that Marduk raised up Cyrus (See P.A. Beaulieu, *The Reign Of Nabonidus King Of Babylon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 108). Isaiah's point is that actually it was the God of Israel who had done this. The references to Yahweh taking Cyrus by the hand, anointing him, pronouncing his name and giving him a throne (Is. 45:1,8) are almost word-for-word what Cyrus claimed about Marduk in his 'Cyrus Cylinder'.

Cyrus was a potential Messiah figure. Cyrus was the anointed one, the 'Christ' of God. Anointing is especially associated with being anointed as a king in the Davidic line (1 Sam. 2:10,35; 2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Sam. 23:1; Ps. 2:2). Could it be that God was willing for Cyrus to become Israel's King? Whilst the chronology is admittedly difficult, it would appear that Daniel and his group of faithful friends, possibly Ezekiel, maybe Esther, and some other prophets were in close contact with Cyrus. The enigmatic reference to Cyrus making the decision to allow Nehemiah's mission for the Jews to return *with his queen sitting near him* may suggest Jewish influence upon him (Neh. 2:6). Could it be that potentially, he was enabled to convert to the God of Israel and fulfill the 'servant' prophecies? See on :9; Is. 44:5.

"Strip kings of their armour" is AV "And I will loose the loins of kings" or Heb. 'Looses the girdle of the strong.' There was a literal fulfilment of this in regard to Belshazzar, king of Babylon, when the city was taken by Cyrus. When the hand came forth on the walls of his palace, and the mysterious finger wrote his condemnation, "Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against the other" (Dan. 5:6).

Isaiah 45:2 I will go before you, and make the rough places smooth- This is the language of Is. 40 concerning the preparation for the coming of the Messianic saviour and reestablishment of the Kingdom in Zion. But Cyrus failed to fulfill this. The language changes from "I" to "you". We as it were overhear God speaking to the heart of Cyrus. This is a profound insight. God seems to be saying that *He* will make the rough way smooth for the exiles, LXX "I will level the mountains"- when in Is. 40 He had asked *they* do this themselves by repentance. But He is now trying to force through His plan to save them, by saying that *He* will prepare the way Himself. He would as it were force open the gates of Babylon to let them out.

I will break the doors of brass in pieces, and cut apart the bars of iron- Herodotus (1.179) claims Babylon had 100 massive gates, 25 on each of the four sides of the city, all, as well as their posts, of brass.

Isaiah 45:3 I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places,

that you may know that it is I, Yahweh, who call you by your name, even the God of Israel- Babylon's treasures are specifically noted in Jer. 51:13 "Abundant in treasures". The location of hidden treasure in conquered cities was typically attributed to magicians and wise men. But here, to Yahweh. God's mention of Cyrus' name 150 years beforehand was intended to be the clear proof to all that His prophetic word would really come true. But :4 seems to see his 'naming' as not so much a case of predicting his name, but giving him a name in the sense of a purpose and intended path of character and behaviour. But he ultimately failed in fulfilling this. "That you may know" is the language of :6, wishing that Israel "may know". It alludes to how at the exodus from Egypt, Yahweh acted so that both His people and the Egyptians would "know that I am Yahweh" (Ex. 6:7; 7:5). The 'knowing' clearly means in practice 'to convert to'. *"That* you may know that it is I, Yahweh, who call you by your name" suggests it was God's intention that Cyrus should come to know His Name. Although there is no expression of intention, Is. 41:25 carries the same hope: "I have raised up one from the north, and he has come; from the rising of the sun, one who calls on My name". Is. 45:3 clarifies that it was God's *intention* that he should do this, although Cyrus failed. As it is His so often dashed hope and expectation of so many men.

Isaiah 45:4 For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel My chosen, I have called you by your name. I have surnamed you, though you have not known Me- LXX suggests that despite all this Divine intention, Cyrus refused relationship with God by refusing to 'know' Him: "For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel mine elect, I will call thee by thy name, and accept thee: but thou hast not known me". The Divine hope was that Cyrus would accept the Holy One of Israel (Is. 41:25 "I have raised up one from the north… one who calls on My name…) although initially Cyrus is the one God had called who knew Him not (Is. 45:4 "I have called you by your name… I have surnamed you, though you have not known Me"). Although Cyrus initially didn't know God's Name, he would come to a point when he did "call on My name". That was the hope, but it seems it didn't happen. We could read Is. 45:4 "yet you have not known Me" as a Divine lament that Cyrus did not respond to Yahweh and enter personal relationship with Him. It is repeated again in Is. 45:5. Just as God has the names of people written in His book, which names will later be blotted out. They were known by name, but refused to respond.

Israel are "My chosen". The reason why there are no accusers against us, not even our own sins, is because we are "God's elect" (Rom. 8:33). The supreme chosen one of God was of course the Lord Jesus, "My elect / chosen, in whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1). And yet here later on in the servant songs of Isaiah, "mine elect" or "My chosen" clearly refers to the people of Israel (Is. 45:4; 65:9,22). The true Israel of God are therefore those counted as somehow "in" the elect one, the singular servant of God, Messiah Jesus. Those baptized into Him are therefore His elect. And how do we know we are "God's elect"? If we are baptized into Christ, "mine elect", then for sure we are. And further, we

have heard the call of the Gospel, we have been called- so, we are God's elect, His chosen ones. Of course the objection can be raised that the whole idea of calling or election may appear unfair. Indeed, the Greek word for "elect" can carry the idea of 'the favoured / favourite one'. There is no ultimate injustice here. The chosen One is the Lord Jesus, beloved for the sake of His righteousness, His spirit of life. Those who respond to the call to be "in Him" are counted likewise. And all this is the way, the method used, in order for God to be the one who counts us as right in the ultimate judgment- for "It is God that justifies".

Isaiah 45:5 I am Yahweh, and there is none else. Besides Me, there is no God- The preceding verse has spoken of Cyrus' failure. It could be that this was related to his refusal to jettison his belief in the Persian gods of good and evil, refusing to accept that Yahweh could really be in control of all.

This language (and in :6,12) alludes to the Babylonian god Marduk; the point being that Yahweh and not the god of Babylon is supreme. See on Is. 40:25. The Jews only totally quit idolatry some time later; they liked to think, as we also tend to, that we can serve the gods of our world in the name of Yahweh worship. But Yahweh is presented as supreme, and Marduk as nothing.

I will strengthen you, though you have not known Me- LXX "I strengthened thee, and thou hast not known me" continues the theme of lamenting that Cyrus refused relationship ['knowing'] with God, even though he was Divinely strengthened to do His will in restoring Judah. "Strengthen" is as AV "girded", and is in contrast to how he was intended to "loose the loins of kings" in Is. 45:1.

Isaiah 45:6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides Me. I am Yahweh, and there is no one else- This was fulfilled in a limited way when Cyrus proclaimed throughout his empire, from east to west, that the Jewish exiles were to return home (Ezra 1:1). But *"that* they may know" suggests intention rather than deterministic prediction. See on :5. This was the intended outcome of the restoration which Cyrus was used to effect. But the returned exiles didn't make Yahweh known; instead they mixed with the surrounding nations, as Ezra, Nehemiah and the restoration prophets make clear. And so these things are all reapplied to the final work of the Lord Jesus. As will be developed on :7, Yahweh's existence as the sole God means there is no room for the idea of a personal cosmic Satan being, nor for the equivalent ideas amongst the Persians, which the Jews were accepting.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create calamity. I am Yahweh, who does all these things- Yatzar, to give "form" to previously existing

matter, and *bara,* to "create" from nothing the chaotic darkness, were all from God. Yahweh alone had given light and success to Cyrus, and darkness, "evil" or calamity to Babylon. The words translated "form" and "create" are extensively used in Isaiah regarding God's forming / creation of Israel and all His people (Is. 43:1,7,21; 44:2,21,24; 45:11; 49:5). The new creation both reforms existing material and creates from the nothing of the chaotic darkness of human life. The whole range of experience, from light to darkness, from peace to evil / calamity, is "for our sakes" as Paul would put it. It is in order to create us as His people, as His new creation. Creation and redemption / salvation are mentioned together throughout Isaiah. The blind see light out of darkness-that is salvation (Is. 21:17-21). All this creation of light / darkness, peace / evil, is all part of the salvation process for God's people.

The "peace" Isaiah's prophecies present is the peace of Jerusalem; which God had created, at least potentially. We note that the contrast is not between good and evil, as we might expect; but between peace and evil. This is because it is specifically "the peace of Jerusalem" which is in view here. The light / darkness refer to the darkness of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians, and the darkness of the exile (Lam. 3:2,6). Indeed the word translated "evil" or "calamity" in :7 is specifically used about these things (Jer. 21:10; 42:10; Zech. 8:14), and Yahweh's formation / creation of the evil that would befall Jerusalem (Jer. 18:11; 26:3; 36:3). The "evil" of the Babylonian exile was not the triumph of the Babylonian gods; it was all of Yahweh the God of Israel. Jeremiah finally grasped Is. 45:7 when he admits in Lam. 3:38 "Doesn't evil and good come out of the mouth of the Most High?". He says this in the midst of so much consternation that 'evil' / calamity had clearly come from God. Isaiah frequently describes the Jews in Babylon as being in a dark dungeon, to be brought out to the light of Zion. This too ultimately had been brought about by Yahweh. The Servant would be made / created as a *light* to bring God's people out of the *darkness*, which He Himself had made: "[God will] make you a covenant for the people, as a light for the nations; to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners out of the dungeon, and those who sit in darkness out of the prison" (Is. 42:6,7). The creator of light and darkness can thus also transform darkness into light: "I will make [s.w. create] darkness light before them" (Is. 42:16). Babylon was commanded by God to "go into darkness" (Is. 47:5) as Jerusalem's light arose. All this was God's "creation" of light and darkness. God indeed said "Let there be light" and there was, He commanded the light to shine out of darkness; but we are led by Is. 45:7 to realize what is only implicit in the Genesis account: The pre-existent darkness at creation was also created by God. For as He says in Isaiah, He alone is God and creator, of absolutely everything. God's creation of darkness and of "Leviathan", the supposed god of chaos and darkness, is specifically stated in Ps. 104:20,26: "You create darkness, and it is night… and Leviathan, whom You created". It's hard to appreciate the radical, unusual, paradigm breaking force of these statements to ancient peoples. The darkness, the sea, the supposed monsters of chaos brooding there… whether they are

or are not actually there… were all created by Yahweh, the same God who creates "peace" for eternity, for His people.

There seems significant evidence for believing that the idea of a personal devil first entered Judaism through their contact with the Persian religions whilst in captivity there. Rabbinic writings don't mention a personal satan until the Jews were in Babylon, and the references become more frequent as Persian influence upon Judaism deepened. This is why the monumental passages in Isaiah [e.g. Is. 45:5-7], addressed to the captive Jews, point out the error of the Persian idea that there is a good God in tension with an evil god, Oromasden the god of light and Ahrimanen the god of darkness. Classically, the devil is understood to be a being with horns and a pitchfork. If we research *why* this should be the case, we soon find that the Bible itself is absolutely without any such images of satan or the devil. But we do find these images in pagan mythology- Pan, Dionysius and other pagan gods were depicted as having horns, long tails etc. In the British isles, let alone ancient Rome and Greece, there were traditions of 'horned gods' being the source of evil- e.g. the Cernunnos amongst the Celts, Caerwiden in Wales, etc. In so many ways, apostate Christianity adopted pagan ideas and brought them into its theology. These horned gods, with forks and long tails, became adopted into a false Christianity as 'the devil'. But the Bible itself is absolutely silent about this- nowhere is there any indication that satan or the devil is a personal being with horns etc.

Isaiah's statement that Yahweh creates both good and evil / disaster, light and darkness, is not only aimed at criticizing the Babylonian dualistic view of the cosmos. It also has relevance to the false ideas which were developing amongst the Jews in Babylon, which would later come to term in the false view of Satan which most of Christendom later adopted. According to the Jewish Apocryphal writing *The Visions of Amram*, human beings choose to live under the control of one of two angels. Amram has a vision of the two opposing angels who have been given control over humanity (4Q544 frg. 1, col. 2.10–14 [Visions of Amram-b] = 4Q547 frgs. 1–2, col. 3.9–13). The good angel supposedly has power "over all the light", whereas the evil angel has authority "over all the darkness". Thus the idea of dualism – which is so attractive to all people – was alive and well amongst the Jews; and thus Is. 45:5–7 was also aimed at the developing Jewish belief in Babylon in a dualistic cosmos.

Of especially significant influence upon Judaism were the Persian views of Zoroastrianism. This was a philosophy which began in Persia about 600 B.C., and was growing in popularity when Judah went to Babylon / Persia in captivity. This philosophy posited that there was a good god of light (Mazda) and an evil god of darkness (Ahriman). The well known passage in Is. 45:5–7 is a clear warning to the Jews in captivity not to buy into this – Israel's God *alone* made the light and the darkness, the good and the "evil". He alone had the power to give "the treasures of darkness" to a man (Is. 45:3), even though such "treasures" were thought to be under the control of the

supposed ‘Lord of darkness’. But Isaiah is in fact full of other allusions to Zoroastrian ideas, seeking to teach Judah the true position on these things. See on Is. 9:6.

Apart from seeking to justify themselves, the uninspired Jewish authors were struggling with the issue we all do- how can a good and kind God do negative things? But they took the easy way out, presuming to rewrite His word in order to pass blame into a Satan figure of their own imaginations. These uninspired Jewish writings from between the Testaments repeatedly seek to rewrite Biblical history and statements in order to accommodate the Persian ideas. Is. 45:5-7 is clear: "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things". But 4 Ezra 2:14 changes this to: "I have left out evil and created good, because I live, says the Lord". We have a stark choice- the inspired text of the Bible, or uninspired Jewish interpretations seeking to justify the adoption of pagan myths about Satan.

Isaiah 45:8 Distil, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness. Let the earth open, that it may bring forth salvation, and let it cause righteousness to spring up with it. I, Yahweh, have created it- Is. 45:1-7 concern Cyrus and really should be read as part of Is. 44. Because of the decree of Cyrus, the land of Israel could have opened and brought forth the Lord Jesus (“Yah's salvation”). The LXX gives the picture of cosmic joy meeting the joy of the earth beneath, resulting in the gift of the Spirit, part of the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31 and Ez. 20, resulting in righteousness and spirituality within the people left on the earth / land of Israel: "Let the heaven rejoice from above, and let the clouds rain righteousness: let the earth bring forth, and blossom with mercy, and bring forth righteousness likewise: I am the Lord that created thee". The new creation envisioned was to be of spiritual characteristics. Judah refused all this, and it has been applied to those in Christ today (2 Cor. 5:17).

"Let the earth open" reminds us that when the earth opened before it brought forth destruction (Num. 16:32; 26:10; Ps. 106:17). Now it opens to bring forth salvation. We have here a worked example of how Yahweh creates both evil and good (:5).

Isaiah 45:9 Woe to him who strives with his Maker- a clay pot among the clay pots of the earth! Shall the clay ask Him who fashions it, ‘What are you making?’ or your work, ‘He has no hands?’- "Maker" is the word for "potter" and hence the reference to potsherds. R.V. "a potsherd among the potsherds of the earth!". Cyrus would become just another broken vessel and become like all the others who had failed to respond to the potters' hand. And Isaiah repeatedly states that it was the Jews who had been made or formed by God; yet they resisted the call of His Kingdom, and thus struggled against their own glorious destiny and God's hand striving to save them. So we could render "Woe unto

him that contends with the power that formed him; the potsherd with the moulder of the clay". The Jews of Isaiah's day would have had big problems with the idea of a pagan king like Cyrus becoming the King of Israel and being Yahweh's special "servant" and even Messiah; see on Is. 45:1. Folk have the same problem and resistance to the idea today. But passages like Is. 45:9-13, Is. 48:14-16 and much of the material that follows the servant songs, are in fact seeking to answer objections to this- e.g. by saying that God is the potter and men are mere clay, and He will raise up precisely *whom He wishes*- even pagan Cyrus- to be His man, the arm of His salvation, at least potentially. We all struggle with God's hand in our lives, seeking ways to escape this or that touch of the Divine potter. But we are but striving with our maker. He wishes our salvation, and every touch of His hand is directed toward that glorious end. On one hand we are "a pot that is like all the others" (GNB); our appearances, life experiences and path can appear more or less identical to those of the unbeliever next door. But for us, there is meaning attached to event; even if those events are not dissimilar to those of our unbelieving neighbours.

Both as individuals and collectively, the whole biography and even genetic prehistory of God's people has been prepared by God in their formation, so that they might encounter God's salvation at an optimal point for them to give the maximum glory to Him (Is. 43:21). And this was potentially true for Cyrus. "Formed" is the word for the potter working on clay, used of how God fashions human hearts or psychologies, working on the deeply internal fabric of the human being (Ps. 33:15). The 'forming' in view is not only "in the womb" (Is. 44:2,24) but throughout their whole psychological and genetic formation. It is possible to strive with our former or "maker" (Is. 45:9), to be unresponsive to His touch of us the clay. The Messiah figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus, was the ultimate case of being "formed" by Yahweh's hand (Is. 49:5 s.w.), implying He too was clay, of human and not Divine nature.

This verse is quoted in Rom. 9:18-21 in a way which comes perhaps closer than anything in the Bible to teaching absolute, unconditional predestination: "He has mercy on whom He wishes to, and hardens who He wishes. Then you will say to me: Why does He still find fault? For who withstands His will? No, O man; who are you to answer back to God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it: Why did you make me thus? Or has not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel to honour, and another to dishonour?". The same piece of clay can apparently be randomly used by God; one part of it can be used to make a vessel which God eternally keeps, and part of the same lump can be used to make a vessel which is cast away for ever. Putting all scripture together, we cannot believe in absolute, unconditional predestination. Yet I for one would answer the question "Why does He still find fault?" by saying something like: 'Because some of the clay is softer and more responsive to the potter's hand than others. If we are soft and responsive to His hand, then we will be the vessel made that He eternally keeps'. But Paul doesn't answer that way. He basically responds: 'How dare

you make any such response! You are not to even question God's apparently absolute, unconditional predestination. Who are you to do so? You are to just accept it in awed silence'. Quite possibly I am being disobedient to that by now saying: There is enough Biblical evidence to conclude that there has to be human freewill response. That must be given due weight and factored in to the final, unknowable equation that equals 'salvation' in its final term. But, within that equation, there is indeed an element of absolute, unconditional predestination. And that element is the "grace" factor. For that is the context in which Paul speaks of salvation.

Isaiah 45:10 Woe to him who says to a father, 'What have you become the father of?' or to a mother, 'To what have you given birth?'- We note how God likens Himself to both father and mother. I noted on :9 that the context here is the Jewish objection to God raising up a 'son' like Gentile Cyrus to be the deliverer. And this challenge echoes down to our day, where we may have a gut level dislike to those clearly raised up to be Yahweh's servants. It is not for us to thus speak to God about His children and servants.

Isaiah 45:11 Thus says Yahweh the Maker and Holy One of Israel: You can ask Me about the things that are to come, concerning My sons, and you command Me concerning the work of My hands!- In the context of God lowering Himself to plead with a proud and apostate Israel, God invites them to "command Me": "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel... concerning the work of my hands *command ye me*. I have made the earth and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have *I commanded*" (Is. 45:11,12 AV). Note the two uses of "command" and "hands". God commands the stars, His hands created them; but *command ye me* concerning My works, and I will answer you. We can *command* God and His *hands* will answer. The humility of the creator shows He is the creator. But we can perhaps more easily interpret this in the context of :10 along with GNB: "The LORD, the holy God of Israel, the one who shapes the future, says: "You have no right to question me about my children or to tell me what I ought to do!". However, probably this is an allusion to the court case God is facing over whether He can save His weak and sinful people from Babylon. He challenges His accusers, those who disbelieve, to ask Him further about His plans for Israel. We assume there is silence. And then in :12 Yahweh goes on the attack, as it were, reminding His accusers that He is the creator of the earth / land and man upon it, and He can as easily re-establish His Kingdom in that land and inhabit it with His people. He is the "maker" of Israel (:11) as well as of the earth and heavens (:12).

Isaiah 45:12 I have made the earth, and created man on it. I, even My hands, have stretched out the heavens; and I have commanded all their army- See on :5,11. The

creation of the earth / land in view is specifically the new creation of His Kingdom restored in the land of Israel, the *eretz* promised to Abraham. He had created that land and had returned "man", His people, upon it. The same power which commands the stars (LXX) commanded each of the exiles to return. They were moved around from captivity to Judah just as the stars are moved. We see here again how "stars" represent Israel, a theme seen early on in Joseph's dreams.

Verses 11-13 are full of God's personal pronouns, "I... Me". Indeed we could translate: "Ask Me about My sons! And about the work of My hands, command Me. I, I made the earth and humankind upon it I created. I, My hands stretched the heavens, and all their host I commanded. I, I stir him up in righteousness, and all his ways I will make straight". The double "I" construction is remarkable. The point is so heavily laboured, that God Almighty Himself in person is so personally involved in the salvation of His people. This is not the abstraction of atonement theory, not a tick box nor equation that results in human salvation, with God setting it up and taking a back seat until judgment day. He, He Himself, personally, is absolutely and passionately working in us towards our salvation. Israel refused so very much, and so does every man who denies the working of God within him unto salvation.

Isaiah 45:13 I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will make straight all his ways-

The idea may be that Cyrus was called to be righteous, to know Yaweh's Name. The "righteousness" in view may simply be an allusion to the ideas found on the Cyrus Cylinder, claiming Marduk had raised by Cyrus in righteousness. Whereas God is saying that it is He and not Marduk to whom these claims really applied; see on Is. 44:28. Yahweh commands the stars (:12) and so there should be no difficulty believing that He could command Cyrus to deliver His people.

LXX suggests this was more of a command, which he failed to obey fully: "I have raised him up to be a king with righteousness". He was to be the king of righteousness but wasn't. And it was a prophecy reapplied to the Lord Jesus. For the picture of ways being made straight is that of Is. 40 about the preparation of Messiah's path to the restored Zion.

He shall build My city, and he shall let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward, says Yahweh of Armies- For no human benefit at all to Cyrus. This is as clear a prophecy as any could wish. God categorically stated that Cyrus would be raised up by Him in order to release the captives in Babylon, and to enable the building of Jerusalem (Is. 45:12); all because God had formed the land [AV “earth”] of Israel to be inhabited and not to be left without His people dwelling upon it. And this happened; the captives were released (although most preferred to stay put in Babylon), and the building of Jerusalem was

enabled (although the work was not done very enthusiastically by Judah, and they preferred to build their own houses rather than Yahweh's).

Cyrus operated "not for price nor reward", for no personal advantage. This helps explain Is. 52:3: "You were sold for nothing; and you shall be redeemed without money". They were "sold for nothing" in that God had no personal benefit from the exile of His people; He did this to them for their spiritual benefit, not for any gain for Himself. Their redemption likewise would be according to His grace, and not because of any transaction between God and man. This was reflected in the way Cyrus commanded the Jews to return and provided all that was materially required to rebuild the temple, but "not for reward", for no personal benefit.

Whilst some critics have tried to argue that Cyrus' attitude to the Jews was just part of a general policy of allowing exiles to return to their homelands, it has to be noted that he made the decree about the Jews as soon as he came to power. And there is evidence that his princes thought it a crazy idea and were opposed to it. Thus Dan. 10 records the Angel explaining how he has been detained by needing to spend time overcoming the princes of Persia. Cyrus made the decree for no good human reason. It was an impulse put into his mind by God. And yet this deliverance of the Jews is described in Isaiah as the result of God's Spirit. His Spirit can tamper directly with the human mind, putting ideas and impulses into us and empowering us to follow them… despite opposition all around us.

"Not for price" could also simply mean that the exiles wouldn't need to pay anything. God had cleared their debt- "You shall be redeemed without money" (Is. 52:3).

Isaiah 45:14 Thus says Yahweh: The labour of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you, and they shall be yours. They will go after you. They shall come over in chains and they will bow down to you. They will make supplication to you: 'Surely God is in you; and there is none else. There is no other god- But the Egyptians and Ethiopians didn't come and fall down before Judah, as the Queen of Sheba had before Solomon. Nor did they accept Yahweh as the only God, and ditch their idols. The idea was that the Jewish exiles in the lands of the South would return, and their captors would come with them, wishing to invert what had happened by showing themselves to now be servile to the Jews and their God. But instead, the returned Jews worshipped the idols of Egypt, and married their women (Ezra 9:1). And thus Israel *were* ashamed and confounded in the future (cp. :17). So the essence of these things is reapplied to the conversion of the Gentiles in the last day.

There are other references to the [potential] conversion of Egypt. "Princes shall come out of Egypt. Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" (Psa. 68:310; and Is. 19:18-22: "In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the

language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts... In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border... When they cry to the Lord because of oppressors, he will send them a saviour and defender, and deliver them. And the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them. And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them" (ESV). Likewise of Ethiopia and Sheba: "From beyond the ruins of Ethiopia, my suppliants, even the daughters of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering" (Zeph. 3:10). "The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts" (Ps. 72:10). This potential conversion of Egypt never happened at the time, just as the exiles didn't all return nor was the Kingdom re-established, and neither did Cyrus act as intended. It's not the prophecy was falsified, but rather that God's statements are ofen statements of intention and potential; but His prophecies are not deterministic, railroading men to conversion in spite of their free will. This is the answer to those who misunderstand some statements in the Bible as implying universal salvation. We note that people from these very areas were converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:10,11), along with the eunuch from Ethiopia.

We could read the "you" here as Cyrus, the subject of the context. Although we could read :13 as saying that Cyrus was not given any reward for what he was to do. In any case, Egypt was conquered by the Persians only under Cambyses, not Cyrus. So the intended reward of "Egypt" wasn't given to Cyrus; perhaps because he failed to fully act as the servant was intended to.

Men falling down before Israel saying "'Surely God is in you; and there is none else'" is transferred to the function of the true Christian in 1 Cor. 14:25. In this case, those "in" the suffering servant become the servant, rather than natural Israel at this point.

Isaiah 45:15 Most certainly You are a God who has hidden Yourself, God of Israel, the Saviour'-

This could be seen as the interjection of Israel in objection to God's statements. It would be one of many examples in Isaiah of where a voice speaks, without introduction. Is. 40 is the clearest example. Yahweh's "I am..." is met by their response "[But] You are...". We could read God as responding in the next verses, not least in His statement that He will save Israel (:16,17). It's as if He stolidly continues in His quest for their salvation, despite their objections that God has hidden Himself. We will discuss on :19 how God responds to this by stating the obvious- that He has not spoken nor worked in some obscure way that needs interpretation and deciphering. The Bible, God's plan of salvation, is not a riddle to be solved. God is not hiding from man, playing hard to get,

but openly revealing Himself. LXX gives "For thou art God, though we did not know it, O God of Israel the Saviour".

Is. 30:20 describes the reestablished Kingdom as a time when Judah's repentant eyes would "see" the God who had taught them through the sufferings of defeat and exile (see note there). Their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him (s.w. Job 3:23; 13:24) just as God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally, the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family / school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me… and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7). See on :19.

Isaiah 45:16 They will be disappointed, yes, confounded, all of them. Those who are makers of idols will go into confusion together- "Disappointed… confounded" are the words used earlier by Isaiah concerning the idolaters amongst the Jews (Is. 1:29; 20:5; 30:5), confirming our previous suggestions that the polemics against idol makers are in fact aimed at the Jewish exiles, rather than Gentiles. The Jews in Babylon were idolaters, and that is why they refused to respond to the salvation made possible through Cyrus.

LXX "All that are opposed to him shall be ashamed and confounded, and shall walk in shame: ye isles, keep a feast to me". This walking in shame is applied to the rejection at the last day of those who have refused the things of the Lord Jesus and trusted in the equivalent of "idols" in their generation (Rev. 16:15). It was to be the makers of idols who

were "confounded" (s.w. Is. 41:11; 45:16) and only the true Israel would not be "confounded" (Is. 45:17; 54:4). The sinners in Israel had refused to be confounded or ashamed of their sins (Jer. 3:3 s.w.) and so they would be shamed in condemnation. Repentance involves an imagination of ourselves coming to judgment day and being condemned, and feeling shame for that; that is how we shall not be ashamed. And it is the servant alone who shall not be ashamed / confounded because of His righteousness (Is. 50:7). Our identity with Him removes that shame. If we condemn ourselves, we shall not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The enemies of Israel would perish alongside the apostate within Israel, in the same judgment. See on :14.

Isaiah 45:17 Israel will be saved by Yahweh with an everlasting salvation- I suggested on :16 that the idol makers were Jews in Babylon and not Gentiles generally. "Israel will be saved..." could be a definition of "Israel" as the true Israel of God. Or it could be another example of where God condemns His people, but then goes right on to protest His love for them and intention to save them (see on Is. 44:1). Ultimately, God's people will not be "disappointed nor ashamed" even though they had been due to their idolatry (the same words are used of them in this connection in :16).

The "eternal age" of the Kingdom of peace could have come at that time, with the Messianic son of Isaiah as the father of that eternal age (see on Is. 9:6). But it didn't. An eternal Messianic kingdom could then have been established; Judah were urged to repent and allow it to happen in Is. 26:4. And the same potential was there for the exiles who returned from Babylon (Is. 45:17; 65:18). And the "father" of that could have been a Messianic figure who arose in Jerusalem. But these potentials have been reapplied and rescheduled to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus to be established in Zion in the last days.

You will not be disappointed nor confounded to ages everlasting- Or, "ashamed". See on :14,16. Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. Consider Is. 50:10: “Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice [s.w. Ezra 1:1 re the proclamation of Cyrus] of his servant [i.e. Cyrus, Is. 45:1], that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God”. Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed Isaiah’s prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4). Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9).

The same Hebrew words for “ashamed [and] confounded” in :16,17 occur in Ezra 9:6, where as a result of Ezra realizing that Judah had married the local women and broken covenant with Yahweh, he admits: “I am *ashamed* and *blush* [s.w. ‘confounded’] to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased....”. The words of Is. 45

could have had their fulfilment in the time of Cyrus; the surrounding nations could have come and worshipped before Judah, and the whole earth quit their idols and look unto Yahweh as a just God and a saviour. But Judah would not. Judah in the new temple would not "defile" Yahweh's Name any more (Ez. 43:7,8); but they were lazy to keep the uncleanness laws, they *did* defile Yahweh by touching dead bodied and then offering the sacrifices (Hag. 2:13,14 s.w.), just as Israel previously had been defiled by touching the dead bodies of their kings and then offering sacrifices (Ez. 43:7); but now, Judah thought they were above God's law, and therefore did exactly the same things which had caused the temple to be destroyed in the first place. The promise that Yahweh would dwell in the new temple was conditional on them not touching dead bodies (Ez. 43:9); but Hag. 2:13 makes it apparent that they did this very thing at the time of the restoration.

Isaiah 45:18 For thus says Yahweh who created the heavens, the God who formed the earth and made it, who established it and didn't create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: I am Yahweh; and there is no other- Yahweh speaks of the returnees as if they were a new creation, created by Him along with the heavens and earth of the temple which He had stretched out in Zion (Is. 43:7; 44:2). He did not form this new land / heavens of the kingdom and temple of Israel in vain- He created it to be inhabited (Is. 45:18). But the Jews acted like the old creation. And the promise of new creation was deferred until the time of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). Judah for the most part declined to inhabit / dwell in the new heavens and earth [the same word in Is. 45:18 is frequently used re. how the returnees *dwelt* in the cities of Judah]. And we too can take the simple encouragement- that God has created His Kingdom, with all the careful planning involved, so that it should be inhabited. He is not playing hard to get, nor indifferent to the progress of His plans. He wants us to be there.

If "the earth" is 'the land' of Israel and "the Heavens" refer to the temple (see 1 Kings 8:30; 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 20:2,6; 11:4; Heb. 7:26; 2 Sam. 15:15 etc.) then God is saying that if the temple and land remained uninhabited, His creation of them would be in vain- hence His plan of restoration. The references in Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration to God being the creator of Heaven and earth would therefore be reminders that it was equally in His power to create the new Heavens and earth of the people of Israel/the temple.

Isaiah 45:19 I have not spoken in secret, in a place of the land of darkness. I didn't say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me in vain'. I, Yahweh, speak righteousness. I declare things that are right- The idea of the first sentence may be that He had not spoken this word to the exiles in "the land of darkness", Babylon or ruined Judah, just for the sake of it. It was not "in vain", the prospect of the Kingdom was attainable. Perhaps this is God's

response to the complaint in :15 that He was hiding Himself. He is urging the exiles as He urges us- that His promise of eternal salvation is for real, He has promised it to us in "truth" ["right"] and for all our sin and dysfunction and separation from His ultimate perfection of holiness, His righteousness is not impugned by His wonderful offer to us. "I declare things that are right" could as well be rendered "I give direct answers". It is Israel who complain He is a God who hides Himself; He replies that in fact the opposite.

God denies that He spoke in "a place of the land of darkness", alluding to how the pagan responses were usually given from some dark cave, like the famous oracle at Delphi. This surely connects with Jer. 2:31: “Have I been a wilderness unto Israel, a land of darkness?”. God’s revelation to man has not been like a dark, trackless desert, but a light in which men might walk towards an assured goal. Any complaint that His word is hard to understand isn't really valid- it reflects a refusal to understand the obvious good news of His salvation and Kingdom. In the same way, "I said not... "Seek me" in vain", in chaos (*tohu*), (as in Is. 45:18, the land was not created "in vain"). He did not reveal His plan of salvation and set up the prospect of His Kingdom *without hope of result*. Life, Bible reading etc. is not a hopeless wander through a confusing wilderness. When Yahweh invited men to “Seek me”, He meant that He could and would be found (Jer. 29:13). Hence :22 "Look to Me and be saved". "I spoke openly to the world... in secret have I said nothing" (Jn. 18:20). "This commandment which I command you this day, it is not hidden from you, neither is it far off" (Dt. 30:11).

The call for Jerusalem to be inhabited of Is. 44:26 is repeated here. God created the new heavens and earth, the restored Jerusalem, to be inhabited. He has planned His eternal Kingdom on earth to be inhabited; to have people in it. This is a profound encouragement if we doubt our own final entry into that Kingdom. The intention to fill the earth with Abraham's spiritual seed, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore, requires the salvation of a great multitude. This is why there is all this created earth around us- for it to be inhabited. Just as God carefully created a habitable world, controlling the exact temperature, proximity to the sun, revolution of the earth etc., so He has created His Kingdom to be inhabited by man.

Isaiah 45:20 Assemble yourselves and come. Draw near together, you who have escaped from the nations- The 'bringing / assembling' and 'drawing near / gathering' of the exiles (s.w. Is. 43:5) would have been primarily fulfilled at the restoration (same words in Neh. 1:9). But most of the exiles remained in the lands of their captivity, just as people resist the Gospel's call today. They had to themselves bring and gather themselves (Is. 45:20; 49:18; 60:4), so that God would confirm this by bringing and gathering them (Is. 43:5; Jer. 31:8; Ez. 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; Zech. 10:10). And so today with all who wish to be in God's Kingdom; our desire to be there and first moves towards it will be confirmed many times over by God's work through His Spirit. The LXX and GNB

suggest that the group in view are the minority of the peoples of the Babylonian empire who were to repent and turn to Yahweh: "people of the nations, all who survive the fall of the empire" (GNB). They were intended to join the repentant exiles in a restored, multiethnic Kingdom of God in Judah. This possibility of course didn't happen, human impenitence was to such an extent, and so it looks forward to the final establishment of the Kingdom in the last days.

Those have no knowledge who carry the wood of their engraved image, and pray to a god that can't save- Again idols are characterized by being unable to save; Yahweh's ultimate salvation of man from death is what makes Him God. The implication is that the remnant who did return from Babylon took idols with them- exactly matching how the Israelites took their idols with them through the Red Sea in their 'return' to Canaan (Ez. 20), and carried the tabernacle of Moloch as well as that of Yahweh. They are challenged in a court case, to present their arguments for doing so, and to justify their disbelief that Yahweh alone could save them He insists that He is a just God and Israel's Saviour (:21).

Isaiah 45:21 Declare and present it. Yes, let them take counsel together- 'Bring your strong arguments'. This is legal language, inviting any opposed to God's purpose with Jacob to present their hard evidence in court. But Isaiah's lengthy prophecies of the restoration must be compared against the sad reality of what actually happened. The prophecies exude a wonderfully positive and joyful spirit, which contrasts with the defeatism of the returnees. And one cannot help but wonder whether we as individuals and therefore as a community have really lived the life of joy which the NT promises for those who truly believe. Is. 45:20-21 is an example: "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations [i.e. Babylon and all the 127 provinces of Persia]... Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them *take counsel together*". These are the very words used to describe how the local opposition 'took counsel together' to frustrate the work of the Jews (Neh. 6:7). Yahweh is exultantly saying: 'Let them do it... let them get on with it, nothing can prosper against you and your work!'. But instead, the Jews took the opposition so seriously.

Who has shown this from ancient time? Who has declared it of old? Haven't I, Yahweh? There is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour; There is no one besides Me- Justice and salvation were not part of the idol worship systems or theologies. And those idols had no histories of prophetic statements and intentions. The whole metaphor of 'redemption' shows that there was a justice in God's salvation. Israel were in debt to Him because of their sin, He didn't quietly forget the debt, rather did He as their redeemer pay the price for their redemption. As it were, to Himself. There is therefore an ethical legitimacy to salvation; He is "a just God and a Saviour". Ps. 85:10 makes the

same point, that "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other". This ethical legitimacy is a big theme of Romans, which is a conscious development of the arguments of Is. 40-66. Thus Rom. 3:26 argues of how "That He might be just, and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus". Justification is just. It is not a turning of a friendly blind eye to sin.

Isaiah 45:22 Look to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other- LXX "ye that come from the end of the earth", as if referring to the exiles returning from the boundaries of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. They were to look to Yahweh in repentance, "turn to Me" (LXX) in repentance; and if they looked, then the blindness of their eyes would be removed by God's Spirit acting in their hearts, according to the promise of the new covenant. But they continued to look / turn to other gods, and so Yahweh's face remained hidden from them because they were not looking to Him (s.w. Dt. 31:18), turning or 'looking' to Yahweh the back and not the face, so that He would remain hidden from them (:15; Jer. 32:33 s.w.).

The altar "Jehovah-Nissi" connected Yahweh personally with the pole / standard / ensign of Israel (Ex. 17:15). Yet *nissi* is the Hebrew word used for the pole on which the brass serpent was lifted up, and for the standard pole which would lift up Christ. Somehow Yahweh Himself was essentially connected with the cross of Christ. “There is no God else beside; a just God and a Saviour (Jesus)… look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Is. 45:21,22) is evident allusion to the snake on the pole to which all Israel were bidden look and be saved. And yet that saving symbol of the crucified Jesus is in fact God Himself held up to all men.

Isaiah 45:23 I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness and will not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath-

God could swear by no greater and so He swears by Himself, by His own life, or as He says often, "As surely as I live" (Heb. 6:13, 16); this, therefore, is the most solemn assurance that He does indeed desire the salvation of His people.

Heb. "righteousnesses", an intensive plural. God's intention is that His people shall bow to Him at the last day and be accepted at His final judgment. That word will not return to Him void. It will achieve fulfilment; just as He formed the new heavens and earth to be inhabited. His plan for the Kingdom will not be in vain. The Divine hope was that the repentant exiles would enter the new covenant, and take an oath to Him. But they didn't, and so these things are reinterpreted with reference to the work of the Lord Jesus, and believers bowing before Him. Rom. 14 quotes these words about how the new Israel will come from all nations to the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus at the last day. There's one thing which the sheer *height* of the Lord's exaltation leads us to.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him… that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow… and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord… wherefore… work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:9-12). These words are alluding to Is. 45:23,24: "…unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". We all find humility difficult. But before the height of His exaltation, a height which came as a result of the depth of the degradation of the cross, we should bow our knees in an unfeigned humility and realization of our sinfulness, and thankful recognition of the fact that through Him we are counted righteous. We will be prostrated in the day of judgment before Him, and yet will be made to stand. We therefore ought not to judge our brother who will likewise be made to stand in that day- to his Master he stands or falls, not to us.

In Phil. 2:10, the Lord Jesus is said to have been given power over all beings in heaven, earth and the nether-world. The Romans understood the world to be divided into these three spheres of the cosmos. But this passage is based upon Is. 45:23, which says that God has total supremacy (see on :5-7)- and this has been granted to His Son. As I understand it, Paul is reasoning that if God is all powerful, and if that power has been given to the Lord Jesus, then whatever cosmology there is around, e.g. belief in a nether-world, well, in that case, Jesus has all power over that as well. The same argument applies to demons. If they exist, well the essence is that they are well and truly under the Lord's control and aren't essentially powerful. Paul doesn't so much ridicule the idea of a nether-world, rather he takes the view, as Jesus did in His dealings with the demon issue, that God's power is so great that their existence is effectively not an issue.

Isaiah 45:24 They will say of Me, 'There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh'. Even to Him shall men come- These will be the thoughts of us each as we are bow before the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus, which is in view in :24. Then we shall appreciate as never before the meaning of imputed righteousness.

And all those who were incensed against Him shall be disappointed- The Samaritans could have provided a fulfilment of all this, just as the prideful Assyrians were before. And yet Sanballat, Tobiah, the Ammonites and Ashdodites were "wroth" [s.w. 'incensed'] against Judah (Neh. 4:1,7). But they didn't come to nothing, nor to shame, in that those very groups were the ones who married into Jewry, to the extent that Tobiah even shifted the tithes out of one of the chambers of the temple and set up his office there. But at the last day, all the Lord's enemies shall be ashamed ["disappointed"] in the shame of condemnation.

Isaiah 45:25 In Yahweh shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory- "Be righteous", because they access the righteousness that is "in" Yahweh alone (:24). And that worked out through the Lord Jesus, "Yahweh our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6). This

phrase "All the seed of Israel" is surely alluded to by Paul when he concludes with awed intensity: "And so all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26). He has in view natural Israel as well as spiritual Israel.

Is. 45:20-25 calls for the Jews to return from Babylon and come unto Him in Zion; but the majority remained in Babylon, and so these words were delayed in fulfilment; Rom. 14 quotes them about how the new Israel will come from all nations to the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus at the last day. But had Jewry returned from Babylon as they had been asked, they would have come to their Messiah there and then. "All the seed of Israel" suggests the ten tribes also were intended to return; but they too preferred their exile to restoring the Kingdom in Zion.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 46

Isaiah 46:1 Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; their idols are on the animals, and on the livestock: the things that you carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary-

The gods could not save their own images. This is the referent of "their". The gods were supposed to not live on earth, but their images, the idols on earth, were their representatives. By contrast Yahweh saves what is His image, which is His blind, deaf and deformed servant Israel.

This appears to be a vision of the gods of Babylon being removed from the city as the Persians advanced. Just as Merodach-Baladan packed his idols on boats, at the approach of Sennacherib. But as I have noted elsewhere, the fall of Babylon didn't happen quite as predicted. Darius the Mede actually maintained the Babylonian gods; of whom Bel and Nebo were the popular ones; although "Bel" is the equivalent of Hebrew 'Baal' and may be a generic name. And so the potential scenario presented elsewhere, of Babylon falling, being destroyed by the fire of Divine judgment Sodom-style, and the exiles returning to Judah- just didn't come about. The various preconditions involving Judah's repentance weren't in place. And so the 'fall of Babylon' prophecies will in essence, although maybe not in every detail, be fulfilled in the fall of latter day Babylon. And this is how we are to understand this picture of the gods of Babylon being put on animals, after being carried about in the various processions earlier. The weary burdened with idols are reapplied to all heavy burdened who can come to the Lord Jesus and be relieved (Mt. 11:28).

So much of later Isaiah is taken up with mockery and criticism of the Babylonian gods and the Marduk cult. The book of Esther, with Mordecai as the joint hero, named as he was after Marduk, demonstrates how caught up were the Jews with the Babylonian gods. Ezekiel repeatedly reveals the idolatry of the captives. Isaiah was therefore an appeal for the Jews to quit the Marduk cult and believe in the radical prophecies about

the overthrow of Babylon. The situation is analogous to how the New Testament is full of references to the Roman imperial cult of empire worship. So much of the Bible is like Isaiah and the New Testament- a radical, counter-cultural call to see our present world for what it is, and to perceive that the ways of God simply can't be mixed in, watered down or compromised with the way of this world. Naturally such criticisms of Babylon and its gods would have been a very risky thing- for Babylon had shown grace to many Jews and they were doing well in rising up the social and economic ladder there. To speak of Babylon in the hostile way the prophets do was a brave and unpopular thing (Is. 13,14,21,46; Jer. 50,51; often in Zechariah). We know from Ez. 8, Jer. 44 and Zech. 5 that many Jews had accepted the idols of their Babylonian conquerors, rather like Ahaz did after his defeat by Assyria (2 Kings 16:10). The spirit of ridiculing the idolatry of Babylon whilst living in it, waiting the call to leave, is so relevant to modern Christians working, living and waiting in latter day Babylon.

Surely the Lord had these words in mind when He bid all who are "weary and heavy laden" to come to Him, to accept His yoke, and find rest under Him (Mt. 11:28,29). In this case, the weariness and weight He refers to is related to idolatry, in whatever form. Not carrying idols means freedom and rest. "The weary" had been offered "rest" in Is. 28:12, but they had refused: "To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith you may cause the weary to rest". Man's restlessness and weariness is indeed related to his idolatry. Look at the burnt out faces of materialists, addicts... No idol ever satisfies, it always needs carrying, and it is exhausting. In its most extreme form, we see this in those in substance addiction; but the same essential experience is found in all idolatry. Man wants rest and peace but refuses the only path that leads to it: "Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jer. 6:16).

Isaiah 46:2 They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves have been carried away into captivity- "They could not deliver", i.e. cause to escape. This is the recurrent theme- that the idols couldn't save, only Yahweh can save, Yah-hoshua, Yah saves, "Jesus". In this God is so unique that He becomes the only God. For elsewhere in Isaiah Yahweh predicates divinity upon being able to save eternally. The idea as noted on :1 is that the idols were to be carried away out of danger; but now there is the picture of the idols having been captured and being now taken off into captivity. But as explained on :1, this isn't what happened when Babylon fell to the Medes.

Isaiah 46:3 Listen to Me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been carried from their birth, that have been carried from the womb- The remnant of the whole house of Israel refers to the repentant remnant of both Judah and the ten tribes, who were intended to repent and return to Zion together, united by their

experience of repentance, grace and forgiveness. The contrast is with how the idols / false gods had to be carried by their people and beasts (:1,2), but Yahweh the true God has carried His people. This is where mere religion and true spirituality are shown to be so different; religion often involves making ourselves feel good by supposedly doing something for God, whereas salvation by grace through faith is about accepting His carrying of us. The "remnant" were those whom Yahweh had hoped would repent, e.g. in Is. 6:9-13: "even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled… The holy seed is its stump". Or again in Is. 10:20-23: "The remnant [lit. the remains] of Israel, the people who have escaped of Jacob's household, will not again any more lean on the one that hit it, but will lean on Yahweh, Israel's holy one, in truth. The remnant will turn, the remnant of Jacob, to God the warrior. Although your people, Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, a remnant will return for it. An end is decreed, overflowing with faithfulness". Thus Isaiah had been asked to name his son "The remnant shall return". But it seems from Is. 46 that even the remnant were caught up in idolatry.

The picture of being carried 'from birth in the womb' could suggest that God was the pregnant mother who somehow had for a long time carried a child that had not come to the birth. Or possibly, had been an invalid child that from birth had to be carried. We think of the man lame from birth being carried in Acts 3:2; and in that acted parable, he represented an Israel who looked for healing in the wrong place. Earlier Yahweh had used the same image- He was as a woman who had been a long time [70 years] pregnant, but was now screaming as she came to the birth: "I have been silent a long time, I have been quiet and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a travailing woman, I will both gasp and pant" (Is. 42:14). The pain and anxiety of a 70 year pregnancy… is a powerful image. As is the feminine image of "God". The child to be born was "the remnant"- a community of those who 'got it', who were spiritually born. But it is questionable if they ever came to the birth. And so the imagery is applied to all Christians who are "born" of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5).

Isaiah 46:4 And even to old age I am He, and even to grey hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; yes, I will carry, and will deliver- As discussed on :3, the image of a child who must be carried from birth is that of an invalid child. Especially in the days before wheelchairs, a handicapped child had to be carried. This child grows up, to grey hairs- and is still carried by God. Not like the super mum who carries her invalid child- until she can do so no more, and must die herself. We have here a picture of the dysfunctional and handicapped nature of God's people. We recall that His beloved servant Israel is presented in the witness box as blind and deaf. He carries them from birth onwards, as the mother of a disabled child does, because He feels a responsibility to that which He has made and "born". There is a word play in "I will bear". He had born the child, so He must bear it for all time. Bearing, carrying and delivering are the words

of child birth, but God does these things all our lives. But unlike a human mother, He never gets old. This is a powerful image, and comforts us that the people of God are imperfect, not "normal", and handicapped. But loved to the end by the greatest parent. What a contrast with the idols, who had to be carried and could not carry their people… Acts 13:18 continues the image in saying that God carried Israel as a nursing father through the wilderness. It is a mother who nurses / breast feeds a child. But God was a nursing father for forty years… and would be pregnant with them again fo seventy years and carry them / us their entire lives.

An oft overlooked component of the promises to Abraham which are the core of the Gospel is that "I will be your God". Land and eternal life in the future, blessings… these are indeed wonderful. But the King of the Cosmos is *my* God. Oh how rich the promise. So often we read that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I take this to mean that He was there for them, through every moment, He was their God, He alone is without beginning and has immortality in Himself. This continuity in God over history is therefore an encouragement to us that He likewise is the continuous One in our lives too. Israel in captivity felt God had forgotten them; and so they are comforted that they are individuals "which have been borne by me from the belly, which have been carried from the womb: and even to old age I am he, and even to grey hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry, and will deliver" (Is. 46:3,4). Note how God, who is presented as male, likens Himself to a woman here. As He carried us in the womb, so He will carry us when we are old and grey haired. True to human parenting experience, the baby is always the father's little baby, even in grey hairs. And this wonderful comfort is so simply because "I am he". This is an evident reference to God's Name, YHWH. The mystery of the Name is partly because the declaration of it in Ex. 3:6 implies grammatically that He is, was, and shall be. This was intended to be a great comfort to Israel in Egypt, who again had felt that God was somehow distant, looking the other way, leaving them in their aloneness. The same Name, the promise of God's abiding presence and purpose with us, provides comfort to every one of His people.

God is likening Himself to a woman who carries a child in her womb, then bears it, and then carries it as a baby, but still carries it when the child is an old man. Incidentally, this simile is proof enough that God is not somehow 'anti-women'. The God of all knowledge is aware of a fundamental psychological phenomena in all men; the fear, however passive and buried, of being without their mother; the fear of loneliness, the fear of eternal separation from the woman who bore and carried them. From the president to the happy village grandfather, this sense is there. Perhaps David appreciated this when he referred to a man weeping at his mother's funeral (not his father's) as the ultimate cameo of grieving and desolation of soul (Ps. 35:14). And yet God says that He is in some ways the eternal mother, the one who bore and carried us in babyhood, but the One who will yet carry us when we are gray headed and once again

unable to walk. Yet He is also the everlasting Father, through His Son (Is. 9:6). It's a picture of exquisite beauty. Our relationship with God as the One who will never leave us is the only answer to what philosophers call 'the existential problem'; the awareness that has come to every thoughtful soul, the terror of being so alone as we get older, the dread of being without our human roots, of becoming the one to whom others (e.g. our children) look to as their background and root, whilst we ourselves have no tangible link with *our* past. This problem is defined by C.S. Lewis in *The Inner Ring*: "I believe that in all men's lives at certain periods…one of the most dominant elements is the desire to be inside the local Ring and the terror of being left outside". This horror of existential loneliness can only be met by our sure knowledge that we have a very personal relationship in the Kingdom of God with our Heavenly Father, who will never ever leave us, and will preserve us unto His eternal Kingdom.

Isaiah 46:5 To whom will you liken Me and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike?- This seems addressed to the idolaters within Judah, who were not denying Yahweh but making Him "equal" to the idols by claiming to worship Him through worshipping them.

Isaiah 46:6 Some pour out gold from the bag, and weigh silver in the balance. They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god. They fall down- yes, they worship- The idea is that people pay in gold to a goldsmith, and he then makes that gold into a god, after keeping part of it for himself as wages. This explains the Divine cameraman zooming in on the handover of the gold pieces to the goldsmith. This recalls the picture in Is. 44:15-17, of a man cutting down a tree, using half for an idol and the other half for firewood. The purpose of presenting this bizarre picture was to enable the audience to perceive the utter foolishness of idolatry, although the person caught up in it can't perceive it. And that is a feature of idolatry to this day.

The creation of idols was something done only under the supposed command of the gods. It seems there is extensive allusion to Marduk here, the Babylonian god whom many of the Jewish exiles had worshipped. We recall "Mordecai", named after Marduk. The ninth to the eighth century Babylonian *Erra Epic* has Marduk listing the necessary elements for the remaking of his living image: the help of the carpenter-god Nin-ildu, the smith-god Ninagal and Gushkin-banda, 'Creator of god and man', the god of gold working. The entire Babylonian mythology is being mocked here. And it was exactly the cult of Marduk which the Jewish exiles were still involved with.

Isaiah 46:7 They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it, and set it in its place, and it stands, from its place it shall not move: yes, one may cry to it, yet it can not answer, nor save

him out of his trouble- Again we have irony being used; the idols had to be carried by their people, whereas Yahweh carried His people (:3,4). This sounds like the processions in Babylon where the idols were carried through the streets on the shoulders of men, and then placed in high places and worshipped. Clearly Is. 40-66 was addressed directly to the returning exiles who would've been familiar with this scene; Isaiah was prophesying all this after Hezekiah had sinned and the captivity had been prophesied in Is. 39. Isaiah has so many detailed allusions to Babylonian life and beliefs that it's impossible to think that it was all written in Hezekiah's time, with no reference to the Babylonians. We find the specific names of Babylonian idols (Is. 46:1,2), ceremonies and processions known only in Babylon (Is. 46:7), omens (Is. 44:25), magic and astrology (Is. 47:1,2,12,13). Time and again there is specific reference to leaving Babylon and returning to Judah (Is. 40:3-11; Is. 42:15,16; Is. 48:20-22; 49:9-12; 52:11,12).

Isaiah 46:8 Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, you transgressors- LXX has this as a call to repentance from idolatry by the exiles in Babylon: "Remember ye these things, and groan: repent, ye that have gone astray, return in your heart". They were to "remember this" that they already knew, and "bring it again to mind" that God is really the great eternal, and His Name is as it is, and they should have had no part in the idol processions spoken of in :7. The idol makers of Is. 44:19 are criticized because "No one takes this to heart". The idol makers of Is. 46:8 are asked "You transgressors, take it to heart". The appeal for repentance suggests it is the Jewish exiles who are in view; they were making the idols.

Isaiah 46:9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me- The exiled Jews ought to have had no part in the idol worship of Babylon spoken of in :7. They should have perceived that the magnitude of Yahweh made all other gods and idols of no significance. Our strength against idolatry in its modern forms is likewise found from appreciating the greatness of our God.

Elsewhere, God cites "the former things" as witnesses of Him and of His saving purpose for Israel. What were the former things? "The former things shall be forgotten" (:18; "the former things shall not be remembered", Is. 65:18)- all the sin and failure. But it was how God dealt with Israel's "former things" which were the witness to Him as He is and was and always shall be- the God who saves sinners by grace. In this sense Israel were to remember their former things, their sins and God's gracious forgiveness of them (Is. 44:20,21). Is. 46:8,9 is clear about this: "Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me". Only Yahweh would

forgive so much sin, "the former things"; no other god would have done. There is none like Him in His forgiveness of His people.

Isaiah 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure- The emphasis on this (e.g. also Is. 41:26) is understandable seeing that such a specific prophecy regarding the 70 years captivity was to be given and fulfilled. But the emphasis and flavour of the words used is not upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

The pleasure or will of God refers specifically to the restoration; Cyrus was raised up to do all God's pleasure in restoring Zion (Is. 44:28).

Isaiah 46:11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of My counsel from a far country; yes, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it-

Literally, a raven. This was an unclean bird. The idea is continually that the ones God uses as His servants are far from ideal and not morally qualified. But still He calls them to His service. God thus addresses the Jewish difficulty of having a Gentile saviour in Cyrus.

The servant songs or poems of Isaiah clearly have reference to a Messiah figure who was to appear at the time of the restoration from Babylon. The early songs clearly have reference to Cyrus- he is named as such. Expositors such as Harry Whittaker and J.W. Thirtle have sought to prove the naming of Cyrus as an interpolation, claiming that Isaiah has sole primary reference to the days of Hezekiah. This seems to me to be desperate. The naming of Cyrus, and the specific references to his military campaigns in the prophecies, simply can't be gotten around. To brush all this off as uninspired interpolation and fiddling with the text of holy Scripture just won't do. The references to Cyrus aren't merely the mention of his name. Is. 41:1-5 alludes unquestionably to the dramatic conquest of Sardis by Cyrus in 547 BC. The 'servant' is described as swooping down first from the east and then from the north, trampling local rulers beneath him (Is. 41:2-5,25; Is. 45:1; Is. 46:11). This 'servant' was to end the Babylonian empire (Is. 43:14; Is. 48:14,15), enable the captive Jews in Babylon to return to their land (Is. 42:6,7; Is.

43:5-7; Is. 45:13), restore Jerusalem and the ruined cities of Judah (Is. 44:26-28; 45:13). There can be no serious doubt that it was Cyrus who fulfilled these things. The servant is a “bird of prey from the east” (Is. 46:11)- according to Xenophon, the eagle was the emblem of Cyrus. The servant “victorious at every step” with lightning speed (Is. 41:2) surely refers to how Cyrus conquered the Medes, the former Assyrian empire, and the Lydians before taking Babylon in 539 BC. We should have no problem with a pagan king being described as God’s “servant”, for that very term is used of Nebuchadnezzar in Jer. 25:9. See on :7. Cyrus failed to live up to his potential (see on Is. 45:4,5) and so the prophecies came to be applied to the Lord Jesus, who was far more fully "the word made flesh" (Jn. 1:14), which is perhaps the idea of "the man of My counsel", the man who would fulfill God's purposes and prophetic word in totality.

Isaiah 46:12 Listen to Me, you stout-hearted, who are far from righteousness- Despite this laboured and repeated assurance, the exiles were stout hearted, which is how they are described in Ez. 2:4. Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14). See on Is. 49:24. It was the invaders of Zion who were the stout-hearted who were to be destroyed (s.w. Ps. 76:5); the hard hearted amongst God's people were and are to be destroyed at the same time as them, facing the same judgment for having the same heart. God criticises His people for being far away from righteousness, but then immediately He goes on to assure them of His grace and insistent attempts to save them. For He says that although they have stepped far away from His righteousness, He will cause His righteousness to draw near to them (:13). They were "far" from righteousness but He would make that righteousness not "far" from them (:13).

Isaiah 46:13 I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not wait; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel My glory-

GNB "Listen to me, you stubborn people who think that victory is far away. I am bringing the day of victory near" suggests that Israel thought it was still far off, but God says He has speeded it up. God began in Is. 40 by saying that He had paid the debt of His people and thus brought to an early end their period of servitude. But as we know from Haggai, they liked to think that the day of restoration was still far off and it was not the time to build the temple. Because they wanted to build their own houses first.

This connects back to Is. 5:19, where we read that the Jews mocked Isaiah and his God, saying "Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it!". There was clearly opposition to Isaiah's prophecies. The idea of judgment coming would have been mocked in these kinds of words. But we wonder whether this is really a verbatim

quotation from these people; or whether God read their thoughts as effectively saying this, and as being the real implication of their positions. For there is no evidence that Judah abandoned Yahweh; rather did they claim obedience and loyalty to Him, although they claimed the same about their idols whom they worshipped in His Name. But God was not deaf to their words, nor the implications of their thoughts and actions. He in fact heard their mocking 'prayer', because He here says that He will "come near" (s.w.) in fulfilment of His counsel or words.

But, perhaps intentionally, these words can be read another way. This idea of bringing salvation near is in the context of the hard hearted Jews being "far" from Yahweh's righteousness. It's as if God wishes to somehow force through His plan of saving them, bringing near the salvation which they pushed far from them. But even then, they refused it. He has the same enthusiasm for human salvation today.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 47

Isaiah 47:1 Come down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, daughter of the Chaldeans: for you shall no more be called tender and delicate- The Ras Shamra texts include a section on the fall and death of Baal, another form of the Babylonian "Bel" of Is. 46:1. Although written in Ugaritic, this section has amazing similarities with the poem of Isaiah 14 about the fall of Babylon – e.g. “The death of Baal” includes lines such as “From the throne on which he sits… how hath Baal come down, how hath the mighty been cast down!”. Isaiah’s message was therefore: ‘Forget those stories about Baal being cast down; what’s relevant for us is that mighty Babylon, which tempts us to trust in her rather than Yahweh God of Israel, is to be cast down, let’s apply the language of Baal’s fall to the kingdoms of this world which we know and live amongst’. Another such example is to be found in Is. 47:1: “Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne”. This is almost quoting [albeit through translation] from the ‘Death of Baal’ poem.

The reference to Babylon as a virgin may be summed up best by the GNB paraphrase: "You were once like a virgin, a city unconquered, but you are soft and delicate no longer! You are now a slave!". The idea is that she is about to be raped and lose her virginity; for Babylon had never been captured by another power at that point. Lam. 1 has the same figures used of what the Babylonians did to Jerusalem: virgin daughter Zion has been widowed and her children taken, the princess has become slave, mocked and abused with none to help her, "Oh how she sits alone, the city full of people" (Lam. 1) is Babylon now sitting in the dirt (Is. 47:1), just as Judah's king and queen had to 'sit' in humiliation, "your beautiful crown has come down" (Jer. 13:18) etc. "You shall no more be called tender and delicate" uses the words of Dt. 28:54,56 about the judgments upon unfaithful Israel. Judah acted like Babylon and therefore received her judgments, just as the rejected of God's people will be "condemned with the world". The judgments had been carried out by Babylon under God's direction, but they were to experience them themselves because they had not only overstepped the limits, but had not shown Divine pity to the sinful and condemned. And the essence of that warning comes through to us.

Isaiah 47:2 Take the millstones, and grind meal; remove your veil, strip off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers-

This was the lowest work; the son of the slave woman who grinds at the mill means the lowest person in society (Ex. 11:5). Babylon was to fall suddenly and be plunged down to the lowest slavery. The suddenness of the fall is stressed later in Is. 47. But the fall of Babylon to Cyrus and his general Darius didn't quite achieve this. As I have noted elsewhere (see on Is. 46:1), the fall of Babylon didn't happen quite as predicted. Darius the Mede actually maintained the Babylonian gods; of whom Bel and Nebo were the popular ones; although "Bel" is the equivalent of Hebrew 'Baal' and may be a generic name. Many within Babylon supported him, and the Babylonians didn't go into captivity across "the rivers", having to lift up their skirts and bare their legs to cross them. And so

the potential scenario presented elsewhere, of Babylon falling, being destroyed by the fire of Divine judgment Sodom-style, and the exiles returning to Judah- just didn't come about. The various preconditions involving Judah's repentance weren't in place. And so the 'fall of Babylon' prophecies will in essence, although maybe not in every detail, be fulfilled in the fall of latter day Babylon. And this is how we are to understand this picture of Babylon being led into captivity. Isaiah has earlier spoken of the Jewish exiles passing through the rivers in returning from Babylon to Zion. Surely this must be the same reference; Babylon were to be humbled, and join the Jews in a pilgrimage through the rivers to Zion. But that didn't happen. This prophecy was however to help the exiles see Babylon differently. The apparent greatness and permanence was going to end, and the city was evil in God's eyes. The exiles needed to leave it. And that message stood, regardless of when and how the judgements upon Babylon were fulfilled. We could also see these prophecies against Babylon as being like those of Jonah against Nineveh- the Divine hope was that there would be repentance in the gap between the prophecy and its intended possible fulfilment.

Isaiah 47:3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and will spare no man- See on :2. This scenario didn't totally come about when Babylon fell to the Medes. The population wasn't destroyed, there was very little bloodshed. But the language of Babylon's judgment here and in :2 is very similar to that of Israel's judgment. The idea is that what Babylon did to Judah was to be done to them, finally. This is the theme of Revelation, where the judgments upon Israel are related to the final judgments upon the beast system which has judged her.

Yahweh is repeatedly presented in Isaiah as the redeemer or *go'el* of Israel. He therefore paid their debt so that they may be freed from their indentured labour. But another duty of the *go'el* was to revenge the shedding of the family blood. And here this idea is alluded to, in that Yahweh would "take vengeance" upon the Babylonians. Thus we go on to read in :4 of Yahweh as His people's "redeemer". It was God who had raised up the Babylonians to punish Judah; but He also looked at it another way. He was the redeemer of His people, and so He must take vengeance for their blood. To have Yahweh as your redeemer, the one who will avenge you, is so wonderful- it must remove from us all attempts at vengeance and achieving payback in this life. The natural desire to settle up over past issues must be resigned- and the psychological energy thereby released put to the Lord's service.

"Will spare no man" is an attempt to translate a very difficult original. GNB "and no one will stop me" is a bit better, but the idea seems to be that Yahweh will accept no intercession to stop His vengeance on Babylon, as the redeemer of His people: “Neither will I suffer man to intercede with me”. Vengeance is His for His beloved family member, and nobody will stop Him being the redeemer. And that has wider implications- nobody

can stop Yahweh being a redeemer. In this context, the redemption is about serving vengeance; but His redemption has far wider applications.

The language here is disturbing: of being uncovered and shamed as a man takes vengeance upon the virgin daughter of Babylon. Uncovering or exposure of someone's nakedness is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. This surely suggests rape, the kind of rape performed by victors against the vanquished. But Yahweh appears strongly behind it. We could argue that the language is similar to that of the Lamentations, where these things were done to the daughter of Zion. And the idea would simply be that what Babylon did to Zion was to be done to her- under God's control. Lam. 1 has the same figures used of what the Babylonians did to Jerusalem: virgin daughter Zion has been widowed and her children taken, the princess has become slave, mocked and abused with none to help her, "Oh how she sits alone, the city full of people" (Lam. 1) is Babylon now sitting in the dirt (Is. 47:1), just as Judah's king and queen had to 'sit' in humiliation, "your beautiful crown has come down" (Jer. 13:18) etc.

Isaiah 47:4 Our Redeemer, Yahweh of Armies is His name, is the Holy One of Israel-

Here we have a voice breaking in, as so often in Isaiah, notably in Is. 40. The voice is that of the exiles. And then the prophecy returns to God speaking directly. The hope was that the exiles would say Yahweh was "our redeemer". This is a fantasy of what God hoped they would say. We find similar fantasy in Hosea, the fantasy of love. And yet it was a redemption refused. God was Israel's "holy one", the unique one, in that He was their saviour: "I am Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel your Saviour" (Is. 43:3). See on :15. God's abiding, eternal Name is contrasted with how the names of Babylon are removed- "you shall no more be *called* [named] 'Tender and delicate'... you shall no more be *called* [named] 'The mistress of kingdoms'" (:1,5). All names and titles, all personality, will ultimately come to nothing. Only Yahweh's Name will endure, centered as it is around His characteristic of eternally saving man. Only the fruits of the Spirit, the characteristics of the Yahweh Name in us, will abide eternally. Your characteristic of [e.g.] impatience will not endure; but your characteristic of [e.g.] pity for sick animals will endure eternally. This points up the supreme importance of character and personality development. For that alone will eternally endure.

The sad thing is that the redemption of Israel made possible through the fall of Babylon wasn't accepted by them; and they remained in exile, for the most part. As Hosea ‘redeemed’ Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel’s go’el , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh’s relationship to Judah in

captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave..." (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

LXX "Thy deliverer is the Lord of hosts, the Holy One of Israel is his name" would suggest that Yahweh was ready to deliver Babylon- this therefore could be read as a call for her to repent, which is also in view in Jer. 51:9. This prophecy against Babylon can therefore be read like the prophesied destruction of Nineveh- to appeal for their repentance in the gap between prophecy and fulfilment.

Isaiah 47:5 Sit in silence, and go into darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms- Darkness is the imagery of condemnation. "Mistress" implies she is a whore awaiting judgment. Again, the language of Judah's judgment, 'sitting in silence', is applied now to Babylon (Lam. 2:10; 3:28: "The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground and keep silence, they have cast up dust upon their heads"; likewise Is. 3:26: "And she (Jerusalem) being desolate shall sit upon the ground" (cp. :1,2). "Go into darkness" recalls Judah being sent into the darkness of Babylon; and now Babylon must go through the same. Lam. 3:2 "He has led me, and brought me into darkness, and not into light". But the mistress of kingdoms was to be destroyed as Sodom was (Is. 13:19); and that didn't happen at the fall of Babylon to the Medes. This, as noted on Is. 46:1, was a potential scenario that was delayed until the latter day fall of Babylon the whore as described in Revelation. We see that condemnation involved being made to go through [at least mentally] what they had put God's people through. This terrible mental torture is symbolized by the language of fire and burning in Gehenna.

Isaiah 47:6 I was angry with My people, I profaned My inheritance, and gave them into your hand: you showed them no mercy; on the aged you have very heavily laid your yoke- Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant. Babylon were not condemned for executing God's judgments upon Judah; but for their subsequent bloodlust and showing no mercy, and abusing those such as the elderly who were not the primary objects of the Divine judgment. This abuse of the elderly was particularly noted by God (Lam. 4:16; 5:12). It was their subsequent pride and pretending to Yahweh (:7) which were the reasons for judgment falling upon them.

We could read with LXX "You defiled My inheritance". The Jewish exiles accepted Babylonian gods and were thereby defiled, but God blames and punishes Babylon for

this. Indeed the Jews had worshipped those gods before the Babylonian invasion. So Yahweh's argument here seems very much biased towards Israel's innocence and Babylon's guilt. His reasoning arose clearly from His great love of His people. And yet this revealing of Babylon for who they were was also a way of appealing to the exiles to come out from her.

But Israel had once been "holy to Yahweh" (Jer. 2:3), but He had profaned them (Is. 43:28 "Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; and I will make Jacob a curse, and Israel an insult"). Likewise the suffering of the aged is mentioned in Lamentations as something Yahweh had brought upon His people: "The anger of Yahweh has scattered them; He will no more regard them: He didn't respect the persons of the priests, nor favour the elderly" (Lam. 4:16 Heb.). But now Babylon is being condemned for not having mercy upon the condemned, especially upon the elderly and priests whom Yahweh had condemned. "You did not have compassion" is the centerpiece of the argument. This was the reason Babylon was to be brutally judged. For Yahweh had said that He would show compassion to Judah- and Babylon were supposed to have figured that and meted out judgment aware of that: "For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land" (Is. 14:1; 54:7,8: "For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you. In overflowing wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting loving kindness will I have mercy on you, says Yahweh your Redeemer"). In the midst of judgment, God would show the compassion of a woman to her own child: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" (Is. 49:15). But Madame Babylon, although a woman, failed to have that instinctive female compassion upon a child; the compassion God had, as a woman. And Babylon was condemned for it. This is a profound insight into how God sees things when it comes to those whom He judges for their sins. We are inclined to enthusiastically relish the punishment of the wicked: 'He got what he deserved'; 'I hope he dies in prison'; 'Serves him right', or even 'May he rot in hell'. And theology-gone-wrong has relished in inventing all manner of awful punishments for our own enemies in "hell" and Dante's inferno. But God asks us to instead have pity upon the condemned- for although He was the author of Judah's condemnation and sufferings, He had huge pity for them. It is this pity for the lost and condemned which is an essential part of God's personality, and we like Babylon will be condemned if we fail to have this. This explains why Babylon were the Divinely used instruments for Judah's judgment, and yet were condemned because they didn't have pity upon the Jews. In wrath they didn't remember mercy. "I was but a little angry and they helped forward the affliction" (Zech. 1:15). There is however no evidence that the Babylonians abused the Jews in captivity. In fact they did very well for themselves. So the criticisms of Babylonian cruelty apply specifically to their actions at the capture of Jerusalem- the kind of cruelty lamented by Jeremiah in Lamentations: "This Nebuchadnezzar has broken his bones" (Jer. 1:17). We

can deduce therefore that Yahweh expected the Babylonian soldiers and leadership to have had more mercy upon the Jews when the city was breached. Even though their wrath was that of Yahweh. He wanted them to have remembered mercy in their wrath, just as He did. They didn't, neither did they repent of it, and so in a later generation, Babylon had to fall.

Isaiah 47:7 You said, 'I shall be a mistress forever;' so that you did not lay these things to your heart, nor did you remember the latter end of it- This also is the criticism made of Judah (Mal. 2:2). Babylon was intended to reflect and repent; Jer. 51:9 suggests Babylon was only judged because she was offered a chance to repent which she refused. I noted on Is. 46:1 that her fall to the Medes was not executed with the full extent of the judgments then pronounced upon her; and maybe that was because some of them did repent.

Literally, Babylon said that she would be "a lady eternally", a "mistress of eternity", her blasphemous equivalent to how Messiah would be the "Father of eternity" (Is. 9:6). Babylon's subconscious thinking and self talk is being described. It is that of all men outside of Christ. They assume their eternity, they play God, and thus refuse to accept the reality of judgment to come. It is exactly because of this that Babylon, and all like her, are cruel to others. They refuse to live in the shadow of inevitable judgment to come. They didn't consider the end results of their actions against the Jews. This is the essence of sin, to refuse to consider the end consequence of our actions. Man generally lives like this, smart or foolish, refusing to accept that there is an end consequence for all thought and action.

Isaiah 47:8 Now therefore hear this, you who are given to pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is none else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children:'-

This critique of a woman "given to pleasures" mirrors that of Is. 32:9-13 concerning the women of Judah. Judah and Babylon acted the same way and were judged the same way, hence all the connections between Is. 47 about the daughter of Babylon and Lamentations about the daughter of Zion. The language of destruction by burning as chaff in :14 is exactly that of Zion's destruction (Lam. 1:7, 13; 2:3, 4; 4:11). Their sins, the reason for the judgment, were the same. Just as Babylon trusted in her enchanters, "the great abundance of your enchantments" (:9), so had Judah trusted "the clever enchanter" (Is. 3:3). Judah were no better than Babylon, but Isaiah is full of prophecy that she shall gloriously rise again from her judgment. There is no such message for Babylon. In this we see absolute sovereign grace. For God's people are demonstrated to be no intrinsically better than the world of sinners in which they live. But still God would save them. Babylon would sit as a widow bereft of her children; Zion likewise would

suffer both widowhood and the loss of her children (Is. 49:20,21; 51:15-20; 54:4). But as Isaiah's prophecies make clear, she would find her husband [Yahweh] again, and be blessed with multiple and eternal children. The descriptions of this in Is. 57 are a parody of the way Babylon permanently loses these things in Is. 47. For Babylon, there was no such promised restoration. She lost her husband [her king?] and her children [vassal states? Inhabitants?]. With only perpetual desolation promised for her future, never to be rebuilt. Babylon had nobody to save them (:15) whereas repeatedly Yahweh is presented as Israel's saviour- by grace alone (Is. 45:21; 46:2,4).

The implication is that Babylon would hear the prophecies of her destruction and mock them; and apply the very language of Isaiah about Yahweh "I am, and there is none else" to themselves (Is. 45:6). For "I am..." is Yahweh's repeated title and Name in second Isaiah (Is. 44:24; 45:3,5,6,7,8,18,19,21,22; 46:4,9). Babylon were condemned for playing God, and we must ask in which ways we are tempted to do this. Not least in our natural tendency to judge others by what we 'say in our heart', our deepest self talk. Likewise Madame Babylon considered she would last "for ever" (:7)- and eternity is Yahweh's unique characteristic (Is. 45:17; 57:15). We must continually remember that these prophecies about Babylon are in order to help the exiles perceive God's take on the society that surrounded them. We too need to realize that society around us is playing God- and will miserably fall as a result. They are not passive in their positions; we must see how God interprets those positions.

We bear the Name of Yahweh / Jehovah, by reason of our baptism into it. His Name is declared as His character- merciful, truthful, judging sin, patient etc. (Ex. 34:5-7). He who will be who He will be, manifesting His characteristics as He does so, must have His way in us too. Babylon and Nineveh were condemned for having the attitude that “I am, and there is none beside me” (Is. 47:8; Zeph. 2:15). Their self-perception was a parody on the Name and being of Yahweh: He alone can say “I am, and there is none else” (Is. 43:11; 44:6; 45:6,21) and seek to be who He is. He alone can seek to articulate the characteristics that make up His Name onto the lives of others, and onto the things that comprise His Kingdom. We are not to be who we are; to ‘just be yourself’; to ‘just do it’, as foolish slogans and adverts encourage us. We are here to show forth His mercy, truth, judgment of sin, patient saving of the weak etc., not our own personality. We are, in the very end, Yahweh manifested to this world, through our imitation of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 47:9 but these two things shall come to you in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood; in their full measure shall they come on you, in the multitude of your sorceries, and the great abundance of your enchantments- It could be argued that because the level of destruction spoken of here didn't happen to the people and city of Babylon when the Medes took it, therefore the prophecies apply to the king and

royal family of Babylon, who were slain by Darius the Mede. The queen was therefore left literally a widow. But even that was but a primary fulfilment; the final fulfilment would be in the destruction of the sorceries of latter day Babylon (Rev. 18:23). But even that will only be because she refuses the invitation to repent of them (Rev. 9:21).

Isaiah 47:10 For you have trusted in your wickedness; you have said, 'No one sees me'; your wisdom and your knowledge, it has perverted you, and you have said in your heart-

"No one sees me" is the attitude of this world. Man lives as if he is not in fact observed by God, as if Yahweh does not in fact see and know all things, reading the thoughts of every man before he even has them in his mind (Ps. 139). Living in the awareness of God's omniscience changes everything.

The condemnation of Babylon's wisdom and knowledge alludes to the contrast between the wisdom of Daniel in the court of Babylon compared to the false knowledge of Babylon's wise men. God could have condemned Babylon for a whole host of sinful actions; but His essential, repeated reason was because of how they spoke in their hearts (Is. 47:10; Zeph. 2:15; Rev. 18:17). And He gave the same reason for His condemnation of Tyre (Ez. 28:2) and Edom (Obadiah 3).

I am, and there is none else besides me'- Babylon acted as she did because she reasoned that "None seeth me...I am, and there is none else beside me" (Is. 47:10 RV). They appropriated the language of God to themselves, they played God in that they thought their ways were unseen by any higher power. And we all have a terrible, frightening tendency to do this.

Isaiah 47:11 Therefore evil will come on you; you won't know when it dawns: and mischief will fall on you; you will not be able to put it away: and desolation shall come on you suddenly, which you don't know- This sudden desolation refers only primarily to the sudden fall of Babylon to Darius as described in Dan. 5. As explained on Is. 46:1, the city and people of Babylon weren't suddenly destroyed. According to Jer. 51:43, the king was already deeply concerned at the advance of the Medes and was feeble at the news of the enemy advance. Hence we should give due weight to the discovery by Layard of inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future.

"Mischief" is literally 'wretchedness'. Paul in Rom. 7:24 felt "wretched" (s.w. LXX). The Greek word is elsewhere used about the feelings of the rejected before God's judgment (James 5:1; Rev. 3:17), likewise in the LXX (Is. 47:11; Mic. 2:4; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:15). Paul feels as if he is even now standing before the judgment seat of God, and is condemned-

yet suddenly he rejoices that he is in fact amazingly saved by Christ. This is the very theme of the earlier sections of Romans- that we are suddenly declared right, justified, as we stand condemned in the dock before God. This lends weight to the suggestion that Romans 7 is indeed autobiographical of Paul, declaring the process of his own conversion, yet telling the story, as it were, in terms which present him as personifying every Jew under the Law.

"Put it away" is the word used for atonement. Man in his condemnation will realize his chronic need for atonement. We have had the wisdom to grasp that now in the blood of the Lord.

Isaiah 47:12 Stand now with your enchantments, and with the multitude of your sorceries in which you have laboured from your youth; if so be you shall be able to profit, if so be you may prevail!- See on :13. "Laboured" is literally "wearied", as AV. The way of the flesh is a weariness, both for Babylon and the unfaithful within Judah (Is. 43:22).

Isaiah 47:13 You are wearied in the multitude of your counsellors: let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save you from the things that shall come on you- Babylon ought to have learnt from the humiliation of her sorceries and wise men before the Divine wisdom of Daniel. We too see God working in the same way today; lessons are taught to people which they don't learn, and therefore harder judgment comes. The critics like to point out that Isaiah knows much detail about Babylonian practices, implying he was in Babylon. But I have no problem believing that Isaiah was given God's Spirit to foresee these things, just as he predicted Cyrus far ahead of time. But there is also the sad possibility that he knew all about these cultic practices because although Babylon's power was yet future, the Jews were already practicing this kind of things even in Isaiah's time.

Isaiah 47:14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: it shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before- The fire would burn so totally that not a live coal would be left (as in Is. 30:14). This suggests a supernatural cataclysm bursting upon Babylon, after the pattern of Sodom's destruction (Is. 13:19). But as explained on :1, this didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. The prophecy was reapplied to the final fall of Babylon described in Revelation. The image of dry stubble before a spreading fire is used of Judah (Is. 1:31). The judgments on Babylon and upon Judah are so often identical. The rejected of God's people will likewise be "condemned with the world", sent back into the world they had loved to share its judgments.

Isaiah 47:15 Thus shall the things be to you in which you have laboured: those who have trafficked with you from your youth shall wander each one to his place; there shall be none to save you- The idea is that the people from the nations within the Babylonian empire would leave Babylon and return home- including the Jews. But this didn't happen; see on Is. 46:1. The Jews were intended to flee Babylon before she fell (Is. 48:20), but they didn't; and so God put another plan into operation, whereby the fall of Babylon was to lead to all the foreigners there, including the Jews, thereby being freed to return to their ancestral homelands. But still the Jews remained, as the book of Esther testifies. God tried then and tries now, by all means, to bring His chosen people to His Kingdom. Human resistance to His efforts is tragic. He must have pleasure in we weak sinners who have at least said "Yes" to His plans.

"None to save you" is the climax, the end stress of the prophecy. Thus it concludes with the essential point: Only Yahweh saves. The astrologers and idols of Babylon couldn't save. That is the theme that echoes throughout second Isaiah. The Babylonian religion was obsessed with predicting the future, but couldn't save; "those who gaze at the stars, who declare each new moon what will befall you" (:13). This is rather similar to how so much Protestant preaching has been about predictions of the future, through interpretations of Bible prophecy- rather than the simple truth of Yah's salvation in Jesus. Earlier, Yahweh is presented as knowing the future- in that He knows Israel shall be eternally saved by grace, when they finally respond to and trust in His salvation. That is the future, the only future worth knowing. But by contrast, man is fascinated by short term predictions of geopolitical events in his own time. This is in fact the spirit of Babylon, seeking to predict the events of each month by the signs of the zodiac (:13). But prediction is not salvation. And Yah saves. "I am God; and beside me there is no Saviour. I have declared [the future], *and* have saved" (Is. 43:11,12). See on :4.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 48

Isaiah 48:1 Hear this, house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth out of the waters of Judah; who swear by the name of Yahweh, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth nor in righteousness-

This prophecy is addressed to Judah, the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Who called Jacob by the name of Israel? It was God, hoping that the exiles like the historical Jacob would change to Israel. But they didn't. This usage of Jacob / Israel is very common up until this point (Is. 40:27; 41:8,14; 42:24; 43:1,22,28; 44:1,5,21,23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1,12; 49:5,6). But after Is. 49 we will read of Zion and Jerusalem rather than Jacob and Israel. The Divine hope had been that Jacob would change to Israel. But as Isaiah progresses, especially in so called 'third Isaiah' from Is. 55-66, we find a far harsher spirit of criticism

and judgment upon the people for having refused the great salvation and restoration offered. It's as if God accepts that Jacob will not change to Israel, and instead the prophecies speak of a far future time with a different form of God's people, known as Zion.

He called them by this name, but they didn't respond by calling upon Yahweh's Name; they spoke of "the God of Israel" but not sincerely. Exactly as they had done before they went into captivity: "Though they say, Yahweh lives, surely they swear falsely" (Jer. 5:2). They accepted the existence of Yahweh, but that is not the same as calling truly upon His Name. Just ticking a box to the effect that 'I am not an atheist' will not save anyone. The exile had not reformed them, as this prophecy will go on to say.

The exiles did not reject Yahweh, but as explained on :5, they were heavily involved in idolatry as well, apparently justifying this as a form of Yahweh worship. They called themselves by the name of Israel and swore by the name of Yahweh, and identified themselves as the people of Zion (:2). The emphasis is upon their naming of themselves, whereas God had wanted to place His Name upon them; see on Is. 44:5. And so we have here a powerful warning to nominal Christians, who use the culture and nomenclature of the true faith and yet whose hearts may be far from it. The exiles were similar to how they had been before they went into captivity; there had been no repentance. For according to Jer. 5:2,6 they also swore by Yahweh but insincerely- and that's why the Babylonians destroyed them: "Though they say, ‘As Yahweh lives;’ surely they swear falsely… Therefore a lion out of the forest shall kill them". Despite this lack of repentance and spiritual progress, still Yahweh was intent on saving them.

Isaiah 48:2 (for they call themselves of the holy city, and rest themselves on the God of Israel; Yahweh of Armies is His name)- Possibly the most hypocritical of the exiles were those who claimed to have originated from Jerusalem- the upper classes of priests and nobles. "Even if they call themselves 'from the Holy City'". They leaned or trusted on God externally but God wants those "Whose mind is stayed upon You" (Is. 26:3 s.w. "rest themselves"). Their heart was not trusting in Him. They just said they trusted in Him. And this is the crucial difference. As so often, form had dominated over content. As explained on :1, the exiles were very culturally loyal to Zion and proclaimed their "rest" or trust in Israel's God; and yet as explained on :5, they were heavily involved in idolatry as well, apparently justifying this as a form of Yahweh worship. And they didn't want to return to Zion and reestablish Yahweh's Kingdom. And so He reminds them that He, the God of Israel, is Yahweh of Armies. His unlimited power articulated through His Angelic hosts could actually bring about in practice the restoration of the Kingdom.

Isaiah 48:3 I have declared the former things from of old; yes, they went forth out of My mouth, and I showed them: suddenly I did them, and they happened- This sudden

action of God may refer to the sudden fall of Babylon described in Is. 47. See on :5. This is being cited as an encouragement to the exiles to see the powerful hand of their God in human history, to realize this was in fulfilment of His prophetic program, and they could take it further. His prophetic words had come out of His mouth; this was the intimacy achieved in the Divine-human encounter through the words of inspired prophets. "The words of the prophets are written on the subway wall", read *en passant*, heard, treated as ordinary and incidental… but the wonder of Divine inspiration, the fact these words and ideas dropped from the mouth of God was overlooked then as it is now.

Isaiah 48:4 Because I knew that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew, and your brow brass- This hard hearted attitude of the Jews is commented upon by Ezekiel, who lived amongst these Jewish exiles in Babylon. God took into account their skepticism and hard hearts, and had therefore made amazing prophecies ahead of time, predicting Cyrus by name 150 years before (:5). We see here God's earnest desire to convince even the hard hearted, and not to just turn away from them if they rejected Him, but to construct His purpose ("project" may be a better word) in order to somehow still incorporate them within His salvation purpose. It's similar to how He mapped out the path of Israel through the wilderness lest they see war and be discouraged (Ex. 13:17). He could have justifiably reasoned that what they had seen in the plagues and at the Red Sea ought to have been enough to motivate anyone to follow Him for the rest of their lives. But He was and is sensitive to our sins and unjustifiable weaknesses; and we should be likewise to others.

So often hardness is condemned: 'hard of neck' that is, stiff-necked, stubborn (Ex. 32:9; 34:9); "hard of face", "hard of heart" (Ez. 2:4; 3:7). "Your brow brass" is the image used for the hard, shameless brow of a prostitute (Jer. 3:3; Ez. 3:7). This was how they were before going into captivity, and they had not been reformed by the exile. So much of the language used about the exiles in Babylon is used also of how they were before the captivity. We are to be soft clay in the hand of the potter. But we live in a world where hardness is almost glorified and softness is seen as weakness. We see hardness on the media all the time, anger and bitterness. And it affects us. Again we note that Judah went into captivity because "they are brass and iron" (Jer. 6:28)- the exile hadn't reformed this. The refining fire had not brought forth any silver (:10) but still Yahweh wanted to save them.

Isaiah 48:5 Therefore I have declared it in advance to you from of old; before it came to pass I showed it to you; lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my engraved image, and my molten image, has commanded them'-

See on :4. This is a tragic reflection of the deep seated belief in idols amongst the exiles. It took some generations for them to quit idolatry, and I have noted throughout the book

of Esther the extent of idolatry amongst the Jewish exiles. Ezekiel's ministry was to the exiles already in Babylon, and he frequently condemns their idolatry. It seems that the decree of Cyrus for the restoration and the "sudden" fall of Babylon (:3) were ascribed by the Jews to their idols. Hence the repeated emphasis that God had predicted these things, and even named Cyrus, well in advance. He and His prophetic word were to be given the credit, and not the idols.

Israel had previously wanted to believe that the gods summarized in the golden calf had brought them out of Egypt (Ex. 32:4), and so God knew they were likely to attribute their deliverance from Babylon as being thanks to their gods. For as Ezekiel makes clear, they were idolaters in Babylon. They were so hard hearted. Why didn't God just give up with them? Every honest man asks himself the same question about himself. But God's grace keeps on and on trying. He did so because of His Name and not because of their righteousness (:11). The argument is that because God knew they were stubborn and unresponsive, He had declared this in advance. The 'former things' were therefore the things of Israel's sins and weaknesses. Those former things will not ultimately come to mind, but God's argument is that He "declared" those things, His love was so great for Israel that He went into the relationship knowing those former things. He will not accept that they had only sinned because they were merely doing what their idols commanded them- because before that, from the beginning, He had chosen His people, well before their encounter with Babylonian idols. And He chose them foreknowing their apostacy: "I knew you would be utterly faithless and I called you a rebel from birth" (:8). Hence He pleads with them "Will you not declare / admit it?" (:6). That Yahweh had declared and foretold Israel's miserable, unfaithful past is one thing; but it becomes of ultimate moment when factored into Yahweh's argument that despite all that unfaithfulness, He will still save Israel into an amazing future salvation and restoration. His past patience and love for them, totally unrequited, is evidence of this. For time and again, Yahweh's argument in Isaiah is that He is a God who can and will ultimately save His people. This came to full term in Yahoshua, Yah saves, Jesus. Apart from the specific prophecies, we could say that the spirit of Yahweh's salvation in Christ is found throughout later Isaiah.

Isaiah 48:6 You have heard it; see all this; and you, will you not declare it? I have shown you new things from this time, even hidden things, which you have not known- LXX "Ye have heard all this, but ye have not known: yet I have made known to thee the new things from henceforth, which are coming to pass". As explained on :5, the exiles knew the prophetic words of Isaiah about the fall of Babylon and the decree of Cyrus and the restoration; but they attributed these events to their idols. They had heard but not known God's word in their hearts. And this is the challenge to all Bible readers; as to whether we are just hearing or reading God's word on a surface level, or whether we really know these things in the Hebraic sense of 'knowing'.

The "new things" are now defined in the following verses; and they include the realization of God's grace toward them despite their treachery (:8), His amazing desire to push forward the work of their salvation. Again Israel are asked to be God's witnesses in the court case about whether Yahweh can in fact save such a sinful people. With the change of a consonant we can translate "and you, will you not bear witness?". Yet the "new things" are "hidden things" which Israel had not yet experienced and to which their ear had not been opened (:8). The things of the new covenant of Jer. 33:3 ("difficult things which you know not"). These are the things Paul speaks of, the things prepared in salvation for those who love God, which eye has not seen, but are revealed by the Spirit given to those who truly repent...

Isaiah 48:7 They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day you didn't hear them; lest you should say, 'Behold, I knew them'- "They are created now" in the sense that creation is by a word, and God is now uttering the word of new creation- that His people will in fact have salvation in a restored Kingdom. See on Eph. 1:9,10. LXX "say not thou, Yea, I know them". Their attitude to the prophecies was that 'Sure, we know all that stuff'. But it was surface level reading and hearing; they refused to perceive the wonderful reality, that the events connected with Cyrus, the fall of Babylon and the decree for restoration had all been foretold and were all part of Yahweh's saving purpose. As noted on :3, "The words of the prophets are written on the subway wall", read *en passant*, heard, treated as ordinary and incidental... but the wonder of Divine inspiration, the fact these words and ideas dropped from the mouth of God was overlooked then as it is now.

Isaiah 48:8 Yes, you didn't hear; yes, you didn't know; yes, from of old your ear was not opened- Their deafness to the real import of the prophetic word (see on :5-7) was their own fault, but they were confirmed in this by not having their ears and eyes opened by God. And yet He was willing and eager to open their ears (see on Is. 42:18 "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see"; 43:8). But they didn't hear or know as intended because they didn't want to; they were unwilling for their narrative of life and self-identity in the prosperity of Babylon and Persia to be so radically interrupted.

For I knew that you dealt very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb- The allusion is to the naming of Jacob from the womb. He was a heel-catcher, and treacherous. Their treachery is described in the word used of Babylon and Assyria's treachery against them (Is. 33:1; Lam. 1:2). And it is used of their marital unfaithfulness against Yahweh (Jer. 3:11,20; 5:11). Knowing that this is how they would be, Yahweh had still entered a relationship with them, exactly as Hosea did with the unfaithful Gomer. Hosea's relationship with her reflected that of God with an Israel who likewise were

"treacherous" to Him (Hos. 5:7; 6:7 s.w.). His foreknowledge of their sins was thereby an even greater display of His passionate love, hope and grace toward His people.

Alternatively we could see "the womb" as Egypt, from whose waters, of the Red Sea, the nation was born. Ez. 20:5 is relevant: "And I made Myself known in the land of Egypt (cp. :7) and I said to them, Cast away each man the abominations of his eyes, and do not contaminate yourselves with the idols [of Egypt]". They took the idols of Egypt with them; and they were doing the same in Babylon.

Isaiah 48:9 For My name's sake will I defer My anger, and for the sake of My praise will I refrain for you, that I not cut you off- "Cut off" is the word used of how the Assyrians had threatened to cut down the cedars of the temple (Is. 37:24; 2:13; 10:34). And the Babylonians actually did this (Is. 14:8). But the Jews then cut down cedars and made idols from them (Is. 44:14 s.w.), acting like the Babylonians, and ignoring the great grace shown in Yahweh's averting or deferring the threatened Assyrian destruction of the temple by cutting down its cedars. See on Is. 48:9. But by not immediately judging His people for their unfaithfulness to Him (see on :8), God's grace as it were earns yet more praise for Him; from us, the spiritually discerning.

Even though so classically undeserving, Israel were saved "for His Name's sake" (Ps. 106:8; Ez. 20:9; 36:22 etc.)- and the same applies to the New Israel, baptized into the same saving Name of grace. They were not punished according to their sins for the Name's sake which they carried, and so will it be with us (Is. 48:9)- but we have to treat others baptized into the same covering Name in this same way as we are treated!

The usage of the idea of restraining anger, like the use of the terms 'remembering' and 'forgetting', suggests that God is so fully willing to enter into our kind of time; for a Being cannot forget and remember simultaneously, an element of time is involved. Likewise at times we read of God being slow to anger (Ex. 34:6), at others, of Him not restraining His anger, or restraining it (Ps. 78:38; Is. 48:9; Lam. 2:8; Ez. 20:22), and holding His peace (Is. 57:11; Ps. 50:21), and being provoked to anger by the bad behaviour of His covenant people (Dt. 32:21; Ps. 78:58; Is. 65:3; Jer. 8:19). God clearly has emotions of a kind which are not unrelated to the emotions we experience, as beings made in His image. But those emotions involve a time factor in order to be emotions. We read of the anger of God "for a moment" (Ps. 30:5; Is. 54:7,8), and of His wrath coming and going, leaving Him "calm" and no longer angry (Ez. 16:42). When we sin, we provoke God to anger- i.e. at a point in time, God sees our sin, and becomes angry. This is attested many times in Scripture. But it's meaningless if God is somehow outside of our time and emotions. God very nearly cut Israel off, doing what He had thought to do at Moses' time. Instead of burning them up, He used the fire of the exile to refine them- but even then, no silver emerged from it (:10).

Isaiah 48:10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction- LXX "Behold, I have sold thee, but not for silver", similar to the idea of Is. 50:1 and Is. 52:3: "Which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities were you sold... You were sold for nothing". Or "But not as silver" might mean that He would not destroy them in the fire of condemnation, but rather would use the fire of affliction to refine them. Or that despite the refining process in exile, no silver had emerged. LXX "I have rescued thee from the furnace of affliction", just as Daniel's friends had been. They were representative of all the exiles. But despite that 'rescue', they refused to leave Persia. Nor would they perceive their prosperity in Babylon / Persia as in fact a furnace, a living out of condemnation. They chose for the most part to remain in it. The idea may be that despite the refining fire of the affliction of exile, they had still not become as silver; the dross was not removed. This is the tragedy of Israel's long history; so much fire, but the dross still held on to, and not removed. And it is so in the lives of so many associated with the new Israel.

Isaiah 48:11 For My own sake, for My own sake, will I do it; for how should My name be profaned? I will not give My glory to another- We sense here the struggle within God, which we see too throughout Hosea, especially in Hos. 11:8. They had been unfaithful and treacherous to Him, and His anger was kindled (:8,9); they needed to be judged. But He had refrained the expression of that anger (:9). On one hand, He cannot let His Name be profaned; but on the other, He will not give His glory to another. This conflict is at the very heart of His being, for His "own sake". The fact the pole of His grace and mercy emerges stronger than the pole of His anger and judgment is not to say that He is simply soft hearted. That triumph of mercy over judgment is the result of real conflict and tension within the heart of God Himself, at the very core of His character.

God will not let His Name be polluted by His people (Is. 48:11; Ez. 20:9). But God polluted His people (Is. 47:6). They did pollute His Name (Jer. 34:16; Mal. 1:7). God invites us to see His efforts to stop His Name being polluted as somehow defeated by the extent of Israel's pollutions. This theme comes out clearly in Ezekiel: they polluted Him, but He strove lest His Name should be polluted. Here is the extent of freewill which God gives man to sin- and also the extent of the hopefulness of God. It's as if He didn't imagine they would pollute Him as much as they did.

"I will not give My glory to another" could mean that Yahweh wouldn't let Israel be destroyed totally lest the other gods took glory for this. This would then be another connection with His decision at the Exodus not to destroy Israel, as He was minded to.

Isaiah 48:12 Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel My called: I am He; I am the first, I also am the last-

The Hebrew could imply "O Jacob whom I called Israel" (see on :1), again referring to the Divine hope that Jacob would change to Israel. The same God who calls His people has also called the heavens and earth into existence (:13 "Mine hand *also*" AV). He who was the first is also the last. He will be with us to the end, to the future, which for Him is infinite, ["the last" is s.w. "the uttermost"]. The calling and usage of pagan Cyrus (:15) was a worked example to the Jews of how God could have used every one of them. The sense may be as in Is. 41:4: "I Yahweh, the first and with the last, I am He". First and last are terms used by the Lord Jesus of those who shall be in His Kingdom (Mt. 20:16). "The last" would then refer to the last generation of God's people. Yahweh would save the exiles along with the "first" of His people such as Abraham; for at the time of the restoration of that last generation, there would be a resurrection of all God's true people, to form a new people would eternally inherit the reestablished Kingdom.

Isaiah 48:13 Yes, My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has spread out the heavens: when I call to them, they stand up together- The idea of calling things which don't exist into existence (Rom. 4:17) has suggestions of creation (Is. 41:4; 48:13). The new, spiritual creation is indeed a creation *ex nihilo*, an act of grace. Incomprehensible to the modern mind, the natural creation involved the creation of matter from out of God, and not out of any visible, concrete matter which already existed. The physical creation therefore looked forward to the grace of the new creation-creating people spiritually out of nothing, counting righteousness to them which they didn't have, treating them as persons whom they were not.

In the same context of Babylon's apparent might being brought down by God's hand, God reasoned that He would perform His will against Babylon, and this should be believed because His hand had created the heavens and earth (Is. 48:13,14). Likewise He taught Job the futility of having such metaphysical doubts about Him, of the joy there is all around us in creation regardless of our personal suffering... through an exposition of His power as creator. All this is why the disciples were inspired to faith that their prayers for deliverance would be answered by the recollection of the fact that God has created all things and therefore nothing is too hard for Him (Acts 4:24 RV).

God through His word created the stars and makes them "stand up"; He creates the stars and "brings out their army" (Is. 40:26). He likewise through His word of restoration could "bring out" His people from Babylon, as the stars of Abraham's seed (also referred to in :19), and make them "stand up"- a Hebrew word commonly used of the 'setting up' of the restored temple in Ezra and Nehemiah. But "stand up together" is the very phrase used in a legal context in Is. 50:8, of standing up together in court: "He is near who

justifies me; who will bring charges against me? Let us *stand up together*: who is my adversary? Let him come near to me". It's as if in the court case, God calls the stars to stand up as witnesses. His word can make them obedient. So He can make His people obedient and His word can bring about the restoration of the Kingdom. The obedience of the physical stars shows God can make the stars of Abraham's seed likewise appear and be obedient. That Israel refused this is none less than tragic. But the promise and reality holds true to all Abraham's seed in any age.

Isaiah 48:14 Assemble yourselves all of you, and hear; who among them has declared these things? He whom Yahweh loves shall perform His will on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans-

It is hard to understand Yahweh's "love" for Cyrus. We can detect an open attitude to who this servant is- whoever is the beloved of Yahweh will do His will on Babylon. And the prophecies of Revelation interpret that servant as the Lord Jesus. Or perhaps the idea is that if God so loved Cyrus just as a man may love his hammer or tool in his hand, how much more does He love His servant Israel. LXX offers "out of love to thee I have fulfilled thy desire on Babylon, to abolish the seed of the Chaldeans".

Babylon fell so that Persia would take over the administration of the 127 provinces where the Jews were scattered, and would allow them to return to Judah. The cup of judgment which Judah drunk for 70 years was passed to Babylon (Is. 51:22). This accounts for Isaiah's repeated and detailed emphasis on the coming fall of Babylon for Judah / Israel's sake (e.g. Is. 47). Although they had sinned, Yahweh showed His gracious love for His people by bringing down Babylon. "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called you [Cyrus] by name: I have surnamed you, though you have not known Me " (Is. 45:4). World geopolitics are manipulated for the sake of God's people. And yet we can refuse to participate in the program, as the exiles did. Likewise the iron curtain was removed from the USSR to allow preachers of God's Truth to take it to those once in darkness. And English has become the lingua-franca of the world, enabling Christian preaching to now penetrate societies literally world-wide. See on Ezra 2:1. But "Israel would not". I explained on Is. 46:1 and Is. 47:11 that Cyrus did not particularly destroy "the Chaldeans" as envisaged in these prophecies. He did not respond to Yahweh's love and refused to "know Him". And so these things are more fully to be realized in the fall of latter day Babylon at the hand of the Son of God's love, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 48:15 I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him; I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous- The Jews of Isaiah's day would have had big problems with the idea of a pagan king like Cyrus becoming the King of Israel and being Yahweh's special "servant" and even Messiah; see on Is. 45:1. Folk have the same problem and

resistance to the idea today. But passages like Is. 45:9-13, Is. 48:14-16 and much of the material that follows the servant songs, are in fact seeking to answer objections to this- e.g. by saying that God is the potter and men are mere clay, and He will raise up precisely *whom He wishes*- even pagan Cyrus- to be His man, the arm of His salvation, at least potentially. His way was made prosperous, potentially; the "way" to the restored Zion of Is. 40 had been potentially prepared.

Isaiah 48:16 Come near to Me and hear this: 'From the beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time that it was, there am I'. Now the Lord Yahweh has sent me, with His Spirit- As often in Isaiah, we have a case here of a 'voice' suddenly speaking, an interjection which can appear unexpected because it is so sudden. Is. 40:6-8 is the clearest example but we have noted these voices / interjections several times in Isaiah. I suggest that this is another example: "Now the Lord Yahweh has sent me, with His Spirit". This could be Isaiah speaking, or it could be the voice of the "servant" figure, just as we suddenly have in Is. 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is on me; because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the humble. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted".

The sending forth of Isaiah was the sending forth of God's word to His people (s.w. Is. 6:8; 9:8). Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh; his prophetic word about Cyrus and the restoration was published and not spoken in secret, and he was sent in the power of the Spirit to authenticate his message. And in Isaiah, the man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached. In the immediate context, Isaiah himself was the servant messenger sent forth (s.w. Is. 42:19; 48:16; 61:1); hence GNB "Now the Sovereign LORD has given me his power and sent me". But he was largely rejected, and Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh (Heb. 11:37). And so the messenger came to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 48:17 Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel- As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's go'el , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave..." (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for

those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

I am Yahweh your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way that you should go- LXX "I have shewn thee how thou shouldest find the way wherein thou shouldest walk". The way to Zion had been prepared (see on Is. 40), but they had to walk in it. They were being led in that way, potentially, just as many are today- but they refused to walk in it. The idols and the Gentile nations amongst whom they lived would not "profit" them (s.w. Is. 30:5,6; 44:9,10; 47:12); but as the book of Esther makes clear, they were profiting well, apparently, from remaining amongst them. But the only real "profit" would be if they quit all that and returned to Zion. But they saw no "profit" in being forgiven and restored as God's people (s.w. Job 35:3).

Isaiah 48:18 Oh that you had listened to My commandments! then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea- This was the potential possible if they had repented and returned to Judah. The promises to Abraham (:19) and the coming of the Messianic seed of Abraham could have been fulfilled; but because Israel chose to be wicked, there was no such peace: “There is no peace... unto the wicked” (:22).

Because of His capacity to imagine, to see possible futures, God feels rejected both by His children and by His wife at the same time. Hence the poignancy behind His words of regret here, seeing what could have been. Likewise "Oh that they would have a mind such as this always" (Dt. 5:29), "O Israel, if you would but listen to Me" (Ps. 81:8,13). It's as if He could see the potentially happy future which they could've had stretching out before Him.

Isaiah 48:19 your seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of your body like its grains: his name would not be cut off nor destroyed from before Me- The new covenant offered to the exiles at this time by Jeremiah and Ezekiel was based on the Abrahamic promises. The promises to Abraham and the coming of the Messianic seed of Abraham could have been fulfilled then, had they repented (:18). The offspring of *their* body could have been as sand grains; they really could have personally been as Abraham. Likewise for us, the receipt of the promises to Abraham means that we stand absolutely with him (Gal. 3:27-29). But the LXX reads as if despite their refusal of these things, all the same God would not totally reject them: "Neither now shalt thou by any means be utterly destroyed, neither shall thy name perish before me". And yet the plain sense of the context is surely that God would cut off the name of His people (Rom. 11:20). Later Isaiah speaks of this and describes a new version of "Israel" who would inherit the restored Kingdom. But they had not yet been cut off- hence the intensity of the appeal in :20 to leave Babylon quickly. Before Yahweh cut their name off.

Isaiah 48:20 Go forth from Babylon, flee from the Chaldeans; with a voice of singing declare, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth: say, 'Yahweh has redeemed His servant Jacob'-

Perhaps at this point Babylon had already fallen and Cyrus was urging the Jews to return to Zion. The redemption of Jacob referred to the consistent Isaianic image of God paying to redeem His people from debt slavery in Babylon. Hence the idea of redemption is connected to Jacob [the exiles] being a "servant" or slave. The nuance here is that by buying them out of slavery in Babylon, Yahweh had purchased them as His own servant or slave. They were returning to the home family, that of Yahweh in Zion, but with joy at becoming His slave within the family. It was to be a change of masters, just as baptism is presented in Rom. 6. For the new Israel, the redemption or ransom is in the Lord's blood, which He says He gave "as a ransom for many". Yahweh would pay them for their service: "I, Yahweh, love justice; I hate robbery with injustice. I will pay their wages faithfully" (Is. 61:8). We have here the exact picture of the prodigal son, who wished to return to the paternal family as a paid labourer.

Leaving Babylon with a voice of singing / joy is in view in Is. 55:12: "For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace". But this was a commandment in Is. 48:20, which the exiles generally disobeyed. They returned hardly with joy, but with nervousness and expectation only that there might be some material benefit for themselves. Yet Jer. 31:8,9 predict this return as being with tears, along with comfort from Yahweh. In Is. 48:20, the return would be with joy. Such a mixture of emotions is reflected in the Songs of Degrees. And it is about the only realistic, imaginable word picture of entry into salvation: "With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will carry them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water… I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them… a great company, they shall return here" (Jer. 31:8,9). The redeemed exiles were to "declare" the great salvation they had experienced, just as we are to declare it to the world. But "declare" is a common idea in second Isaiah; Yahweh repeatedly claims to have "declared" the future, the salvation of His people. This salvation was "the end" which He declared from the beginning (Is. 46:10; 42:9; 44:7; 43:12 "I have declared and I have saved"); and in this chapter (Is. 48) Yahweh uses the word of His declaration of Israel's future salvation (Is. 48:5). Those who have been saved will join Yahweh in declaring this great salvation as their experience. This is the basis of our witness- not information about the Bible, not theory nor theology, but our personal experience of the Gospel of salvation and redemption.

Consider all the calls to leave Babylon:

"Go forth from Babylon, flee" (Is. 48:20)

"Depart [s.w. eschew, withdraw from, desist from], go out from there... go out of the midst of her" (Is. 52:11)

"Flee out of the midst of Babylon, go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans... Be the first to leave!" (Jer. 50:8)

"Flee out of the midst of Babylon and save every man his life... go away from the midst of her" (Jer. 51:6,45)

"Come! Flee from the land of the north... Come, Zion, Escape [slip away] you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon" (Zech. 2:6,7)

"Come out of her My people" (Rev. 18:4; 2 Cor. 6:17).

There is a repeated sense of urgency, after the pattern of the call of Lot to leave Sodom (Gen. 19:17 "flee for your life"). But like Lot, the exiles didn't want to leave and many didn't. The fact Babylon wasn't destroyed as planned was because God so loved His people who had wrongly chosen to remain there. "I will bring them from the north country" (Jer. 31:8)- but they had to make the decision to leave. Whether slipping away or boldly upping and going... God will take anyone on the journey- if they want to make it. He will not drag people against their will. But His enthusiasm is great.

The idea in Is. 47:15 was that the people from the nations within the Babylonian empire would leave Babylon and return home- including the Jews. But this didn't happen; see on Is. 46:1. The idea here is that the Jews were intended to flee Babylon before she fell, but they didn't; and so God put another plan into operation, whereby the fall of Babylon was to lead to all the foreigners there, including the Jews, thereby being freed to return to their ancestral homelands. But still the Jews remained, as the book of Esther testifies. God tried then and tries now, by all means, to bring His chosen people to His Kingdom. Human resistance to His efforts is tragic. He must have pleasure in we weak sinners who have at least said "Yes" to His plans. Although Babylon had fallen to Cyrus, this was not the judgment of Babylon described by the prophets. A yet greater fall of Babylon was envisaged at the time, after the Jews had left. Most of them remained, and so by grace, the prophecies didn't come true then and were reapplied and reinterpreted in the picture of Babylon's final fall in Rev. 18.

“Come out from among them and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17) is picking up the language of Is. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7 concerning the return of the exiles from Babylon. The edict of Cyrus for the Jews to return to the land was reapplied to God’s command to us to leave the spirit of Babylon, the Gentile world, and go up to do His work. The returned exiles are us. God told His people to flee from Babylon, to come out of her and return to His land and Kingdom (Is. 48:20; 52:7; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7). Babylon offered them a secure life, wealth, a society which accepted them (Esther 8:17; 10:3), houses

which they had built for themselves (Jer. 29:5). And they were asked to leave all this, and travel the uncertain wilderness road to the ruins of Israel. They are cited in the NT as types of us in our exit from this world (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4). Those who decided to obey God's command and leave Babylon were confirmed in this by God: He raised up their spirit to want to return and re-build Jerusalem, and He touched the heart of Cyrus to make decrees which greatly helped them to do this (Ezra 1:2-5). And so the same Lord God of Israel is waiting to confirm us in our every act of separation from the kingdoms of this world, great or small; and He waits not only to receive us, but to be a Father unto us, and to make us His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18).

The command to flee Babylon must be compared with Is. 52:12: "For you shall not go out in haste, neither shall you go by flight: for Yahweh will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your vanguard". Although the exodus from Egypt was in many ways a pattern for the exiles to leave Babylon, in distinction from then, they would not "go out in haste" (s.w. Dt. 16:3). They would not be persecuted in Babylon, leading them to flee. Rather they were to "flee" from Babylon spiritually (Is. 48:20) of their own volition and desire.

Isaiah 48:21 They didn't thirst when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock also, and the waters gushed out- Just as everything had been provided for them when they left Egypt, so they need not worry about the logistics of returning to Judah. The practical issues which loom in the minds of those confronted with the Gospel of the Kingdom will all likewise be dealt with by the God who desperately wants us to say "yes". But the exiles generally said "no", and so these things are reapplied and reinterpreted to new Israel who say "Yes" to the invitation to participate in the restored Kingdom of God in Judah. The Lord Jesus spoke of how out of Him would come "living water", not still well water, but bubbling water fresh from a fountain (Jn. 4:11; 7:38). And He invites His people to drink of it. It was this kind of water that bubbled out of the smitten rock. Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21 describe it with a variety of words: gushing, bursting, water running down like a high mountain stream, "flowed abundantly"... as if the fountains of deep hidden water had burst to the surface ("as out of the great depths", Ps. 78:15). So the Lord was saying that He was like the rock, and we like Israel drinking of what came out of Him.

We note here that the rock gave water throughout the wilderness journey (Is. 48:21). This would surely necessitate that the giving of water at Horeb was not a one-off solution to a crisis. There is a word play in the Hebrew text of Is. 48:21: "He led them through the Horebs [AV 'desert places']" by making water flow from the rock. The Horeb experience was repeated for 40 years; as if the rock went on being smitten. Somehow the water from that smitten rock went with them, fresh and bubbling as it was the first moment the rock was smitten, right through the wilderness. It was living, spring water-

not lying around in puddles. Isaiah and other scripture uses the quenching of thirst as a figure for salvation (Is. 41:17; 48:21; 49:10). Whoever has a thirst for salvation will get it- the key thing is that we thirst after righteousness, as the Lord taught in the Beatitudes.

Isaiah 48:22 There is no peace, says Yahweh, for the wicked- "The wicked" are the Jewish exiles of :18 who refused the potential peace with God which was offered if they repented and returned to Judah to reestablish His Kingdom of peace.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 49

Isaiah 49:1 Listen, islands, to me; and listen, you peoples, from far: Yahweh has called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother has He made mention of my name- The previous chapter has concluded with a lament over the Jewish exiles' refusal of the Gospel of the reestablished Kingdom in Judah. Now, "the servant" addresses the Gentiles. But we have to wait until :6 to understand that this was a result of his failure to convert Israel. Cyrus had failed to "know Yahweh". And so the invitation to participate in the Kingdom is made to "your peoples", "the Gentiles" (LXX). The servant now takes on a different identity; it is "Israel" (:3), but this is clearly a title for a Messianic figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus. His personal preexistence is clearly ruled out here: "Before I was born, the LORD chose me and appointed me to be his servant" (GNB).

But all those of the new Israel who are "in" Israel-the-Messiah also have the words of the servant songs relevant to them. For all true of Him becomes true of us. And so there are a number of instances of where these Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ. The servant known from birth (Is. 49:1,5)= Gal. 1:15,16 [choice from birth, calling, ministry to the Gentiles]; “I have laboured in vain…” (Is. 49:3) = “That I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain” (Phil. 2:16; 1 Cor. 15:58); “Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord” (Is. 49:4) = “He that judges me is the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:4); “Him whom man despises” (Is. 49:7) = “We are despised” (1 Cor. 4:9,10; 2 Cor. 4:9,10); “The Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you” (Is. 49:7 RSV) = “A chosen vessel” (Acts 9:15); Is. 52:15 = Rom. 15:21, where Paul appropriates a prophecy of how the news of the crucified Christ would spread to those who had never heard it. He didn’t just read those verses as prophecy; he saw in them an imperative to fulfill them. This is an example of where prophecy depends to some extent upon us to fulfill it. The 19th century brethren understood the prophecies of Israel’s return to the land like this- they collected funds to enable it; Is. 49:8 “In an acceptable time have I heard thee” = 2 Cor. 6:2; Is. 53:1 = Rom. 10:16; Is. 49:6 = Acts 13:47; Is. 43:5 = Acts 18:9,10.

At times, the prophets are paralleled with Israel- Jeremiah was a “prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5), and yet this was Israel’s role, as stated here in Is. 49:1. Both the prophets and Israel are described as “the servant of the Lord”. But God and Israel were in the process of divorce, as they knew. The prophets were both on God’s side, and Israel’s. They were torn men. Just as God Himself was. He appeared “like a man confused” (Jer. 14:9).

Isaiah 49:2 And He has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand has He hidden me: and He has made me a polished shaft; in His quiver has He kept me close- Is. 51:16 uses the same language about an individual who would restore Zion. Whatever primary application this may have had to Cyrus, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah etc.,

they clearly failed. And so the words are reapplied to the Lord Jesus. He would achieve the purpose of Yahweh by the words of His mouth, rather than physical actions and conquests. His word would have a sharp piercing quality to it, like a sword or javelin / arrow. And so it is with the word of the Lord Jesus whose mouth is like a sharp sword (Rev. 1:16), able to penetrate (a 'sharp sword') and to range far ('a polished arrow'). It would appear from these statements that the Lord Jesus was protected and specially guided by the Angel in the first thirty years of his life: "In the shadow of His hand (an Angelic phrase) hath He hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in His quiver hath He hid me". The word 'quiver' comes from the word for an astrologer, in the sense of being something that conceals knowledge. Thus the Angel hid the true identity of Jesus, so that "flesh and blood" alone could not recognize that He was God's Son (Mt. 16:13-17). "The Lord" that passed by Moses and hid him with his hand in the cleft of the rock was an Angel.

But as explained on :1, the Messianic Servant, ultimately the Lord Jesus, includes all who are "in" Him. Thus Paul's description of each of us as the warrior of the Gospel in Ephesians 6 composites together various descriptions of Messiah's clothing in the servant songs (Is. 11:5 = "loins girded with truth"; Is. 49:2 "mouth like a sharp sword"; Is. 52:7 "bring good tidings / publish salvation" = "the preparation of the Gospel of peace"; Is. 59:17 "breastplate of righteousness"; Is. 59:17 "helmet of salvation"). We are to be Christ to the world.

The idea of Messiah being "hidden" connects with other similar prophecies. The restoration prophecies continually refer to an individual called "the righteous one"- the references are somewhat masked in the English translations which speak simply of "righteousness", but it is evidently 'the righteous one' who is being addressed rather than abstract righteousness. Consider the statements of intent about this Person: The righteous one would be prepared and kept hidden by Yahweh (Is. 42:6); he was to be raised up to rebuild Zion and release the captives from Babylon (Is. 45:13); he is pictured as near / approaching (Is. 51:5), called to Yahweh's footstool in Zion (Is. 41:2); he was to be "brought in" to the temple at the end of the 70 weeks prophecy (Dan. 9:24); then, Jerusalem would be known as the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 50:7 and often- AV "habitation of justice"), the intention of Ez. 48:35 would be fulfilled, in that Jerusalem would be known as the city where Yahweh dwells; the righteous one of Yahweh would then "go out" in blessing to the surrounding nations. Hence Jer. 33:16; 23:6 etc. outline God's intention that after the restoration, the rebuilt Zion would be named "The Lord our righteous one" because Jerusalem would be the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 31:23; 50:7). This is similar language to the restoration prophecies of Isaiah- the surrounding Gentile world would see / perceive / believe in "the righteous one" who would reign in the rebuilt Zion (Is. 62:2). The impression seems inescapable that at the time of the restoration, God had prepared a Messiah-figure, hidden (as it were) in Yahweh's quiver (Is. 49:2), not revealed to Israel, who could have restored

Judah, rebuilt Zion and converted the surrounding Gentiles. It could be that this person was Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah or some other known historical figure. Or it could be that this person was prepared, waited in the wings, but was never used by God. He could have been revealed to Judah by the anonymous messenger of Isaiah 40. But all these prophecies had to be reapplied- to the Lord Jesus, with John the Baptist and later the latter day Elijah as the announcing messenger.

Isaiah 49:3 And He said to me, You are My servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified- As noted on :1, the servant is now no longer Cyrus, who had failed to "know Yahweh" and live up to his potential. And Israel had refused the potentials of responding to the Gospel. So now Yahweh was to be glorified in an individual servant, in whom "Israel" could be comprehended if they became in Him. It all looks forward to the entrance into the Lord Jesus of all baptized into Him, thereby becoming the true Israel of God and Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:27-29).

The servant is told "You are Israel", but his mission is "to bring Jacob again to Him, and that Israel be gathered to Him" (:5). "Israel" brings Israel back to God. He does this by being their representative, also "formed from the womb" just as Israel were (Is. 44:2,24). The servant so far in Isaiah has been Israel, but the servant has been a failure. The mission of this new iteration of the servant is to make Israel that servant they were intended to be. And that is one of the wonders of personal salvation, that we shall be restored to who we should have been, could have been, were individually intended to be. We will finally and eternally fulfil our intended mission. Israel had failed to declare Yahweh to the Gentile world as intended, but this Israel-like servant would do. The Lord Jesus is "Israel" in that He is all we should and could have been. This is why He enables all in Him to be the true Israel as God intended, and it's why Paul uses the language of the "Israel" servant about himself and all in Christ. He is called both "My servant" and "My salvation to the end of the earth" (:6). Yah's salvation, Yahoshua, is 'Jesus'. God was to be glorified in Israel (Is. 44:23) but now, in His servant Israel. John's Gospel stresses how the Lord Jesus glorified Yahweh, supremely in His death and the salvation achieved thereby.

The fact He is perfect and sinless has this nuance and facet to it- that He is as we might have been. He was all "Israel" was intended to be, all they could have been and should have been. He is likewise all we should and might and could have been. We each have individual callings and possibilities that we fail in. But He is perfect in each of them. This is the power of understanding the Lord as our representative; He was "Israel", God's people as intended, fulfilling their intended function through identity with them, and on that basis He brings "Israel" to God. His discouragement at Israel's lack of response flows on naturally from God's complaints about Israel in the previous chapter. The new

Israel, the Lord Jesus, would be the witness Israel were intended to have been to all the borders of the land promised to Abraham: "these shall come from far; and behold, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim" (:12). Sinim is a reference to Sin (Pelusium) on the border of Egypt, the boundary of the promised land. People were to come from the North, West and South- not from the East, because the restoration from Babylon had already been predicted. The idea is 'in addition to those in Babylon'. Israel were to have filled that land with the knowledge of Yahweh. They failed, but "Israel" in the sense of the Lord Jesus would do this- and in fact literally to the ends of the planet. The other nations 'imprisoned' in Babylon were intended to join the Jewish exiles and be led by them to Zion. But the Jews preferred to stay in Babylon. The Lord Jesus as the ideal Israel would lead the Gentiles out of spiritual Babylon on a global level, and take them to Zion eternally.

Isaiah 49:4 But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity-

We must give weight to the way "voices" appear in Isaiah, especially in Is. 40. These could be God fantasizing about the words and feelings His faithful servant would have. Just as Hosea does about Gomer, putting words into her mouth and imagining her doing things which in fact she never did. The fantasy of love.

Paul alludes here in saying that because of the Lord's resurrection, our labour is not in vain. We are "in" Him and His mission to Israel and the Gentile world becomes our mission. And somehow in the bigger picture, it will succeed. We may lose our battles, but our team wins, gloriously. At least some will respond. The next verses will give the servant a commission to the Gentiles. So the servant is pictured at a point where his ministry to Israel appears to have ended in failure, and when his ministry to the Gentiles begins. That snapshot point is surely the cross. Likewise in :7, the snapshot of the servant is at a point when he was "him whom man despises… whom the nation abhors, a servant of rulers". This is the language of Is. 53 about the Lord's sufferings in His time of dying.

The LXX makes the allusion to idolatry clearer: "I have given my strength for vanity and for nothing". The Messiah, "Israel", was totally representative of His people, even in their sinfulness. This representative identification with them was to be the basis of their ultimate salvation.

Yet surely the justice due to me is with Yahweh, and my reward with my God- The idea may be "my work should be my recompense". Even if we feel our work for God has not been successful, we were the ones rewarded by doing it, it was itself our blessing. "My reward is with my God" recalls the feelings of Nehemiah, who perhaps could have been this Messianic figure in an initial sense: "Remember me, O my God, for good" (Neh.

13:31; "my God" is a common theme in Ezra and Nehemiah). Is. 49:4-6 seems to foresee how the returnees would be discouraged in their work of rebuilding, and at the fact that not all God's people had been gathered back. And yet even then, provided they had the right spirit, the Kingdom blessings could still come. Isaiah 49 goes on to comfort the servant that the remainder of Israel would be regathered, and that the broken down walls of Zion were continually before Yahweh (Is. 49:16). And so love's labour is not lost, in that it is rewarded finally, at the last day. Even if what we worked for didn't of itself work out. In the Kingdom we shall those things from a different perspective, one we cannot yet get to. The words put in the Lord's mouth here are allusive to those of the failed servant Israel in Is. 40:27: "Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and the justice due me escapes the notice of my God?". Again we see the Lord Jesus as the true Israel, God's people as they ought to be.

Isaiah 49:5 Now says Yahweh who formed me from the womb to be His servant- The application of these words to the Lord Jesus precludes any idea of His personal preexistence. Is. 49:5,6 contains a prophecy concerning Christ as the light of the world, which he fulfilled (Jn. 8:12). He is described as meditating on "the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant". Christ was therefore "formed" by God in Mary's womb, through the power of His Holy Spirit. Mary's womb was evidently the place of Christ's physical origin.

Both as individuals and collectively, the whole biography and even genetic prehistory of God's people has been prepared by God in their formation, so that they might encounter God's salvation at an optimal point for them to give the maximum glory to Him (Is. 43:21). "Formed" is the word for the potter working on clay, used of how God fashions human hearts or psychologies, working on the deeply internal fabric of the human being (Ps. 33:15). The 'forming' in view is not only "in the womb" (Is. 44:2,24) but throughout their whole psychological and genetic formation. It is possible to strive with our former or "maker" (Is. 45:9), to be unresponsive to His touch of us the clay. The Messiah figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus, was the ultimate case of being "formed" by Yahweh's hand (Is. 49:5 s.w.), implying He too was clay, of human and not Divine nature.

To bring Jacob again to Him, and that Israel be gathered to Him (for I am honourable in the eyes of Yahweh, and my God has become my strength)- LXX "I shall be gathered and glorified before the Lord". Israel had refused to be regathered to the land, they had not obeyed the command to be gathered (s.w. Is. 43:9; Joel 2:16); but this individual servant would be, and thereby the true Israel "in Him" would be regathered. The verb for "gather" can be used in two senses, either "to gather in" or "to take away," "gather off" (e.g. Ez. 4:29). Response to the Messiah figure would lead to one of these two gatherings- to salvation, or condemnation.

Dt. 30:1-5 was clear that when Israel returned to Yahweh in repentance whilst in captivity, He would gather them back to their land. Hence the word play with *shub*, meaning both to repent, and to return. But the servant in Is. 49 is tasked with gathering Israel to Yahweh and returning them to their land. As if His work was to bring them to repentance and gather them almost in spite of their lack of repentance. And this is indeed the work of the Lord Jesus on human hearts today. It is the Lord's death that does this, according to John's allusions to this servant prophecy; He lifted up is the point and impetus of gathering together. The cross elicits repentance and return to God. Whilst there must still be freewill response, the cross is a far more powerful impetus to repentance than simply offering to gather God's people once they repent.

We note again the parallel of Jacob and Israel. This is very common up until this point (Is. 40:27; 41:8,14; 42:24; 43:1,22,28; 44:1,5,21,23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1,12; 49:5,6). But from now on in Isaiah we will read of Zion and Jerusalem rather than Jacob and Israel. The Divine hope had been that Jacob would change to Israel. But as Isaiah progresses, especially in so called 'third Isaiah' from Is. 55-66, we find a far harsher spirit of criticism and judgment upon the people for having refused the great salvation and restoration offered. It's as if God accepts that Jacob will not change to Israel, and instead the prophecies speak of a far future time with a different form of God's people, known as Zion.

The servant Israel was to glorify God (:3) and also be glorified [s.w. "honourable"] by God. This language of glorifying and therefore being glorified is frequently found in John's Gospel, especially John 17, where the Son glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies the Son. It is specifically applied to the Lord's death and resurrection (Jn. 12:28; 13:31; 14:13; 17:1,4). Clearly the servant Israel is ultimately the Lord Jesus. Israel were gathered to God through the Lord's death; He was lifted up "so that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad" (Jn. 11:52). "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn. 12:32). We note that Jn. 11:52 speaks of gathering Israel plus the dispersed: "not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad". This idea of salvation for Israel plus the Gentiles is directly taken from Is. 49:6. I have noted on :4 that a snapshot is presented of the servant at the point when His ministry to Israel appears to have ended, and His to the Gentiles begins. Which is the cross.

Isaiah 49:6 Yes, He says, It is too light a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel- This could have come true at the restoration. Is. 49:6 speaks of the reestablishment of the tribes of Israel and the 'establishing' of the land (Is. 49:8). The intended boundaries of the tribal cantons are given in Ezekiel 48. There was perhaps a renewed awareness of which tribe each captive was from, after the genealogical records were burnt at the fall of Jerusalem. Note the

references to Judah (Ezra 10:23), Benjamin (Neh. 3:23), Manasseh Ezra 10:33) and Joseph (Ezra 10:42; Neh. 12:14). But the land wasn't laid out again according to tribal boundaries as envisaged in the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel. The few who returned were content with their little farms, and didn't rise up to a wider vision. And how much potential achievement for us as a community is disabled by our parochial, selfish, self-satisficing attitudes...?

The servant was encouraged that although His mission was primarily to Israel and they had refused His work (:5), He was not to be discouraged because the project of salvation was to be extended to the Gentiles. The idea seems to suggest that the extent of this purpose had to be revealed to the Lord Jesus in order to save Him from disappointment with His mission to Israel, as if His conception of His work had to be enlarged. This would be appropriate for someone with human nature.

We could render "to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept", in which case we have an allusion to the minority in the time of Elijah who were likewise "kept" from apostacy (1 Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:4). Messiah, like Elijah, didn't appreciate that despite His apparently failed ministry, a small remnant of Israel would be restored to God.

I will also give you for a light to the nations, that you may be My salvation to the end of the earth- The Lord was to save the Gentiles, even "the ends of the earth / land" promised to Abraham, where the exiles were located. And yet He died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was "a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), "the consolation *of Israel*", unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel.

I explained earlier in this chapter that the Messiah as "Israel" was an individual in whom the true Israel of God would be found, through mutual identification of Him with them and they with Him. And so Paul takes this prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world, and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although Acts 26:23 applies it to Jesus personally). Paul even says that this prophecy of Christ as the light of the world was a *commandment* to him; all that is true of the Lord Jesus likewise becomes binding upon us, because we are *in* Him. Note that Paul says that God has commanded *us* to witness; it wasn't that Paul was a special case, and God especially applied Isaiah's words concerning Christ as light of the Gentiles to Paul. They apply to

us, to all who are in Christ. Everything about the Lord Jesus becomes a commandment to us to be likewise. The Lord Jesus understood Himself as "the servant" and yet also understood Paul to be that servant who brought light to the world: "I have appeared to you, to appoint you a servant and a witness... to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light" (Acts 26:16,18). All that is true of the Lord is true of all those in Him. As He said, "You are the light of the world", because He is. We note that Paul and Barnabas quote Is. 49:6 about themselves at a point when they felt they had failed with their ministry to the Jews and decided to "turn to the Gentiles". This is exactly how the servant [Jesus] felt at the time of His death- and He is told that He would be given a greater ministry, to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas perceived what we call can- a bridge from the Lord on the cross [and the prophecies about Him there] to their own life situations. And they acted as Him.

Light and salvation are clearly parallel. In this sense the Lord was the light of the world (Jn. 8:12; 9:5). It is the experience of salvation which is the light in which the believer lives; all other experience of human life is simply life lived in darkness. The Lord was indeed "the light of men" (Jn. 1:4). He was to bring people out of darkness (:9)- and into Himself, the true light. Those who follow the Lord Jesus will not remain in darkness (Jn. 12:46). He didn't simply show them the light of salvation- He was and is the light, He is the salvation. He is Yah-saves. That light must spread "to the ends of the earth", and the great commission clearly alludes to this- beginning in Jerusalem and with the Jews, the message of the light and salvation of the Lord Jesus must be taken to "the ends of the earth". When this is achieved, the Lord's mission will have been accomplished. Missionary and evangelistic endeavour is the fulfilment of who He essentially is. And all who engage in it will experience the very special presence of the Lord who is that light that they are spreading.

Isaiah 49:7 Thus says Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One- The servant Israel was to redeem Israel. But Yahweh was the redeemer. The servant Israel, the Lord Jesus, was the means by which Yahweh would work to redeem Israel. As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave..." (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for

those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

To him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to a servant of rulers- LXX "Sanctify him that despises his life, him that is abhorred by the nations that are the servants of princes". This Messianic servant would sacrifice His life and be abhorred by the nations; so that the nations would come to worship Him. This is exactly what was and shall be achieved through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall worship; because of Yahweh who is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you- The leadership who had despised the suffering Servant would arise from their thrones and bow in homage before Him.

Isaiah 49:8 Thus says Yahweh, In an acceptable time have I answered you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you; and I will preserve you, and give you for a covenant of the people, to raise up the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritage-

These words about the servant, the Lord Jesus, are quoted in 2 Cor. 6:1,2, where we are called "workers together with" the Lord Jesus and are urged to appeal to others to be saved. The context is in 2 Cor. 5:20: "we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating the world by us. We beg you on behalf of Christ". The servant was Israel but is the Lord Jesus personally. If we are "in Christ", then all these servant prophecies apply to us. We will be answered and helped during the acceptable time, the day of salvation. We are to make use of that as we too fulfil the servant's ministry, to bring Israel and the whole world to salvation and acceptance.

Whatever the initial possible application to the exiles, the "acceptable time" is now, for now is the today of salvation. All these things have been transferred and reapplied to all who would believe them, seeing the first audience rejected them. We could translate "to restore (:6) the land (of Israel), to allot (Dt. 21:16) the desolate inheritances". Just as each Israelite had a specific allotted inheritance in the land, so each believer in Christ has a specific inheritance in the future restored Kingdom.

There are many allusions to David's sufferings throughout the servant songs. Here it is to Ps. 69:13 "But I pray to you, O LORD, in the time of your favour; in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure salvation". The moral weakness of the servant is thus suggested. And yet the servant is also the Lord Jesus, and as Is. 53 will make clear, the servant identified totally with the sin and weakness of His people.

"The people" is "the nations", the Gentiles. Gentile salvation is however connected with restoring the land (of Israel; Is. 49:6), and allotting (Dt. 21:16) the desolate heritages. The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to “inherit” the land; yet the same

word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing Israel to “inherit” the land again after their return from “the north country” (Zech. 2:12; 8:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the “north country”, then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized “throne of the Lord” (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn’t even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

The vision is of a multiethnic people of God; the restoration of the Kingdom in Israel is connected with the salvation of Gentiles. The 'help' and 'preservation' of the Servant was ultimately through the strengthening and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. But all that is true of the Messianic Servant is true of those in Him; hence His Name is "Israel". And so this verse is quoted about us in 2 Cor. 6:2 in the context of our being preachers, labouring with God. This is the language of the Lord’s preaching, which freed men from the prison house (Is. 61:1,2). Yet because we are in Him, we too have His ministry; our words too can *make men inherit* the Kingdom, and free men from their bondage. “We are witnesses [through being] in him” (Acts 5:32 RVmg.). As the Lord in Isaiah’s servant songs was the suffering, saving, atoning servant, lifted up to give salvation world-wide-so are we. For we are in Him.

*Isaiah 49:9 Saying to those who are bound, ‘Come out!’- T*his is the same word as in Is. 48:20 "Go forth of Babylon". But they chose to remain there.

To those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves!’- This is language applied to the Lord Jesus bringing people out of darkness to the light, which means salvation in Him (Jn. 8:12; 12:46). They could have had a deliverance similar to that of Israel from the darkness of Egypt (Ps. 107:10,14), but they preferred darkness to light. Just as they did before the captivity, they put darkness for light (Is. 5:20). Thus they refused the work of the saving Servant, who wanted to bring them out of that darkness (Is. 42:7), and preferred to remain in the darkness of condemnation (Is. 47:5).

And so these things have been reapplied to the work of the Lord Jesus. Those who are thankfully redeemed in Christ, now lovingly reconciled to Him, are described as having been blind, starving prisoners, bound in the darkness, awaiting execution (Ps. 107:14; Is. 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Zech. 9:11). Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are “the poor” (Gk. ‘the crouchers’), cringing in utter

spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). The Lord in the Sermon on the Mount clearly understood this deliverance of the prisoners to refer to His work with a new Israel; since the Jews in Babylon had preferred to stay in their comfortable prison of exile, and didn't perceive it as a place of spiritual darkness.

They shall feed in the ways, and on all bare heights shall be their pasture- The idea is that there would be abundant provision for them, with pasture even on the beaten paths and bare heights where usually there wouldn't be. The idea here and in :10 was and is that absolutely all their needs would be abundantly provided for on the physical and spiritual journey to the restored Kingdom. This is the picture of the return of the exiles found in Is. 40:11; 41:18; 42:7, with rivers opened on the bare heights and ample food and pasture on the return path to Zion.

Isaiah 49:10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun strike them: for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by springs of water He will guide them- It was the responsibility of the priests and religious leaders to "gently lead" the exiles back to their God and their land, but they failed in this (Is. 51:18 s.w.); and so because there was none to guide / gently lead (s.w.), God Himself had to intervene and do this through His Son (Is. 40:11; 49:10).

This repeats the assurance of Is. 48:21. Just as everything had been provided for them when they left Egypt, so they need not worry about the logistics or "the way" of returning to Judah. The practical issues which loom in the minds of those confronted with the Gospel of the Kingdom will all likewise be dealt with by the God who desperately wants us to say "yes". These words are repeated about the faithful of the new Israel in Rev. 7:16, brought "out of great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14) just as the exiles were intended to have been brought out of Babylon.

Isaiah 49:11 I will make all My mountains a way, and My highways shall be exalted- This repeats the message of the highway to the restored Zion being prepared in Is. 40:4.

Isaiah 49:12 Behold, these shall come from far; and behold, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim- "Sinim" my simply refer to the uttermost border of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, "Sin" being on the southern border with Egypt (cp. Gen. 10:17). LXX "And others from the land of the Persians", GNB "and from Aswan in the south". The tragedy of the book of Esther is that at its conclusion, the Jews were established in Persia in prosperity. They refused to use all this potential. The refusal of the exiles to respond led to the reapplication of this to the worldwide gathering in of Gentiles from all over the globe. Sinim is a reference to Sin (Pelusium) on the border of Egypt, the boundary of the promised land. People were to come from the

North, West and South- not from the East, because the restoration from Babylon had already been predicted. The idea is 'in addition to those in Babylon'. Israel were to have filled that land with the knowledge of Yahweh. They failed, but "Israel" in the sense of the Lord Jesus would do this- and in fact literally to the ends of the planet. The other nations 'imprisoned' in Babylon were intended to join the Jewish exiles and be led by them to Zion. But the Jews preferred to stay in Babylon. The Lord Jesus as the ideal Israel would lead the Gentiles out of spiritual Babylon on a global level, and take them to Zion eternally.

Isaiah 49:13 Sing, heavens; and be joyful, earth; and break forth into singing, mountains: for Yahweh has comforted His people, and will have compassion on His afflicted- The 'singing' of the heavens refers to Judah's intended joy at the restoration (cp. Is. 48:20). See on Is. 54:2. As the whole creation would share the joy of Hosea and Gomer's remarriage (see on Is. 1:26), so Is. 44:23 and Is. 49:13 use similar terms to describe how all creation could have rejoiced in the reuniting of Yahweh with His people on their return from Babylon.

The temple still lay "waste" (Hag. 1:4,9) just as it had lain "desolate" [s.w. Jer. 33:10,12] after the Babylonian destruction. The 'restoration' was in fact not really a restoration at all, in God's eyes. Thus Ezra sat down desolate [AV "astonied"] at the news of Judah's apostasy in marrying the surrounding women; using the very same word as frequently used to describe the 'desolate' Jerusalem that was to be rebuilt (Ezra 9:3 cp. Is. 49:8,19; 54:3; 61:4). He tore his priestly garment (Ezra 9:3), as if he realized that all Ezekiel's prophesies about those priestly garments now couldn't come true (s.w. Ez. 42:14; 44:17,19). Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah's record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfill the Messianic prophecies about them which existed.

Comfort and compassion from God can be given by Him, and yet refused. And again we have an abiding warning to us, as the new Israel, not to waste or disregard all the potential comfort there is from God, not least in our day through the ministry of "the comforter, which is the Holy Spirit".

Isaiah 49:14 But Zion said, Yahweh has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me-

This is a huge anticlimax to the loving grace declared in :13. The mountains, skies and earth all rejoice in it [there's a similar picture in Hosea in the same context of God's saving, marital love for Israel]. But Zion refuses to accept the grace, making the foolish complaint that Yahweh has forgotten about her. Indeed it could be that we are to read her words as the accusation of a wife in a divorce court, for legal language is so

common in Isaiah. Accusing him of abandoning her- the word for "forsaken" is used when lamenting a loss, like of Jacob losing Benjamin, Gen. 44:22. She presents herself as the abandoned / forsaken one, despite the visible presence of God in the cherubim amongst the exiles [see Ezekiel]. This is such a spiteful, ungrateful response that we feel it unworthy of any further response. No sensible further dialogue seems possible. Yahweh addresses Zion, but in :14 she speaks to nobody in particular, telling the world she is an abandoned woman. Come on, Zion. You can do better than this. We therefore marvel at Yahweh's patience in even engaging with it, replying personally to her as He does in His response of :15. His grace shines through time and again; His eager desire to always engage with His people shows how He has not at all abandoned nor forgotten them.

See on :25. AV "my Lord", as if referring to Yahweh as her husband (Is. 50:1; 54:6 cp. Gen. 18:12). But as explained on :13, Yahweh had not forsaken them; it was they who refused to avail themselves of the comfort of His love. We must follow the images carefully. Zion is presented in Is. 49:14 as a forsaken young wife. She is also presented as a young mother who had lost her children, who suddenly gets them back. But Is. 49:15 then applies feminine imagery to God as Zion's mother, actually breastfeeding His people. God is the eternal mother, the figure that every man, if he is honest, would dearly love to have. Not an old frail lady with dementia, as his last memories of her might be, but the younger woman who, as a child, apparently had all the answers and made all the provisions. Even if man never had a mother or had a bad mother, that is the idea desire of every man. It is clearly enough why men have a "thing" about women's breasts. And that is God to man. God has set eternity in our hearts, a longing for things which we shall never quite achieve in this life. But that longing is met uniquely in Him. The woman longs for a strong father, a wonderful ever present husband, and children who are always somehow present and not distant, who crown her maturity with teeming happy grandchildren (Is. 49:21-23). She never has those things… her father may or may not have been the strong one, but he grows old and weak. Her husband was not perfect, and is not always strong. Her children are not as she would wish, perhaps she is estranged from one and another is lost to her, under the influence of in-laws or drugs… or not thinking spiritually as she does. But these deep longings are met uniquely in the things of the Father and His Kingdom. Yahweh is revealed as the eternal husband of Zion, the *go'el* who redeems from all life's problems, the father of her wonderful children. Family life, good as it can be when lived in the Lord, never fully meets these longings of both man and woman. And even the best of human relationships are time limited. Only Yahweh of Israel can be eternally all these things to man. The failures and lack of total fulfilment in family life for both men and women are merely to hone and focus upon what we would ideally wish for- and we shall receive it eternally, in our relationship with God and His people in His Kingdom. And in Is. 54, Zion is presented as a once barren woman. Now and for eternity she not only has children but her children

are abundant (Is. 54:1), widespreading (Is. 54:22) and prosperous (Is. 54:13). They come to her from all directions (Is. 60:4) and her children "dwell with her" (Is 62:5 LXX)- a woman's secret desire, to have her children with her and not distant in any sense. And she has yet more children, without the pain of labour (Is. 66:7-14).

Reasoning back from the addresses to the captives in later Isaiah, it appears they thought that Yahweh was a God who just operated in the land of Israel. The captives felt they couldn't sing the songs of Yahweh in a Gentile land (Ps. 137). They thought that now they were outside His land and far from His temple, they were forgotten by Him (Is. 49:14,15), their cause ignored by Him (Is. 40:27) and they were "cast off" from relationship with Him (Is. 41:9). Hence Isaiah emphasizes that Yahweh is the creator and the God of the whole planet, and His presence is literally planet-wide. Likewise there is much stress in those addresses on the fact that Yahweh's word of prophecy will come true. Remember that there had been many false prophets of Yahweh just prior to the captivity who predicted victory against Babylon and prosperity (Lam. 2:9,14; Jer. 44:15-19). And the 70 years prophecy of Jeremiah appeared to not be coming true, or at best was delayed or re-scheduled in fulfilment [even Daniel felt this, according to his desperate plea for fulfilment in Daniel 9]. And so there was a crisis of confidence in the concept of prophecy, and Yahweh's word and prophets generally. Isaiah addressed this by stressing the nature and power of that word, and urging faith in its fulfilment and relevance. We hear today the same responses when we confront people with the Gospel. They complain that God has forgotten them because indeed they are too weak and sinful, and they just want to have a reasonable life as and how they are. But this is not genuine humility. It is a stubborn lack of faith in the offer of salvation. It is a limiting of God's power, a denial of His passionate interest in us, and a spurning of His earnest pleas to let Him save us. And a short sighted love of the present world experience.

The sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross.

Isaiah 49:15 Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet I will not forget you!- And yet in anger God said He would destroy Israel's children and walk away from them and forget them (Hos. 9:12). Unlike the stone faced gods of the Gentiles, Yahweh had emotion and passion, and internal conflicts. And His word reveals them to us. This "compassion" was only to be shown when Israel repented (s.w. Dt. 30:3) and would not be shown if they were impenitent (s.w. Is. 9:17; 27:11; 55:7). But although they had not repented, Yahweh still felt that fatherly "compassion" toward them (Is. 49:15 s.w.). He is

unafraid of appearing to contradict His word, such is the passion of His love. We note that the Hebrew words for "compassion" and "womb" are related, from the same root *rhm, riham* (compassion) and *rehem* (womb). We could translate 'womb-compassion'. Whilst a woman may indeed murder and even eat her own baby, as the Bible itself testifies, there is a unique natural bond between a woman and the child of her womb. This bond is far stronger than between a father and his child. God therefore uses this uniquely feminine allusion in order to show the depth of His compassion with His people. It points up the intensity of His usage of the word for "compassion" in saying through Hosea that His people are Ruhamah (Hos. 2:1,4), not those upon which He any longer has compassion (as in Jer. 13:14 "I will not have compassion"). He used the word in Dt. 30:3, saying that He would have this "compassion" when He would "turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will gather you from all the nations whither Yahweh your God has scattered you". This idea that Yahweh would show compassion only once they repented is also found in Jer. 30:18; 33:26. But His point now is that in fact that compassion had never left them throughout the exile. He had been far more compassionate to them than He had said- because of the nature of things being their mother. Hence Jer. 31:20 says the same thing as Is. 49:15: "Is [not] Ephraim My dear son? Is he [not] a darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have compassion on him". If the wicked amongst the exiles forsook their ways and thoughts and returned to Yahweh, *then* Yahweh would have compassion upon them (Is. 55:7). Ps. 102:13 likewise speaks of the time when Yahweh would arise and have compassion upon Zion because "the set time is come", as if His compassion is shown only at the restoration; likewise Is. 14:1 "Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob… and set them in their own land" (also Jer. 12:15; Ez. 39:25; Zech. 10:6). But in Is. 49:15 Yahweh is saying that He had had compassion upon them throughout the exile, although He would indeed show them compassion in returning them from Babylon (s.w. :10,13). Judah's conquerors, the Assyrians and Babylonians, had had no compassion upon the Jews (s.w. Is. 9:17; 13:18; Jer. 6:23). But Yahweh did, in His wrath He always remembered His mercy / compassion (Hab. 3:2), all through the exile. But the exiles didn't see this, complaining that they had had no compassion, no breastfeeding, but had been abandoned. They complained "How long will You not have compassion on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You have had indignation those seventy years? Yahweh answered the angel who talked with me with kind and comforting / compassionate words" (Zech. 1:12,13). The compassion had been there all along. Yet the exiles rejected it. And this amazing compassion has been applied to us: "In Him the fatherless find mercy / compassion" (Hos. 14:3), we who were not His begotten children are given the compassion of the womb. These very words are quoted in the New Testament about all believers in Christ: "I will have mercy [s.w. compassion] on her who had not obtained mercy; and I will tell those who were not My people, ‘You are My

people;' and they will say, 'You are my God!'". This amazing womb-compassion is for all who have been born again.

The image of breastfeeding is of course distinctly and uniquely feminine. Yahweh uses this aspect of femininity about Himself. Perhaps in no other place in scripture does He so strongly present as female. And yet He does so in the context of also presenting as the male husband of Zion. He indeed is all things to every person. In the years of exile, when "Zion" liked to imagine her God was far away- He was in fact breastfeeding her, the ultimate moment of intimacy between parent and child, the act of physico-emotional bonding that no male can share nor replicate with their child [hence Yahweh uses this female imagery about Himself at this point]. Breast milk production depends upon the child continually drinking the milk. If the child stops doing so, the production of breast milk stops. The language used here is so powerful. Zion had been feeding from Yahweh all through her exile. To claim He had abandoned and forgotten her was self contradictory and so obviously wrong. A lactating woman is unable to forget her child in that her body is focused upon her production of milk. Even the thought of the child, or hearing a crying baby, can cause a milk ejection reflex from the woman. The mother's body is unable to forget that she is nursing, and reminds her to feed it. It's an amazing picture of God's constant awareness of and love for His people. But because they were switched off to Him, they reflected their attitude to Him back onto Him- a psychological classic. They were disinterested in Him, and they decided that He was like that to them too. The challenge comes down to us today: *Be as constantly enthusiastic for God as He is for you*.

Isaiah 49:16 Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands- The idea may be that Israel were as the lines graven on a man's palm, with which he was born. Thus from absolute eternity, we were the great "all things" to Almighty God, intimately connected with Him, part of His very own person- He the God of all, all past and future creations. But God's hands are His creative members; on those hands were the walls of Zion, and so all His actions were geared towards the final salvation of Israel. Their rejection of such great Divine passion and interest was and is the tragedy of the cosmos. And the marks in the palms of His Son will apparently remain eternally, He still appears looking like a lamb with the wounds of His slaughter upon Him (Rev. 5:6).

Your walls are continually before Me- The broken down state of the walls was continually in God's mind throughout the exile, as they were in Nehemiah's mind too. Or perhaps the walls of a restored Zion, those spoken of in Rev. 21, are in view. The ultimate hope of Israel, of their restoration, was ever before God. But at the time of the restoration, very few of His people cared about the state of the walls; such was the distraction of materialism. Possibly the idea is that the walls of Jerusalem were

engraven on God's palms, i.e. on both His hands. The plans to rebuild the city, found in Ez. 40-48, were totally on and in His hands. He was so eager to make it happen. If only the exiles had grasped this, they would have had God working with both hands along with them.

Isaiah 49:17 Your children make haste; your destroyers and those who made you waste shall go forth from you- LXX "And thou shalt soon be built by those by whom thou were destroyed, and they that made thee desolate shall go forth of thee". The idea was that a repentant remnant of Gentiles would return with the repentant exiles and work in the rebuilding of Zion. But this didn't happen. And so it is all given a reapplication to Gentiles building in Zion, the new Jerusalem.

Isaiah 49:18 Lift up your eyes all around, and see: all these gather themselves together, and come to you- All these prophecies of Isaiah were because when the Gentiles came to Zion after the Assyrians were destroyed, they were supposed to gather together to Judah's God. But Hezekiah's apostacy influenced them, and therefore Judah went into captivity in Babylon and only after repentance were to be restored. Now the situation was to be repeated; and the Gentiles would again be gathered to Zion, but now they would permanently join themselves to Israel's God.

It is God who gathers His people (Is. 11:12; 40:11; Jer. 31:10; Ez. 34:12), whereas the Gentiles gather themselves to Him (Is. 49:18). His grace therefore appears the greater to His people, somehow forcing through His purpose with obstinate sheep. The 'bringing / coming' and 'drawing near / gathering' of the exiles (s.w. Is. 43:5) would have been primarily fulfilled at the restoration (same words in Neh. 1:9). But most of the exiles remained in the lands of their captivity, just as people resist the Gospel's call today. They had to themselves bring and gather themselves (Is. 45:20; 49:18; 60:4), so that God would confirm this by bringing and gathering them (Is. 43:5; Jer. 31:8; Ez. 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; Zech. 10:10). And so today with all who wish to be in God's Kingdom; our desire to be there and first moves towards it will be confirmed many times over by God's work through His Spirit.

As I live, says Yahweh, you shall surely clothe yourself with them all as with an ornament, and dress yourself with them, like a bride- As if they were the girdle worn by a bride- which Judah had forgotten to wear, so slack were they in their attitude to their Heavenly husband (Jer. 2:32). The conversion of the Gentiles was to be to the glory of God's people. "As I live" continues the theme we have so often, of God forcing through His saving purpose "for My own sake" (see on Is. 45:23), swearing by His own life because He could swear by nothing greater- that truly He would save His people. "Clothe yourself… dress yourself" is the word 'bind / girdle'. In Jer. 2:32 Yahweh had lamented “can… a bride forget her girdle?". But Judah had forgotten Yahweh. Now the

Divine hope is that she will learn her lesson and decorate herself for her husband. But this was to be the desperate hope of Hosea that Gomer would one day love him. These things have had to be transferred to us, the new people of God, the new iteration of His wife.

Isaiah 49:19 For, as for your waste and your desolate places, and your land that has been destroyed, surely now you shall be too small for the inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up shall be far away- This is exactly relevant to the situation in Judah after the first break in the rebuilding; the walls were broken down by the Samaritans, but Nehemiah was raised up to lead more back with him from Babylon and rebuild them. And yet sadly, this too failed, for Judah were still unwilling to completely forsake Babylon. "Thy walls are continually before me [even during the 70 years captivity]... [even while in captivity they were thinking that Yahweh had forgotten them, :14]...thy builders (RVmg.) make haste... thy land that hath been destroyed [by the Babylonian scorched earth policy] shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants... then shalt thou say, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I am barren, an exile...?" (Is. 49:16,19,21 RV). This all implies there would be a population explosion at the time of the restoration. But there is no evidence this was the case. All this was potentially true; but it didn't come to pass in reality.

Isaiah 49:20 The children of your bereavement shall yet say in your ears-

These children were born after she had lost her husband and children. She has no idea who had conceived them for her (:21). The idea surely is that whilst Israel were estranged from God, the Gentiles would become God's children and become her spiritual children. This explains the obvious paradox of bereavement of children resulting in having children, "the children of bereavement". LXX "For thy sons whom thou hast lost shall say in thine ears". The idea of receiving back children who had been once slain is clearly alluded to in Job's experience (Job 42:13), who is set up as representative of the Jews in exile.

'The place is too small for me; give more space to me that I may dwell!'- The implication is that *eretz* Israel will be too small for the restored people of God; and they will therefore have to go and live with the Gentiles. The implication is that the boundaries of the promised land will expand to encompass the entire planet.

Isaiah 49:21 Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has conceived these for me, since I have been bereaved of my children, and am solitary, an exile, and wandering back and forth? Who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?'- see on Gen. 33:5. Children born through another were still reckoned as the wife's

children (Gen. 16:1; 30:1). The children of Zion were therefore suckled by the Gentiles (Is. 60:16); nursing fathers implies guardians. The implication is that just as the *eretz* Israel will be expanded to include Gentile territories (see on :20), so ethnic Gentiles will be genuinely considered by the Jews to be their people.

We note Zion's wonder at God's grace, that she the widow and bereaved of children should now find a husband and children- in contrast to Babylon who proudly denies she will ever experience widowhood nor bereavement of children, but would abide a "mistress forever". Zion has the realization so many of us do at times- *God was with me through this all along.* All through our weak periods, be they minutes or years, He was there. Showing His grace, love and compassion to us. She had complained that she was "forgotten" (:15), and this is a figure for being barren. Thus when barren women bore children, it is said that Yahweh remembered them, having apparently 'forgotten' them in their time of barrenness (Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:11,19; Rachel in Gen. 30:22). Now Zion sees that she does have children- she has not in fact been forgotten by God. She says this in her heart, to herself. It's a picture of deep internal marvel at God's grace. Just as we shall walk away from the judgment seat into eternity, with the faithful of all ages, wondering at His grace, saying within our deepest self "How did this happen? Duncan, you shouldn't be here. But you are!".

Isaiah 49:22 Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations, and set up My banner to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders- This banner or ensign lifted up in Zion is ultimately the pole of the cross of the Lord Jesus. Upon this will be predicated Yahweh's extension of His covenant to the Gentile nations; for to 'lift up the hand' is to enter into solemn covenant.

Isaiah 49:23 Kings shall be your nursing fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers: they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick the dust of your feet; and you shall know that I am Yahweh; and those who wait for Me shall not be disappointed-

Or "ashamed". Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. Consider Is. 50:10: “Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice [s.w. Ezra 1:1 re the proclamation of Cyrus] of his servant [i.e. Cyrus, Is. 45:1], that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God”. Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed Isaiah’s prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4).

Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9). And so these things are reapplied to the coming of Gentiles to the hope of Israel in Christ. Former enemies worshipping at the feet of repentant Jews becomes reapplied to all believers in Christ (Rev. 3:9).

Isaiah 49:24 Can prey be taken from a warrior? Or can prisoners of a tyrant be rescued?- LXX "Will any one take spoils from a giant? and if one should take a man captive unjustly, shall he be delivered?". The Lord Jesus alludes here in saying that through His work, the house of the strong man has been taken and his spoils looted (Mk. 3:27).

Or this can be read as the Jews remonstrating against God's message of deliverance from captivity: "Can prey be taken from a warrior? Or can prisoners of a tyrant be rescued?". They thought their salvation was too hard even for God. They made the same mistake as all who reason that their situation or personality is too far gone for God to redeem. For the 'salvation' of the exiles in Babylon is alluded to in the New Testament as a prototype of our salvation in Christ. The good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15; Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21). Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14). Passages like Ezekiel 18 and Is. 59:9 imply a certain bitterness of Israel towards their God, considering that He had dealt with them unfairly, and inappropriately punished them for the sins of their fathers. Despite having enabled their exit from Babylon, they complained: "Vindication remains far removed from us and deliverance does not reach us" (Is. 59:9). This was an awful spurning of the great salvation enabled for them.

Isaiah 49:25 But thus says Yahweh, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children- LXX "If one should take a giant captive, he shall take spoils, and he who takes them from a mighty man shall be delivered". But when Babylon fell, the captives didn't want to leave and preferred prosperity under the Persians, as the book of Esther makes clear. And so these things were reapplied and fulfilled in more abstract, spiritual terms. Thus the Lord Jesus alludes here in saying that through His work, the house of the strong man has been taken and his spoils looted (Mk. 3:27).

Isaiah 49:26 I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine- The idea is as in GNB "I will make your oppressors kill each other", which will come true in the last days (Ez. 38:21; Hag. 2:22; Zech. 14:13).

And all flesh shall know that I, Yahweh, am your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob- The final triumph of God's project of saving His people will be the parade witness to "all flesh" which finally brings about the spread of His Kingdom worldwide. The lovely story of Ruth speaks of our redemption. Her “kinsman redeemer” [Heb. *Go’el*] was the “mighty one”, Boaz. We find this word especially used in Isaiah’s prophecies to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, urging them to return from that Gentile land to Judah, and take the Gentiles with them. They had the impression there in Babylon that God had somehow forgotten them. The book of Ruth appears to have been written up [perhaps in Babylon] in order to encourage them to return- after the pattern of Naomi and Ruth returning to the land and being redeemed by their *Go’el*. But this *Go’el* is none less than God Himself. So many passages in Isaiah allude to the Ruth story: “I Yahweh am your Saviour and your redeemer [*Go’el*], the *mighty one* of Jacob” (Is. 49:26). Judah were urged in Is. 55:6 to call upon God “While He is *near*”- the same Hebrew word translated “kinsman”. The servant songs go on to explain how Yahweh could become our kinsman through His Son, our representative, of our nature. Judah in captivity were likewise encouraged by Jeremiah to return to the land- with full allusion to Ruth: “Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities… for the Lord has created a new thing in the earth: a woman shall compass a man” (Jer. 31:21,22). This refers to the way in which Ruth summed up the courage to ‘go after’ Boaz, to present herself to him for marriage- reflecting the spiritual ambition of all those who seek redemption and restoration in Christ.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 50

Isaiah 50:1 Thus says Yahweh, Where is the bill of your mother's divorce, for which I have put her away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities were you sold, and for your transgressions was your mother put away- We have reached the point in the previous chapter where the apparently abandoned Zion finds that she has children she never knew about- ultimately referring to the Gentile converts made whilst she was in a state of separation from God her husband. Now we have explained to us the difficulties with her previous sons, who clearly saw the exile as unjust, as we have recorded in Ezekiel. But in the immediate intended context, "Zion" may refer to the community in Jerusalem while her "sons" symbolize the returning exiles. Zion's sons are spoken of clearly in Lamentations and Is. 51:20: "Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets". Those "sons" who were slain and sent to Babylon never in fact did return for the most part, they declined the offer of redemption. And so the "sons" of Zion become the Gentiles in the final fulfilment. Now these children [perhaps primarily those at the time of the exile] are addressed, and they have explained to them what actually happened with their absent mother. And they are also reminded that they too are sinners and sold themselves into slavery, and Zion's captivity was actually their fault.

Zion was indeed sent away by God, but He remained married to her and we are left with the intentionally ambiguous challenge: Where [or what] is the bill of her divorce? What kind of divorce? And can the bill even be found? Has God perhaps destroyed it? The word for sending away is that used of Adam being sent out from Eden, although in hope of return (Gen. 3:23,24). Is. 50:2 likewise alludes to God's calling out to Adam: "Why when I called, was there none to answer?". The seed of the woman was to enable man's return, through overcoming the seed of the serpent. And that clearly looks forward to the Lord's work on the cross.

Jer. 3 says that God did divorce the 10 tribes, but Judah sinned worse than them. It would seem the case God didn't divorce Judah: "Turn O backsliding children, says the Lord, for I am married unto you" (Jer. 3:14). This highlights His special grace to Judah- and points up their deep wrongness in refusing it.

So the intent of the questions is something like this: "I wrote no bill of divorce, nor have I any creditors whose demands I met by selling you into slavery. These are not the real reasons for the separation that has taken place between you and Me, and for My sending you into captivity".

It could be argued that God had divorced the ten tribes and given them a bill of divorce (Jer. 3:8). But although Judah had sinned even worse, by grace He didn't do this. It would

seem the case God didn't either didn't divorce Judah, or all the same considered her His wife despite their divorce: "Turn O backsliding children, says the Lord, for I am married unto you" (Jer. 3:14). They had sold themselves to exile in Babylon by worshipping Babylon's gods; the same figure is used in Judges. Or we could understand that the bill of divorce cannot be found because God had so totally forgiven their sins.

This can be read as God's answer to the Jewish objection that God had as it were gotten rid of them as His wife for His own ends, such as getting cash benefit. And so He invites them to look again at the bill of divorce and remind themselves of the reasons for the divorce; LXX " Of what kind is your mother's bill of divorcement?". It was because of their gross unfaithfulness. Ezekiel had to reason with the exiles in a similar way, arguing against their idea that God had been unreasonable to them.

The simplest reading is that the exiles were complaining that God had sent them into captivity for His own benefit, not because they had deserved it. Ezekiel speaks to the same wrong attitudes. God's reply is that they sold themselves. Or we can read this as God saying that He had indeed divorced them and sold them- and they need to ask why this was. It was because of the huge debt of their sins. Hence CEV "I didn't divorce your mother or sell you to pay debts; I divorced her and sold you because of your sins". But that paraphrase is also problematic. In one sense, it was Israel and not God who had debts. Perhaps the idea is that their debts to Him were so great that He sold them to the Babylonians as slaves. And yet the metaphors beg questions. Not least, why was God so driven to force His own family member to pay debt that He sold them? The debt was to Him- why was He so insistent they pay up? That is the seriousness of sin, and the cost of their redemption was fully paid by Him so that there was some justice in this glorious, costly plan of redemption. The idea is that it was Israel who had accumulated the debt, and so God as the head of the family had had to sell them into debt slavery to clear it. But then He Himself clears the debt.

But further, here Isaiah urged the Jews to return to the land by saying that God had forgiven them, and on this basis He appealed for them to both ‘repent’ and ‘return’ to the land. The two terms are related. Thus He showed His grace; forgiveness preceded, not followed, repentance. Is. 44:22 is clear about this: “I have swept away your transgressions like clouds [therefore] return to me, for I have [already] redeemed you”. Perhaps the question as to where the bill of divorce was could imply that it didn't exist; God was angry with their sins, but kept no record of them- hence He could comfort Judah that there was actually no documentary evidence for their divorce and therefore she could return to Him. As Paul put it, the goodness of God leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). And we are asked to show that same “goodness” of God to others, being “kind [s.w. ‘goodness’] one to another… forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). We too are to show this grace of forgiveness-before-

repentance; but perhaps in no other area has formalized, institutionalized Christianity failed worse. *If* XYZ shows *us* she's repented of her divorce, *then* we'll forgive her and accept her in fellowship [as if, in any case, we are the ones who need to forgive her]. These are graceless and yet terribly common attitudes. The Greek word translated "goodness" is rendered "gracious" in 1 Pet. 2:3- newly converted babes in Christ taste of this gracious goodness, and it leads to repentance.

"Her term of service is over, that the debt owed for her iniquity has been satisfied" (Is. 40:2) suggests a kind of transactional approach which some find inappropriate. Zion had a debt to pay she could only deal with by selling herself as a slave for a period. But they are the terms used. A debt was paid or cleared; although not necessarily by her labour! "Without money you will be redeemed" (Is. 52:3). For the language of "redemption" will be used about Zion; someone had redeemed her, had met the debt. For that is what 'redemption' alludes to her. Clearly sin is presented as debt; Is. 50:1 is clear: "Do you think I sold you into captivity like a man who sells his children as slaves? No, you went away captive because of your sins; you were sent away because of your crimes". God did not sell them into slavery, they sold themselves, just as Elijah said of Ahab: "you have sold yourself to do evil" (1 Kings 21:20). Indeed the captivity occurred because they sold themselves to do evil (2 Kings 17:17). We likewise are "sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). But somehow the debt had been cleared, not by Zion's slave labour, and so she need not serve any longer. The fact the Jews chose to remain in Persia is exactly for the same reasons as people prefer to remain in bondage to sin when faced with the Gospel of redemption. How that was achieved is not at this point made clear. God could simply forgive debt. But the servant song of Is. 53 surely gives the deeper answer- it was the death of the Messianic servant which provided the technical answer as to "how" this was achieved. We could render Is. 40:2: "Indeed, she will receive double from the hand of Yahweh in exchange for all of the suffering on account of her sins". This double blessing is that if Is. 61:7: "Instead of your shame you shall have double; and instead of dishonour they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess double". It is in Is. 53 that we have the explanation as to how suffering for sin can lead to this double blessing- it was through the suffering servant, representative of Israel and yet morally perfect.

Isaiah 50:2 Why, when I came, was there no man?-

We could read this as God being amazed that no man had responded to His message to return and restore the Kingdom. But Is. 59:16 says He was amazed there was no

intercessor. None of the potential Messiahs made good on their potential. Or the idea may be that God is explaining why Judah had gone into exile. He had 'come' to them in the prophets, but there was nobody who responded to His call. Yet in :4 we read the servant saying that He had responded. So on balance it seems that this is indeed a reference to Judah's failures to respond to God's word- but the servant, who has been defined as the true "Israel" in Is. 49, did respond. And wonderfully so. The servant has his ear opened to Yahweh's word (:5) whereas Israel kept their ears shut to that word (Is. 48:8, and that is emphasized throughout Isaiah, see Is. 8:11-9:6; 30:8-14; 42:18-25). As discussed on Is. 49, the Lord Jesus was and is all God's people ought to have been. He is "Israel". This is why we are bidden obey the servant and follow His example in :10: "obey the voice of His servant… He who walks in darkness, and has no light, let him trust in the name of Yahweh, and rely on his God" just as :4-9 have shown the servant to have done during His sufferings. In the initial context of the exile, no Messiah figure arose to provide this pattern. Those who walked in darkness (:10) were the exiles, for they were promised deliverance from the dark dungeon of Babylon. They were to obey the servant figure. All this is transferred to us and our following of the Lord Jesus in order to leave the darkness of our "Babylon".

The Messiah figure was to appear at a time when the cities of Israel were desolate and needed rebuilding, and when the people had been told “Go forth” of Babylon, and Zion’s “builders” would hastily work, despite feeling themselves to be “exiles” (Is. 49:6,9,17 RVmg.,21 RV). There could have been a Messiah figure at the restoration. “But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me” (Is. 49:14). They didn’t have the faith to believe that God’s grace was enough to really forgive them for the sins that had led them into captivity, and for their apostasy in Babylon, where they had been spiritually “marred” (Jer. 13:7). And so the planned Messiah figure and Kingdom never fully happened. And God laments this: “Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer?” (Is. 50:2). Nobody responded to the Divine call to repentance as God 'came' to them in the prophets, nor for a Messiah. No Messiah figure appeared; or the reference may also be to the paucity of response when Cyrus announced the possibility of returning to the land.

There even seems at times a difficulty on God's part to understand why the people He had loved could hate Him so much: "Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, We will no more come to thee?" (Jer. 2:31); "Why then has this people turned away?" (Jer. 8:5); "Why have they provoked me to anger?" (Jer. 8:19; Jer. 2:14; Jer. 30:6; Is. 5:4; Is. 50:2). "What more could I have done for my vineyard… why did it yield wild grapes?" (Is. 5:1-7). This is so much the anguished cry of bewildered middle aged parents as they reflect upon a wayward child. This Divine

struggle to understand reflects the extraordinary depth of His love for them; and it warns us in chilling terms as to the pain we can cause God if we spurn His amazing love.

When I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all, that it can't redeem?- Here and in Is. 59:1 the idea of Yahweh's hand being shortened is used as an excuse not to respond to God's call to quit Babylon for Zion. The idea was that His ability to act, His hand, was somehow limited or 'reaped down'. They assumed the fact they had been reaped in the harvest of judgment meant that their God had been (Is. 17:5; Jer. 9:22; Hos. 8:7; 10:13). They simply refused to accept the repeated prophetic message that it was the God of Israel who brought judgment upon Israel. They treated Him as the surrounding peoples treated their gods- always saving them in trouble, and if they didn't, then the god had died with them.

Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stink, because there is no water, and die for thirst- "To deliver" continues the language of deliverance from debt and debt slavery. God is asking 'Do I really not have the means to buy you out of your debt?'. He did, but allowed them to go through the process of trying to pay off the debt they couldn't pay. And allowing the debt of sin to be dealt with legitimately.

God sent His prophets to appeal to Israel for repentance. They *could have lead to repentance*. But Israel would not. The word they heard was powerful, so powerful it could dry up the Red Sea in a moment (hence the dead fish; or a reference to Ex. 7:21); but despite that power, the Jews didn't respond to it, considering that God was unable to redeem from exile. So they didn't return / repent, both to their God and to His land. Their impenitence was related to their disbelief that the Kingdom was really possible, even though they accepted Yahweh's existence and were loyal to the culture of being His people. The marriage feast was totally ready and waiting for the Jewish people; they could have had it. But they didn't want it, and so the course of human history was extended. Therefore finally God sent His Son. The Lord Jesus Himself was amazed that no other man had achieved the work which He had to; and therefore He clad Himself with zeal and performed it (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16 cp. Rev. 5:3,4). God knew that salvation in the end would have to be through the death of His Son. But there were other possible scenarios for the repentance and salvation of mankind, which no man achieved. And so, as in the parable of the servants sent to get fruit from the vineyard, there was left no other way but the death of God's only Son. We have to note the similarities with denomination Christianity. There is an external culture of 'belief' in God and His Son, but when individuals are asked whether they believe they will be saved if the Lord comes now or they die now- there is an awkward silence, or the accusation of being proud if you think that. When effectively they are saying that God's saving hand is shortened and He has no power to deliver. To believe the gospel of the Kingdom of God and the name of

Jesus Christ is to believe we will be there. It is not the same as *knowing about* these things in doctrinal purity.

Isaiah 50:3 I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering- This could refer to God's deep mourning for all the wasted potential; He had empowered the people to return (:2), but they didn't, and no Messiah figure arose as had been potentially possible. For the degree of unrealized or wasted potential is fundamentally connected to our depth of mourning.

Isaiah's constant references back to the Exodus deliverance are to make the point that what God had done then, He could just as easily do for the exiles as they left Babylon / Egypt. Is. 50:2,3 could be read as a statement of God's possibilities, bringing out the huge potential power which God *could* wield for the exiles: "*If I were* to rebuke the sea it would dry up! I *could* turn rivers into a wilderness… I *could* clothe the heavens with blackness". All this conditional language and grammar shows the great potential which Israel could have tapped into had they wished.

The reference may be to the plague of darkness coming upon Babylon or the Jews in judgment, just as it did upon Egypt. The final fulfilment of this will be in the last days, for it is alluded to in Rev. 6:12, "The sun became black as sackcloth of hair".

Isaiah 50:4 The Lord Yahweh has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him who is weary-

The Lord is described here as the ideal disciple. He had "the tongue of the learned" a disciples' tongue (see Is. 8:16), He studied the Divine master morning by morning "as the learned", after the manner of disciples, and so He too could then teach disciples. He says this in Jn. 17:8: "The words which You gave me I have given to them, and they received them". Again we see Him as our representative, Himself first a disciple, a pattern to us as His disciples. Likewise He was called "Israel" because He was the ideal people of Israel. And in :6 "I gave my back to the smiters" is the language of Ps. 129:3 about the sufferings of Israel as a nation in exile. The appeal in :10 to hear His voice obediently is legitimate because He Himself had done so (LXX "let him hearken"). The servant has the disciples' tongue in that the words he speaks are the words of his teacher, God. The Lord supremely fulfilled this, speaking the Father's words and not His own, to the point that He was "the word made flesh".

"The weary" would be those wearied by their own sins and weaknesses (Mt. 11:28). The servant sustains the weary with His word: "that I may know how to sustain with words him who is weary". The weary are clearly the unspiritual exiles: "you have been weary of

Me, Israel" (Is. 43:22; 40:30). It isn't a case of man facing off against God's word, and being left to respond or not. The Lord Jesus, the supreme servant, knows "how to sustain with words him who is weary" of God's words because God had specifically taught Him how to do that. And He was the best student. This is an amazing insight into the relationship between Father and Son. He will not force, but He will go beyond leaving man to respond to God's word unaided. He will go further than that. And we will have seen this in our own spiritual paths- somehow God's word is made alive to us through the higher working of the Lord's hand.

The previous verses have lamented Judah's refusal to hear the call to repentance. But now the Saviour Servant speaks of how He was trained by Yahweh to teach people, Israel especially, the true way; and then to exemplify and embody that teaching in His own suffering and death (:6,7). Clearly these things refer to the Lord Jesus. The LXX speaks of His ability to teach and instruct us His people: "The Lord even God gives me the tongue of instruction, to know when it is fit to speak a word". But "those who are taught" is literally 'the disciples', the taught ones. He spoke to them in their own tongue, in their own terms and language; and He was taught to do this. This would explain why the Lord used the language of demon possession rather than correcting those wrong ideas.

He wakens me morning by morning, He wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught- "Those who are taught" are literally 'the disciples'. He was taught by God, morning by morning, to hear as the disciples heard. He was progressively led to appreciate the perspective of those far less spiritual than Himself. He was taught the ability to hear as we hear, although as God's Son He Himself heard with far quicker and deeper perception than we do.

He “learned obedience” through experience, “by the things which He suffered”; thus gaining that practical learning which adapted Him for “speaking a word in season” to suffering men (Heb 5:8). The contrast is with how God daily appealed to Judah and they refused to listen, “daily rising up early” (Jer. 7:25). In Mk. 1:35 we have the practical picture of the Lord's early morning sessions with His Father. The image is drawn from a master wakening his pupils early for instruction.

The Lord Jesus “morning by morning” heard God’s word “as the learned” (Is. 50:4 AV); but the Hebrew words for “accustomed” in Jer. 13:23 and “learned” in Is. 50:4 are the same. God teaches by repetition- which may be out of vogue in the experience / problem based learning philosophy of current education, but it’s God’s way. Once habit solidifies, it becomes effectively part of our nature and almost impossible to change, at least in human strength- so Jer. 13:23 teaches us: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil”. The Hebrew translated “accustomed” carries the idea of repeated habit. The Hebrew idea of

‘teaching’ is connected to the words for ‘habit’ or ‘custom’; because teaching was by repetition.

The Lord was noted for rising up early and praying (Mk. 1:35). Is. 50:4 prophesies of the Lord Jesus that morning by morning, God awoke His ear "to learn as a disciple". That last phrase is surely to signal the intended similarities between the Lord's path of growth, and that of all disciples. How we start our days is really so important. The next two verses go on to predict that because of this morning-by-morning teaching process, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is. 50:5,6). Thus we come to the cross, the life of cross carrying, as the end result of our morning reflections. It was from His own experience that the Lord could bid us take up our cross- *His* cross- each morning. The unbelieving world is repeatedly characterized as walking in a crooked path (Lk. 3:5; Acts 2:40; Phil. 2:15 and often in Proverbs). Quietly starting every day right is part of our walking in a *straight* path, following the way of the cherubim; and by walking in that straight daily path we will not have opportunity to stumble (Heb. 12:13).

The same word for "waken" is used of God stirring up the spirit of men to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1,5). It is often used in the sense of stirring up spiritually. But although Jerusalem was urged to awake, to be thus roused up (Is. 51:17; 52:1 "awake, awake!"), "there is none that stirs up himself" (Is. 64:7). But the Lord did respond magnificently to this stirring up. This can be our daily experience, morning by morning stirred up and responding as the Lord did.

Isaiah 50:5 The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward- The early morning teaching sessions between Father and Son resulted in His ear being opened to perceive the death of the cross. And He was not rebellious. He as "Israel" was representative of sinful Israel (see on Is. 49:1-3); it was the exiles who were to have their ears opened. But they refused, preferring to remain deaf (see on Is. 42:20; 43:8; 48:8). But His ears were opened because He wanted to hear; unlike them He was not rebellious (s.w. Is. 1:20; 63:10); He did not "turn away backward" as the idolaters of Judah did (s.w. Is. 42:17; Jer. 38:22). He triumphed at every point where we as Israel fail. To be right with God, Israel had to identify with Him. We become in Him by baptism, and thus His righteousness is imputed to us (Gal. 3:27-29).

Isaiah 50:6 I gave my back to the strikers, and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair; I didn’t hide my face from shame and spitting-

Giving His back to the smiters reflects His body language displayed in His sufferings, offering the other cheek to be smitten (Mt. 5:39), in a spirit of giving His life and body. The symbol of which we take in the communion bread. "My cheeks to those who

plucked off the hair" is LXX "I gave my cheeks to buffering" i.e. to being smitten with the open hand, which was literally fulfilled in the Lord's case (Mt. 26:67; Mk. 14:65). The spitting likewise (Mt. 26:67; 27:30). The Lord said in Lk. 17:32 that the prophecies of His sufferings included the prediction that He would be spat upon. Only Is. 50:6 mentions this, so we can be sure that this is true of the Lord Jesus.

Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14). See on Is. 49:24. The servant was called to sustain the "dispirited" by the prophetic word (Is. 50:4). And yet passages like Is. 50:4-11 and even Is. 53 speak of how the servant met even physical abuse as well as rejection in his ministry to his fellow Jews. Indeed the servant feels that his mission to them has been a failure (Is. 49:1-6), a complaint met by God's promise that his mission would be in some way reapplied to the Gentiles in their captivity to sin. The way the servant is beaten and has his hair pulled out (Is. 50:4-11) reminds us of how the prophet Jeremiah was treated the same way by the Jews when his message was rejected (Jer. 20:2; Jer. 37:15). The servant was spat at by his fellow Jews- an expression of utter contempt (Job 30:10). Whilst the servant prophecies find their later fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, it seems to me that in their first context, they speak of how a prophet or prophets at the time of the exile were rejected and even beaten up by their fellow Jews. Indeed, Isaiah ends on a negative note, describing the judgments to come upon the Jews who had rejected the message of deliverance from Babylon (Is. 66:24).

As explained on :5, the cross was the end point of the Lord's early morning teaching sessions with His Father. And so He unlike every other victim of crucifixion and torture willingly gave His body parts to His torturers.

Jesus commanded us not to physically resist the forces of evil: "But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also" (Mt. 5:39,40). Christ is the example in this: "I gave My back to those who struck Me ..." (Is. 50:6). The Lord gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He gave His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6).

The Lord would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26).

Isaiah 50:7 For the Lord Yahweh will help me; therefore I have not been confounded-

Though his body is beaten, plucked, and handled as if it were an animal body, and he is subjected to ridicule and humiliation (:6), the servant is not ashamed. That was a psychological miracle, attributable to God. "Confounded" or "ashamed" is the same word for "shame" as in :6. The Lord didn't seek to avoid the shame, because He trusted that God would help Him not to experience shame. His abusers must surely have noticed that His body language was so different to the crucifixion victims they often abused and shamed before their deaths. The Lord was not ashamed. And it is this same quiet assurance which is shared with all in Him; see on :9.

It was to be the makers of idols who were "confounded" (s.w. Is. 41:11; 45:16) and only the true Israel would not be "confounded" (Is. 45:17; 54:4). The sinners in Israel had refused to be confounded or ashamed of their sins (Jer. 3:3 s.w.) and so they would be shamed in condemnation. Repentance involves an imagination of ourselves coming to judgment day and being condemned, and feeling shame for that; that is how we shall not be ashamed. And it is the servant alone who shall not be ashamed / confounded because of His righteousness (Is. 50:7). Our identity with Him removes that shame. If we condemn ourselves, we shall not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The enemies of Israel would perish alongside the apostate within Israel, in the same judgment.

Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be disappointed- This again is understandable in the context of the cross. The Lord set His face to go to Jerusalem, and the final sacrifice which would be there (Lk. 9:51). He hardened His face like a rock; and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30).

His whole life and heart direction was "set" in the way of the cross, and that eternity which He knew was beyond it. Perhaps His lack of destructive anger was because He didn't let Himself be shamed by men, instead taking His self-worth and values from God's acceptance of Him. To avoid "anger" in the wrong sense, we need to avoid being wrongly shamed. And we can do this by ensuring we ourselves aren't led into shame, due to placing too great a value upon the opinions of men. Our shame should be before God for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God (Jer. 6:15). Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness.

The ideal servant knew that He would not be "turned back" nor "ashamed". The unfaithful amongst the exiles would be "turned back and ashamed" (Is. 42:17) and the word for "ashamed" is repeatedly used of how the unfaithful amongst the exiles would be "ashamed" because of their idolatry and lack of faith (Is. 42:17; 44:9,11; 45:16; 65:13; 66:5). God's true people would never be ashamed, world without end (Is. 45:17);

"they shall not be ashamed that wait for me" (Is. 49:23). Zion would "not be ashamed… for you shall forget the shame of your youth" (Is. 54:4). As explained on Is. 49:2, the servant is the true Israel, who would be unashamed.

We may enquire how this meshes with the specific prophecy that the servant would not "faint nor be discouraged' (Is. 42:4) until His mission is accomplished, of saving God's people. What we read here nuances that prophecy. We have setbacks and defeats, but like the Lord we are to see that discouragement as temporary, and the overall thrust of our lives is not to be discouraged. For ultimate victory is certain. And after each momentary discoursgement we again set our faces like a flint as did Ezekiel: "Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant, harder than a flint, have I made thy forehead; fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks" (Ez. 3:8,9). This again was God's psychological strengthening of His servant, available to us through the Spirit.

Isaiah 50:8 He is near who justifies me; who will bring charges against me? Let us stand up together: who is my adversary? Let him come near to me-

We note the legal language. Justification, having charges brought, an adversary, standing up together in court (as in Is. 47:12,13). Now it is the Lord Jesus as it were in the dock. He was struck and spat upon during His mock trial before the crucifixion- but He remembered that the ultimate judgment was before God, and in His mind, challenged His accusers to stand up with their accusations before God. Knowing God would justify Him. Indeed a pattern for us when facing false accusation and being wrongly judged by men. The declaration of His innocence was in the resurrection (Rom. 1:4) and the judgment upon His false accusers spoken of in :9 could refer to the events of AD70 and the last day. The case against Him would collapse before God's righteous judgment, like the moldering of a moth-eaten garment.

As explored on :7, those who feel the real justification of the Spirit, the real power of imputed righteousness, will not be unsettled by human criticism or "charges" brought. For the nearness of God's justification in Christ is more than sufficient. Is. 56:1 is a parallel passage, speaking of how Yahweh's righteousness (imputed to us by His justification of us in Christ) is "near to come", and His salvation soon to be revealed. As Paul develops in Rom. 1-8, we are saved by the imputation of righteousness, justification by faith. But that is yet to be revealed, although it could have been "near" even in time for the exiles. They refused these wonderful things, but they are true for us too, as we await the soon revelation of the Lord Jesus at judgment day. Keeping this hope in view means we shall ultimately have nobody and nothing charged against us, there will be no legal adversary in court with us at the last day. And this means that we handle accusation, both justified and false, in that perspective. And yet it is criticism

and the shame which arises from it which can psychologically and spiritually destroy people in this life.

The songs of the suffering Servant are applied to us in Rom. 8:31, where Paul exalts that "if God be for us, who is against us?"- alluding to Is. 50:8 "The Lord God is helping me- who is he that would convict me?". If we are in Christ, we like Him cannot be condemned. In the legal context, if the judge of all is legally “for us”, then there effectively is no accuser, nothing and nobody standing against us. It’s as if Paul has rightly guessed his readers’ response: ‘OK Paul, I have nothing to say against your argument, but all the same you don’t know what a sinner I am, what a line of sins I have waiting there to condemn me’. And Paul’s exultant answer is that if God is “for us”- and he has demonstrated this time and again, that God quite simply wants to save us- then nothing and nobody, not even our own sins, can ultimately stand against us.

Isaiah 50:9 Behold, the Lord Yahweh will help me; who is he who shall condemn me?-

This is the language of Rom. 8:33. But the "me", referring here to the Lord Jesus, is applied to us. We are in Him. He stands in the dock uncondemned and justified. And so do we. This is the huge, unspeakable significance of being "in Christ": "If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died— more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us". The Lord was declared righteous by God through His death on the cross, yet these very words are applied to us. A related idea is found in the Messianic prophecy of Ps. 118:6: "Yahweh is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?". Yahweh justified the Lord Jesus (:8). To justify clearly means to declare righteous. The Lord Jesus was vindicated by God in the court case against Him and the resurrection was His declaration as right (Rom. 1:4). We have here in Is. 50 His very thoughts as He was spat upon, tried and falsely accused. He was telling Himself how God was His judge, and none of the accusations were true nor valid. And then Romans 8 applies His thoughts there- to us, justified in Him!

As explained on :8, with God on our side in the final judgment, as both judge and advocate, there are no charges against us nor legal adversaries left in the court room. Yahweh had repeatedly offered the "servant" His "help" in order to encourage the weak minded exiles to return to Zion, just as His hand had 'helped' Hezekiah against the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:8). At the restoration, Ezra believed this "help" would enable the restoration to the extent that they didn't need any human soldiers to help them (Ezra 8:22 s.w.).

Behold, all they shall wax old as a garment, the moth shall eat them up- The "they" are any possible adversaries who might bring charges against us. This had particular

relevance to all the adversaries to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. With Yahweh justifying the returned exiles, the court room was effectively empty of adversaries, all charges were to be seen in the perspective of God's ultimate justification of His people (see on :8). These words are also found in Job 13:28, where it is God who consumes them, as it were manifesting Himself in a tiny moth. We find the same ideas in Is. 51:6, where the "they" is the 'heavens and earth' of any system, be it Persia / Babylon or an unbelieving Jewish system, which is adversarial to God's people and purpose. The contrast is with how the clothing of Israel in the wilderness did not "wax old" (s.w. Dt. 8:4; 29:5; Neh. 9:21). The exodus and journey to the promised land is repeatedly alluded to in Isaiah as a pattern for the exiles to follow in returning to Judah, and for us in our exodus from this world and journey towards the Kingdom.

Isaiah 50:10 Who is among you who fears Yahweh, who obeys the voice of His servant? He who walks in darkness, and has no light, let him trust in the name of Yahweh, and rely on his God-

“Who among you reveres Yhwh, listens to his servant’s voice? One who has walked in deep darkness and had no brightness must trust in Yhwh’s name and lean on his God”. God had made the darkness light for them, but still there had to be some freewill response from the exiles. See on :11. The "darkness" initially was that of exile in Babylon; see on Is. 49:9. A Messianic figure was to arise, whose voice they were to obey, and thereby trust in their God. This didn't happen at the time, and so it is all reapplied to the Lord Jesus as the servant. But the servant whose voice was to be obeyed was intended to be Cyrus. "Who is among you who fears Yahweh… his God?" is the language of Ezra 1:3. Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. "Voice" is s.w. Ezra 1:1 about the proclamation of Cyrus, the servant (Is. 45:1). Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed Isaiah’s prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4). Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9).

The Yahweh Name is the most essential challenge to faith. "I *will* be" is a challenge to believe that what is not yet seen *will be* on the basis of what has been and what is. We must trust / believe in the Name of Yahweh (Is. 50:10). The emphasis is perhaps upon the word "him". As the Lord Jesus clearly trusted God throughout the trauma of His sufferings (:8,9), so let every believer likewise trust. But considering the Lord's absolute faith / trust at that time, this is quite some challenge. But this is where the Lord's personality and final sacrifice are not to simply be admired from afar- He as He was is an abiding invitation to us all to follow His example.

Isaiah 50:11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who adorn yourselves with torches around yourselves; walk in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that you have kindled. You shall have this of My hand; you shall lie down in sorrow- Why this reference to paganism and idolatry immediately after the call to obey the voice of God's servant Cyrus and leave Babylon (:10)? Isaiah frequently shows the folly of worshipping Babylonian idols. And yet it seems that it was Judah's worship of these idols that kept them in Babylon. Those who feared Yahweh had none of the light provided by the Babylonian idols; but the majority preferred Babylon's light to Zion's.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 51

Isaiah 51:1 Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek Yahweh- "Listen to Me" [repeated in :4,7] is an appeal to the exiles to believe the amazing good news of redemption from Babylon. That appeal went largely unheard, and so it comes down to us who want to accept this great salvation. GNB "You who want to be saved"- which is surely all of us, followers after righteousness, hungering and thirsting to be righteous, as the Lord put it.

Ponder the parallel between Is. 51:1 and 7: “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord… hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness”. To know God’s righteousness is to seek / follow it; of itself, it inspires us to ambitiously seek to attain it. The Messianic servant addresses the exiles again, specifically those who were seeking Yahweh rather than seeking idols. God was willing to push forward His salvation plan even with a remnant, but there is no evidence there was even a remnant of repentant, faithful ones at the time of the restoration.

Look to the rock you were cut from, and to the hold of the pit you were dug from- The rock and pit were the feeble Abraham and Sarah (:2). The returning, repentant exiles could potentially have been the little stone cut out of the rocky mountain of Dan. 2, which would come to the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham and form the reestablished Kingdom of God. But they failed in this, and so Dan. 2 had a longer fulfilment. To liken Abraham and Sarah to a "pit" is strange, but GNB offers "quarry". The extra information of Dan. 2 is that they were cut out "without hands". The exiles refused to respond, and so the Lord applies this language to the spiritual children of Abraham in Mt. 3:9 "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham".

Isaiah 51:2 Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him, and made him many- Abraham was called before he had children, and his wife barren; but from that feeble beginning God made a new nation. The tiny remnant of exiles who were faithful should not therefore consider that they were too few to become the revived Kingdom of God in Judah. All the time we sense they had so many fears and such weak faith, and God through Isaiah is patiently addressing them and encouraging them. Ez. 33:24 records how the exiles turned this reasoning on its head; they argued that they were many, and so seeing Abraham was few and received the land, so they ought moreso to be given it. They missed the point, that the repentant remnant would be very small indeed. But even if they were just two people like Abraham and Sarah, who also lived far away from Judah to the east, they could still be multiplied and have the Abrahamic blessing fulfilled in them.

We will discuss on :17 how the alcoholic, abused, drunken Zion lying in the dust was to be transformed, awoken from her stupor, clothed in royal clothes and enthroned as a queen. People in that kind of desperate situation are often sceptical of any good news, let alone a message of love and radical transformation for them. Just as people are so hesitant to believe that they will actually be saved. The Jews are asked to consider Sarah, another woman, like Zion. She also was barren and frail. But at an advanced age, she was miraculously rejuvenated by the Spirit, and bore Isaac. And the Jews were thereby her descendants, and living proof to the fact God can radically transform a person when it seems all is lost and just too far gone. What God had done for Abraham and Sarah was miraculous, and He could do the same for bedraggled Zion, lying drunk in the dust. From one impotent man [so Paul reasons in Romans] and one barren woman- came a multitude. A desert would become the garden of Eden; a wilderness would likewise become Yahweh's garden. And yet the exiles refused to do as asked, and look to Abraham and Sarah. In Is. 63:16,17 they complain that Yahweh has made them err from His ways, and they have no connection with Abraham: "Abraham doesn't know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us".

Isaiah 51:3 For Yahweh has comforted Zion; He has comforted all her waste places, and has made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of Yahweh; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody- GNB "I will show compassion to Jerusalem, to all who live in her ruins", perhaps implying that now the appeal of God was to the poor minority of Jews whom the Babylonians had left in Judah at the time of the exile. This "joy and gladness" is the scene of Jer. 33:11, when God's people enter the new covenant. But they refused to accept this, instead struggling to imperfectly keep the old covenant; and so this scenario was precluded at that time. The "comfort" had already been given- but they had to claim it and accept it.

The past tense is used to bring out how this potential was so certain of fulfilment- if they wanted it. The appeal of Is. 40 to "comfort" God's people was being repeated- but they had to accept it. I argued on Gen. 1,2 that the garden of Eden was the *eretz* promised to Abraham; Eden could have been restored in the reestablished Kingdom of God which was now possible if they listened in obedience and repentance (:4). Adam like Judah had been exiled eastward, but was now being recalled. Instead of the sadness associated with the curse and moral failure, there would instead have been joy.

Isaiah 51:4 Listen to Me, My people; and give ear to Me, My nation: for a law shall go forth from Me, and I will establish My justice for a light of the peoples- The LXX better brings out the parallel between God's people and the Gentiles. A remnant from both groups were being invited to repent and join in with a new, multiethnic people of God in the restored Kingdom: "Hear me, hear me, My people; and you kings, hearken to Me: for a

law shall proceed from Me, and My judgment shall be for a light of the nations". This is the envisaged "law" going forth from Zion in the reestablished Kingdom (Is. 2:2-4), not *the* law of Moses, but *a* law which was to be "a light to the peoples". Ultimately this is the message of the Lord Jesus, the light of the world, the word / law made flesh. For "law", *torah*, we could better render "teaching". The "light of the peoples" is the good news of salvation in the servant (Is. 49:6 "... a light for the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth"). The teaching or judgment [NEV "justice"] that would be a light to the nations is that of salvation in Christ. Judgment / justice is thus related to salvation- the judgment is that we are pronounced justified, uncondemned in Christ, as just explained in Is. 50. Likewise in :5 we have paralleled justice / rightness and salvation. This is a great theme of Romans- that sinners rightly condemned to death can be rightly declared just / righteous, with absolute moral legitimacy. This legitimacy is through being "in" the ideal Israel, ultimately the Lord Jesus. Again we find the parallel between justice and salvation in :8: "My righteousness / rightness / justice shall be forever, and My salvation to all generations". Remember always that the idea of being 'righteous' is to be innocent, and to be declared publically innocent. This is why there is so much legal allusion in Isaiah, and why it is so crucial to be "in" the righteous servant through whom we are declared innocent and uncondemned.

Isaiah 51:5 My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth, and My arms shall judge the peoples; the islands shall wait for Me, and on My arm shall they trust- The idea may be that God's gracious salvation is approaching, and with this as His "arm" He will judge the peoples; and that is why the peoples trust upon His arm. This makes sense of the two references to "arm" in this verse. Man can look forward to Divine judgment because it means salvation. David's Psalms so often look forward to Divine judgment. God's arm is His salvation: "Be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble" (Is. 33:2). And the arm of Yahweh was revealed in the death of His Son (Is. 53:1 "to whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?").

The Kingdom could have come very quickly had the exiles repented. God was so eager to fulfill His saving plan. Hence LXX "My righteousness speedily draws nigh". His enthusiasm and almost impatience to save His people reflects an eternal aspect of His character, which encourages us that He is far from indifferent as to the outcome of His saving purpose with us. See on :14.

Note the parallel between righteousness and salvation. As Paul develops in Rom. 1-8, we are saved by the imputation of righteousness, justification by faith. But that is yet to be revealed, although it could have been "near" even in time for the exiles. They refused these wonderful things, but they are true for us too, as we await the soon revelation of the Lord Jesus at judgment day.

Isaiah 51:6 Lift up your eyes to the skies, and look on the land beneath; for the skies shall vanish away like smoke, and the land shall wax old like a garment; and those who dwell therein shall die in the same way: but My salvation shall be eternal, and My righteousness shall not be abolished- This is parallel in reference to Is. 50:9: "Behold, all they shall wax old as a garment, the moth shall eat them up". The "they" are any possible adversaries who might bring charges against us. This had particular relevance to all the adversaries to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. With Yahweh justifying the returned exiles, the court room was effectively empty of adversaries, all charges were to be seen in the perspective of God's ultimate justification of His people (see on Is. 50:8). These words are also found in Job 13:28, where it is God who consumes them, as it were manifesting Himself in a tiny moth. We find the same ideas here in Is. 51:6, where the "they" is the 'heavens and earth' of any system, be it Persia / Babylon or an unbelieving Jewish system, which is adversarial to God's people and purpose. The contrast is with how the clothing of Israel in the wilderness did not "wax old" (s.w. Dt. 8:4; 29:5; Neh. 9:21). The exodus and journey to the promised land is repeatedly alluded to in Isaiah as a pattern for the exiles to follow in returning to Judah, and for us in our exodus from this world and journey towards the Kingdom.

Salvation and righteousness are paralleled here, as in :5,8. Salvation is due to Yahweh our righteousness, the Lord Jesus, and our becoming in Him. Our knowledge of righteousness (:7), our seeking for it (:1), is a seeking for and pre-experience of salvation. It's not that we must achieve righteousness in order to be saved. It's rather that we seek it, we "know" it, we love it, we want it, and it is fully counted to us in Christ. And because we are justified, counted righteous, there is a 'rightness' to our salvation as unrighteous sinners. Our salvation is eternal, and so is God's righteousness that is counted to us. The outcome of this judgment is that we are declared right, and that is for ever in that the judicial conclusion, the judgment of the Divine court, will never be overturned. Like the servant, we are freed from condemnation- for ever.

Isaiah 51:7 Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law- This is addressed to the righteous minority amongst the exiles, who although they couldn't fully obey the law in exile, still had it in their hearts. And if they entered the new covenant, the Spirit would write that law in their hearts (Jer. 31:33). But instead, the returned exiles refused to have the law in their hearts (Zech. 7:12 "they made their hearts as hard as flint, in case they might hear the law"), and so these things are reapplied to Gentiles who are willing to have the essence of Divine law in their hearts (Rom. 2:15).

Don't fear the reproach of men, neither be dismayed at their insults- The call is to act as the servant of Is. 50, who was not shamed because he was justified by Yahweh. See on

:1,6. As explained on Is. 50:8, we need not fear insults nor false accusation from men because we shall ultimately be justified, and even now have righteousness imputed to us. This had particular relevance to the returned exiles. "Reproach" is s.w. Neh. 1:3; 2:17; 4:4; 5:9 about the reproach of the Gentiles against the partially rebuilt Jerusalem. Is. 51:3-11 is clearly in a restoration context. This passage seems to have foreseen the lagging of spirit in Zerubbabel and the builders, and the need to encourage them that a second group of exiles ought to have come with Nehemiah with great joy. A few came, but this yet further opportunity was again not realized by the returnees. See on :11.

Isaiah 51:8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool- These words are also found in Job 13:28, where it is God who consumes them, as it were manifesting Himself in a tiny moth, and also as a "worm". See on :6.

But My righteousness shall be forever, and My salvation to all generations- Note the parallel between righteousness and salvation. As Paul develops in Rom. 1-8, we are saved by the imputation of righteousness, justification by faith. But that is yet to be revealed, although it could have been "near" even in time for the exiles. They refused these wonderful things, but they are true for us too, as we await the soon revelation of the Lord Jesus at judgment day. Keeping this hope in view means we shall ultimately have nobody and nothing charged against us, there will be no legal adversary in court with us at the last day. And this means that we handle accusation, both justified and false, "the reproach of men" (:7) in that perspective. And yet it is criticism and the shame which arises from it which can psychologically and spiritually destroy people in this life.

Isaiah 51:9 Awake, awake, put on strength, arm of Yahweh-

This voice that now is heard is the voice God hoped He would hear from the exiles. To call upon Yahweh to awake is a cry of faith; for we note the criticism of Judah for asking the false gods to "awake" for them in Hab. 2:19: "Woe to the one saying to wood, "Awake"; "Wake up" to the silent stone" (cp. Jer. 2:27). The hope was that the exiles would accept Yahweh's arm to save them from Babylon and bring them to Zion and the restored Kingdom. But they refused this. The essence of God's planned salvation will come true for His people in salvation from sin, and the path to His eternal Kingdom. Yahweh's arm becomes the crucified Lord Jesus, who awoke in resurrection: "To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?" (Is. 53:1).

"Put on strength" can be rendered 'dress yourself'. Yahweh's arm would awake and be dressed for action; and we will read in :17 how Zion, lying in a drunken stupor, was called to likewise awake, and in Is. 52:1,2 to dress herself. Yahweh's mighty arm that

created all things and had saved Israel historically from Egypt... could work that same humanly impossible transformation for His people.

This and :10 are perhaps God's hopeful imagination of how the exiles would pray to Him; the kind of Divine fantasy which Hosea had about the repentance of Gomer and her return to him which he imagined to the point of fantasizing about. LXX "Awake, awake, O Jerusalem, and put on the strength of thine arm", repeated in :17. The exiles are called "Jerusalem". They called themselves this (Is. 48:2); but they needed to do more than such merely external, legalistic, ritualistic identification of themselves with a name and culture. And that is an abiding challenge for God's people today. They had to "awake", to allow God's Spirit to act upon their hearts to "stir up" their spirits (s.w. 1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16), just as He had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to let them return (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:22). The spirit of the exiles was likewise awoken or stirred up to return (s.w. Ezra 1:5). Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves' (Is. 64:7). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond.

Awake, as in the days of old, the generations of ancient times. Isn't it You who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the monster?- If they allowed themselves to be 'awoken' or 'stirred up', then Yahweh would likewise awake for them and act miraculously as He had at the time of the exodus from Egypt. But they would not be stirred up, and so the stirring up or awaking of Yahweh's arm had a longer term application. The arm of the Lord- a title of Christ- is described as awaking (cp. Christ's resurrection), and as being "It which hath dried the (Red) Sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made a way for the ransomed to pass over" (Is. 51:9,10). This is describing the work of Christ in language applicable to the Angel of the Exodus who brought Israel through the Red Sea.

Marduk killed Tiamat in the waters and cut him in pieces. This is one of many mocking allusions to Marduk, showing Yahweh's supremacy over him. See on Is. 40:25. Marduk was formed- but Yahweh had no god before Him and will have none after Him (Is. 43:10). Marduk had a counsellor, Ea, called in the inscriptions "the all-wise one". But Yahweh has all wisdom and has no such counsellor (Is. 40:13,14; Is. 41:28). All this reference to the Marduk cult was in my opinion not merely a pointless mockery and poking of fun at the Persian culture. It was a very real appeal to the Jewish exiles to quit it, to come out and be separate; remember again and again that Mordecai [and perhaps Esther too] had adopted names reflective of the Marduk cult.

Yahweh "Trod on the back of Sea", i.e. the supposed Satan figure called "Sea" (Job 9:8; Dt. 33:29; Amos 4:13; Mic. 1:3; Is. 63:3). Even if such a being existed, he had been destroyed for good by Yahweh at the Red Sea. "You split Sea... cut Rahab in pieces... didst pierce the dragon" (Ps. 78:13; Neh. 9:11;Is. 51:9-11). Thus the splitting of the Red

Sea was understood as a splitting of the Satan figure or god known as "Sea". All this was what Moses had in mind when he sought to explain to his people what had happened at the Red Sea- even if there were such a being as the "Sea" god of evil, Yahweh their God had totally destroyed him and split him into pieces. And the real 'satan' was Egypt, real men on a real earth who posed a danger to Israel.

The various sea monsters alluded to all spoke of chaos. The sea and all within it was seen as chaos, which man could not deal with. And so life can appear to man. And so it is. It is only the hope of eternal salvation which gives us victory and peace over the chaos. The ransomed of Yahweh pass over the sea of chaos, at peace (:10).

Isaiah 51:10 Isn't it You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?- Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel "found grace in the wilderness" before, and they would do again, "When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest" (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would "cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". This is why Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11).

The allusion is not only to the exodus, but to creation itself. The present world was created by a re-organization of things which existed in some form before. This means that when our own lives, or the collective life of God's people, appears to be in chaos- then we can in faith reflect that God has brought beautiful order out of chaos, and He can likewise powerfully bring order to what seems hopeless. This is the context of the creation allusions in the laments of Ps. 74:12-17; 89:10-15; Is. 51:9 etc.

"The depths of the sea" is mentioned because it was there that the worst sea monsters were imagined to live. And the "depths of the sea" are the place that the condemned sink down to (Ps. 69:3,15; 130:1; Ez. 27:34). As we will discuss on :17, the condemned Zion [she had drunk the cup of Divine condemnation] was at rock bottom and apparently not saveable, an alcoholic in the dust, addicted to the wine of her own condemnation. But the God who made a way for His people through the depths of the sea could make a way for her too, to come on the journey from Babylon to Zion in a new exodus. Those deepest depths of the sea, the place of condemnation, were to be made a way, turned into a road toward eternal salvation. The experience of condemnation, as experienced by Peter weeping in the darkness, was to be used by God to ultimately save His people. Yet they refused even that, and preferred to remain in their condemnation.

Isaiah 51:11 The ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy shall be on their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy; sorrow and weeping shall flee away- The envisaged singing was with the Songs of Degrees. Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied that Judah would come with joy to Zion, and would continue there with an everlasting joy. But the records give little indication that they were joyful; Neh. 8:9,10 shows Nehemiah encouraging them to be joyful, because “the joy of the Lord is your strength”. They didn’t want to have all joy and peace through believing; and so the Kingdom of joy didn’t come. They didn’t live the Kingdom life of joy, and so they didn’t possess or experience the Kingdom. The lowness of their petty concerns deprived them of it.

There was great joy at the time of the first Purim in Esther's time when sorrow was turned to joy (s.w. Esther 9:22), but the people did not return. The restoration was intended to be the time when sorrow was turned to joy (Jer. 31:13 s.w.). But as we can, they forgot the price aid for their ransom and remained in slavery. And those who did return didn't do so with the voice of joy, but with nervousness and then complaining about the famine, bad harvests and diseases they and their crops were smitten with on returning. The eternal joy spoken of here will come true only at the return of the Lord Jesus. Joy by its nature is temporal in this life, because of our emotional structure; we cannot maintain such experiences of joy in a permanent sense. But this is the wonderful nature of salvation. "Sorrow and sighing" is the same phrase used about David's feelings because of his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 31:10). As noted throughout Is. 35, the essential theme is of internal spiritual transformation, and no longer experiencing the effects of sin; for that is the greatest "joy". The exiles refused all these things, and so they are reapplied to the final removal of sorrow and sighing at the return of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 21:3,4).

There is no account of the actual journey to Zion of the first exiles in Ezra 1:11, but the apocryphal 1 Esdras 5:1-6 speaks of the returnees playing the restored musical instruments of the temple and singing as they came. This was therefore a primary fulfilment of the restoration prophecies about God's people coming with singing unto Zion (Is. 35:10; 51:11). We note how Ezra 2:65 mentions "singers" as amongst the exiles who returned.

Isaiah 51:12 I, even I, am He who comforts you- The image is of a mother comforting a child, to the point the child need have no fear of anything nor anyone else, if loving mother is on their side. But that comfort was rudely refused by the exiles in Is. 49:13,14. These prophecies, these appeals to Judah to accept salvation, probe the psychological and subconscious reasons why they refused. They fear "man who shall die", they feared that somehow it might all backfire. Or they feared what they would look like in the eyes

of man, giving up the good life for the ruins of Zion. They feared Babylon, and therefore they didn't leave when asked. And yet that fear was dealt with, Babylon fell, and Cyrus immediately invited them to return to Zion. And they still didn't leave. God addresses and answers all their possible reasons for not responding. Just as He does with man today. But still they didn't respond.

God is not distant; the God of the cosmos was eager to personally draw near to the hearts ("comfort") of the exiles. But they refused.

Who are you, that you are afraid of man who shall die- Is. 40:6-8 has the same basic message of *comfort* through the message of human mortality and weakness. For it is our fear of others, of their opinions and judgments, which causes so much *dis*comfort to so many. And so here too, the mortality of humanity is used as a comfort to the downtrodden people of God. Because man is mortal... don't fear man, but rather God. And this is to be a *comfort* to us. God chose His message of comfort to be simply: "Man is mortal!". But the exiles and the potential "servant" figure feared men, perhaps one particular ruler of Persia or Babylon, whom he thought would not allow their restoration; see on :16; Is. 52:13. They feared him rather than God, and so they didn't flee Babylon as asked. But then God removed Belshazzar and Cyrus gave the decree for them to return. And they refused even that. But all their possible excuses for not responding to the call of the Gospel are dealt with in Isaiah's prophecies; and mankind today is likewise without excuse for not responding.

And of the son of man who shall be made as grass- In Hebrew thought, “the Son of man” meant an ordinary, mortal man (Is. 51:12). Several times we are reminded that “God is not a man” (Num. 23:19; Hos. 11:9); yet Christ was clearly “the Son of man” or, as he is often called in the New Testament, “the *man* Christ Jesus”. The Greek text calls him “son of *anthropos*”, i.e. of mankind, rather than “son of *aner*” [husband, man].

Isaiah 51:13 And have forgotten Yahweh your Maker, who stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and fear continually all the day because of the fury of the oppressor, when he makes ready to destroy; and where is the fury of the oppressor?-

They had "forgotten Yahweh", when in Is. 49:14 they accused Yahweh of having forgotten them. They reflected onto Him their own attitude to Him. We likewise can assume that God is "in" our relationship with Him as much as we are in it. And we only occasionally think of Him. We might therefore transfer this onto Him, assuming He too only occasionally thinks of us. The challenge is to be as constantly enthusiastic for God as He is for us.

LXX "because of the wrath of him that afflicted thee: for whereas he counseled to take thee away, yet now where is the wrath of him that afflicted thee?". In the Isaiah context,

this is clearly a reflection upon the boast of the Assyrians that they would take Zion into captivity in their land. The exiles were intended to remember this and to realize that the apparent strength of Babylon and its leadership was not going to hinder their restoration (see on :12).

Time and again, Isaiah's restoration prophecies told Judah that they should not fear, as Yahweh would mightily be with them in their work (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8,11; 54:7,14; 59:19). But Judah feared the surrounding nations- Ezra and Nehemiah are full of this theme (Ezra 3:3). Nehemiah refused to be put in fear by the Samaritan opposition because of his faith in Isaiah's promises (Nehemiah 6:14). And Isaiah further spoke to Judah's heart in Isaiah 51:12,13: "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations [s.w. re. the foundation of the temple being laid] of the earth ['heaven and earth' often refers to the temple]; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" (AV). The fact they did fear meant that they had forgotten Yahweh who was so eager to re-establish their Kingdom.

Isaiah 51:14 The captive exile shall speedily be freed- Again we note how "speedily" the deliverance and reestablishment of the Kingdom could have happened. The Kingdom was indeed very "near"; see on :5.

And he shall not die and go down into the pit, neither shall his bread fail- See on Is. 52:2. The exiles failed to discern that in spiritual terms Babylon was a prison cell from which the righteous should seek to hasten out of, to flee from; to shake off the yoke it put upon their necks (Is. 51:14; 52:2). Yet all they saw was a nice, comfy life, and they thought they were doing their bit by giving some silver and gold to those who wanted to return and build the temple, a desire which they would all have soberly nodded in agreement with as being 'a great work' (what similarities with ourselves?). Those who did return satisfied themselves with a small temple, disregarding the instructions which Ezekiel had given them in Babylon, they lacked the faith to believe that Yahweh would be a wall of fire around them and instead built their own wall, and got on with building their own ceiled houses (as Haggai lamented) rather than Yahweh's house, marrying the local women, extorting wealth even from each other and enslaving their less fortunate brethren, trading on the Sabbath, allowing the local Arab leaders chambers even in the temple... and so the Kingdom prophecies were deferred. The process that could have brought about Yahweh's establishment of His Kingdom seems to have been centered around an attack from the surrounding nations, aimed against the wonderful new temple Judah were supposed to have built, which would be destroyed by Yahweh who dwelt in that temple ['Zion'].

Is. 51:14, speaking of the call to Judah to leave Babylon, sounds as if they were willing and eager to leave that spiritually dreadful place. But the reality was that Judah didn't hasten to be loosed, they preferred the Babylon life, and didn't perceive it for the spiritual pit that was killing them which it was. Most of them chose to remain there. So this passage is therefore a prophecy, a command, about how God wanted Judah to respond.

Isaiah 51:15 For I am Yahweh your God, who stirs up the sea, so that its waves roar: Yahweh of Armies is His name- The roaring of the waves is applied here to Yahweh's victory at the roaring Red Sea, implying that this invasion is going to be destroyed as the Egyptians were. This didn't happen at the Babylonian invasion, although potentially it could've done had Judah repented. Is. 17:12 uses the phrase about the judgment upon Syria and Israel; and probably Judah is also in view here (see on Is. 17:5), with the rushing of waters representing the various nations in the Assyrian or Babylonian confederacy. But this strange rush of nations against them would be strangely stopped (Is. 17:13), by grace. "The roaring of the seas" is the term used for the Babylonian invasion of Judah (Jer. 5:22; 6:23). What began in Is. 17 as a prophecy of judgment against Syria and Israel at the hands of the Assyrians now morphs into judgment against Judah at the hands of the Babylonians; see on Is. 13:1.

There is Angelic reference here: "The Lord of Hosts (of Angels) is His Name... I have put My words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand (an Angelic phrase- for the Angel hid Moses in the shadow of His hand), that I may... say unto Zion, Thou art My people" (Is. 51:15,16).

Isaiah 51:16 I have put My words in your mouth, and have covered you in the shadow of My hand- Israel the servant was likewise hidden in the shadow of God's hand (Is. 49:2). All the characteristics of the individual "Israel" were to be imputed to the people of Israel whom he represented. This would be achieved if they accepted the Spirit, part of the package offered in the new covenant (Is. 59:21). His words would be written in their hearts too. Having Divine words put in the mouth meant they were to be as Aaron and Moses before Pharaoh (s.w. Ex. 4:15); for it was also Moses who was covered in the shadow of Yahweh's hand as He passed by. See on Is. 52:13. Remember that they were bidden flee Babylon before she fell to the Medes. The servant figure need not have feared the king of Babylon, he was intended to go to him and plead as Moses "let My people go". But the exiles feared men, perhaps one particular ruler of Persia or Babylon, whom they thought would not allow their restoration; see on :12. They feared him rather than God, and so they didn't flee Babylon as asked.

That I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and tell Zion, 'You are My people'- LXX renders this in the future tense: "I will put my words into thy mouth, and I will shelter thee under the shadow of mine hand, with which I fixed the sky, and founded the earth: and the Lord shall say to Sion, Thou art my people". But the confusion of tenses is because this is what Yahweh had already done for His people; He was about to make a new creation, with all the excitement of the creator; but they didn't want to be recreated. They had to realize that potential. And it's the same for us, called to leave Babylon and participate in the reestablished Kingdom of God.

As God longed to pronounce the words "You are my people" to them (Hos. 2:25), so here Isaiah speaks of how at the restoration God wished to use that very phrase to returned Judah; see on Is. 1:26. Hosea / God speak in the most shocking terms- "I will sow her... in the land" (Hos. 2:25). This means, bluntly, they would have sex, in the land of God. *But the Jews in Babylon just plain weren't interested in returning to the land*. They preferred to remain there where they were, and 'worship' God, criticizing others for their apostasy, but not really come back to Him with any passion. God wished that once again He would be with them in the wilderness as He was at the beginning of their national relationship, and then enter a new covenant with them, the joy of which would result in the physical transformation of the planet.

The same word that called heaven and earth into existence can ["that I *may* plant"] call Zion "My people". Yahweh will now go on in :17-22 to present Zion as a naked, drunk, alcoholic, sensually abused woman laying in the dust. But she would still be reinstated as God's people. If we doubt God's power to save us, or think we are just too hard or complex a case- just look at what God has so effortlessly created.

Isaiah 51:17 Awake, awake, stand up, Jerusalem- The exiles are called "Jerusalem". They called themselves this (Is. 48:2 "they call themselves of the holy city"); but they needed to do more than such merely external, legalistic, ritualistic identification of themselves with a name and culture. And that is an abiding challenge for God's people today. They had to "awake", to allow God's Spirit to act upon their hearts to "stir up" their spirits (s.w. 1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16), just as He had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to let them return (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:22). The spirit of the exiles was likewise awoken or stirred up to return (s.w. Ezra 1:5).

God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would be "raised up" [s.w.]- Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to "Awake!"- the same word translated "stirred up". But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves' (Is. 64:7). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens.

God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God's grace still shines through.

Yahweh would "stir up" Cyrus (s.w. Is. 41:2,25; 45:13), so this could have been fulfilled through that stirred up "mighty man" of Is. 42:13. But he failed. The "mighty man", the *gibbor*, therefore became reapplied to the Lord Jesus (Is. 9:6 s.w.). But He will act through the stirring up of a repentant Judah (s.w. Is. 51:9,17; 52:1), seeing that no man would be 'stirred up' (s.w. Is. 64:7). All the potential candidates had refused the Divine nudges to be stirred up.

That has drunk at the hand of Yahweh the cup of His wrath; you have drunken the bowl of the cup of staggering, and drained it- Taking the cup of wine is a double symbol: of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), and of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). Why this use of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads. Paul realized this in pleading with the Corinthians to examine themselves before taking the emblems. He saw the ceremony and our self-examination there as a kind of foretaste of the judgment (1 Cor. 11:29-32). If they wanted to accept it, judgment was over and done. But they didn't, and so they were to many times more drink it.

The cup is clearly the symbol of God's wrath and judgment, as in Rev. 14:10: "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture, into the cup of His indignation". Both Judah and Israel had been made to drink of this cup (Ez. 23:31-33; Lam. 4:21). In this figure, they had been laying on the floor drunk in Babylon. Drinking from a "bowl" or flagon is the language of drinking to get drunk. Hence the verse begins with a call to awake ["rouse yourself!"] and stand up. But the same language is used of the cup being given to Babylon (Jer. 25:15; 49:12; 51:7). Judah had drunk the same cup as Babylon. She had been urged to flee Babylon lest she share Babylon's judgment. She had not done so. She ultimately shared Babylon's judgment. But even then, God seeks to awake His drunken wife [to use another image] and make her stand up from her stupor. He keeps on and on trying. This impoverished relative whom He had paid dearly to redeem / buy out of slavery is here pictured as a drunkard, stoned on the floor. Who had "wrung / sucked out" the dregs, so desperate was she to get the alcohol out from the dregs at the bottom of the goblet; or at best, drained every drop of alcohol from the cup. Rather like the drunken alcoholic who vomits but will try to suck out the alcohol from his own vomit. She was addicted to the wine of her own condemnation- for she wanted to remain in Babylon. The figure of a helpless drunk continues in :18- she [and it is a female drunkard] has sons, but there were none of them to take her by the hand [to help her stand up], none of her sons were there to take her by the arm and guide her home. The Hebrew for "guide" is also translated to carry, to

lead gently. All appropriate to helping a drunk person. They were sons who she had "brought up" (:18), so she is not a young woman. There always seems something extra tragic in the image of a drunk woman. Indeed :19 comments: "Who shall be sorry for you?". Usually man does feel sorry for other men who suffer- but not when we consider their suffering to be their fault. In :22 the woman is pictured as still clutching her cup of wine, until Yahweh forcibly takes it from her and gives it to the Babylonians. "You afflicted and drunken, but not with wine" (:21) may mean that the language is not criticizing literal drunkenness; rather is the wine to be read symbolically of God's judgment. And yet this verse begins with God [or the servant] calling upon drunken Zion to awake ["rouse yourself!"] and stand up. The chapter break is unfortunate, for Is. 52:1,2 go on in this same context: "Awake, awake, put on your strength, Zion; put on your beautiful garments, Jerusalem, the holy city... Shake yourself from the dust! Arise, sit up, Jerusalem! Release yourself from the bonds of your neck". The vulnerable woman in the drunken stupor, lying in the dust, is to be transformed very quickly into a beautiful woman. She who was sitting on the dusty ground was to arise, be dressed, and then sit again- on a throne. She is to be dressed after being roused from her drunken stupor; suggesting she may well have been naked as she lay there. There is a clear connection between nakedness and drunkenness in the case of Noah; and Lam. 4:21 associates drinking the cup of wrath with nakedness: "the cup shall pass through to you also; you [you too, like Zion] shall be drunken, and shall make yourself naked". Hab. 2:15,16 associates drunkenness and nakedness as if becoming naked is inevitable: "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbours, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies!". There may be in :23 a suggestion that she was sexually abused whilst in this state: "...who have said to your soul, ‘Bow down, that we may walk over you;’ and you have laid your body as the ground, and as the street, to those who walk over". 'Bowing down' is certainly a sexual euphemism in Job 31:10: "let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her". Laying the body down horizontally for others to dominate likewise is sexually suggestive. Lam. 1:8-10 describe Jerusalem as naked, despised and sexually abused for her sins: "Jerusalem has grievously sinned; therefore she has become as an unclean thing; all who honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yes, she sighs, and turns backward. Her filthiness was in her skirts; she didn’t remember her latter end; therefore is she come down wonderfully; she has no comforter: see, Yahweh, my affliction; for the enemy has magnified himself. The adversary has spread out his hand on all her pleasant things". Ezekiel 23 likewise describes Jerusalem / Judah as Oholibah, drunk on the wine of God's wrath ["You shall even drink it and drain it out, and you shall gnaw the broken pieces of it", Ez. 23:34], so drunk and distressed she tries to pluck off her own breasts, naked and sexually abused by the Babylonians. Hence the comfort of Is. 52:1 that now, never again shall the unclean or polluted "enter into her".

We marvel again at the imagery- the wife of Yahweh had been repeatedly unfaithful to Him, lived like a whore [according to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea etc.], had sold herself into debt slavery in Babylon, and ended up collapsed drunk in the dust for 70 years, during which she was sexually abused. And still God wanted her back, seeking to rouse her from her stupor to be dressed as a glorious queen and enthroned as queen, counted as "the holy city" (Is. 52:1,2), having a glorious remarriage and second wedding (Is. 54). A man would only do this from love for that woman, love at its most absolute, love to the end, love to its ultimate term. And still she refused… and that huge love was then chanelled to us, the new Zion.

But again, this was to be due to the representative servant "Israel" sharing all their experiences; for the statement that the Lord Jesus "tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9) suggests He too drunk the cup of death and condemnation, whilst personally innocent. He was the arm of Yahweh who would "Awake" out of the dust as drunken Zion was called to.

Isaiah 51:18 There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she has brought forth; neither is there any who takes her by the hand among all the sons whom she has brought up- See on :17. The LXX renders this in the past tense: "and there was none to comfort thee of all the children whom thou borest; and there was none to take hold of thine hand, not even of all the children whom thou has reared". Now Isaiah returns to the reality- that they would not respond to the call, and would have no servant figure who could in the spirit of Moses ask the king of Babylon to let them go; see on :16.

Zerubbabel, the 'shoot out of Babylon' as his name means, *could have been* the promised Messianic shoot out of the withered stem of Jesse. He could have been the Messianic shoot out of the dry ground of Babylon (Is. 53:2) who would accompany the return of the temple vessels from Babylon (Is. 52:11). But he disappears strangely out of the record. Thus the events of Nehemiah 8, where the Feasts of Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles as well as the dedication of the wall are all recorded, make no mention of the High Priest or Zerubbabel officiating. He, Joshua and indeed anyone who could have taken their place somehow didn't rise to the occasion. And so Is. 51:17,18 lamented, prophetically: "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury [at the end of the 70 years captivity]… [but] There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up". It was the responsibility of the priests and religious leaders to "gently lead" the exiles back to their God and their land, but they failed in this (Is. 59:18 s.w.); and so because their was none to guide / gently lead (s.w.), God Himself had to intervene and do this through His Son (Is. 40:11; 49:10).

Isaiah 51:19 These two things have happened to you; who will bemoan you? Desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword; how shall I comfort you?- Nobody would be sorry ["bemoan"] for her- except God. We could render: "Who can bemoan you?". Only God. The Divine sorrow and comfort for Zion is the great message throughout Is. 40-55. God was eager to personally comfort them, but they refused. Hence this rhetorical question. The primary reference is to God seeking to comfort them over the desolation of Judah by the Babylonians. But also in view may be the withholding of agricultural blessing after the restoration which occurred several times- in Neh. 5:2,3 (as prophesied here in Is. 51:19), in Haggai's time, and later in Malachi 3:10,12; when the restored Zion could have been as the garden of Eden, i.e. paradise restored on earth (Is. 51:3). Here we see frightening similarities with ourselves. We know, but often don't do. We sense this cycle of failure, crying out for mercy, receiving it, failing again, crying for mercy, receiving it, failing again…we see it in Israel, in our brethren and those around us, and in ourselves. We can expound it, lament it, feel the shame and tragedy of it all…and yet continue to have a part in it. Eventually, the people stayed in this groove so long that they degenerated into how they were at the time of Malachi- self-righteous, with no sense of failure any more, living self-centered lives of petty materialism, earning wages as they did in Haggai's time, to put into pockets with holes in, life without satisfaction, achieving nothing, passively angry. This is what Malachi clearly portrays. It's a terrible picture, and one which we can sail dangerously close to identifying with.

Isaiah 51:20 Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of Yahweh, the rebuke of your God- God recognizes here that He is not unaware of the desolation of Jerusalem. He uses the language of Lamentations to describe the scenes. He is not the judge who hands out judgments and sentences with no personal comprehension of what they involve. But these judgments had been legitimate; but they were now over, if they wanted them to be (:21,22).

Isaiah 51:21 Therefore hear now this, you afflicted and drunken, but not with wine- They had drunk the cup of judgment (:17,20), but not the wine of final condemnation. Isaiah's prophecies continually emphasize that God is fully aware of their "affliction", and would have mercy upon them in it (Is. 49:13; 54:11; 66:2 s.w.).

Isaiah 51:22 Thus says your Lord Yahweh, and your God who pleads the cause of His people, Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of staggering, even the bowl of the cup of My wrath; you shall no more drink it again-

Despite their pathetic state, God would still take their side in court ['plead their cause' as their advocate against Himself as the judge] and justify them. How much will He, for we who are in Christ.

Babylon fell so that Persia would take over the administration of the 127 provinces where the Jews were scattered, and would allow them to return to Judah (Is. 43:14). The cup of judgment which Judah drunk for 70 years was passed to Babylon. This accounts for Isaiah's repeated and detailed emphasis on the coming fall of Babylon for Judah / Israel's sake (e.g. Isaiah 47). They had been asked to flee Babylon before that, but when they didn't, God still worked with them; now reasoning as if their cup of judgment had passed to Babylon (:23), and they were now free to leave Babylon. Although they had sinned, Yahweh showed His gracious love for His people by bringing down Babylon so that they might leave (Is. 48:14). "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee [Cyrus] by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me " (Is. 45:4). Likewise the iron curtain came down to allow preachers of God's Truth to take it to those once in darkness. And English has become the lingua-franca of the world, enabling Christian preaching to now penetrate societies literally world-wide. See on Ezra 2:1.

Isaiah 51:23 And I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you, who have said to your soul, 'Bow down, that we may walk over you;' and you have laid your back as the ground, and as the street, to those who walk over- See on :22. There were yet to be many times when the Gentiles would trample Zion underfoot. Here and in :22 is envisioned a time when this would never happen again. The Babylonian treading down of Jerusalem could have been the last time. But that potential was spurned by the exiles. And so there shall come one final time in the last days when Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24), when these prophecies will come to their final term.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 52

Isaiah 52:1 Awake, awake, put on your strength, Zion- God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would be "raised up" [s.w.]- Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to "Awake!"- the same word translated "stirred up". But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves' (Is. 64:7). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God's grace still shines through.

Put on your beautiful garments, Jerusalem, the holy city- The implication is that she was about to be married to Yahweh.

For henceforth there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean- But the uncircumcised did come and live in the temple and marry the Jews. And Ezra and Nehemiah covered themselves with sackcloth in mourning because of these things. And thus they showed that this prophecy could not be fulfilled at their time. Tobiah the Ammonite was given a chamber in the temple for him to use as an office for undermining God's people (Neh. 13:7). This precluded the fulfilment of the restoration prophecies. There were to be "holy chambers" in the temple for the Levites (Ez. 46:19 and very often in Ezekiel 40-48). The uncircumcised Gentiles were not to be brought into the sanctuary (Ez. 44:7). It was God's intention that when Judah returned from Babylon, the uncircumcised would not come into Zion (the temple), and the Kingdom would be established (Is. 52:1,11). There was to be no Canaanite in the house of Yahweh (Zech. 14:21).

Isaiah 52:2 Shake yourself from the dust! Arise, sit up, Jerusalem!- The drunken Zion, lying in the dust, was to arise and sit down [Heb.] on a throne. These prophecies about Zion's glorification from the dust are an inversion of the prophecies of Babylon's fall- she [also presented as a woman] was to come down from her throne, having drunk the cup of wine of Yahweh's judgment, and lay in the dust (Is. 47:1 etc.). This was the great inversion so typical of how God works. But Zion refused to be part of it. She wanted to remain in the dust.

God's psychological stirring up of the exiles (:1) depended upon them being open to this- hence the verbs here suggest proactive action by the exiles themselves- shaking themselves, arising and sitting up. "Arise" is the word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling

over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival. The word for "sit up" is in fact used of how both Ezra and Nehemiah "sat down" in grief at the apostasy of the Jews (Ezra 9:3; Neh. 1:4).

Release yourself from the bonds of your neck, captive daughter of Zion!- The Jews didn't perceive the soft life of Babylon as chains around their necks, and so they didn't loose themselves and leave. See on Is. 51:14. The same words are used in Is. 58:6 of how the exiles refused to release the bonds they had placed upon their brethren. And yet they were themselves in bondage, needing release, if only they would realize their true position. But God was simply so positive about His people- Is. 51:14 appears to be a descriptive statement about the Jews, but in reality it wasn't true: "The bound down one hastens to be loosed". Sadly, they didn't respond to the exhortation to loose themselves from the bands upon them (Is. 52:2). They preferred to stay in bondage, as so many do today, despite God willing them to seek release as He did with the exiles.

Isaiah 52:3 For thus says Yahweh, You were sold for nothing; and you shall be redeemed without money- They were "sold for nothing" in that God had no personal benefit from the exile of His people; He did this to them for their spiritual benefit, not for any gain for Himself. Their redemption likewise would be according to His grace, and not because of any transaction between God and man. This was reflected in the way Cyrus commanded the Jews to return and provided all that was materially required to rebuild the temple, but "not for reward", for no personal benefit (Is. 45:13). Or the idea may be that they were not sold as slaves, whereby their owner [God] would have received payment; but rather they sold themselves into debt servitude, whereby their labour and time in service paid the debt, and therefore no money changed hands. And yet Israel complained: "You sell your people for nothing at all" (Ps. 44:3). They failed to accept they had sold themselves into slavery by their sins. The exiles with whom Ezekiel reasoned likewise failed to understand the real reasons why they were in exile / slavery.

"Her term of service is over, that the debt owed for her iniquity has been satisfied" (Is. 40:2) suggests a kind of transactional approach which some find inappropriate. Zion had a debt to pay she could only deal with by selling herself as a slave for a period. But they are the terms used. A debt was paid or cleared; although not necessarily by her labour! "Without money you will be redeemed" (Is. 52:3). For the language of "redemption" will be used about Zion; someone had redeemed her, had met the debt. For that is what 'redemption' alludes to her. Clearly sin is presented as debt; Is. 50:1 is clear: "Do you think I sold you into captivity like a man who sells his children as slaves? No, you went away captive because of your sins; you were sent away because of your crimes". God did not sell them into slavery, they sold themselves, just as Elijah said of Ahab: "you have sold yourself to do evil" (1 Kings 21:20). Indeed the captivity occurred

because they sold themselves to do evil (2 Kings 17:17). We likewise are "sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). But somehow the debt had been cleared, not by Zion's slave labour, and so she need not serve any longer. The fact the Jews chose to remain in Persia is exactly for the same reasons as people prefer to remain in bondage to sin when faced with the Gospel of redemption. How that was achieved is not at this point made clear. God could simply forgive debt. But the servant song of Is. 53 surely gives the deeper answer- it was the death of the Messianic servant which provided the technical answer as to "how" this was achieved. And the Lord alluded to it in saying that He gave His life as a ransom payment for "the many", a term used throughout the suffering servant song. We could render Is. 40:2: “Indeed, she will receive double from the hand of Yahweh in exchange for all of the suffering on account of her sins". This double blessing is that of Is. 61:7: "Instead of your shame you shall have double; and instead of dishonour they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess double". It is in Is. 53 that we have the explanation as to how suffering for sin can lead to this double blessing- it was through the suffering servant, representative of Israel and yet morally perfect.

Redemption or buying a relative out of slavery always involved money being paid. Here, it is noted that Israel were redeemed without money. That could simply mean 'without them having to pay'. But the image of debt slavery is such that the slave didn't receive money nor pay it back. I suggest that this comment is meant to provoke the question: With what did Yahweh redeem Israel, if not with money? The answer is in the servant song that follows. The price was the blood of the servant. Surely 1 Pet. 1:18,19 allude here in saying that we were redeemed not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. And yet redemption without money may refer to the fact that Cyrus was moved to pronounce freedom for the Jewish exiles, at a time when nobody let their slaves go free for nothing. He stood only to lose and not to gain anything by letting them go. His decision was purely the result of God's Spirit working upon him.

Isaiah 52:4 For thus says the Lord Yahweh, My people went down at the first into Egypt to live there: and the Assyrian has oppressed them without cause- Ezekiel is very clear that God's judgments upon His people were not at all "without cause" / without a legal reason (Ez. 6:10; 14:23). But just as He gave them a bill of divorce and then destroyed it as if the reasons didn't exist any more (Is. 50:1,2), so the legal "cause" of the judgments was taken away. They were "oppressed without cause", God says, as He seeks to persuade the exiles of how totally He has dealt with their sin (Is. 52:3).

If we take this translation, then this is amazing grace; for the prophets are full of reasons / causes as to why Israel were oppressed by Assyria. But God is prepared to impute righteousness to them to such an extent that this is seen as having been "without cause". The Lord was hated "without a cause" (Jn. 15:25) and this is imputed to all those

in Him. But GNB is worth considering: "When you went to live in Egypt as foreigners [in disobedience, at the time of Jeremiah, with him pleading with them not to], you did so of your own free will; Assyria, however, took you away by force and paid nothing for you. And now in Babylonia the same thing has happened: you are captives, and nothing was paid for you".

Isaiah 52:5 Now therefore, what do I do here, says Yahweh, seeing that My people are taken away for nothing? Those who rule over them mock, says Yahweh, and My name continually all the day is blasphemed-

"What do I here?" could be read as if Yahweh is already in Zion, and presents as being there alone, with His beloved people / woman in Babylon. As if He is thinking, "I am here... but My beloved people are there. And I want to be with them". He feels the same to us. Almost regretting the vast distance, physically and morally, which there is set between us. He has and will collapse that distance in the things of His Son and His Kingdom. He was so zealous to have them back with Him, because He has forgiven them and therefore considers they were absent from Him "for nothing". And yet God presents Himself as in a quandry, because His Name was every day being blasphemed in Babylon. These words are quoted in Rom. 2:23,24 as if the behaviour of the exiles made the Babylonians blaspheme; and also because He had said He would restore His people and yet hadn't done so. And God wanted to put an end to that, for His Name's sake: "You who boast in the law dishonour God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you”". Hence His plan to do something to stop His people blaspheming His Name: "My people shall know My name" (:6). Initially (see Dt. 30), His plan was that if and when Judah repented / returned to Him in exile, He would return to them and return them to their land. They didn't repent. And so, as Isaiah's prophecies have already stated, He decided to in any case return them to their land. But they refused to leave Babylon. They came up with foolish excuses, that God was unreasonable to them, had forgotten about them as His wife and gone off with other women, that He was just in this for the money etc. Through Isaiah and other prophets, He answers these objections and uses every appeal and approach He can to try to persuade them to accept His great redemption. They refused. Their moral behaviour in Babylon was so bad that it caused His Name to be blasphemed amongst the Gentiles. And so he was in a quandry, and decided to all the same return them to Zion. But He was morally bound by His refusal to force people against their will. And so they still had to make some volition of their own- hence :2 "Release yourself from the bonds of your neck, captive daughter of Zion!". The bonds were opened, they just needed to lift them off. But still they refused. This Divine lowering of the bar in order to save is reflected in the Lord's parable of the marriage supper. The Jews, those invited, made bizarre excuses as to why they couldn't come. And so as the dinner sat on the table going cold, as it were, the homeless and vagabonds were invited in. But not all of them could believe in such grace. Still there were places. And so the command was

given to go out and force in just anyone willing. Perhaps we see a similar progressive lowering of the bar in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard- the first workers agreed to work for a penny / day. But there were still workers needed, and so any lazy or handicapped man willing to do at least some work, even for just an hour, was offered a day's wage for the little work they did. If these things have any chronological application, it would mean that the call of the Gospel in the very last days must be offered to anyone willing to say yes. The bar is lowered. The spiritually homeless and unclean are to be urged to come in, all they have to do is say "Yes". If indeed we are in the last days, then the bar was lowered so that the likes of you and me could accept the invitation.

See on :4. LXX "And now why are ye here?" would suggest that the Jews ought to have already returned. The Babylonians didn't so much mock them, as their God. They were not unpopular in Babylon, and they were popular under Persian rule, as the book of Esther makes clear. They should not only have left Babylon, but quit worshipping the local idols and shown what Yahweh worship was really about; and He would have acted in a wondrous way to restore His Kingdom. But their impenitence precluded that from happening, and so the restoration project of Yahweh didn't work out as planned, and so His Name was blasphemed. This verse seems to be behind the mention in Rom. 2:24 that God's Name was blasphemed amongst the Gentiles because of Jewish impenitence and refusal to accept Messiah. Hence this prophesy continues to state that He would reveal His Name to His people as it is in His Son, and then they would ultimately accept Him and thus the blasphemy of God's Name would cease.

"Taken away" in Is. 53:8 is the word used just prior to the commencement of this fourth servant song: "what do I do here, says Yahweh, seeing that My people are taken away for nothing... oppressed without cause?" (Is. 52:5). They were taken away because of their sins. But Yahweh identified Himself with the exiles as if with them in exile (reflected by the visions of the cherubim glory seen with the exiles by the rivers of Babylon). And He wonders why He and His people are in exile, seeing the people had been "taken away for nothing". Somehow the reason for their exile had been removed. And Is. 53:8 explains how this could have happened- the suffering servant "was taken away" and had been "stricken for the disobedience of My people". The debt had been paid, the sin removed, so Yahweh and His people were now in exile for no reason. Sin has been made an end of, according to Dan. 9. Tragically, most of them chose to remain in that exile rather than accept this amazing offer and truth. Which has therefore been extended to all men.

Isaiah 52:6 Therefore My people shall know My name. Therefore they shall know in that day that I am He who speaks; behold, it is I- See on :5. The lament in :5 that God's Name was blasphemed may refer to blasphemy by the exiles, in that they bore His Name but worshipped idols. In the day of restoration, they would "know" the Name in truth which

they had before blasphemed or caused to be blasphemed, and not just as a word or culture they adhered to. Knowing God's Name is paralleled to knowing that He really speaks and His saving purpose expressed in that word is Him. "It is I", "the word was God", that word which for the exiles was all about their certain salvation in His Kingdom, was the essence of God. He is all about saving, and so His Son was rightly named 'Yah's salvation'.

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful on the mountains- As discussed on :5, God's offer of salvation to Zion is amazing: offered on virtually any terms, so long as there was some volition from Zion to remove her now loosened chains. The message was amazing and beautiful, indeed good news, and God expected Zion to eagerly and joyfully receive it. They didn't. And so that Gospel of the Kingdom has been reapplied and re-offered- to the whole world. And so this verse is quoted in Rom. 10:15 about the preachers of the Christian Gospel today.

"Mountains" may refer as an intensive plural to the great mountain, of Zion. For it is Zion, the temple mount, which is addressed with the news that "Your God reigns".

Are the feet of him who brings good news- The future reestablished Kingdom is called “good things” in Is. 52:7 (quoted in Rom. 10:15) and Jer. 8:15. *All things work together for good* (Rom. 8:28) doesn’t mean that somehow everything will work out OK for us in this life- for so often they don’t. We are asked to carry the Lord’s cross, to suffer now and be redeemed in glory later at His return, in the “good things” of the Kingdom.

Who publishes peace, who brings good news of good, who publishes salvation- The "peace" in view is peace with God after all Israel's conflict with Him.

Who says to Zion, Your God reigns!- Heb. "Your God has become king", i.e. has established His everlasting kingdom. The enthronement of Yahweh in Zion could have happened at the time of the restoration. So much potential was disallowed by Judah's lack of faith, vision and repentance. And so these things are applied to the Lord Jesus, who is presented here as both the herald of the king and also the king. But all that is true of Him, the servant named "Israel", is true of all those in Him. Isaiah’s description of the beauty of Christ’s heralding or preaching in Is. 52:7 is quoted by Paul concerning every preacher of the Gospel (Rom. 10:15); the “he” of Is. 52 is changed to “them” in Rom. 10. And Paul is quoting this Old Testament prophecy about Jesus to prove that we are all “sent” to preach the Gospel. The validity of our commission to preach is quite simply that Jesus Himself preached; in this way we are all personally “sent” to preach, simply because He was sent to preach. As the Father sent Him, so He sends us.

The whole latter part of Isaiah is full of descriptions of this preaching to Israel, appealing to them to repent, humble themselves, quit their materialism and idolatry, and accept the Lord Jesus as Messiah (e.g. 55:1-5). The preaching of Is. 52:7 is the "report"

concerning Christ's cross of Is. 53:1; the message of "peace" of Is. 52:7 is the Gospel of peace with God through the sacrifice of Christ (Is. 53:5). And Isaiah 40 expands this message to include the mortality of man and the primacy of God's word. All these things are distinctive Bible doctrines; it is surely *we* who ought to be making this witness!

In Rom 15:21, Paul justifies his preaching by quoting from part of the suffering servant prophecy in Is. 52 / 53. That whole passage is set in a context of explaining "how beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings... all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Is. 52:7,10 AV). The preaching of good tidings and the declaration of God's salvation was through the crucifixion. Paul quotes Is. 52:15: "To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand". This was Paul's justification for taking the Gospel to where Christ has not been named. Note in passing how the Lord Jesus sees us as "beautiful" in our witness to Him (as in Song 7:1). Yet further into Is. 53, so much else jumps out at us as appropriate to Paul's preaching: "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high [cp. Paul knowing how to be exalted and abased, themes that occur in Is. 53 about Jesus' death]. As many were astonied at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man [cp. Paul's thorn in the flesh?], and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for [that] which had not been told them shall they see; and [that] which they had not heard shall they consider". Paul appeared before Agrippa, Festus, and one or two Caesars, with a visage marred by his evangelistic sufferings.

Isaiah 52:8 The voice of your watchmen! They lift up the voice, together do they sing; for they shall see eye to eye- GNB perhaps gives the sense: "Those who guard the city are shouting, shouting together for joy. They can see with their own eyes the return of the LORD to Zion". Is. 4:5,6, Ez. 48:35 and other passages suggest the literal dwelling of Yahweh in Zion, such as will happen at the establishment of the Kingdom when we shall see His face, and God Himself shall dwell amongst us (Rev. 22:4). Such wonderful potentials were wasted by the exiles. For this could have happened then in some sense. This is a prophecy embedded between verses which speak of the command for Judah to leave Babylon: "Loose thyself from the bands... depart ye, go ye out from thence" (Is. 52:2,11). But most of them preferred to remain. Who are the watchmen? Surely they are the Angels, who potentially prepared the way for Judah to leave Babylon. Had the people of Judah followed the cherubim Angels above them and all returned to Zion, they would have as it were seen the Angels eye to eye, sung together with the Angels at the new creation of Zion... and God's eyes are the Angels, so in that sense Judah would have seen eye to eye with God. But they didn't utilize what God had prepared; they lazily preferred to stay within their comfort zones by remaining in Babylon. In our experience

in Christ, the same is all true, day by day. The way is set up for us, and if we bravely and boldly go in the way which the Angels have prepared, the way God intends, then we will have the experience of truly walking with the Lord, singing with His Angels, seeing eye to eye, in foretaste of the final day when we shall finally see Him face to face. See on Ezra 8:21.

When Yahweh brings Zion back- Time and again, Jeremiah had prophesied how Yahweh would *bring again* His people and the vessels of the temple back to the land (Jer. 28:3,4,6; 30:3,18; 31:23); and this all had a fulfilment in the return from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah. It was then that in some sense Yahweh 'brought again Zion' (Is. 52:8). Yet they would only be "brought" if they were willing to leave; their preferrence to stay within their comfort zone meant that so much was precluded. The same word is to be found in Ez. 38:8 and Ez. 39:27, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. As if knowing this, Hos. 6:11 had prophesied [otherwise strangely] that Judah would reap their punishment, *when* they returned from captivity. They returned [s.w. 'bring again'], but not to the Most High (Hos. 7:16). Joel 3, however, speaks from the perspective that Judah would be 'brought again' from Babylon under Ezra; and then Joel 3:2 "I will also gather all nations… and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land". This applies therefore to the last days.

Isaiah 52:9 Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem; for Yahweh has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem- The broken down wastes of Jerusalem suddenly bursting into joy suggests an immediate, in a moment transformation; rather than slow and partial rebuilding with many obstacles and difficulty shifting the rubble, as was experienced at the restoration. Such a rebuilding of the waste places as envisioned here would suggest miraculous Divine intervention and activity. It will finally come true when the heavenly Jerusalem and Zion descend from above, ready built, onto the site of Zion; as seen in the final visions of Revelation.

Isaiah 52:10 Yahweh has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God- The past tense is used because this outcome was so certain- but it still depended upon the repentance and faith of the exiles. Had they returned, supported with the same kind of miraculous manifestations as seen at the exodus, then "the nations" amongst whom they were scattered, the 127 provinces of Persia, would have seen God's arm revealed. The ends of the *eretz* were specifically those areas on the borders of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, which is where they had been taken into captivity.

But this didn't happen. And so the arm of Yahweh which brings salvation is revealed now to the nations through the work of the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:1). We can reflect how an omnipotent God could have achieved salvation in a less painful way than He did- but He made bare His arm in the death of the cross (Is. 52:10), i.e. He expended Himself greatly. The same idea is present when we read of Yahweh paying a price for the redemption of His people from Egypt. He didn't pay the Egyptians anything, but the figure is used to express the extensive effort He was involved in for His people. The baring of an arm means a display of strength and intention- and God does this to show the ultimate strength He has to save His people. His power and intention to save is so huge.

Isaiah 52:11 Depart, depart, go out from there, touch no unclean thing! Go out of the midst of her! Cleanse yourselves, you who bear the temple vessels of Yahweh- See on :1. "Come out from among them and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:17) is picking up the language of Is. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7 concerning the return of the exiles from Babylon. The edict of Cyrus for the Jews to return to the land was reapplied to God's command to us to leave the spirit of Babylon, the Gentile world, and go up to do His work. The returned exiles are us. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV "instruments"] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah's 'Kingdom' passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The restoration of the kingdom could potentially have happened at the time of Ezra. LXX "separate yourselves, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord" was not really obeyed by the Levites and priests at the time of the restoration, because Malachi as well as Ezra and Nehemiah often mention their lack of separation from the peoples of the land, even intermarrying with them.

Cyrus specifically commanded the temple vessels to be restored (Ezra 1:7-11). The vessels were to be caried by the priests and Levites (Num. 1:50; 4:15); but it is noted that very few priests and Levites wanted to leave Babylon. So again, the potential here wasn't realized by the exiles, and the language is applied to Christians today as they leave the world and make the journey Zionwards (2 Cor. 6:17).

Isaiah 52:12 For you shall not go out in haste, neither shall you go by flight: for Yahweh will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your vanguard- Although the exodus from Egypt was in many ways a pattern for the exiles to leave Babylon, in distinction from then, they would not "go out in haste" (s.w. Dt. 16:3). They would not be persecuted in Babylon, leading them to flee. Rather they were to "flee" from Babylon spiritually (Is. 48:20) of their own volition and desire. After the decree of Cyrus, they went with the King's blessing and not in panic. The promise that Yahweh would go before and behind them suggests that He would be even more present with them than He was with the

Israelites who left Egypt, for He went before them but not also behind them. Such a visible accompaniment of the exiles back to Zion was potentially possible.

Is. 40 opens with a picture of the triumphant march in glory from Babylon to Zion. This is a great theme in Isaiah, and it speaks of our path from the world to God's Kingdom. Yahweh goes both in front (Is. 52:12) and behind, as the vanguard (Is. 58:8). Just as He is both the one to whom Israel owe their debt, and the one who redeems them from it by paying it off. He is involved in us, including our history of sin, around and above us, all the way through. Not going with haste highlights the comparison with their hasty exodus from Egypt. This was to be a far greater and more glorious exodus.

Isaiah 52:13 Behold, My servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high-

It could be argued that whenever "Behold..." is used with reference to a prophesied person, the reference is to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. And the call to "Behold" or see is effectively an invitation to perceive. Thus "Behold the man whose name is The Branch" (Zech. 6:12), "Behold your King comes unto you, humble..." (Zech. 9:9), "Behold... I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper" (Jer. 23:5).

The servant was "wise" and turned / made others righteous (Is. 52:13; 53:11). These very words are used in Dan. 12:3 of how all who are "wise" and "turn many to righteousness" will shine eternally at the resurrection. Clearly our work of witness in this world is to be a living out of the sufferings of the Lord on the cross. He there is not just to be passingly admired, but to be the template for the lives of all who are God's suffering servants.

But "deal wisely" in Is. 52:13 could also be translated "succeed"; and the fourth servant song concludes with the same idea: "Through him Yahweh's purpose will succeed" (Is. 53:10). The implication could be that He will be the succesful servant, whereas the other possible iterations of the servant in Israel, Cyrus and Zerubbabel had not succeeded. The same word for "succeed" used in Is. 53:10 is found in Is. 55:11 "so shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper [succeed] in the thing I sent it to do". That word of restoration of the Kingdom would succeed, because the servant would succeed. It was made possible through His sufferings. It's not a question of whether we succeed; God's plan to save us through His suffering Son has succeeded. We just have to accept that, and thereby be freed from the success / failure complex that grips our societies. The 'success' of the servant would be in that He would be high and lifted up-on a cross. That is the ultimate success and not any human exaltation.

We could understand that Cyrus was the servant who indeed brought about the physical return to the land of Israel (Is. 44:24-48:22); but the "servant" also needed to bring about the spiritual return / repentance of the people to enable their forgiveness

and full spiritual restoration. And the "servant" who achieved that was the Lord Jesus. Or we could understand that there is only one "servant"; initially Israel, later Cyrus. But Cyrus had failed to be the servant figure intended and Israel had failed to prepare the way through repentance. And so now another servant is spoken of- ultimately the Lord Jesus. Cyrus was not so much a 'type of Christ' as being a failed Messiah figure, who was replaced by the Lord Jesus. And that accounts for the similarities between them. Likewise "the servant" as Israel had not worked out- he proved blind, handicapped and incapable of action (Is. 42:18). But the Lord Jesus was the servant Israel failed to be- He was the ideal Israel, called out of Egypt as they were ["out of Egypt have I called My Son"]. Through His representative death, He enabled all in Him to be the servant- and that is why after Is. 53, Isaiah speaks of "servants" in the plural (Is. 54:17; 56:6; 65:8,9,13-15; 66:14) or offspring (Is. 59:21; 61:8,9; 65:9,23; 66:22). These are the children who come out of His travail, as Is. 53 will put it. This is why elements of the servant's sufferings are presented as the pattern for all His people "In Him". As He did not strive in the streets, so Paul says that the Lord's servant likewise must not strive. The servants/offspring continue the Servant's activity by suffering (57:1); enlightening the nations (60:1–4, 9; cp. 42:6; 49:6, applied by Paul to himself); receiving the promised Spirit (61:1; cp. 44:3); and sharing in the Servant's exaltation and vindication (60:1, 3; cp. 52:13). The Lord uses the language of the suffering servant to describe how His servants would also be "lead", "delivered up", beaten, brought before rulers etc. (Mk. 13:9-11 "when they shall lead you, and deliver you up...").

This continues the allusions to the exodus in :12 and throughout the servant songs. Moses was the great servant of Yahweh, and he "was very great" in the eyes of the Egyptians and their leaders (Ex. 11:3). The servant figure had been intended to come before the king of Babylon as Moses came before Pharaoh, to demand freedom for God's people, and then to lead them out of Babylon back to Judah, accompanied by Divine miracles, signs and logistical provision just as Israel had on their wilderness journey (Is. 51:12,16). The potential servant figures at the time of the restoration failed in this, and so the prophecies are reapplied to the Lord Jesus and His mediation for us on the cross, leading His people thereby out of Babylon into the restored Kingdom.

Clearly a Messiah figure could have arisen at the restoration: "And their leader shall be one of them, and their ruler shall come forth from their midst; and I will bring him near, and he shall approach me; for who would dare to risk his life to approach me?' declares the LORD" (Jer. 30:18-21 NAS). This leader who would come close to God in mediation would be willing to give his life to enable this. This must be connected with how Is. 53, describing Messiah's death, is actually in a restoration context (beginning in Is. 52). Could it not be that a Messiah figure could have arisen and died a sacrificial death to bring his people to God? Daniel 9 likewise associates the rebuilding of Zion with the death of "Messiah the prince" to reconcile Israel to God- perhaps potentially possible

within a literal 70 week period from Cyrus' decree? Ezra's prayer of Ezra 9 is full of reference to Daniel 9, as if he saw it as capable of fulfilment then.

The glory "high and lifted up" which Isaiah saw in Is. 6:1 is more specifically defined here in Is. 52:13 where "high and lifted up" is used of the exaltation of the suffering servant, the Messiah figure who could have been Hezekiah, had he responded rightly to his sufferings. But after God's attempts to reapply it to Zerubbabel and others, it came to full term in the suffering of the Lord Jesus.

Is. 6:10 is quoted in John 12, with the information that "these things said Isaiah, because he foresaw his glory, and he spoke about him" (Jn. 12:41). The hour of glory was the hour of crucifixion. The son of God, naked, covered in blood and spittle... was the Son of man glorified. And likewise when we are fools for Christ's sake, then we know His glory. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up", with the temple veil torn (Is. 6:4 cp. Mt. 27:51), and was moved to realize his sinfulness, and vow to spread the appeal for repentance (Is. 6:1,5). The high, lifted up Lord whom he saw was He of Is. 52:13- the crucified Lord. And yet Isaiah saw Him enthroned in God's glory, as it were on the cross. What was the nadir of shame in the eyes of men was the acme of exaltation in God's eyes. So John links the visions of Is. 6 and Is. 52/53 as both concerning the crucifixion (Jn. 12:37-41); there the glory and essence of God was revealed supremely. Jn. 12:38-41 draws a parallel between being converted, and understanding the prophecies of the glory of the crucified Christ. To know Him in His time of dying, to see the arm of Yahweh revealed in Him there, is to be converted.

Isaiah 52:14 Just as many were astonished at you (his appearance was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men)-

The "many" astonished are the "many nations" of :15 and the "many" who are accounted righteous (Is. 53:11) because "He bore the sin of many" (Is. 53:12). This same group of "many" are those whose sins are carried- having been convicted by His sufferings, or, as is now ultimately true, the cross of Christ. See on Is. 53:1.

"Astonished" is the word used of Israel being viewed like this in their exile and condemnation among the nations (Lev. 26:32). As the rabbis point out, the language of the suffering servant is indeed at some points that of Israel. As He was oppressed and afflicted (Is. 53:7) so were Israel in Egypt. As He was cut off from the land of the living, so had Judah been cut off from their land. But the point is that Israel had failed to be the servant, and the Lord Jesus took their condemnation onto Him as their representative. This was of absolute relevance to the exiles of Judah in Babylon. Likewise Isaiah's descriptions of "Zion", humiliated then exalted, match very much with the language of the suffering servant. Again and again we see representation. The Lord's death and resurrection to glory indeed was of power to us in that He did that as our representative. The word for "astonished" or "apalled" is used when one is considered to be under judgment from God (Lev. 26:32; Jer. 18:16; 19:8); they think He is suffering for His own sins (as in Is. 53:3,4) and consider him a sinner forsaken by God. Just as happened at the cross.

It has been observed that the later language of the song, especially about bearing sin through death, has similarities with the language of a substitute king being dressed as a king, sat upon the king's throne, and then taking on himself all the evil omens and curses that were upon the actual king- and being killed in order to remove those curses from the king. Those things are indeed alluded to; the idea of bearing sin and curse for another through death would have elicited these things in the minds of the first hearers. But the record adapts and deconstructs it to show the far greater truth of the servant's work. He died not as a substitute, a vicarious death, but as a representative, in order to save not merely a king but the whole world of sinners who would identify with Him. Because this sufferer does not merely die and stay dead as a substitue would need to, instead He resurrects to eternal life, and this is the basis of the salvation of all in Him: "He shall see his seed. He shall prolong his days... *After* the suffering of his soul, he will see the light and be satisfied"(Is. 53:10,11). He was "numbered with the transgressors", counted as a transgressor, in order that He might make intercession for the transgressors, being pierced for our transgressions, stricken for the transgression of the people (Is. 53:5,8,12).

See on Gen. 39:6; Job 17:7,8. We are to be “conformed to the image of [God’s] son" (Rom. 8:29)- to share His morphe, which was so marred beyond recognition that men turned away in disgust (Is. 52:14 cp. Phil. 2:7). The mind that was in Him then must be in us now (Phil. 2:5). This is proof enough that His "form" was not His essential nature. It is a form which we can share and reflect. The mixture of the Divine and human in the Lord Jesus is what makes Him so compelling and motivational. He was like us in that He had our nature and temptations; and yet despite that, He was different from us in that He didn't sin. Phil. 2 explains how on the cross, the Lord Jesus was so supremely "in the likeness of men"; and yet the same 'suffering servant' prophecy which Phil. 2 alludes to also makes the point that on the cross, "his appearance was so unlike the sons of

Adam" (Is. 52:14). There was something both human and non-human in His manifestation of the Father upon the cross. Never before nor since has such supreme God-likeness, 'Divinity' , if you like, been displayed in such an extremely human form- a naked, weak, mortal man in His final death throes.

There, on the cross, the Lord Jesus was the form of God, equal with God in that sense, the only begotten Son. And yet on the cross His form was marred more than that of any man, He finally had no form that could be desired (Is. 52:14; 53:2). And yet this was the form of God. *He* was contorted and marred more than ever, there was no beauty in *Him* that men should desire Him, in those hours in which His Son suffered there. The Lord Jesus then had the form of God, although in His mind He had taken the form of a servant. The Lord made Himself a servant in His mind; He looked not on His own things, but on those of others (Phil. 2:4,7). This is the context of Philippians 2; that we should have the *mind* of Christ, who disregarded His own status as Son of God and humbled Himself, even to death on the cross, so that we might share His status. His example really is ours, Paul is saying.

He was 'lifted up' in crucifixion and shame; and yet 'lifted up' in 'glory' in God's eyes through that act. We read in Is. 52:14 that His face was more marred, more brutally transmogrified, than that of any man. And yet reflecting upon 2 Cor. 4:4,6, we find that His face was the face of God; His glory was and is the Father's glory: "The glory of Christ, who is the image of God... the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred even more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14 AV). This prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more.

The servant was "marred", a word that appears only in Leviticus to describe strangers so corrupted that they
must be barred from offering Yahweh's bread (Lev. 22:25). This in turn is part of the code of Lev. 22:19-25 that bars any animal that is marred from being offered as a sacrifice. A related word is used in the complaint that Israel offered marred / lamen animals for sacrifice (Mal. 1:14). The root word is frequently used of moral corruption. The sacrifice of the servant was therefore of one who was barred from being either a priest or a sacrifice. The rejected sacrifice became the ultimately acceptable sacrifice. Likewise the servant in the form of Israel had been found blind and dumb, again, disqualifying them from priestly service or sacrifice. But it was exactly through that identity with the unacceptable that the servant, the Lord Jesus, acted as the supreme priest and sacrifice. We go on to read of His priestly action: "So shall he sprinkle many nations",

when He was "marred" and legally disqualified from priesthood. We note too that this servant functions as both priest and offering.

"More than any man... more than the sons of men" is a double emphasis. It is the same idea as the Messianic Ps. 22:6, "I am a worm, and no man". The Lord was humiliated until He felt He had made less than human. And thus He is able to identity with all who are abused to the point of being treated in an inhumane way, as if they were not people. Like the labourer treated like an animal rather than a person let alone the physical and mental abuses that go on in relationships. It has been observed that Christian art before the time of Constantine pictured the Lord as repulsive in His appearance; after Constantine He is portrayed as having an ideal beauty. This is typical of the increasingly unreal conception of the Lord.

Isaiah 52:15 So shall he sprinkle many nations- Perhaps alluding to the ritual of sprinkling blood upon the leper to pronounce him clean (s.w. Lev. 14:7). Men from all nations were in prospect sprinkled by His blood; and therefore we must extend the knowledge of this to all men, both in our collective and personal witness. Lk. 24:48 simply comments that the disciples were witnesses to the resurrection and the fact that forgiveness and salvation was therefore potentially available to all men. The parallel records in Mt. and Mk. say that they were told to go out and witness to the resurrection world-wide. Putting them together it is apparent that if we are truly witnesses of the resurrection in our own faith, then part and parcel of this is to take this witness out into our own little worlds. If we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, we will preach it world-wide. He died and rose as the representative of all men; and therefore this good news should be preached to all kinds and all races of people.

But "sprinkle" may well be a poor translation, meaning rather that they would be inspired to admiration, as LXX. The Hebrew for 'sprinkle' means to cause to spurt or rise up.

Kings shall shut their mouths at him- As explained on :13, the servant was to witness before kings, and stun them into silence if they had any objection to the idea of the salvation of God's people. But "shut their mouths" may also imply repentance by these "kings". I suggest this because the whole reason for the Law of Moses was “so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). Paul is quoting here from Ps. 63:11: “the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped”. He’s reasoning that because we’re all sinners, we’re all liars- for untruth is the essence of sin. We are not being true to ourselves, to God, to His word, to our brethren... we profess covenant relationship with God, to be His people, and yet we fail to keep the

terms of that covenant. And the Law of Moses convicted all God's people of this, and in this way led them to the need for Christ. Yet Is. 52:15 prophesied that the crucified Jesus would result in men shutting their mouths. The righteousness and perfection displayed there in one Man, the very human Lord Jesus, has the same effect upon us as the Law of Moses- we shut our mouths, convicted of sin. In fact, to forcibly be made to go silent is a figure for condemnation: "The righteous shall rejoice, but all the wicked shall shut their mouths" (Ps. 107:42); "The king shall rejoice in God… but the mouth of those who speak lies shall be shut" (Ps. 63:12). It is also a symbolic of deep respect: "The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth" (Job 29:9). The Lord's cross, the suffering of the servant, convicts men of sin and leads them to the silence of condemnation- and yet takes them further, in faith that because of His achievment, we can be forgiven and eternally saved. In His suffering, the Lord also was dumb, like a lamb before shearers (Is. 53:7). But this dumbness is that of those condemned for their sins. He identified with and felt our condemnation, and so is able to save us. But it doesn't end there. As our representative, we also are to replicate His work for others. And these sufferings of the suffering servant are to be our pattern. For Christ suffered not simply to fulfil an ancient prophecy and save us; but suffered in order to leave us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

For that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand- Paul read "…for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider" (Is. 52:15) as a prophecy which required him to fulfill it, by taking Christ to those who had not heard (Rom. 15:21). It was because they of themselves would not "consider" / 'understand' (s.w. Is. 1:3) that they were psychologically confirmed in their attitudes and blinded so that they would not understand / consider (Is. 6:9,10). And so God operates to this day. It was the suffering of the servant, the Lord Jesus upon the cross, which was designed to as it were jolt them into considering / understanding (s.w. Is. 52:15). So GNB "They will see and understand something they had never known".

The word for "understand" occurs again at the conclusion of the song- "My righteous servant will justify many by the knowledge of himself" (Is. 53:11), the idea being 'by understanding him'. The understanding in view is the understanding of His sufferings and what they achieved- in short, to know and believe the meaning of the cross of Christ. "Shall they understand" is transitive, thus implying that they shall be taught by and come to understand by learning. And the teacher is the suffering of the servant. The Lord Jesus to this day patiently leads men to an ever greater and deeper understanding of His sufferings and death on the cross. And those profound truths are in fact "the truth", the only truths worth reaching in human life, and they are as the GNB puts it "something they had never known".

ISAIAH CHAPTER 53

Isaiah 53:1 Who has believed our message? To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?-

This may follow on from the end of Is. 52, where we have the converted nations astounded at what the suffering servant had achieved. The idea may be: "Who would have believed our report! Were we to hear from others what we see, it would be unbelievable". We could argue that 53:1-6 are the thoughts of the repentant nations- they are the "we" and "our". The kings and nations who are "the many" of Is. 52:14,15 are the same "many" of Is. 53:10-12. They are converted by the sufferings of the servant and His work- the work of the Lord Jesus. And thus they come to Zion, as often spoken of in later Isaiah. Yet we must give full weight to the usage of these words in Jn. 12:37,38 and Rom. 10:16, which apply them to specifically Jewish disbelief in their crucified and suffering servant / Messiah. Or as has been observed, "Those [the Gentile kings] understand what they formerly did not hear; Israel, on the contrary, does not believe that which they have heard".

To make bare the arm meant to reveal power and to show intention to use it, just as men may roll up their sleeves and begin a fight. Just as the arm of Yahweh is said to awaken in Is. 51:9. In the suffering of the servant, the Lord Jesus, God showed He meant business to His maximum extent in dealing with the problem of human sin and the apparently impossible task of human salvation. Just as earlier in Isaiah He has been likened to a woman in labour, giving her maximum mental and physical focus to the task in hand- of bringing forth a child. "The arm of the Lord" is now revealed as a person, the suffering servant. The context of this arm of Yahweh is found in Is. 52:10 "Yahweh has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God". The past tense was used because this outcome was so certain- but it still depended upon the repentance and faith of the exiles. Had they returned, supported with the same kind of miraculous manifestations as seen at the exodus, then "the nations" amongst whom they were scattered, the 127 provinces of Persia, would have seen God's arm revealed; the revelation (s.w.) of His salvation (Is. 56:1). The ends of the *eretz* were specifically those areas on the borders of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, which is where they had been taken into captivity. But this didn't happen. The message of these things was not generally believed by the exiles, despite all the appeals to them to believe it (e.g. Is. 43:10 s.w.). And so the arm of Yahweh which brings salvation is revealed now to the nations through the work of the Lord Jesus.

Note the pronouns in Is. 53. The “we” who preach the Gospel of the cross are the “we” who rejected and condemned the Saviour, and the “we” whose sins are forgiven and who are reconciled to God. *These* are the reasons why we preach the crucified Christ in zeal and humility (Is. 53:1,2,3,5,6). Grace is the motive power for witness; we preach the

word of His grace as it has been to *us*. We *aren't* little sinners. It was our race who crucified the Lord of glory, and we have some part in their behaviour.

Isaiah 53:2 For he grew up before Him as a tender plant- Isaiah 53 is prefaced in chapter 52 by the command to return from Babylon and to proclaim the good news of the Messianic Kingdom which Cyrus' decree could have brought in; as if it *could* have come true then. He shall "grow up" as a root from a dry land (Is. 53:2) uses the word frequently used about the 'going up' from Babylon to Jerusalem.

When Zedekiah was taken into captivity (Ez. 17:20), it was prophesied that "a tender one" (Messiah- Is. 11:1; 53:2) would be planted "upon an high mountain", and grow into a tree in whose shadows all animals would live (Ez. 17:21,22). This is clearly the Messianic Kingdom (Lk. 13:19). This young twig at the time of the captivity was surely Zerubabbel, and the "high mountain" upon which his Kingdom could have been established is surely the "high mountain" of Ez. 40:2 where the temple could have been built. Yet the prophecy had to suffer a massive deferment until its fulfilment in Christ. See on Is. 51:18.

And as a root out of dry ground. He has no good looks or majesty; when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him-

The double figure of both a root and a tender shoot suggest connection with the prophecies of Messiah as "the root of Jesse" (Is. 11:10) and also the branch (Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). We could read this as meaning that He grew spiritually without any good environment- a challenge to all who think better environment would make them more spiritual. However we could also read this as meaning that the Lord was like a stunted shrub struggling for existence in an arid soil. Which is why He "has no good looks". This is possibly a window onto the question of whether the Lord was handsome, or otherwise. But the essential point is that He grew up tender and sensitive in a hard environment. We cannot therefore blame our dry, unspiritual environments for our lack of spirituality. The Lord arose from such dry ground, green and tender, ultimately sensitive in an insensitive world. The thirsty land surrounding Him represented spiritually barren Israel (Ps. 42:1-3); but the Lord Jesus so took His people upon Him, into His very soul, that His soul became a thirsty land (Ps. 143:6); He felt as spiritually barren as they were, so close was His representation of us, so close was He to sinful man, so fully did He enter into the feelings of the sinner. In the same way as the Lord really did feel forsaken as Israel were because of their sins, so He suffered thirst, both literally and spiritually, which was a punishment for Israel's sins.

Is. 53:2 speaks of Messiah, in a restoration context beginning in Is. 52, as 'growing up', the same word used to describe the 'coming up' from the dry ground of Babylon. This potential Messiah could have been Zerubbabel, but when he failed to fulfill the

prophecies, there was the possibility that another man could have fulfilled his role. Nehemiah ‘came up’ from Babylon, and was “the servant” who ‘prospered’ Yahweh’s work (Neh. 1:11; 2:20), just as the servant prophecies required (Is. 53:10; 48:15); and he was thereby the redeemer of his brethren (Neh. 5:8). He encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (Neh. 9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfill the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion’s gates in Messiah’s Kingdom would be praise. He was “despised” as Messiah would be (Neh. 2:19; Is. 53:3 s.w.). He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as Messiah would (Neh. 2:12 cp. Zech. 9:9); and Neh. 2:16 sounds very much like “of the people there was none with me” (Is. 63:3). The Gentiles round about came to sit at Nehemiah’s table to eat and drink (Neh. 5:17), just as Isaiah had prophesied could happen on a grander scale at the restoration of the Kingdom. One wonders if the potential fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies was transferred to him? And yet Nehemiah returned to Babylon at least once, and there is no record that on his second visit he stayed on, but rather, the implication seems to be, he returned again to the service of Babylon. The total lack of Biblical information about his later life may reflect this disappointing decision. This train of thought enables us to appreciate the joy and pleasure which the Father had when finally His beloved Son lived up to all that He sought and expected.

The fourth servant song has a way of using two words of similar reference, and then repeating them reversed. In Is. 52:14 we have the first of seven cases of this in the song. "Appearance… form" in Is. 52:14 are the same words translated "good looks [s.w. "form"… beauty [s.w. "appearance"]" in Is. 53:2, but the order is reversed. The amazement of people at the disfigured form and appearance of the servant in Is. 52:14 clearly refers to His appearance in His time of dying, i.e. the Lord Jesus on the cross. We would therefore tend to think that Is. 53:2 refers to the same. Or we could understand all this to mean that in fact, throughout His life He was essentially as He was on the cross. His supreme spirituality shown in His death was but a reflection of how He had always lived and 'grown up'.

Here are the other examples of this usage of two words and reversing them:

"Man… sons of men" (52:14) = sons of men… men (53:3 Heb.)

"Suffering… disease" (53:3) = "Diseases… suffering" (53:4)

"Bear… carry" (53:4) = "Bear… carry" (53:11)

"Stricken… afflicted" (53:4) = "Stricken… afflicted" (53:7,8)

"Crushed… wounded" (53:5) = "Wounded… crushed" (53:5 Heb.)

"Our transgressions… our iniquities" (53:5) = "Our iniquities… our transgressions" (53:11,12).

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised- The same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). He desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

And rejected by men; a man of suffering, and acquainted with disease. He was despised as one from whom men hide their face-

The AV brings out the connections more clearly: "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief… Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (:4). His experience of sorrow and grief was intimately tied up with our sorrow and grief. He was so intensely our representative; and we respond to this by baptism into Him and living life in Him.

The translations vary, "we hid as it were our faces from him" or “As one that hids his face from us”. The latter would be yet another allusion to leprosy. LXX "for his face is turned from us" would connect with how Hezekiah turned his face to the wall during his illness (Is. 38:2). His whole life was a being acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3 AV); and yet we read in this same context that He was put to grief in His death (:10). The grief of His death was an extension of the grief of His life. “Who hath believed our report?" (Is. 53:1) was fulfilled by the Jewish rejection of Him in His life, as well as in His death (Jn. 12:38)."He bore the sin of many" (Is. 53:12) is applied by Jn. 1:29 to how during His ministry, the Lord Jesus bore the sin of the world.

Isaiah laments that despite the wonder of the atonement God would work out on the cross, scarcely any would believe it, and men would turn away their faces from the crucified Christ (Is. 53:1,3). And so it happened. Men and women went out that Friday afternoon to behold it, they saw it for a few moments, beat their breasts and returned to their homes (Lk. 23:48). My sense is that most of that crowd still died in unbelief, untouched by what they saw that day. And so it is with us. We break bread, and we rise up and go on our way, we return to the pettiness of our lives, to a spirituality which often amounts (at its best) to little more than a scratching about on the surface of our natures. But let's not look away, and change the subject; let's see the love of Christ, behold it, and by this very act be changed into that same image, from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18).

And we didn’t respect him- We are programmed to shy away from the ultimate realities, in the same way as men hid their faces from the terror and dastardly horror of the

crucifixion of God's Son (Is. 53:3), and as "none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding" to realize the idiocy of worshipping a piece of wood as an idol (Is. 44:19).

There are copious connections between Job and the suffering servant:
Is. 49:7 – The servant is abhorred = Job 19:19 s.w.
Is. 50:4 – The servant has the tongue of a teacher and sustains the weary = Job 4:3, 29:21 – Job instructed many,
strengthened the weak, and counselled others.
Is. 50:6 – The servant gave the cheek to those who would pull out his beard = Job 16:10 – Job's tormentors struck him on the cheek (s.w.)
Is. 50:6 – The servant did not hide his face from insult and spitting- Job 30:10 – Job is abhorred and spat upon (s.w.) Is. 50:8,9 – The servant has a vindicator to vouch for him, and he is confident he will be justified- Job 19:25; 13:18 Job has a redeemer to help him, and he is confident he will be vindicated.
Is. 52:14 – Many were appalled at the servant, whose appearance was distorted- Job 17:8 (cf. 21:5); 2:12 – The upright were appalled at (s.w.) Job's circumstances, and his appearance was almost unrecognizable to his friends.
Is. 53:3 – The servant was despised by men- Job 19:18 Job was despised even by children.
Is. 53:3 – The servant was rejected by men- Job 19:14 – Job was rejected (s.w.) by his loved ones.
Is. 53:3 – The servant was a man of suffering- Job 2:13 – Job's suffering (s.w.) was very great.
Is. 53:3,4 – The servant bore the diseases of the people- Job 2:7; 7:5 – Job was afflicted with disease.
Is. 53:4 – The people accounted the servant touched by God- Job 19:21 – Job said that the hand of God had
touched (s.w.) him.
Is. 53:4 – The people accounted the servant struck by God- Job 16:10 – Job was struck (s.w.) on the cheek
Is. 53:6 – God afflicted the servant- Job 7:20 – Job felt he was the target of God's affliction (s.w.)
Is. 53:9 – The servant was not guilty of violence- Job 16:17 – Job claims there was no violence (s.w.) in his hands.
Is. 53:9 – There was no deceit in the mouth of the servant- Job 27:4; 31:5 – Job declares that his tongue will not utter deceit (s.w.), and his foot has not hurried to deceit (s.w.).
Is. 53:9 – The servant is innocent of wrongdoing- Job 1:8 Job is blameless.
Is. 53:10 – It was God's will to crush the servant- Job 6:9 Job's desire is that God would be willing to crush (s.w.) him. Is. 53:10 – After God crushed him, the servant would see his offspring and prolong his days- Job 42:13,16 After his suffering came to an end, Job

had more children and lived to see four generations of his descendants.
Is. 53:12 – God reinstated the servant- Job 42:10 God restored Job's fortunes, giving him twice the riches he had before.
Is. 53:12 – The servant made intercession for transgressors- Job 42:8, 10 Job made intercession for his friends.

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering- God speaks of being burdened by Israel's sins (Is. 43:24)- and yet this is a prelude to the passages which speak of the Lord Jesus bearing our sins on the cross (Is. 53:4,11,12). We even read of God being wearied by Israel's sins (Is. 7:13; Jer. 15:6; Ez. 24:12; Mal. 2:17). Even though God does not "grow weary" (Is. 40:28) by nature, it seems to me that in His full entering into His people's situation, He does allow Himself to grow weary with the sins of those with whom He is in covenant relationship. It was this kind of capacity which God has which was supremely revealed in His 'sharing in' the crucifixion of His Son.

The Lord Jesus during His ministry fulfilled the prophecy of Is. 53:4 that on the cross He would 'take our infirmities' (Mt. 8:17). These "infirmities" according to Is. 53:4 were our sins, but sin's effect is manifested through sickness. The moral dimension to these "infirmities" is established by Paul in Romans, for in Rom. 5:6 he uses the word to describe how "when we were yet *weak* [s.w. 'infirm'], Christ died for the ungodly; and he explains his sense here as being that "when we were yet *sinners*" (Rom. 5:8). Jesus as the Lord the Spirit engages with our infirmities, on the plane of the spirit, the deep human mind and psyche. What He did on the cross in engaging with our moral infirmity He did in His life, and He continues to do for us in essence.

Yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted- "We esteemed him [as He hung on the cross] smitten of God" (Is. 53:4 AV). It was in a sense God who "clave the rock" so that the waters gushed out (Ps. 78:15; Is. 48:21). "Clave" or "struck" / "smitten" implies that the rock was literally broken open; and in this we see a dim foreshadowing of the gaping hole in the Lord's side after the spear thrust, as well as a more figurative image of how His life and mind were broken apart in His final sacrifice. See on Is. 48:21.

The "affliction" of the servant in His sufferings is noted again in :7. This is the word used for how the Babylonians and others had afflicted God's people (Is. 60:14 "Them that afflicted you"; Lam. 3:33; 5:11; Zeph. 3:19). The servant took upon himself all the experiences of Israel in their condemnation and consequence of sin. Just as on the cross, the Lord took upon Himself all our experiences and results of sin. Truly He was our representative. The word for "affliction" is several times translated 'humbled', 'brought down', and is alluded to in Phil. 2, speaking of the progressive humbling of the Lord Jesus, coming to a pinnacle in His dying "even the death of the cross".

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions- This verse is at the very centre of the Song, seeing it begins in Is. 52:13. We are to reconstruct in our own minds the process of the crucifixion. As the nails pierced His skin and flood flowed… this was for my transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities- AV "bruised". Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). The Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He was bruised "and by his bruises we are healed" (LXX). The Lord Jesus was "wounded in the heel" through his death. Is. 53:4,5 describes Him as being 'bruised' by God through his death on the cross. This plainly alludes to the prophecy of Gen. 3:15 that the serpent would bruise Christ. However, ultimately God worked through the evil which Christ faced, *He* is described here as doing the bruising (Is. 53:10), through controlling the forces of evil which bruised His Son. And so God also works through the evil experiences of each of His children.

The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed-

The idea seems to be: "The penalty we should have paid was upon him". This is the language of financial transaction. This connects directly with the great theme of redemption in Isaiah. As discussed on Is. 40:2, Israel had sold themselves into slavery to pay the debt of their sins. But Yahweh as their *go'el* redeemer had offered to pay the debt [to Himself] and thus free them from their debt slavery, to cut short the period of slavery in Babylon. Now we have explained the price He paid. God's people were redeemed "without money" in the sense they didn't need to pay it. But God did- and it was through the suffering and death of His Servant, ultimately the Lord Jesus.

Many have pointed out the connections between the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 about Jesus, and the later commentary upon them in Psalm 89 and Isaiah 53, with reference to the crucifixion:

If he [Jesus] commit iniquity = *If his children* [us] forsake my law… = The Lord hath laid on *him* the iniquity of *us* all

I will chasten *him* with the rod of men = Then will I visit *their* transgression with the rod = For the transgression of *my people* was *he* stricken

And with the stripes of the children of men = And *their* iniquity with stripes = With *his* stripes *we* are healed.

The point of all this is to show how our sins were somehow carried by the Lord Jesus, to the extent that He suffered for them. But *how* was this actually achieved? It is one thing

to say it, but we must put meaning into the words. I suggest it was in that the Lord so identified with us, His heart so bled for us, that He *felt* a sinner even though He of course never sinned. The final cry "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" clearly refers back to all the many passages which speak of God forsaking the wicked, but never forsaking the righteous. The Lord, it seems to me, *felt* a sinner, although He was not one, and thus entered into this sense of crisis and fear He had sinned. He *so* identified with us. In the bearing of His cross, we likewise must identify with others, with their needs and with the desperation of their human condition... and this is what will convert them, as the Lord's identification with *us* saved *us*.

The Lord was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet the Lord Jesus received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of Sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; each one has turned to his own way- This verse is at the centre of the fourth servant song. This is the essence of it all. The sheep have gone astray, but the servant as one of them, a sheep or baby sheep led to shearing and slaughter, would save them. By representation. The Bible is in one sense a very long history book, recording human behaviour over time from God's perspective. One thing at least is clear from that history- the majority are usually wrong. People go astray "like sheep", in that they follow each other into sin. Time and again we see that the minority position was the right and Godly one, and the majority position was wrong. We each sin in our own unique and personal ways; but we do so because we follow the flock. And the context of Isaiah 53 is that the crucifixion of the Lord was necessary exactly because of this. He was the ultimate strong man psychologically, who ultimately went the Father's way when no other human ever did.

In the short term, the sheep were scattered by the wolf, even though the Lord died so this wouldn't happen. And He knew in advance that this would happen (Is. 53:6; Mk. 14:27; Jn. 16:32). The Lord faced His final agony with the knowledge that in the short term, what He was dying in order to stop (i.e. the scattering of the sheep) wouldn't work. The sheep would still be scattered, and He knew that throughout the history of His church they would still keep wandering off and getting lost (according to Lk. 15:3-6). Yet He died for us from the motive of ultimately saving us from the effect of doing this. He had clearly thought through the sheep / shepherd symbolism. Unity and holding on to

the faith were therefore what He died to achieve (cp. Jn. 17:21-23); our disunity and apostasy, each turning to his own, is a denial of the Lord's sufferings. And this is why it causes Him such pain.

And Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all- see on Lk. 15:4-6. That piece of wood that was laid upon the Lord by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him; your laziness to do your readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law… that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*… that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. It was Yahweh who laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).

The LXX here has "The Lord handed him over (*paradidômi*) for our sin" and this is surely alluded to in the language of "the Son of Man will be handed over (*paradidomi*) to be crucified" (Mt. 26:2). The handing over or betrayal of the Lord by Judas in fact had God's hand behind it. In Mt. 26:16 Judas was looking for a convenient time to hand Him over, again *paradidomi*.

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed- Before the cross, we are convicted of our sinfulness. And yet we are assured there of our ultimate salvation. Isaiah 53 predicted that there, “He was oppressed”- Heb. ‘exaction was made’ (s.w. Is. 58:3). He bore our punishment / condemnation on the cross. We each ought to be crucified to death- this is the exaction for sin. And yet, Jesus died for us. The exaction was made from Him. The rejected will have to bear their own sin, and therefore their feelings will be akin to His in the time of crucifixion. Yet we are to bear the cross with Him. We must either crucify ourselves now, or go through it in rejection. This is a gripping logic.

"Oppressed" is the word for "taskmaster" and has been used by Isaiah of Judah's dominators and abusers (Is. 9:4; 14:2,4). The Lord Jesus was "oppressed" as Israel's representative and thus became the basis for righteousness to be imputed to all who had been oppressed and had oppressed others. See on Is. 60:17.

Yet when he was afflicted he didn’t open his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is mute, so he didn’t open his mouth- John the Baptist looked at Jesus walking towards him and commented that here was the “Lamb of God”, a phrase the Jews would’ve understood as referring to the lamb which was about to be sacrificed on Passover (Jn. 1:29). John presumably was referencing the description of the crucified Jesus in Is. 53:7; for John, he foresaw it all, it was as if he saw Jesus as already being led out to die, even though that event was over three years

distant. And so he could appeal to his audience to face judgment day as if they were standing there already. We need to have the same perspective.

Is. 53:7 speaks of the Lord at this time as being uncannily silent: "as a sheep before *her* shearers is silent" . The LXX has: “Because of his affliction he opens not his mouth", as if the silence was from pure fear as well as a reflection of an internal pain that was unspeakable. Job’s experience had foretold that the cross would be what the Lord had always “greatly feared". The Passover Lamb, so evidently typical of the Lord as He approached death, was to be *male*. And yet Is. 53:7 conspicuously speaks of a female sheep. Why such an obvious contradiction? Was it not because the prophet foresaw that in the extraordinary breadth of experience the Lord was passing through, He was made to empathize with both men *and* women? He felt then, as He as the seed of the woman stood silent before those abusive men, as a woman would feel. This is not the only place where both the Father and Son are described in feminine terms. It doesn't mean, of course, that the Father is a woman; what it means is that He has the ability to appreciate and manifest feelings which a male would not normally be able to. Through His experience and zeal for our redemption, the Lord Jesus came to the same ability as His Father in these areas. Those who have suffered most are the most able to empathize. And yet somehow the Lord exceeded this principle; it was true of Him, but *such* were His sufferings and such His final empathy that this isn't a fully adequate explanation as to *how* He got to that point of supreme empathy and identity with us that He did. *Exactly* how He did it must surely remain a mystery; for God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself by that fully and totally representative sacrifice.

Literally, the Hebrew is "like a sheep before the faces of its shearers". This connects with how He was "as one from whom men hide their faces" (Is. 53:7). Those men are described as behaving just as we imagine them- having to face the Lord, seeing they were His "shearers", and yet seeking to avert their gaze, hiding their faces from Him. They hid their faces from Him; but He didn't “hide his face from shame and spitting” (Is. 50:6). This is the clash between those of bad conscience with Him with the ultimate clean conscience. This is all so psychologically credible, and an example of where Old Testament prophecy fills in far more details than the simple historical descriptions of the Lord's sufferings which we have in the New Testament.

The female element in Old Testament sacrifice pointed forward to the Lord’s sacrifice, as a sheep before her shearers. His identity with both male and female, as the ultimate representative of all humanity, meant that He took upon Himself things that were perceived as specifically feminine. The mother was the story teller of the family; when people heard the Lord tell parables and teach wisdom, it would have struck them that He was doing the work of the matriarch of a family (V.C. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *The Social World Of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) pp. 28-29). “Typical female behaviour included taking the last place at the table, serving others,

forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and attempting to heal wounds", strife and arguments (B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights From Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1993) p. 54). All this was done by the Lord Jesus- especially in His time of dying and the lead up to it. He was in many ways the idealized mother / matriarch. His sacrifice for us was very much seen as woman's work. And this is why the example of his mother Mary would have been a particular inspiration for Him in going through the final process of self-surrender and sacrifice for others, to bring about forgiveness and healing of strife between God and men. In a fascinating study, Diane Jacobs-Malina develops the thesis that a psychological analysis of the Gospels shows that the Lord Jesus played his roles like "the wife of the absent husband" (Diane Jacobs-Malina, *Beyond Patriarchy: The Images Of Family In Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1993) p.2.). And assuming that Joseph disappeared from the scene early in life, His own mother would have been His role model here- for she was indeed the wife of an absent husband. You'd have to read Jacobs-Malina's study to be able to judge whether or not you think it's all valid. But if she's right, then it would be yet another tribute to the abiding influence of Mary upon the character of the Son of God.

This idiom of being a lamb dumb and not knowing the outcome of events is used about Jeremiah to describe his willful naivety about Israel's desire to slay him: "I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me" (Jer. 11:19). In this Jeremiah was indeed a type of Christ. Likewise we note that being cut off out of the land of the living (:8) is also the language of Jeremiah (Jer. 11:19). Perhaps the connections are to teach us that the Lord died with Jeremiah on His mind. On one hand, the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning who should betray Him; and yet He went through the pain, shock and surprise of realizing that Judas, his own familiar friend in whom He trusted, had done this to Him (Ps. 41:9; Jn. 6:64; 13:11). He knew, and yet He chose to limit that foreknowledge from love. This is in fact what all human beings are capable of, seeing we are made in the image of God. Thus Samson surely knew Delilah would betray him, and yet his love for her made him trust her. And we as observers see women marrying alcoholic men, wincing as we do at the way their love makes them limit their foreknowledge. There is an element of this in God, as there was in His Son as He faced the cross.

The Greek for "delivered Him" (Rom. 8:32) is three times used in Is. 53 LXX about the handing over to Jesus to His death [NEV "that is led"]. The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on "*How*", with what passion and

emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: "Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. Notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led* (this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him.

We are in Christ, connected every moment with the life and living out of His cross. We *are* dying with Him, our old man *is* crucified with Him because His death is an ongoing one. “It is Christ that died… Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?… As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom 8:34-36). According to Isaiah 53, He on the cross was the sheep for the slaughter; but all in Him are *all day long* counted as sharing His death, as we live out the same self-control, the same spirit of love and self-giving for others, regardless of their response…

Isaiah 53:8 He was taken away-

"Taken away" in Is. 53:8 is the word used just prior to the commencement of this fourth servant song: "what do I do here, says Yahweh, seeing that My people are taken away for nothing… oppressed without cause?" (Is. 52:5). They were taken away because of their sins. But Yahweh identified Himself with the exiles as if with them in exile (reflected by the visions of the cherubim glory seen by the rivers of Babylon). And He wonders why He and His people are in exile, seeing the people had been "taken away for nothing". Somehow the reason for their exile had been removed. And Is. 53:8 explains how this could have happened- the suffering servant "was taken away" and had been "stricken for the disobedience of My people". The debt had been paid, the sin removed, so Yahweh and His people were now in exile for no reason. Sin has been made an end of, according to Dan. 9. Tragically, most of them chose to remain in that exile rather than accept this amazing offer and truth. Which has therefore been extended to all men.

But GNB may have the sense right: "He was arrested and sentenced and led off to die, and no one cared about his fate". But what man didn't then care about was to become the most crucial act in human history, for which all true men would be eternally grateful.

Much study has been done of the crisis many males go through around the age of 30, the desire to stop experimenting and settle down, to cease being cared for and instead

seeking to build up something permanent, the sense that life is passing by…it has all been very well summed up by Daniel Levinson in his study of the "age thirty transition". All this energy was released by the Lord into His three year ministry which changed human destiny, so intense and far reaching and successful was it. "I go to prepare a place for you…." is surely an allusion to the Palestinian tradition that the wife came to live with the new husband after a year and a day, whilst He 'prepared the place' for her. The cross was His purchase of us as His bride. The bridegroom was “taken away” from the wedding guests (Mk. 2:20)- the same word used in the LXX of Is. 53:8 for the ‘taking away’ of the Lord Jesus in His crucifixion death. But the groom is ‘taken away’ from the guests- because he is going off to marry his bride. The cross, in all its tears, blood and pain, was the Lord’s wedding to us.

By oppression and judgement- LXX "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away". But if as the MT, in what sense did the oppression and lack of justice take away His life? The Lord poured out His soul unto death; "he was taken away by distress" (Is. 53:12,8 AVmg.) suggests that it was the mental crisis in the brain of Christ on the cross which resulted in His death. This is why Pilate marvelled that He died so quickly. It is evident from this that the physical process of crucifixion did not kill Christ, but rather the heart burst (both figurative and literal) which it brought upon Him. Do we not sense that striving in our minds as we fellowship His sufferings? Surely we do, but from a great distance. Yet we should sense it more and more, it should make us get out of this sense of drifting which we all too often have, day by day drifting along with very little stirring up our minds.

And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living- “Cut off" is Heb. ‘excluded’, "from the land of the living” (s.w. ‘the congregation’- of Israel). And this was for the transgression of His people. This is undoubtedly reference to the self-sacrificial exclusion of Moses from the land, that Israel might enter. The Lord died the death of a sinner, He chose like Moses to suffer affliction with us, that we might be saved. The allusion is also to how the scapegoat was sent into a "cut off land" with the sins of Israel. However the Hebrew is intentionally ambiguous here. The idea can be 'Who can talk of his children? Nobody, because he has none, he died childless'. The Ethiopian eunuch clearly found this reading attractive. But equally: 'Who can talk of / describe his children? Nobody, for they are so many, more than a man could number!'. Likewise He was cut off / taken away from the land of the living could refer to His death, as well as to His ascension in glory. Just as He was "lifted up" on the cross in both shame [to the human eye] or in glory, in God's eyes. Jn. 12:38 thus quotes Is. 6 and Is. 53 together about the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, arguing that both prophecies were when "Isaiah saw his glory and spoke of him".

And stricken for the disobedience of My people?- see on Ex. 32:32. The darkness that came down at the crucifixion would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no

longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

"Stricken" as in :4 "we accounted him stricken" is the word for disease or leprosy in Lev. 13:5 etc. The paradox is thus created of an apparently blemished sacrifice atoning for sin. This apparent contradiction would have been immediately apparent to any Jewish reader or hearer of these words. As discussed on Is. 52:14, we again have the powerful message of representation. The Lord was unblemished, but so identified with the blemished that He was counted as blemished. And this was the basis of the efficacy of His work. Had He died as a substitute, the point would be laboured that the unblemished died for the blemished. But in fact the unblemished was identified with the blemished to the point of being counted as blemished, and this was what uniquely empowered His sacrifice. Although sacrificial language is used, and there is indeed allusion to the rituals of sacrifice, this sacrifice was altogether of a different nature. The Lord bore the sins of the many like the scapegoat, which was a "purification offering" (Lev. 16:5)- because He was identified with the impure.

Isaiah 53:9 They made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth- see on Dt. 34:6. Sin is likened to violence in Is. 53:9 cp. 1 Pet. 2:22. There is a clear fulfilment in the Lord's burial in the graveyard belonging to the rich man Joseph of Arimathea. But this obvious fulfilment of prophecy isn't noted in the New Testament. A hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfillments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples.

"Death" is literally "deaths". This could be an intensive plural- His was the hardest of all human deaths, the greatest death, of the most significance. Or the plural may be another hint at His representative death- He died the death of all who die in and with

Him. We are baptized into His death, and so His death became and becomes the deaths of every one in Him. And His resurrection glory likewise.

In the ancient world, how you died and were buried was important. Several times we read of having no burial or a shameful burial; being buried the wrong way was the ultimate shame. The suffering servant was buried honorably, but died shamefully, "with the wicked". He experienced both shame and glory at the same time, just as being "lifted up" is used in John's Gospel of the cross. It was both shame and glory. The NAB renders "A grave was assigned him among the wicked, and a burial place with evildoers" as if in fact the entire death and burial was shameful. If this reading is correct, we can assume that His burial place was "assigned him", in Gehenna, but Joseph of Arimathea overrode that by giving Him an honourable burial. Shame and glory are likewise juxtaposed in our Christian experience. But death, the ultimate shame, turns into the ultimate glory. Thus Is. 40 began this section by saying that the Gospel, the good news, is that all flesh is as grass, but the word of the Lord, the word of eternal restoration of the dead, lasts for ever.

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it was Yahweh's will to bruise him-

The rabbis are fond of spotting words created by equidistant lettering in the Bible text. Here, starting with the letter 'yod' in the word *ya'arich*, counting every 20 letters backwards, we spell 'Yeshua shmi', 'Yeshua is my name'.

It was *God* who 'bruised' the Lord on the cross. Gen. 3:15 says it was the seed of the serpent who bruised Him. Conclusion: God worked through the seed of the serpent, God was [and is] totally in control. The serpent is therefore not a symbol of radical, free flying evil which is somehow outside of God's control, and which 'bruised' God's Son whilst God was powerless to stop His Son being bruised. Not at all. God was in control, even of the seed of the serpent. However we finally wish to interpret "the seed of the serpent", the simple fact is that God was in powerful control of it / him. The same word for "will" is found in Isaiah's opening criticism of Israel: "I have no pleasure / will in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats" (Is. 1:11 NIV). Yet God's pleasure or "will" was in the bruising and sacrifice of the servant. Is. 1:11 may be saying that God had no pleasure in the sacrifices His people were offering Him at that point, because they were offered with the wrong spirit. If indeed animal sacrifice was not His "will", we naturally wonder why He asked for it in the first place. We recall the language of offerings having a sweet smell to God- when properly offered. But the offering of His Son was supremely His will / pleasure: "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:10).

He has caused him to suffer. When You make his soul an offering for sin-

His soul making restitution is again the idea of the debt of Judah's sin being cleared by God through the suffering of the servant. Is. 53:10 NIV describes the Lord's death as a "guilt offering". Ignorance is no atonement for sin, as the Law taught. "Forgive them *for* they know not what they do" sounds as if the Lord felt that He was the offering for ignorance, which was required for both rulers and ordinary Israelites (cp. how Peter and Paul describe both the rulers and ordinary people as "ignorant", implying they had a need for the ignorance offering of Christ, Acts 3:17; 13:27). And significantly, Heb. 5:2 describes Christ as a good priest who can have compassion on those (i.e. us) who have sinned through ignorance and want reconciliation. As we come, progressively, to realize our sinfulness, we need to make a guilt offering. But that guilt offering has already been made, with the plea "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do". All our sin, false guilt and real guilt, has been dealt with. We perhaps cannot ultimately decide, at least not by any intellectual process, what parts of our sense of "guilt" are false guilt, and which are legitimate and needful guilt. Whatever, the Lord's guilt offering has removed all this. And yet the phrase for "guilt offering" could as well be translated ‘restitution’ or ‘reparation offering’, as its use in Numbers makes plain (Num. 5:7,8 "He shall confess his sin which he has done, and he shall make restitution for his guilt in full, and add to it the fifth part of it, and give it to him in respect of whom he has been guilty. But if the man has no kinsman to whom restitution may be made for the guilt, the restitution for guilt which is made to Yahweh shall be the priest’s"). Restored relationships with God and man are possible through this offering. The guilt offering made reparation or restitution (e.g., Lev. 5:15,16). It removed guilt and liability for punishment; as the Lord's offering removed from us the fear of condemnation. The idea of restoration of course connects with the exiles and Kingdom of God being restored at their time. The offering of the servant could have been made then, in some form. It wasn't, and the silver lining of that failure was that it was far more powerfully made and achieved through the Lord Jesus.

The Lord’s soul was sorrowful unto death in Gethsemane, as if the stress alone nearly killed Him (Mk. 14:34). "My soul is full of troubles, and my life (therefore) draweth nigh unto the grave" (Ps. 88:3). Is. 53:10-12 speaks of the fact that the Lord's *soul* suffered as being the basis of our redemption; the mind contained within that spat upon head, as it hung on that tortured body; this was where our salvation was won. Death is the ultimately intense experience, and living a life dedicated to death would have had an intensifying effect upon the Lord's character and personality.

The LXX is very relevant to Hezekiah: "The Lord also is pleased to purge him from his stroke. If ye can give an offering for sin, your soul shall see a long-lived seed".

He shall see his seed- It seems to me that in some sense the Lord Jesus had a vision of us in the Kingdom just before his death (Is. 53:10; Heb. 12:2; Ps. 22:17,20 cp. Eph. 5:30).

"*When* thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed… he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. 53:10,11 AV). "*When*" would suggest that the Lord had some kind of vision of those He was offering Himself for, especially in their future, forgiven state.

Another take is that when God made His soul sin on the cross [AV “offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it’s an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to ‘see’, to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being “in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He “his own self…in his own body" bore our sins “upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord’s moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His ‘nature’.

He shall prolong his days- The victory of the Lord Jesus is described as Him 'prolonging his days', in allusion back to the way Dt. 17:20 teaches that the King of Israel must study the word all the days of his life, with the result that he would "prolong his days". The almost unbelievable victory of the man Christ Jesus against every aspect of the flesh was due to His saturation with the spirit of God's word.

And the will of Yahweh shall prosper in his hand- The pleasure or will of our loving Father is that we should share His Kingdom (Lk. 12:32), and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross of Jesus (Is. 53:10). God isn’t indifferent. He wants us to be there. That’s why He gave His Son to die. It’s as simple as that. The deepest longings we feel in our earthly lives, as parents, as lovers, are mere flickers of the hungering desire God feels for us. It is a desire that cost Him His very own crucified son. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruisings') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross.

Isaiah 53:11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light and be satisfied- I prefer AV "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied". He will and does now

see in us the [result of] the travail of His soul. We note that His travail was so much internal, "of his soul". The term "travail / suffering of [the] soul" effectively means 'His life's work' (Ecc. 2:24; 4:8; 6:7 s.w.). As we die, one by one, and He knows that for sure He will resurrect and save us at the last day… this verse comes true, time and again. He sees the result of His life's work and His final death… and is "satisfied".

My righteous servant will justify many by the knowledge of himself- "Raised for our justification' (Rom. 4:25) is an allusion to the LXX of Is. 53:11, which speaks of "the righteous servant" (Jesus) "justifying the righteous". The repetition of the word "righteous" suggests that on account of the Lord's death, and resurrection, His righteousness becomes ours, through this process of justification. But how and why, exactly, does Christ's death and resurrection enable our justification? Paul has explained that faith in God brings justification before Him. Now Paul is explaining how and why this process operates. Jesus died and rose again to eternal life as our representative. If we believe into Him (which Romans 6 defines as involving our identification with His death and resurrection by baptism), then we too will live for ever as He does, as we will participate in His resurrection to eternal life. Our final justification, being declared in the right, will be at the day of judgment. We will be resurrected, judged, and declared righteous- and given eternal life, never again to sin and die. This is the end result of the status of 'justified' which we have now, as we stand in the dock facing God's judgment.

Through the cross, the Lord Jesus would "justify the many". Yet this phrase is picked up in Dan. 12:3 and applied to those who preach the Gospel- and thereby become "*those* who justify the many". The implication is plain enough. Through preaching, we live out the Lord's death for others in practice, we placard Him crucified before the world's eyes. We are not simply "Him" to them; we are Him crucified to them. The honour of this is surpassing.

The language is very similar to that of Dan. 9, about "Messiah the prince" being "cut off", making an end of sin, and bringing in eternal righteousness, i.e. justification, for "the many".

We naturally wonder how the offering of one righteous servant could "justify the many" when they are presented as sinners. For Ex. 23:7 is clear: "I will not justify the wicked". A good man cannot get a bad man out of his death sentence. Judaism, and all forms of 'religion', wriggle and struggle with this. They have no realistic, credible path towards the salvation of sinners. Short of making God turn a blind eye and renege on His own clearly stated ethics and principles. God's justice and rightful refusal to justify the wicked… appears as too large a roadblock, intellectually, morally, ethically, practically, in the path to human salvation. There are allusions to Mosaic sacrifices throughout the song of this

suffering servant. But none of them are exact; and there is no priest, nor sanctified place of offering mentioned. Nor do Mosaic sacrifices resurrect and bring forth eternally saved children. But the God who would not justify the wicked under the old covenant has found a way to achieve all this, through His servant who is the personification of His ideal "Israel". All who identified in Him, as we do through baptism, can have this amazing experience. He is Israel and he restores Israel. Isaiah's words have been clear enough, that Jacob is and was Yahweh's servant: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Is. 49:3 and often, e.g. Is. 41:8-10; 44:1-3,21; 45:4; 48:21). "You, Israel My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen… you whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth and called from its corners and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you" (Is. 41:8,9). Judaism is not wrong on this point. The mission and sufferings of the servant are indeed full of connection with passages about Israel; e.g. a sheep led to slaughter (Is. 53:7 = Ps. 44:22). But the servant Israel are declared blind, lame and useless. "Israel" are also not the servant- "Who among you [Israel] fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant?" (Is. 50:1). And it is the servant figure who brings good news to Israel and who is sent to bring Israel back to Yahweh (Is. 49:5). This difference between the servant and Israel becomes clearest and most acute here in Is. 53, where Israel fail to acknowledge the servant; and finally "For the transgressions of My people [Israel] He [the Servant] was stricken" (Is. 53:8). So in this fourth servant song, the singular servant arises to be Israel in one man. To save not only Israel, but all in Him: "Now says Yahweh who formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him, and that Israel be gathered to Him… yes, He says, It is too light a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give you for a light to the nations, that you may be My salvation to the end of the earth" (Is. 49:5,6). This was indeed "what the law could not do" (Rom. 8:3); "And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). And so you understand why indeed I would crawl, on my hands and knees if necessary, from one side of London to the other, from one side of England to the other, from one side of Europe to the other, from one side of this world to the other, to baptize just one man "into Christ". For all the grief, the cost, the angst, the drama… I would do it again and again, to the end. And you understand now why I urge each of you likewise, to bring men into Christ.

And he will bear their iniquities- "Bearing sin" in other Old Testament passages (Lev. 19:17; 20:2; Num. 9:13; Lam, 5:7) refers to a person bearing the consequences of his or her own sin. He was a sin bearer; and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. As He bore away our iniquities (Is. 53:11), so "we then that are strong ought to bear the iniquities of the weak" (Rom. 15:1). The Lord Jesus didn't sin Himself but He took upon Himself our sins- to the extent that He *felt* a

sinner, even though He wasn't. Our response to this utter and saving grace is to likewise take upon ourselves the infirmities and sins of our brethren. If one is offended, we burn too; if one is weak, we are weak; we bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1). But in the context of that passage, Paul is quoting from Is. 53:11, about how the Lord Jesus bore our sins on the cross. We live out the spirit of His cross, not in just bearing with our difficulties in isolation, but in feeling for our weak brethren. The description of the believer as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1) alludes to the scapegoat, the only living sacrifice, which was a type of the risen Lord (Lev. 16:10 LXX = Acts 1:3). As the Lord ran free in His resurrection, bearing away the sins of men, so we who are in Him and preach that salvation can do the same. As He bore away our iniquities (Is. 53:11), so "we then that are strong ought to bear the iniquities of the weak" (Rom. 15:1). We live out the spirit of His cross, not in just bearing with our difficulties in isolation, but in feeling for our weak brethren. Bearing sin was clearly a reference to the scapegoat, and being cut off from the land of the living (:8) alludes to the scapegoat being sent to a land "cut off". We note there is no mention in Is. 53 of a priest officiating- the absent priest in the ritual points to God Himself officiating, after the pattern of Abraham offering Isaac.

Isaiah 53:12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong- Graciously dividing the spoil with those who didn't fight for it evokes the behaviour of Abraham (Gen. 14:22-24) and David (1 Sam. 30:24-26). Clearly we are to get that this servant is the promised seed of Abraham and David. The idea of the Lord binding Satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that the Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb. 'those that are bound')". This dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided all His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of all the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12). We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe.

Because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors-

The Lord clearly understood this about Himself in Lk. 22:37 (also Mk. 15:28): "For I say unto you, That this that is written must yet be accomplished me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end", i.e. a completion, a

fulfillment. And the Lord surely had these words in mind when in Mt. 26:28 He spoke of "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins". The New Testament quotes or alludes to the fourth servant song more than any other section of the Old Testament.

There would have been a loss of lymph and body fluid to the point that the Lord felt as if He had been "poured out like water" (Ps. 22:14); He "poured out his soul to death", as if His sense of dehydration was an act He consciously performed; He felt that the loss of moisture was because He was pouring it out Himself. This loss of moisture was therefore due to the mental processes within the Lord Jesus, it was a result of His act of the will in so mentally and emotionally giving Himself for us, rather than just the physical result of crucifixion.

In the Lord's death we see the heart that bleeds, bared before our eyes in the cross. It is written of Him in His time of dying that He "poured out his soul unto death" (Is. 53:12). The Hebrew translated "poured out" means to make naked- it is rendered as "make thyself naked" in Lam. 4:21 (see too Lev. 20:18,19; Is. 3:17). The Lord' sensitivity was what led Him to His death- He made His soul naked, bare and sensitive, until the stress almost killed Him quite apart from the physical torture. To be sensitive to others makes us open and at risk ourselves. A heart that bleeds really bleeds and hurts within itself. And this was the essence of the cross.

The Lord poured out His soul unto death as a conscious act performed to enable our redemption (Is. 53:12). Materially, this may refer to the way in which every respiration of the Lord would have scraped His sensitive skin against the rough wood, so that there would have been constant blood flow from His back. This was sometimes a cause of death through crucifixion: blood loss through repeated agitation of the wounds by lifting up the body to breathe and exhale. In this sense He poured out His soul unto death. Muscle cramps would have tended to fix the muscles and make respiration difficult without a willful yanking of the body weight upwards on the wounded nerves.

The Lord Jesus Christ “made himself of no reputation”, or “emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7 R.V.), alluding to the prophecy of his crucifixion in Is. 53:12: “He poured out his soul unto death”. He “took upon himself the form (demeanour) of a servant” by his servant-like attitude to his followers (Jn. 13:14), demonstrated supremely by his death on the cross (Mt. 20:28). Is. 52:14 prophesied concerning Christ’s sufferings that on the cross “his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men”. This progressive humbling of himself “unto death, even the death of the cross” was something which occurred during his life and death, not at his birth. The context of Phil. 2 relates to the mind of Jesus, the humility of which is being held up to us as an example to copy. These verses must therefore speak of Jesus’ life on earth, in our human nature, and how he humbled himself, despite having a mind totally in tune with God, to consider our needs.

Phil. 2 is a hymn or poem, stressing the seven stages of the Lord's humiliation, culminating in "death, even the death of the cross", followed by seven stages of exaltation. There are multiple allusions to Is. 53 throughout the poem. The 'V' shaped image of Phil. 2 is actually a conceptual reflection of what we have in this fourth servant song. The same Hebrew words are used of the Lord's humiliation as they are of His exaltation. Thus:

He "lifted up" our sicknesses and sins (53:4,12) but was "lifted up" in exaltation (Is. 52:13)

He "knew" sickness (53:3) but by His knowledge He justified many (53:11)

"The many" were astonished at His humiliation (52:14) but "the many" receive a share in the spoils of His victory (53:11,12)

He opened not His mouth in His humiliation (53:7) but kings would not open their mouths as they stood before the realization of what He had achieved (52:15)

Yahweh "purposed" to bruise Him, but Yahweh's purpose prospered in His hand (53:10)

Yet he bore the sin of many- "Bear" is the word used at the start of the song, "he shall be lifted up" (Is. 52:13). It was as if the sin of "the many" was publically displayed in Him, lifted up, but in glory. The Lord knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us... wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel.

And made intercession for the transgressors- On the cross, the Lord prayed for men to be forgiven. This was a fulfilment of this prophecy that He would "justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities", be wounded for our transgressions, be bruised for our iniquities, make a sin offering for His seed, heal us through His stripes, achieve our peace with God through His chastisement, bear the sin of many, be numbered with the transgressors, be stricken "for the transgression of my people", and make "intercession for the transgressors". These are all broadly parallel statements. "The transgressors" are primarily "my people", Israel, who despised and rejected him. And yet they also refer to us, insofar as we become identified with Israel in order to be saved. The prophesy that Christ would make "intercession for the transgressors" in His time of dying was surely fulfilled when He prayed "Father forgive them".

The risen and exalted Lord is spoken of as being shamed, being crucified afresh, as agonizing in prayer for us just as He did on the cross (Rom. 8:24 cp. Heb. 5:7-9). On the cross, He made intercession for us; but now He ever lives to make such intercession (Heb. 7:25). There He bore our sins; and yet now He still bears our sins (Is. 53:4-6,11). Somehow, the cross is still there. The blood of Jesus cleanses us, in the present tense, from all our sins; the Lord Jesus loves us and frees us from our sins by His blood (1 Jn. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). We are cleansed by an ever 'freshly slain' sacrifice (Heb. 10:20 Gk.).

LXX "and was delivered because of their iniquities" is alluded to in Rom. 4:25: “Handed over because of our trespasses”. The Gospel accounts of the crucifixion give special emphasis to the moment of the Lord being handed over to those who would crucify Him. Paul is going on to show the mechanics, as it were, of how God has chosen to operate. His scheme of justifying us isn’t merely a case of Him saying ‘So you are declared right by Me’. He can do as He wishes, but He prefers to work through some kind of mechanism. We are declared right by God although we are sinners; which raises the obvious question: So what becomes of our sins? And so Paul explains that by talking about the crucial role of the death of Christ. Because He was of our nature, He is our representative. Although He never sinned, He died, yet He rose again to eternal life. Through connection with Him, we therefore can be counted as in Him, and thereby be given that eternal life through resurrection, regardless of our sins. In this sense, Jesus had to die and resurrect because of our sins.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 54

Isaiah 54:1 Sing, barren, you who didn't bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who did not travail with child-

Zion had had sons whom she "bore", but they were dead (s.w. Is. 51:18 "there is none to guide her of the sons she has brought forth"). Now she is presented as a woman who was always barren and never brought forth. It could simply be that various images are used for Zion (divorced for adultery, a self harming alcoholic lying naked in the dust and sexually abused, abandoned by a capricious and bad tempered husband, an abandoned wife of youth, barren, an older woman bereaved of her adult sons, widowed) to express the various aspects of her feelings and to reflect to us her fractured self-identity. Although we can just about put all those images together in one single characterization of "Zion". In this case we have the picture of an attractive young woman who married a man who loved her, had children by Him, but committed adultery; was divorced by her husband and sent away from Him after multiple opportunities to change; wrongly perceives and misremembers him as having abandoned her for other women and being a short tempered, angry man; her children were killed; she became barren, or feels barren because her children were dead; her husband died [so she thinks]; and she ended up a self harming alcoholic lying naked in the dust and sexually abused by passers by. This would be true to observed experience, in my decades of running soup kitchens and dealing with older people in addiction. And yet from that low point she could have been transformed... And "the power that hath saved thee" and made Zion free is now available to all who want to be God's woman.

But all the images are what Zion thought within her mistaken and non factual narrative. She thought God was an angry God who in a burst of anger had sent her away; when His heart was bursting with love for her, and He was aware of her as a mother is aware of her newborn baby. He says that in fact there is no "bill of divorce"- possibly implying He had not divorced Judah, although He had divorced Israel. She says she is barren- when she had had children, who had died. Her husband had died, so she thinks- because of the belief that a god was married to his capital city, and if the city fell to another god and the inhabitants taken away, then this meant the god had died. Yet God goes along with her narrative, as His Son did with the issue of demons. And reasons with her on each point as if it were true, rather than making point blank attacks on her wrong positions. This is the behaviour of many Protestant groups who think it's all about winning theological battles, rather than saving people one by one.

There are other options, however, to considering all the descriptions of Zion as describing the singular characterization of one woman. The phenomenon of "communal amnesia" can occur in exiled communities, and maybe this feeling as if she has never had children is a way of reflecting that. Or we could consider that seeing her sons had been slain, she had the mentality of a barren woman. For to not have children was

social death for a woman; hence the tragedy of sons being slain during the mother's lifetime. In this case, God feels so deeply her pain, recognizing how defined she was by the social views around her, sensitive to how she felt that losing her sons made her feel as if she had never in fact given birth to them. Such feelings may not be applicable to many modern women; but they were how women felt at that time, and Yahweh appreciated that. And gave her an opportunity to have children again, new children who would be counted hers and who would take away her shame amongst women and elevate and fulfil her. The idea is that adopted children were as legitimate to a woman as those she gave birth to. This may be hard for us to appreciate. But having children was such a huge social issue, and was a woman's sole purpose and pride. If she had children named to her and their mother was not around, this was indeed as fulfilling as having her own native children.

The language of crying aloud and breaking forth is that of the pain of childbirth. But this once barren woman gives birth without pain, and instead with cries of joy: "burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs". The curse would be removed, which goes along with the language of Eden being restored. The same idea is in Is. 66:7 "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered or a man child". However, a totally different scenario had been originally envisaged- the trauma of the Babylonian invasion was to be Zion's painful labour, but she would go to Babylon and there be delivered of a child- hinting surely at her repentance, bringing forth a spiritual child: "Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now you will go forth out of the city, and will dwell in the field, and will come even to Babylon. There you will be delivered. There Yahweh will redeem you from the hand of your enemies… Therefore He will abandon them until the time that she who is in labor gives birth. Then the rest of his brothers will return" (Mic. 4:10; 5:3). All that had changed. Yahweh did abandon them in exile (Is. 54:7) but He put an end to that- even though Zion didn't give birth as intended. She didn't give birth to the child- instead she was given the Gentiles as children. But she refused them. Now another scenario is presented, quite different and far more gracious than that found in Micah. Zion had not brought forth the child in Babylon. But God didn't abandon them. The idea was that although in Isaiah's time the child had come to the birth but there had been no strength to deliver (Is. 37:3), yet she would deliver the child in Babylon. But she didn't. In another figure, her children were dead and she was barren, laying drunk in the dust having drunk the wine of condemnation and having become addicted to it. And they had refused to accept the redemption from Babylon when it was offered. She had indeed been in labour pains but had brought forth the wind, nothing (Is. 26:17,18), they conceived chaff and brought forth stubble (Is. 33:11). Now, by absolute grace, God is offering yet another scenario, whereby the barren and bereaved Zion has children, without pain. And even then they resisted, retreating into hard right wing nationalism and xenophobia, resisting

any idea of the Gentiles becoming Zion's spiritual children. And so God redefined Zion, and the essence of these things comes true for that new Jerusalem.

God's hope here in Is. 54:1 is that Zion would cry out in joy as she gave birth to the Gentiles, and had those children counted to her. But it was Yahweh Himself who had likened Himself to a woman who had been in labour throughout the years of exile, and would now "cry out like a travailing woman" (Is. 42:14). He would be totally identified with them in this birth process. But still they refused that personal identity with Him, remaining merely culturally associated with Yahweh on the level of religion.

The allusion is to Sarah, to whom the exiles had earlier been bidden to "look" for inspiration (Is. 51:2). Sarah in her time of child-birth is likened to us all as we enter the Kingdom, full of joy (Is. 54:1-4); and yet at that time she was eaten up with pride and joy that she could now triumph over her rival; see on Gen. 21:10. And yet Sarah at that time is seen from a righteous perspective, counted as righteous, in that she is a type of us as we enter the Kingdom. God's mercy to Sarah and Abraham is repeated to us daily.

It could also be that what is in view here are spiritual children. The Divine hope was that the lack of spiritual 'children' amongst the exiles, repentant converts to the prophetic message, was going to be replaced by such "children" from among the Gentiles.

For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, says Yahweh-

"The city of your holiness has become desolate / barren, Zion has become as a wilderness, Jerusalem, a curse" (Is. 64:10). Her barrenness was because of a Divine curse. The children of Zion are clearly defined in Gal. 4 as the Christian believers, having Jerusalem as "the mother of us all". The bridegroom of Zion is presented in Revelation as the Lord Jesus, for He marries a new, beautifully adorned Jerusalem. And yet Paul seems to interpret "the desolate", barren woman as Sarah, and the "the children of the married wife" as Jews under the law, being the children of Hagar, born into slavery. But in that case, here Hagar is called "the married wife". Possibly the connection is with Rom. 7:2, "A married woman is subject to the law of her husband so long as he lives". But the idea is that Zion had been an unfaithful wife, a prostitute who was now barren [so Hosea; and Is. 1:21 "the faithful city of Jerusalem has become a harlot"; who could be transformed into "a city of righteousness, the faithful mother-city Zion" (Is. 1:26 LXX). "The married wife" may not be a different woman [Hagar], but a reference to how Zion was when she miserably married, before her divorce with God. What is in view is Sarah when barren, and Sarah who rejoiced at the birth of Isaac. Paul's point in Gal. 4 is that if you want to live as a slave to the law, then you are the child of Hagar the slave; for she "bore children into slavery" (Gal. 4:27). And so the allusion may not be so much to Hagar, but the point may rather be that the two women represent Zion past and present. When she had been married to Yahweh she was barren; but the paradox is that now she

was "desolate" she was going to have children, and she would do so without going through "travail" for them (Gal. 4:27). Gal. 4:27 confirms this interpretation and develops it, connecting unbelieving Israel with the barren woman and the largely Gentile church with the fruitful one.

The idea of God being destroyed in the destruction of His people (see on Jer. 6:26) may be the basis of the descriptions of Zion as being left widowed (Lam. 1:1; Is. 54:1-8). We ask the question- if she was a widow, who died? Her husband, God, was as it were dead. The very idea of the death of God is awful and obnoxious. But this was and is the depth of God's feelings at His peoples' destruction.

We must follow the images carefully. Zion is presented in Is. 49:14 as a forsaken young wife. She is also presented as a young mother who had lost her children, who suddenly gets them back. But Is. 49:15 then applies feminine imagery to God as Zion's mother. God is the eternal mother, the figure that every man, if he is honest, would dearly love to have. Not an old frail lady with dementia, as his last memories of her might be, but the younger woman who, as a child, apparently had all the answers and made all the provisions. Even if man never had a mother or had a bad mother, that is the ideal desire of every man. It is clearly enough why men have a "thing" about women's breasts. And that is God to man. God has set eternity in our hearts, a longing for things which we shall never quite achieve in this life. But that longing is met uniquely in Him. The woman longs for a strong father, a wonderful ever present husband, and children who are always somehow present and not distant, who crown her maturity with teeming happy grandchildren (Is. 49:21-23). She never has those things... her father may or may not have been the strong one, but he grows old and weak. Her husband was not perfect, and is not always strong. Her children are not as she would wish, perhaps she is estranged from one and another is lost to her, under the influence of in-laws or drugs... or not thinking spiritually as she does. But these deep longings are met uniquely in the things of the Father and His Kingdom. Yahweh is revealed as the eternal husband of Zion, the *go'el* who redeems from all life's problems, the father of her wonderful children. Family life, good as it can be when lived in the Lord, never fully meets these longings of both man and woman. And even the best of human relationships are time limited. Only Yahweh of Israel can be eternally all these things to man. The failures and lack of total fulfilment in family life for both men and women are merely to hone and focus upon what we would ideally wish for- and we shall receive it eternally, in our relationship with God and His people in His Kingdom. And in Is. 54, Zion is presented as a once barren woman. Now and for eternity she not only has children but her children are abundant (Is. 54:1), widespreading (Is. 54:22) and prosperous (Is. 54:13).

Isaiah 54:2 Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of your habitations; don't spare: lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes- They would

need more space for all the children- the Gentile converts who would be made seeing that the Jews were unresponsive (:1). This extension of her tents meant enlarging the boundaries of the land (:3). The implication could even be that the further they lengthened their tent cords, the more Gentile converts would come in. "The place" of the tent, the territory where it was pitched, had to be expanded. God's redeemed family was to be extended beyond the limits of the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

Isaiah so often uses the idea of 'stretching out' the Heavens with reference to His creation of His new Kingdom (Isaiah 40:22; Is. 42:5; 44:24; 45:15; 51:13; 65:17,18). Zechariah 1:6 cp. 12:1 show that to stretch out Jerusalem is parallel with stretching out the 'heavens'. The 'singing' of the heavens refers to Judah's intended joy at the restoration (Isaiah 49:13 cp. 48:20). Israel were being told to peg out their tent as wide and far as they could; because this would be the extent of their Kingdom. The Kingdom would be as 'large' for them as they had vision for in this life. The God who stretched out the heavens would have no difficulty in stretching out barren Zion's tent to include new children. But she had to herself move the tent pegs. And how far she moved them limited how many children God would give her. All things are possible to those who believe, God Himself is unlimited.

This expansion of the tent or tabernacle of the once barren Sarah is in order to include the Gentiles. This implies they are within the tabernacle, and this is perhaps why Paul alludes to this passage in Galatians 4- in argument against the Judaizers who were against the inclusion of the Gentiles within the tent of meeting.

Isaiah 54:3 For you shall spread out on the right hand and on the left; and your seed shall possess the nations-

"Spread out" is the word used in Gen. 28:14 of the promised seed spreading forth to all points of the compass. This fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises was to be an outcome of accepting the new covenant. They would have responded to the appeal of Is. 51:1 to look to Abraham and Sarah, to be likewise energized by the Spirit and made fruitful out of the most fruitless, barren position. See on :2. GNB "You will extend your boundaries on all sides; your people will get back the land that the other nations now occupy". The idea is that Israel would possess all the nations within the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and yet expand those borders. The Abrahamic promise was that the seed would possess the gate of their enemies- the nations on the edges of and bordering on the *eretz* (Gen. 22:17; 24:60).

And make the desolate cities to be inhabited- At the restoration the temple still lay "waste" (Hag. 1:4,9) just as it had lain "desolate" [s.w. Jer. 33:10,12] after the Babylonian destruction. The 'restoration' was in fact not really a restoration at all, in God's eyes. Thus Ezra sat down desolate [AV "astonied"] at the news of Judah's

apostasy in marrying the surrounding women; using the very same word as frequently used to describe the 'desolate' Jerusalem that was to be rebuilt (Ezra 9:3 cp. Is. 49:8,19; 54:3; 61:4). He tore his priestly garment (Ezra 9:3), as if he realized that all Ezekiel's prophesies about those priestly garments now couldn't come true (s.w. Ez. 42:14; 44:17,19). Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah's record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfill the Messianic prophecies about them which existed.

Isaiah 54:4 Don't be afraid; for you shall not be ashamed: neither be confounded; for you shall not be disappointed-

Ancient society was shame based. People were humiliated because they had been shamed. But Zion is encouraged: "do not be humiliated, for you will not be ashamed". This fear of shame is still a major issue in human psychology. Those redeemed in Christ are in Him, who refused to feel shame because He was innocent (Is. 50). Insofar as we feel in Him, we too can live without shame in this world. Humbled before Him, but without the fear of possible shame... if people knew my sins, if life doesn't work out, if my poverty is revealed as it is, if my family life goes wrong.

Harmonizing with the second half of the verse, LXX has "Fear not, because thou has been put to shame, neither be confounded, because thou was reproached". The shame of the Babylonian captivity was strong in their reasoning; they feared leaving Babylon lest such shame be repeated. It was to be the makers of idols who were "confounded" (s.w. Is. 41:11; 45:16) and only the true Israel would not be "confounded" (Is. 45:17; 54:4). The sinners in Israel had refused to be confounded or ashamed of their sins (Jer. 3:3 s.w.) and so they would be shamed in condemnation. Repentance involves an imagination of ourselves coming to judgment day and being condemned, and feeling shame for that; that is how we shall not be ashamed. And it is the servant alone who shall not be ashamed / confounded because of His righteousness (Is. 50:7). Our identity with Him removes that shame. If we condemn ourselves, we shall not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The enemies of Israel would perish alongside the apostate within Israel, in the same judgment.

Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. Consider Is. 50:10: "Who is among you that fears the LORD, that obeys the voice [s.w. Ezra 1:1 re the proclamation of Cyrus] of his servant [i.e. Cyrus, Is. 45:1], that walks in darkness, and has no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God". Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed

Isaiah's prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4). Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9).

For you shall forget the shame of your youth; and the reproach of your widowhood you shall remember no more- Their widowhood implied their husband Yahweh had as it were died; see on :1. GNB "You will forget your unfaithfulness as a young wife, and your desperate loneliness as a widow". This death of God was not just a reference to His total identification with the exiles' sufferings and deaths. "God was in Christ" in the Lord's death. Whilst God is not Jesus and neither can God die, He was totally identified with the death of His Son. And that left Israel a widow, as it were.

The "reproach" of widowhood was that if a husband died without having had children by the wife, the woman was shamed for not having had children. The word is used by Rachel when she rejoices at her pregnancy because "God has taken away my reproach" (Gen. 30:23). This shame was to be taken away by suddenly being given other children, just as happened for Job. For Job lost his children but then suddenly got them back in the form of other children, when his captivity was turned by Yahweh. Job's story was clearly written for the exiles. But they didn't want this "reproach" removed, because the word is repeatedly used of how things were for the returned exiles (Neh. 1:3; 4:4; 5:9). Because they didn't want the Gentile children offered to them by God. That reproach could have been taken away (Is. 25:8), if they had accepted the command to identify with the reproach-less Servant and "not fear the reproach of men" (Is. 51:7). The removal of reproach was a feature of the new covenant (Ez. 36:15,30; Joel 2:19). But they refused. This offer to be free from all shame placed on us by society, because of our identification with the Lord, is now made to us. Earlier, God had told Judah that their reproach was indelible: "Because you say this word, The burden of Yahweh, and I have sent to you saying, You shall not say, The burden of Yahweh; therefore, behold, I will utterly forget you, and I will cast you off, and the city that I gave to you and to your fathers, away from My presence: and I will bring an everlasting reproach on you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten" (Jer. 23:38-40). It was of God's grace alone that He was offering a way out of this reproach and shame- and they refused it.

This refusal is remarkable [as is all refusal of the Gospel of God's love]. It was understood that a deity was married to his capital city, and thus Yahweh had been married to Zion / Jerusalem. If a city was destroyed and the inhabitants taken into captivity, it was as if the deity had died. Thus Babylon would become a widow when she fell (Is. 47:9). And thus Zion is described as widowed. But Yahweh is telling the exiles that Zion is free, is redeemed, He their God is gloriously alive, and they can now return to Zion and thus to Him. But they refused. Although they zealously retained the appearance of being His people, in reality they preferred the Babylon life and did not want actual restored *relationship* with Him. Which seems how it is for many 'Christians'

today, who effectively have no active *relationship* with God.

The continued assurances of freedom from shame are in the context of Yahweh as Israel's *go'el* or "redeemer" (:5). The redeemer paid money to get the family member out of debt, took vengeance for his blood- all to save the family from shame. And this work of the "redeemer" to free from shame is applied to God's people generally; and it applies to us too. The verse opens using three separate words for shame, translated here "ashamed… confounded… disappointed". In ancient societies, public disgrace, humiliation and embarrassment were feared more than death- and they still are today. Whether in life on a council estate, or high society. In Christ, we are ultimately freed from all aspects of shame, requiring four different words for it in just this one verse- through being declared righteous / innocent, justified, free from condemnation, in Christ.

Isaiah 54:5 For your Maker is your husband; Yahweh of Armies is His name: and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; the God of the whole earth shall He be called- As explained on :2,3, the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham would convert to Yahweh. LXX "He that delivered thee, He is the God of Israel, and shall be called so by the whole earth". And this could have potentially happened had the exiles returned in faith and repentance. "The Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth" is a phrase used in Zechariah regarding the Angel co-ordinating the restoration.

Israel is so often set up as the bride of God (Is. 54:5; 61:10; 62:4,5; Jer. 2:2; 3:14; Hos. 2:19,20). This is why any infidelity of theirs to God is spoken of as adultery (Mal. 2:11; Lev. 17:7; 20:5,6; Dt. 31:16; Jud. 2:17; 8:27,33; Hos. 9:1). The very language of Israel 'selling themselves to do iniquity' uses the image of prostitution. This is how God feels our even temporary and fleeting acts and thoughts of unfaithfulness. This is why God is jealous for Israel (Ex. 20:15; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15)- because His undivided love for them is so exclusive. He expects them to be totally *His*.

We note how the description of Yahweh as Israel's "redeemer" often goes together with His title as "the holy one of Israel" (here and Is. 41:14; 43:14; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7). His redemption of His worthless people is what sets Him apart, makes Him so "holy". No other god would have done this. There was and is no greater grace. And He is His people's "Holy one" in the sense of being their / our only one. Israel belongs exclusively to her redeemer, and He belongs exclusively to them. Because His redemption of them is so unique; and the price of that redemption is ultimately in the blood of His son, given as a "ransom [payment] for many". In this same verse we likewise have a similar metaphor- Yahweh is the husband of His people, and they are His wife.

Isaiah 54:6 For Yahweh has called you as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, says your God- see on Zech. 11:10,11. God speaks as if He died, and therefore Israel was left as a widow (Is. 54:4,6); see on :1. "Cast off" is the term found later in the prophets: “My God will cast them away” (Hos. 9:17; Is. 54:6); the same Hebrew word occurs when God says He would “reject” Israel (Hos. 4:6). But even when Israel were to be in the land of their enemies as punishment for their sins, “I will not cast them away” [s.w.] (Lev. 26:44). God will not cast away Israel (Is. 41:9). Only if Heaven can be measured will God cast away Israel (Jer. 31:37). God has not cast away His people (Rom. 11:2). We see here the deep tension within God's mind as He considers His status and position toward His unfaithful people. He here compares Himself to a young man hopelessly in love with a woman (Israel) who was really no good, a man who took the blame when it was undoubtedly her fault (Is. 54:6,7), grieving that she wouldn't return to Him (Am. 4:8 etc.). "I am broken with their whorish heart… I am crushed" (Ez. 6:9; Jer. 8:21 NIV). God likens Himself to a broken man because of Israel's fickleness. He went through the pain of the man who knows He has been forgotten by the woman he still desperately remembers (Hos. 2:13). RV “even a wife of youth, when she is cast off”. The Hebrew is difficult. We can read it as an exclamation: "and a wife of youth—can she be rejected?". As if it were unthinkable to permanently reject the wife of your youth. Through Malachi, Yahweh condemned the Jews for doing this to the wives of their youth. He reasons as if the wife of your youth is always your wife. Whatever. And despite all Judah's adultery, He now reasons the same way. For "the shame of your *youth*" (:4) is related to her having been a wife in her *youth*. The shameful things of her youth were done whilst she was married to God.

However, as discussed on :1, we can understand God's words in :6,7 as merely reflecting the claims Zion was making- that her husband had abandoned and forsaken her. God would then be using those terms and running with them, not arguing that they were false accusations, but rather saying that 'Fair enough, so you say, but now there is a glorious and eternal future possible for our marriage'. And that is typical of how He responds to criticism, and it was how His Son dealt with false accusations too. This may also explain how Zion is described as "barren", when barrenness would not be her fault. She had in fact had children, but the idea she had been "barren" was part of her own false narrative. And God runs with that, saying that the barren will bear children, as did Sarah (Is. 51:1,2). Too quickly we write off people who have spun a false narrative and bought into it and repeated it to the point they believe it is true. God instead runs with their narrative, and seeks to show it leads to something far greater and better. And His narrative is to be the final Truth.

Isaiah 54:7 For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you- But even in this small moment [intended to be 70 years], He was watering them

and caring for them. He is involved "*every* moment" in the life of His people; Job, presented as the suffering exiles, came to realize this (Is. 27:3 cp. Job 7:18 s.w.).

The sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was the Lord. He too was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross.

The deathless love of Hosea for Gomer, the very intensity and height of it, in itself highlights the tragedy of God. That His love, yes, the passion and longing of God Himself, was rejected by His people. There are some reasons to think that the book of Hosea was rewritten (under inspiration) during the captivity. Isaiah had explained here that although God and Israel had departed from each other, they would come together again by Israel being regathered- i.e. by their return from Babylon to the land. And perhaps Hosea was rewritten at the same time, as an appeal for the Jews to 'return' to their God, i.e. to return to Judah. And yet, so tragically, whilst they all avowed their allegiance to Yahweh, generously supported the few who did return... the majority of the Jews didn't return to their God. They chose the soft life in Babylon, where they remained. It's why the close of the book of Esther is so sad- the Jews are there in prosperity and popularity in Babylon, no longer weeping by the rivers of Babylon.

And yet we still struggle with the language here. God says He was angry for just "a moment" (:7,8), but will give them eternal love. But 70 years is a human lifetime, and the first generation of exiles died in captivity. His 'forsaking' is compared to His eternal mercies. Likewise His "wrath of a moment" is favorably contrasted with "everlasting loving kindness" (:8). But His wrath had been very real, resulting in the deaths of so many, and the total wreck of their lives. It could seem that God is rationalizing His wrath and the extent of it. For as Job would complain, He doesn't see as man sees, He doesn't have "eyes of flesh" (Job 10:4); for Him, 70 years is a moment, for man it is a lifetime. Moses in Ps. 90 complains likewise. So is this really God out of touch, using inadvertently upsetting language, because He doesn't "get it" as to how His words will be taken by humans? I suggest not. He also speaks of how He has co-suffered in silence throughout the exile "for a long time" (Is. 42:14), as if in labour pains for His people for 70 years. He presents it as a matter of perspective- a long time in one sense, a moment of time in the prospect of the infinity which He had offered Zion. He is intentionally provoking us with this reasoning- and demanding we see things from an eternal, Kingdom perspective. In which perspective, all human sufferings is miniscule and momentary. He is forcing us to engage with Him. As often noted, He had offered Judah restoration only if they repented, and had in any case consigned them to perish amongst the Gentiles. Because of generations of whoredom on their side. Any complaint that 'God is being insensitive to man' drives us to that recognition of the total

unworthiness of man to even be alive. We have no right to life, no human rights. We are sinners. By grace, God was prepared to upend His own words of judgment. And we should be grateful for that.

Isaiah 54:8 In overflowing wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting loving kindness will I have mercy on you-

"In a little wrath" is literally 'In an outbreak of wrath' as if God as the husband desperate to reconcile is now taking false guilt, misrepresenting Himself as a bad tempered man who had sent his wife away in a moment of rage. He presents as wanting to take all the responsibility, to say or do anything in order to get her back. Or we can read this, as discussed above, as God 'going along' with Zion's wrong narrative. And reasoning onwards from where she stood, rather than trying to correct her. We read of the anger of God "for a moment" (Ps. 30:5; Is. 54:7,8), and of His wrath coming and going, leaving Him "calm" and no longer angry (Ez. 16:42). When we sin, we provoke God to anger- i.e. at a point in time, God sees our sin, and becomes angry. This is attested many times in Scripture. But it's meaningless if God is somehow outside of our time and emotions. The very use of the terms 'remembering' and 'forgetting' suggest God is so fully willing to enter into our kind of time; for a Being cannot forget and remember simultaneously, an element of time is involved. Likewise at times we read of God being slow to anger (Ex. 34:6), at others, of Him not restraining His anger, or restraining it (Ps. 78:38; Is. 48:9; Lam. 2:8; Ez. 20:22), and holding His peace (Is. 57:11; Ps. 50:21), and being provoked to anger by the bad behaviour of His covenant people (Dt. 32:21; Ps. 78:58; Is. 65:3; Jer. 8:19). God clearly has emotions of a kind which are not unrelated to the emotions we experience, as beings made in His image. But those emotions involve a time factor in order to be emotions.

The prophets spoke of the amazing grace and eternal love of God for Israel, how His wrath endured but for a moment (Is. 54:8; 57:16); and yet Israel asked: “Will He be angry for ever?” (Jer. 3:5). It was more than frustrating for the prophets; they shared God’s feelings of having poured out so great a love, to see it ignored and disregarded, no time to look at it, too busy sowing my seeds, weeding my garden, having coffee...

Says Yahweh your Redeemer- As Hosea ‘redeemed’ Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel’s *go’el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh’s relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn’t come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: “We are slaves this day in the land you

gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren

Isaiah 54:9 For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be angry with you, nor rebuke you- LXX offers "From the time of the water of Noe this is my purpose". The idea is that out of judgment comes a new creation, where the wrath of God doesn't figure because it has as it were been dealt with through the judgments. What is in view is a time when His judgments shall never again need to be revealed upon His people. This could have happened at the restoration but it evidently didn't, and all this is therefore reapplied to the time of the Lord's return. It applies to His people now in that we are free from condemnation. Because we are "in" the Servant, who can ask "Who is he that shall condemn Me?", and those words are applied to all in Christ in Rom. 8:32,33.

God is changing the metaphors. Initially, it was His people who were to be slain for their sins in exile, and only the repentant minority would survive. Then He moves to the image of His people having sold themselves into debt slavery for a period. But He has now bought them out by a redemption payment. Then He speaks of His having divorced them but having destroyed the bill of divorce, so they are free to return. Now He speaks of His having died, leaving them a widow; and finally of His having briefly thrown them out of the house in a fit of wrath. The movement of the metaphors is all one way, towards a growing desperation to persuade His people to return to Him. He ends up both minimizing their sin and His wrath. In Is. 54:9 He speaks of how His wrath was only "a little" when it had been flaming and intense. He begs them to return to them, saying He will never again even "rebuke" them, He will impute such righteousness to them that He will see them as never needing His criticism. He likens their exile to the flood, and after the flood there had been a new covenant and realisation by God of human weakness. He as it were downgraded His hopes of man. As He had promised never to judge the earth again with water, now He says He will never condemn His people again. If they are "in" His servant, they will be free of condemnation.

Isaiah 54:10 For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but My loving kindness shall not depart from you- The departure of the mountains may refer to the huge geological changes at the time of the flood, but the mountains also figuratively refer to the nations and kingdoms which would be subsumed beneath the mountain of Yahweh's Kingdom- which could have come when the little stone of the exiles were cut out of the mountain of Babylon / Persia and returned to the land. But another, longer

term fulfilment of the image prophecy of Dan. 2 had to come into play. As discussed there, the metals of the image initially represented "kings", and the application to "kingdoms" was brought about by the refusal of the exiles to repent and act as the little stone destroying the image of Babylon.

Neither shall My covenant of peace be removed, says Yahweh who has mercy on you- Every Israelite was intended to be a priest; they were to be "a Kingdom of priests". The "covenant of my peace" was with both Israel (Is. 54:10) and the priesthood (Mal. 2:5). The same is true of spiritual Israel; "a spiritual house, an holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5). But the covenant in view was likely the new covenant of peace with God which the exiles could have accepted (Ez. 20; Jer. 31).

Isaiah 54:11 You afflicted- This is the word usually translated "poor" in the material sense. It was the poor who were to enthuse about the reestablishment of Zion (Is. 14:32; 41:17; 66:2 s.w.). The book of Esther makes clear that there were many wealthy Jews in Babylon / Persia. It was the simple pull of materialism which kept many of them from responding to the Gospel of quitting all that for the sake of the restored Kingdom of God. And it is the same today where "to the poor the Gospel is preached" with most response. Or we can simply read this as God hearing all their false excuses why they couldn't accept His love, and responding and feeling: 'You poor thing'.

Tossed with storms- The usual word for "whirlwind", the symbol of God's judgment which had scattered them in exile. It is also the term used for Jonah's experience in the storm (Jonah 1:11,13); and he is to be read as representative of a disbelieving Israel.

And not comforted- The "comfort" of Is. 40 had been offered to them, but they had refused. But here God as it were feels sorry for them even in their "not comforted" position, which was due to their refusal of His comfort. Such is His grace and His earnest desire to as it were force through, as far as legitimate, His saving purpose with His people.

Behold, I will set your stones in beautiful colours, and lay your foundations with sapphires- The “stones” were laid (Nehemiah 4:2 s.w.), but not with colours, as could have been (Is. 54:11-14). And neither were the foundation stones gemstones, as could have been. This prophecy was therefore reapplied in Revelation to the things of the Kingdom to be established at the Lord’s return. RVmg. "with antimony", a precious eye-powder. God says He will use this as liberally as cement for the setting of the previous stones. This suggests the precious stones were like eyes; and "sapphires" recalls the cherubim Ezekiel had seen hovering in exile (Ez. 1:26). It's as if the cherubim would return to Zion and settle in the new temple. Ezekiel's final visions of the glory returning have this also in view. It never happened as the exiles precluded it. And so it has application to the indwelling of the spiritual Zion by the Spirit.

The precious stones of :11-13 are typical of the wedding gifts given by a husband at a royal wedding. Zion the city is of course effectively God's people. She is adorned by her husband with these gifts, in the most glorious remarriage ever conceivable. For Yahweh had done the same to Israel at their previous wedding at Sinai: "I beautified you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a chain on your neck. I put a jewel on your forehead, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head" (Ez. 16:11,12). Now He does it again to her. He marries her *as if* she is a virgin, when in fact she has been a prostitute whilst married to Him before, and this is a remarriage: "For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons shall marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you" (Is. 62:5). This is the extent to which God can sanctify man from sin and make us a new creation. And yet the wedding jewels are interpreted as her Gentile converts- which the exiles increasingly refused to accept as legitimate: "Lift up your eyes all around, and see: all these gather themselves together, and come to you. As I live, says Yahweh, you shall surely clothe yourself with them all as with an ornament, and dress yourself with them, like a bride" (Is. 49:18).

Isaiah 54:12 I will make your pinnacles of rubies, and your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones- LXX "and thy gates crystal"; GNB "and the wall around you with jewels"; see on :11. This is all alluded to in the description of the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21,22. It could've come true at the time of the exiles, had they repented; but is deferred to the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 54:13 All your children shall be taught of Yahweh; and great shall be the peace of your children- Their children were not taught of Yahweh, because the priests were lazy to do so (Mal. 2). And so Yahweh Himself (who is speaking here) will teach them; hence GNB "I myself will teach your people". Teaching was envisaged as going forth from the restored Zion (Is. 2:2-4). But many of the exiles preferred to remain in exile because they likely excused themselves with the argument that remaining would be better for their children. Seeing the exiles refused this, these words are quoted of us in Jn. 6:45. It is the language of the new covenant, the law being written on our hearts directly by God, of being taught directly by Him through the Spirit, free from any human teacher; of having the ear of the disciple as the Lord had (see in Is. 50:4). This is not to decry human teachers, but they only have legitimacy insofar as they teach God's words led by His Spirit. "Shall be taught" is literally 'shall be disciples'.

Isaiah 54:14 In righteousness you shall be established: you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not be afraid; and from terror, for it shall not come near you- This could be an appeal for the exiles to act rightly and justly so that the Kingdom could come about. Hence LXX "abstain from injustice, and thou shalt not fear; and trembling shall not

come nigh thee". Our eternal establishment in the Kingdom will be "right", not because we personally were righteous but because God judged us in Christ as right, we were eternally justified as right.

Isaiah 54:15 Behold, they may gather together, but not by Me: whoever shall gather together against you shall fall because of you- The idea may be that whoever now attacks Judah, would not be doing so under God's direction as had previously been the case. And they would therefore face His wrath and destruction (:17). LXX "Behold, strangers shall come to thee by me, and shall sojourn with thee, and shall run to thee for refuge".

God had previously threatened to judge His people by gathering their enemies together to destroy them by acting like a smith blowing fire upon them. But we will read that the judgment / condemnation of His people which He had planned- would now no longer come about. He would count them righteous, so this would not happen: "they may gather together, but not by Me… Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgement… their righteousness is of Me, says Yahweh" (Is. 54:15-17).

It is another way of saying that His people would be free from the condemnation from Him which on one hand was just. We will now read of the smiths making weapons with which to destroy Israel, and the allusion is clearly to the threat against the exiles made in Ez. 21:31: “And I will pour out upon you My indignation; with the fire of My wrath I will blow upon you; and I will give you into the hands of fiery men, smiths of destruction”. God likens Himself to a smith, gathering materials and blowing fire upon them in judgment of Judah: "As they *gather* silver, brass, iron, lead and tin into the midst of the furnace to blow the fire onto it to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger and in My wrath, and I will lay you there, and melt you. Yes, I will gather you, and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst" (Ez. 22:20-22). God is now saying that this will not in fact happen. He would not be in this 'gathering'. The weapons He had formed / sharpened against His people would not in fact prosper. We too "are saved from [God's] wrath through Him", the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 54:16 Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy- This leads on to the statement in :17 that the forming of any weapon against Israel is doomed. The creators were themselves created, by God- including those who had been created to destroy God's people in judgment. Both evil and good were from God (Is. 45:5-7). These

who were created by God to destroy contrast with the category noted in :15, who were not sent by God in this mission.

The Jewish commentator Rashi has it about right: ""Behold I am He Who created a smith who devises a weapon, and I am He Who has created a destroyer that destroys it". That is, to say: I am He Who incited the enemy against you; I am He Who has prepared retribution for him". The idea is that God is the creator of the men who form weapons which frighten His people. If He created those men, He is well in control of what they may create.

Isaiah 54:17 No weapon that is formed against you will prevail-

"Formed" can be understood as whetted or sharpened. This will be true in the latter day context of Joel 3:9,10: "Sanctify war [against God's people]! Stir up the mighty men. Let all the warriors draw near. Let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears".

The "weapon" is that of :16. The exiles imagined all manner of opposition if they were to accept the prophetic call to quit Babylon / Persia and return to Judah. But God's promise was that they would leave in peace, be led by His visible presence and have the natural creation bursting into applause on the way (see on Is. 55:12). But they doubted that, focusing upon all the human devices ["weapons"] which they imagined might stand in the way. So many today likewise resist the call of the Gospel of the restored Kingdom of God for the same reasons. The word for "prevail" is used four times in the record of Rebekah's journey from the east (where the exiles were) to the land of promise; it was indeed made prosperous (Gen. 24:21,40,42,56). And their journey to the land of the Kingdom likewise would have been made prosperous, and no opposition to it could have prospered with God on their side. The prophetic word of the restoration was to prosper and achieve their return and revival (Is. 55:11).

And you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgement- We are "in" the Servant who cannot be condemned and condemns every tongue that speaks against Him. And Rom. 8 applies those words to each of us in Christ; "Who shall condemn us?". Those suffering with the pain of others' words need to remember this rather than just playing the tape of those words. See on Is. 51:1,6,7. As explained on Is. 50:8, we need not fear insults nor false accusation from men because we shall ultimately be justified, and even now have righteousness imputed to us. And the exiles were invited to believe that, as they imagined all the verbal opposition they might encounter by returning to Judah.

This is the heritage of the servants of Yahweh, and their righteousness which is of Me, says Yahweh- This again refers to what Paul would term imputed righteousness, counting right those who believe in God's grace. LXX "ye shall be righteous before me".

Israel are the plural "servants" because they have found identity in the singular servant "Israel" who was sent to redeem Israel. From now on in Isaiah we never read of "the servant" singular, but only of the plural "servants"- those in Him. "Says Yahweh" is literally "The utterance of Yahweh", and can be a legal allusion, especially if we render it as a separate sentence. This is as it were His final statement as the judge of all. His people have been declared righteous. With all that eternally implies.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 55

Isaiah 55:1 Come, everyone who thirsts, to the waters! Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price-

It could be argued that this invitation is to the "servants" of Is. 54:17. But we note that :6-9 call upon the exiles to repent of their unGodly thoughts and ways. It is a call to leave Babylon. "Come!" [AV "Ho!"] recalls how the exiles in Zech. 2:10 are bidden flee from Babylon: “Ho! Ho! and flee from the north land”. It is a command; indeed there are at least ten imperatives in :1-3. Come, come, buy, eat, buy, listen, delight, turn… The only requirement is to hunger and thirst for spiritual things, and to take them by faith. But just as Is. 51:1 addresses those who "seek righteousness", here those who are spiritually thirsty and hungry are addressed. Perhaps the Lord perceived the connection between Is. 51:1 and Is. 55:1 when He spoke of the blessedness of those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness". The language is an inversion of the cry of a water seller, to come and buy water. The materialistic, money centered worldview of the exiles is perhaps addressed. Everything costs in this world- but not the most important things of salvation. The exiles refused the invitation, and so it has been offered to us by the great Servant, the Lord Jesus: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened” (Mt. 11:28). And His offer to all men to come to Him and drink surely suggests that He saw these things as reapplied to Himself, seeing Israel had refused God's offer at the time of the exiles (Jn. 7:37-39). Perhaps this verse is the background of His parable of how the places at the feast were declined by the Jews and then the feast was thrown open to all. Jerusalem was always known for its lack of water, and that water had to be bought in Jerusalem. Previously God had judged Zion by taking away her water (Is. 1:30; 3:1; 50:2). The Lord presents Himself as the source of spring water in Zion, freely available to all. The water in earlier Isaiah had been representative of salvation: "With joy will you draw water from the wells of salvation" (Is. 12:3). And the free nature of this water [when water or usage of wells usually had to be paid for] is alluded to in Rev. 21:6; 22:17: "He that is thirsty, let him come. Let him that desires take the water of life freely". The key qualification is to want it, to be thirsty for it- and to have the faith to take. Wanting and taking salvation are the key issues.

LXX "wine and fat", associated with the offerings. No longer would poverty or lack of resources mean that sacrifice could not be offered. One by one, every possible excuse in the minds of the exiles was dealt with. God would provide all and overcome every possible fear and imagined problem in responding to the call of the Kingdom, just as He does today. Cyrus even decreed that he would meet the costs of all sacrifices; he let the people go "without price" (s.w. Is. 45:13), for no personal reward. The same phrase "without money and without price" is found in Job 28:15 regarding the value of wisdom; see on :2. The book of Job is full of connections to Isaiah, as it was rewritten to encourage the exiles in captivity. The greatest wisdom was to leave Babylon / Persia and

return to Judah, with all the inversion of values this required. But this appeal to the exiles wasn't responded to. And so these ideas were reapplied to the Lord Jesus, in His appeal to us: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me" (Jn. 7:37,38).

Is. 55:1-6 bids Israel seek the Lord, and then comments that His word will accomplish what He wants it to achieve; the earth / land will respond to the rain of His word which He sends upon it (:11). This seems to be saying that somehow there will always be response from Israel to the Gospel. And the following verses hint that this may be specifically so in the last days, for :12 says that the result of the land's response to the word will be that "you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing". Their response to the word in the last days ushers in the Kingdom.

The idea of buying without money in Is. 55:1 connects with the entire theme of Yahweh being Israel's "redeemer", their *go'el*, the One who would pay the price of their debt, rather than them having to work as slave labour for a period. They were thus redeemed without money. Clearly the link is to Is. 52:3 "you shall be redeemed without money". God would pay, not them. This is why Is. 55:11 will go on to talk of how God's word shall achieve His intention- and the "word" immediately in view is the word of restoration of the Kingdom and eternal salvation of God's people.

Isaiah 55:2 Why do you spend money for that which is not bread?- Again, the Lord clearly had this in view when He challenges the people not to labour for the bread that perishes, but to accept His offer of eternal life (Jn. 6:27). LXX "Wherefore do ye value at the price of money?". This invites them to a radical revaluation of life and the things which comprise it. The monetization and capitalization of everything was going on even in ancient societies. God's people are asked to a radical revaluation of all things.

And your labour for that which doesn't satisfy?- But they continued to do so; they were as greedy dogs who could 'not be satisfied' (Is. 56:11 s.w.), obsessed with personal gain. Again we detect that it was a love of the soft life of materialism in Persia which was the root cause for the exiles not responding to the invitation, and the book of Esther therefore has a sad ending, portraying the Jews as wealthy and popular.

Listen diligently to Me- I noted on :1 an allusion to the appeal of wisdom in Job 28, and this here is a repeat of wisdom's call in the Proverbs. The way of wisdom was to accept the invitation to the free feast of fat things which Yahweh had prepared in Judah for those who quit Babylon.

And eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness- This refers to the banquet awaiting them on return to Zion, the feast of fat things of Is. 25:6- if they would say "Yes" to the Kingdom program. The Messianic banquet could then have come.

It has now been reapplied, to our experience in the breaking of bread now, and ultimately to the marriage supper of the lamb when the Lord returns.

Isaiah 55:3 Turn your ear, and come to Me- "Come to Me" or 'Go away from your place toward me', can be read in the spirit of :1, where as noted there, the exiles in Babylon are bidden leave and come to God, who in that sense is located in Zion.

The invitation therefore was to the great feast of :1,2- all for free. The parable of the great supper therefore alludes to Is. 55:1-3; and thereby would suggest that we can interpret the call to the supper as the call of the Gospel, and the hungry people sitting down to a fine meal as our ecclesial experience now (although this isn't to say that we can't read it as concerning the future Kingdom too).

Hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David- This everlasting covenant refers to the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31 and Ez. 20, but it would only be given if they 'heard' in obedience and repentance. The promises to David are described as the mercy of God (Is. 55:3; Ps. 89:33,34). God having a son is the sign of His love for us, and this must elicit a response in us. David himself marvelled that such mercy had been shown to him: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house...You know Your servant" (2 Sam. 7:18-20). And yet in the very next chapters, we read of how David made a renewed attempt to show mercy to the house of Saul. Mephibosheth says that he is "thy servant... what is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such... as I am?" (2 Sam. 9:8). Mephibosheth is using the very words which David used to God; David is showing mercy to Mephibosheth in the very way in which the promises of God to him were the "mercies" shown to David. Appreciating that the promises concern us personally, and that they reveal such loving grace from the Father, can only lead to a similar response in showing love and grace through entering into the lives and destinies of others. Having expounded the deeper aspects of the promises to Abraham in Romans 9-11, Paul spins the argument round to practical issues: "I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, by the mercies of God [a technical term for the promises- 'the sure mercies of David', Is. 55:3], that you present your bodies a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1). The "him" of :4 is the "sure mercies of David" of :3, perhaps an intensive plural for the great mercy shown to David, which was in the promise of his Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus.

“The sure mercies of David” result in the wicked man forsaking his way (Is. 55:3,7). The description of the promises to David as “sure mercies” (1 Chron. 17:13) may perhaps be with a reference to his sin with Bathsheba; his forgiveness in that incident is typical of that which we all receive (Rom. 4:6-8). The very existence of the “mercies of / to David” therefore inspire us in forsaking sinful thoughts and wicked ways (Is. 55:7).

The new or "everlasting" covenant offered in Ezekiel was presented as dry bones hearing God's voice and living again. This is surely alluded to here: "hear, and your soul shall live". The exiles (see on :1) are being asked to believe that God has forgiven them their adultery. And so they are here directed to the way God was merciful with David- over the Bathsheba incident. The gracious covenant with David, "I will make with *you*" plural. "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David" (Acts 13:34). He was assured of salvation in the promise of 2 Sam. 7... and this is now being promised to all those who accept that same covenant. This explains why many of David's psalms relevant to that sin have clearly been edited and reapplied to the exiles in Babylon, urging them to believe in God's grace. The covenant with David was everlasting in that God's forgiveness and salvation of David was eternal, it would never be abrogated: "I will keep My grace for him forever. My covenant will stand firm through him" (Ps. 89:28). God "shows grace to His anointed, to David and to his seed, forever" (Ps. 18:50). The covenant with David, as with Abraham, was unconditional. Even sin could not take away the eternal grace: "If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men... but My loving kindness shall not depart from him" (2 Sam. 7:14,15). It just had to be believed. And the exiles preferred to remain with partial obedience to the old covenant, rather than accept this new covenant.

Another option is that "David" here refers to Messiah, ultimately the Lord Jesus, as it does elsewhere (Ez. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Jer. 30:9; Hos. 3:5). The words are quoted in Acts 13:34 of how it was the Lord Jesus who had responded to the call to come and eat and drink, and therefore had been resurrected to life eternal: "As for the fact that He raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken in this way: I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David". Hence :4 continues with Him in view. The everlasting covenant offered is the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Isaiah 55:4 Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples- LXX understands "the peoples" here as "the Gentiles". As noted on :3, the "him" is the "sure mercies of David", an intensive plural for the great mercy shown to David, which was in the promise of his Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus. The eternal covenant offered to the exiles was also going to be offered to the Gentiles, who would form a new multiethnic people of God (:5). We could put the emphasis upon "him". Israel were God's intended witness to the nations of God's grace and power to save (Is. 43:10; 44:8). They failed in that; but the Messiah figure, the servant called "Israel", was to be and do what Israel failed to. By being in Him, we are all that we were intended to be. We read no more of the "servant" after Is. 53; it seems here that the idea is that "David", the Messiah from David's line, was to be that servant figure. The previous possible iterations of the servant, in the people of Israel, Cyrus etc., had all failed.

Isaiah 55:5 Behold, you shall call a nation that you don't know- As explained in :4, a new multiethnic people of God was to be formed around the new covenant being offered to all. The Jews would "call" the Gentiles by the name of their own nation, Israel. They would 'know' them in the Hebraic sense of knowing, i.e. having a spiritual relationship with them.

And a nation that didn't know you shall run to you, because of Yahweh your God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you- Again, the Hebraic sense of 'knowing' includes the idea of having a spiritual relationship with the other party. The remnant of the Gentile nations in the land would see how Yahweh had glorified the returned exiles, and would eagerly ["run to..."] wish to accept this God as theirs. But in reality, the exiles returned to the land and mixed with the Gentiles, worshipping their gods and marrying their women as they had done in the lands of their exile.

If these words are addressed to "David" and this name refers to Messiah (:3), then the "He" who has glorified "You" [God] would be the Lord Jesus, who did so supremely (Jn. 17:5).

Isaiah 55:6 Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call you on Him while He is near-

In the context of the exiles, the allusion is clearly to the prediction that when in exile for their sins, God's people could still seek and find Him: "If from thence you shall seek the Lord your God, you shall find Him, if you seek Him with all your heart" (Dt. 4:29). We could read Jer. 31:18 as the people sceptically asking God to turn them to Himself: "turn me, and I shall be turned".

"While He is near" refers to how salvation was "near" to the exiles: "I bring near My righteousness... My salvation... My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth... My salvation is near to come (Is. 46:13; 51:5; 56:1). Hence we could render with Rabbi Kimchi: "because he may be found: call upon him, because he is near". But there was only a window of opportunity, which would close. And it did close, hence the more angry and judgmental tone of later Isaiah, and the possibilities of salvation and redemption were reapplied to a newly defined Zion, the Christian church. "Call upon him" has been transferred to the Christian era in the invitation to call upon the Lord in baptism (Rom. 10:13).

The offer of the Messianic banquet (:1-3) and new covenant (:3) was not going to be on the table for ever. The exiles had to repent, leave exile and return to the land in order to reestablish and rebuild the things of God's Kingdom. There was no such repentance. And those who did return were motivated by personal gain and were not spiritual

people, as the restoration prophets and the historical records in Ezra and Nehemiah make clear. So the window of opportunity closed, and the things of the new covenant, Messianic banquet and restored Kingdom became reapplied and deferred. The offered salvation was "near" to them, about to come (see on Is. 46:13; 51:5); but it swooped close to them, but they refused to catch it. But the same Hebrew word for "near" is translated “kinsman”. The servant songs explained how Yahweh could become our kinsman through His Son, our representative, of our nature. See on Is. 49:26. The appeal is therefore urgent, because for the exiles, the amazing offer was time limited. It is therefore an appeal for repentance, hence LXX: "Seek ye the Lord, and when ye find him, call upon him; and when he shall draw nigh to you, let the ungodly leave his ways...".

Like Israel we can seek God daily, taking delight in approaching unto Him; and yet need the exhortation to urgently seek Him (Is. 55:6 cp. 58:2 "Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways: as a nation that did righteousness"). We can appear to seek unto Him in prayer and attendance at our meetings, and yet not seek Him in the real sense at all. Likewise men came to Jesus physically, at quite some effort to themselves, and yet He tells them that they have not truly come to Him at all (Jn. 6:24 cp. 35-37). We can draw near with our mouth, honour Him with our lips, “but have removed [our] heart far from me” (Is. 29:13).

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Yahweh- We note that the way of a man is his thoughts. The appeal for repentance was and is essentially a call to change our thinking, our self talk; and to adopt God's thoughts, which at that time were not Judah's thoughts (:8). The return to Yahweh was to be reflected in a return to the land. We might have expected a call to forsake idolatry and other specific sins, but the appeal is to change their thinking. For that is the essential issue. We note the same juxtaposition of ideas in Is. 57:15- the exalted lofty one, dwelling in the hearts of men.

And He will have mercy on him; and to our God- "Mercy" is s.w. "compassion". Unlike the stone faced gods of the Gentiles, Yahweh had emotion and passion, and internal conflicts. And His word reveals them to us. This "compassion" was only to be shown when Israel repented (s.w. Dt. 30:3) and would not be shown if they were impenitent (s.w. Is. 9:17; 27:11; 55:7). But although they had not repented, Yahweh still felt that fatherly "compassion" toward them (Is. 49:15 s.w. "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?"). He is unafraid of appearing to contradict His word, such is the passion of His love.

For He will abundantly pardon- This is the same word as often used in the law; when sacrifice was offered, "it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 4:31,35 etc.). But in exile there was

no opportunity to offer acceptable sacrifice. A forsaking of thoughts was what was required; for our hearts are the essential sacrifice. This "pardon" would have been given had the exiles had accepted the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 33:8).

We note that Is. 65:1,2 alludes closely to Is. 55:6,7: "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I' to a nation that was not called by My name". The exiles had chosen not to seek and find Yahweh; to not call upon Him nor forsake their wrong ways and thoughts: "I have spread out My hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts" (Is. 65:2).

The Hebrew for "abundantly pardon" is better rendered "Multiply to pardon". Every sin has a specific forgiveness- and we sin countless millions of times. The encouragement is to every individual, that God's pardon is as it were multitudinous. All our many sins, of omission and commission, can be eagerly forgiven. His pardon is of an altogether different nature to our experience of forgiveness at the hands of others. Often they have some vested interest in granting the pardon. Or they will pardon once but not if we repeat. Or they will pardon one or two things, but not many things. And they give our sins against them a weighting, some they can forgive others they cannot. At least, not more than once. And their pardon may be time limited. God pardons "abundantly", and multiplies that pardon.

Isaiah 55:8 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says Yahweh-

This is a criticism of the people at that time, not a general musing about man. Like Jer. 17:11, this verse has been wrongly harnessed by the 'total depravity of man', 'alienation by nature' brigade- as if having God's thoughts is somehow impossible. The thoughts and ways of God were to be those of God's people, whose current thoughts and ways had to be forsaken (:7). This is not a general statement that God's ways are unreachable by man. Quite the opposite. But God's thoughts and ways are as high as Heaven is above earth (:9). And so our minds are to be in heavenly places. This is possible through the Spirit: "Things which eye saw not and ear heard not and which did not enter into the heart of man, whatever things God prepared for them that love Him, God revealed them to us through the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:9,10). This is not a statement about the inability of humanity to think as God does. Rather is it a lament that Judah didn't do this, when they could have done (:7). Note the parallel between the wicked's "way" and "his thoughts"; they are unrelated to God's thoughts/ ways (Is. 55:8). Is. 55:7 is therefore saying that after conversion there must most importantly be a change of mind, an aspiring after God's unattainable thoughts / ways.

Isaiah 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts- This is not to say that His thoughts are unattainable. The whole idea of :7,8 is that Judah could have God's thoughts. They are here being inspired to touch the sky, to rise above the mundane, earthly thoughts of the flesh. Is. 55:6,7 implies that we can find God in this life, we can return to Him. But Is. 55:9 then says that "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are (God's) ways higher than your ways" . This seems to be one of the many Isaiah allusions to the book of Job: "Can you by searching find out God?", the answer being 'No'. This shows that although ultimately we *cannot* find God by our searching, such is His moral infinity, yet if we *seek* to find Him, He will count us *as if* we have found Him; and we can think His thoughts (:7). Thus God will *impute* complete forsaking of human thinking to us. Our least response is to impute forsaking of sin to our brethren, and to think as Yahweh does.

It is specifically God's mercy to His people which is described as high as the heavens. It is this which God seeks to persuade Judah of. Their unspirituality, their lack of having God's thoughts, was insofar as they failed to believe His thoughts and ways of saving them could come true for them. Hence the chapter will go on to assure them that God's word of planned restoration of His Kingdom will not return void. He will in the end save man, even if through a somewhat different path of fulfilment than originally intended with the exiles. Their thoughts were not His in that they did not believe in that mercy and therefore didn't reflect it to other men. His thoughts were above their thoughts in that they could not conceive of the vast degree to which He was ready to forgive them. And this is still why people fail to believe this same good news offered in the Gospel. The nature of God's forgiveness and salvation is of a different order to any experience we have had of human salvation and forgiveness, which amounts to little more than a "play on". God's grace is exactly the proof that He is God and not man: "I will not execute the fierceness of My anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man" (Hos. 11:9). "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity... because He delights in grace" (Mic. 7:18). The gracious redeemer of Israel is often presented as "the holy one of Israel", the unique one, unlike any other. His ways and thoughts are summarized in :10 as His word, His word of restoring the Kingdom, of salvation. Here is the evidence that it is God's saving grace and forgiveness which is as high as the heavens: "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His grace toward them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:11). "For Your mercy is great unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds" (Ps. 57:10). "Mercy shall be built up forever, Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens" (Ps. 89:2). God's ways are His thoughts; and His thoughts of grace towards us are more than man can number (Ps. 40:5). "I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jer. 29:11). It was these thoughts that the exiles didn't believe; it was those thoughts which were and are the basis of the new covenant and the Gospel of the Kingdom offered to us today. The exiles

were full of bad thoughts, with no grace toward others, no mercy, no intention of salvation: "Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity... they walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts... I know their works and their thoughts... O Jerusalem, how long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?" (Is. 59:7; 65:2; 66:18; Jer. 4:14). By contrast, the God who dwells in Heaven dwells there with the man of a humble and contrite spirit: "For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a broken and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Is. 57:15). The humble spirit is the one who has God's ways and thoughts in his heart. And he is 'in heavenly places' with God, as Paul would put it.

Isaiah 55:10 For as the rain comes down and the snow from the sky and doesn't return there but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, and gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater-

The rain does return to God in the water cycle, as various Bible verses state. So we need to translate to the effect that it doesn't return "*until it* waters the earth" etc. "Bring forth" is a word typically used of a woman bringing forth a child. We have just read God's promise to make the barren Zion bring forth children (Is. 54:1). This was to be performed by His word, the same word that they saw making the earth and natural creation 'bring forth'. The exiles refused this, and so this promise of seed and bread is applied to Christian believers (2 Cor. 9:10). The failure of the exiles to respond to so many wonderful, generous prophetic words might appear to be the greatest failure of God's words. But the point is, that those words came true still- in that an even greater Gospel of Salvation was offered not just to Israel but to the world. And it has been accepted by a new Israel. Always a phoenix arises from the ashes of apparent failure in the work of evangelism.

This statement about the power of God's word is in the context of urging Judah that they can in fact repent, and think God's thoughts (:7-9). The returned exiles, or [later] all who wished to become part of God's restored Kingdom, would be empowered by the water of the Spirit (see on Is. 44:3) to "spring up" on what had previously been dry ground (Is. 44:4). That Spirit would be articulated partly through the prophetic word (Is. 55:10 s.w. "bud", "spring up"). This will be the restored Eden, where Yahweh had caused the vegetation to "spring up" (s.w. Gen. 2:5). This springing up or growing would be in the fulfilment of the promises to David of the establishment of the Kingdom of his seed (s.w. 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 132:17). But the springing up would be of a community of people, the plural seed who were "in" the singular Messianic seed, who would think God's thoughts (:7). And this is now experienced through baptism into the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:27-29). It is "righteousness" which would "spring up" (s.w. Is. 61:11); the work of the Spirit would result in the seed becoming righteous through their mental, spiritual transformation.

And yet it will also be on account of their status as "in" the "branch of righteousness" which will "spring up" (Jer. 33:15). The work of the Spirit will be, and is, to transform the plural seed in practice into what they are by status in the Messiah- righteous. And it is this power, this gift, this Divine 'causing' us to be righteous, which every spiritual person so thirsts for.

Repeatedly, later Scripture alludes to the fact that it was by the word of God that the world was created; and that same powerful, re-forming, saving word was and is that heard by His people still (Ps. 33:6,9; 104:7; 147:15-18; 148:3-5; Is. 40:26; 44:23; 48:13; 50:2; 55:10). A. Heidel comments: “The word of the Babylonian deities was not almighty. On the contrary, the word of the creator in Gen. 1 is almighty. He commands and the result is in perfect conformity to his command... there is a profound difference between the Bible and non-biblical religions” [on this point of the word being the agency of creation] (Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 126).

Isaiah 55:11 so shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing I sent it to do-

The word of restoration was going to ultimately succeed, as will all sending forth of God's word- even if the exiles refused it, the good news of the restored Kingdom would be accepted by the Christian church, even if much later. Indeed the whole idea of a word going out from God to earth, achieving God's will and then returning to Him... is all the language of John's Gospel about the successful, saving work of the Lord Jesus, the word made flesh (Jn. 7:28,29,33; 8:14,21,22,42; 13:1,3; 16:27-30; 17:8,11,13). He was the servant who would prosper- "the will of Yahweh will prosper/succeed [s.w.] by his [the Servant's] hand" (Is. 53:10). So many of us labour under the impression that our efforts to spread God's word are fruitless. But overall, His word of salvation will succeed. Even if we lose our battles, our side gloriously wins the war, and because we fought, we have the absolute right to glory in the victory. And we will be surprised how our witness of the word does produce effect, even if after our death, and only to be perceived by us in the Kingdom.

In the immediate context of the exiles, the LXX seems to suggest that God's word of judgment on His people would not end until that word had produced the required response, which was repentance: "It shall by no means turn back until all the things which I willed shall have been accomplished; and I will make thy ways prosperous, and will effect my commands". The prospering of the prophetic word of restoration was certain, if they accepted it; see on Is. 54:17. But the context here is of thinking God's

thoughts, even if His thoughts are higher than the earth (:7-9). It was His word of promised restoration which could achieve that; if they believed they would and could be restored to God, then this would affect their thinking.

We put God to endless pain and labour in order to fulfil His wish to save men, if we don't fulfil what in prospect we could fulfil. In the context of the restoration, Yahweh truly said that "...so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (AV). His word will have fulfilment in the end, but it can have its fulfilment in us, here and now. Nehemiah twice stated that Yahweh was prospering him in his work of restoring Zion [Neh. 1:11; 2:20 s.w.]; but generally, the word of prophecy was deferred in its fulfilment. Let's not be satisficers as Israel were, minimalists happy so long as we have our bit of land to live on, our cieled roof to dwell under... and neglect *His* house.

The RV translates the parable of the sower as if the seed sown is the convert: "he that was sown..." (Mt. 13:19 RV). And later on in Mt. 13:38 we are told so again: "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom". Yet the seed was a symbol of the word of God. The parallel between the seed and the convert is such as to suggest that the word of God will produce converts in some sense; it will not return void (Is. 55:11). The apparent dearth of response to some preaching therefore poses a challenging question. Are we preaching the word of God alone, or our own ideas? Does God withhold blessing for some reason unknown to us? Is this parable only part of a wider picture, in which somehow the word *does* return void due to man's rejection? Thus the word of God was 'made void' by the Pharisees (Mk. 7:13 RV- a conscious allusion to Is. 55:11?).... This is perhaps one of the most defiantly unanswerable questions in our experience. As an aside, one possible explanation is that "the word" which is sent forth and prospers, achieving all God's intention, is in fact Messiah. The same word is used about the 'prospering' of the Servant in His work: Is. 48:15; 53:10 cp. Ps. 45:4. Another is to accept the LXX reading of this passage: "...until whatsoever I have willed shall have been accomplished". Here at least is the implication that *something* happens and is achieved when we preach God's word. The same idiom occurs in Ez. 9:11 AVmg., where we read that "the man clothed with linen"- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- "returned the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me". The word 'returned' in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren't.

"Deal wisely" in Is. 52:13 could also be translated "succeed"; and the fourth servant song concludes with the same idea: "Through him Yahweh's purpose will succeed" (Is. 53:10). The implication could be that He will be the successful servant, whereas the other possible iterations of the servant in Israel, Cyrus and Zerubbabel had not succeeded. The same word for "succeed" used in Is. 53:10 is found in Is. 55:11 "so shall

My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper [succeed] in the thing I sent it to do". That word of restoration of the Kingdom would succeed, because the servant would succeed. It was made possible through His sufferings.

Isaiah 55:12 For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing; and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands-

Leaving Babylon with a voice of singing / joy is in view in Is. 55:12: "For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace". But this was a commandment in Is. 48:20, which the exiles generally disobeyed. They returned hardly with joy, but with nervousness and expectation only that there might be some material benefit for themselves.

The immediate possibility was that the exiles would leave Babylon in peace, after "the servant" negotiated their release from there with full blessing and no violence; and the natural creation would as it were burst into applause as they journey to Zion. Thus GNB "You will leave Babylon with joy; you will be led out of the city in peace. The mountains and hills will burst into singing, and the trees will shout for joy".

But this could have had a yet earlier fulfilment in Isaiah's time. As the Jews of Hezekiah's time went out of Jerusalem to a revitalized land and started to receive the tribute of the surrounding nations (the primary application of Isaiah's Kingdom prophecies), so the saints will pour forth from Jerusalem to establish the Kingdom worldwide. "You shall go out (from Jerusalem) with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and hills shall break forth before you into singing..." (Is. 55:12). After the surrounding of Christ in Jerusalem and the defeat of Gog, Ps. 2 describes the establishment of the Kingdom worldwide: "I shall give the heathen for Your inheritance... kiss the son, lest He be angry " (:8,12).

Even as late as the time of Esther, this could have had a fulfilment. For the same word for "gladness" is used of the joy of the exiles when they were saved from Haman's destruction (Esther 9:17). The subtext to the otherwise positive picture of good triumphing over evil at the end of Esther, with a day of feasting and gladness proclaimed, is that their day of feasting and gladness was prophetically intended to be in Zion (Is. 25:6 s.w.). They went into exile exactly because they had days of 'feasting' and didn't respond to the prophetic message (s.w. Is. 5:12). It was in Zion that they were to experience "gladness" (Is. 35:10) when they returned (Is. 51:11). They were to leave the lands of their captivity in "gladness" and thus come to Zion (Is. 55:12 s.w.). But they didn't return. The "day of gladness" was to be accompanied by the blowing of trumpets (s.w. Num. 10:10), summoning them to Zion. But there is no mention of this; because they didn't want to return there, but to remain in prosperous Persia.

Isaiah 55:13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree; and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to Yahweh for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off-

This could literally refer to the transformation of the desert before the exiles as they returned from Babylon to Zion, as discussed on Is. 41:19. This marvellous vegetation springing up as the redeemed passed by would remain throughout the future ages as a monument to God's grace. Ultimately, the eternal sign will be a transformed, immortal people in a transformed, eternal world.

They refused to believe and leave, and so the far grander fulfilment will be in the day when the curse [thorns] will be removed from earth. We can also simply understand these trees and plants as representative of people; the rough and useless thorns would be transformed into the beautiful and useful fir / cypress and myrtle. Which is the work of the Spirit.

The myrtle (= "Esther") was a native of Persia and not Palestine. The idea is that the captives would return from Persia and be planted in the restored kingdom. The curse of thorns and thistles placed upon the *eretz* in Eden would then thereby be removed. But the book of Esther has a sad ending, in spiritual terms; for God's people were prosperous and accepted in Persian society, and preferred to remain there rather than do the work of the Kingdom and allow its restoration.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 56

Isaiah 56:1 Thus says Yahweh, Keep justice, and do righteousness; for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed-

The idea is that those addressed were to keep justice because salvation was near- implying, they could bring about its arrival by living righteously. The implication is that if they didn't, then it wouldn't come. "Salvation near to come" in Is. 56:1 is the same idea as discussed on Is. 46:13; 51:5: "I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not wait; and I will place salvation in Zion... My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth". The idea was that the restoration of God's Kingdom, "salvation", had come near to the Jews in exile- and all they had to do was accept it, leave Babylon and go to Zion in faith and live it. But they refused, and most didn't even leave Babylon at that time. But God's word [of this restored Kingdom] didn't return to Him without having achieved its end- because this amazing good news was and is offered to the whole world, of whatever ethnicity, Jew or Gentile. And so the language is taken up in the New Testament- the Kingdom of God 'came near' again in the first century (Mt. 3:2; 10:7 "the kingdom is at hand"; Lk. 10:9,11; 21:31; James 5:8). The Kingdom coming near doesn't therefore have to mean that it was inevitably about to come. "Near", in the context of the Isaiah passages, meant that the possibility of it coming was indeed "near" at that time. But if it wasn't accepted, then the possibility would recede and be reapplied to others. It came near to the exiles in Babylon, it came near to first century Israel- but both times they rejected it. And so it has come near to us, especially in these last days.

A case can be made that Is. 56-66 forms a so-called 'Third Isaiah'. The tone becomes more critical and harshly judgmental of the Jews for refusing the Gospel of salvation and restoration. The speaker in Is. 56–66 appears to be in Israel, at a time when the Temple is either built or in the process of being rebuilt (Is. 56:5,7; 57:13; 60:13; 63:18; 65:11,25; 66:1–4,20,21). In Isaiah 40–55, the speaker seems to be still in Babylon (Is. 43:14; 44:28; 45:1; 46:1; 47:1,5; 48:14,20).

The salvation of Yahweh's Kingdom could have soon come, *if* Judah had 'kept judgment'. But Malachi and Haggai, along with the record of the injustices of the Jewish nobles in Nehemiah, show the lack of judgment / justice amongst the returnees. Israel should have been just and not abusive of their brethren, precisely because "my salvation is near to come". We are to do righteousness, because God's righteousness is about to be revealed (RV). We seek to live the Kingdom life now, seeing we will so soon, by grace, be living it anyway.

The offer of the Messianic banquet in the preceding chapter (Is. 55:1-3) and new covenant (Is. 55:3) was not going to be on the table for ever. The exiles had to repent, leave exile and return to the land in order to reestablish and rebuild the things of God's

Kingdom. There was no such repentance. And those who did return were motivated by personal gain and were not spiritual people, as the restoration prophets and the historical records in Ezra and Nehemiah make clear. So the window of opportunity closed, and the things of the new covenant, Messianic banquet and restored Kingdom became reapplied and deferred. The offered salvation was "near" to them, about to come (see on Is. 46:13; 51:5); but it swooped close to them, but they refused to catch it. The appeal is therefore urgent, because for the exiles, the amazing offer was time limited.

There is a parallel passage in Is. 50:8: "He is near who justifies me; who will bring charges against me? Let us stand up together: who is my adversary? Let him come near to me". Those who feel the real justification of the Spirit, the real power of imputed righteousness, will not be unsettled by human criticism or "charges" brought. For the nearness of God's justification in Christ is more than sufficient. Is. 56:1 speaks of how Yahweh's righteousness (imputed to us by His justification of us in Christ) is "near to come", and His salvation soon to be revealed. As Paul develops in Rom. 1-8, we are saved by the imputation of righteousness, justification by faith. But that is yet to be revealed, although it could have been "near" even in time for the exiles. They refused these wonderful things, but they are true for us too, as we await the soon revelation of the Lord Jesus at judgment day. Keeping this hope in view means we shall ultimately have nobody and nothing charged against us, there will be no legal adversary in court with us at the last day. And this means that we handle accusation, both justified and false, in that perspective. And yet it is criticism and the shame which arises from it which can psychologically and spiritually destroy people in this life.

The tone in Isaiah appears to change now. The historical interlude in Is. 37-39 has demonstrated that the prophecies in Is. 1-36 of judgment at the hands of Assyria were ameliorated and deferred by the intense repentance and intercession of Isaiah's school of prophets. But the interlude concludes with the bad news that the reformation was not thorough, and that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon; and therefore the earlier prophecies of judgment by Assyria would be reapplied to judgment by Babylon. But out of that there was to come a wonderful restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel, explained in the so called 'second Isaiah' (Is. 40-55). But sadly, the Jews who returned failed to allow that amazing potential to come true; and that is the burden of the so called 'third Isaiah' (Is. 56-66). It seems that God therefore gave up trying to restore the Kingdom in a political, national sense; and looked instead to a purpose with individuals who had His word in their humbled hearts.

Isaiah 56:2 Blessed is the man who does this- As noted on :1, God was now looking to build relationships with just some individuals who were spiritually minded, seeing that

on a national level His wonderful project for the restoration of His Kingdom had been disallowed by them.

And the son of man- The appeal is to individuals within the community, but "the son of man" looks forward to the Lord Jesus, the representative servant Messiah called "Israel", who would alone be completely obedient. Because Is. 64:7 laments that there was apparently not a single one in the community who would 'hold fast' the offered covenant (s.w. "who holds it fast").

Who holds it fast- To "hold fast" means to keep covenant (Is. 56:4,6; 2 Chron. 7:22; Jer. 31:32). The "it" they were to hold fast to was God's righteousness and not their own (Is. 56:1). But they refused to do so because like Job, they held fast (s.w.) to their own righteousness (s.w. Job 27:6). The word means literally, 'to harden / strengthen'. The individual who wanted to accept the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31:32 and Ez. 20 would in turn be strengthened / confirmed by God in that way, just as today (s.w. 2 Chron. 16:9; 19:11). Hezekiah had initially 'strengthened himself' in Yahweh, just as his name means; but didn't remain in that way (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:5,7). Isaiah is asking his audience to continue as Hezekiah could have been. The returning exiles were initially 'strengthened' (s.w. Ezra 1:6; 6:22; Neh. 2:18 etc.) but on a national level, they hadn't continued in this. So individuals are now bidden strengthen themselves, and to be strengthened, in the things of the new covenant.

Who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil- There was a problem with Sabbath abuse during the restoration. And so these potential prophecies of what could have happened at the restoration were precluded from fulfilment. The Sabbath was intended to teach self-control, restraining the hand from doing evil. Perhaps also in view is the assimilation of the exiles with the Persian and Babylonian culture. They refused the good news of restoration because of their comfort within that culture. We don't get the impression the likes of Esther and Mordecai kept the Sabbath- people didn't even know Esther was a Jewess.

Isaiah 56:3 Neither let the foreigner who has joined himself to Yahweh speak, saying, Yahweh will surely separate me from His people-

The foreigner in view may be the foreigners whom God intended to return with the exiles from Babylon to Zion. That scenario didn't really happen. The Jews didn't actually want to leave the foreigners and worshipped their gods. But it becomes true in the glorious reapplication to all who say "Yes" to the good news of the restored Kingdom and the new covenant.

We have here another example of the Bible's huge interest in self talk. For the foreigner and eunuch are being told what not to "say" in their own self talk. The foreigner had indeed "*joined* himself" and so he should not in his self-talk say the opposite- that he

had been *separated* from Yahweh. We too can join ourselves to the Lord but then in our self-talk, completely deny this. The contrast is between 'Don't you *say*' (:3) and "For thus *says* Yahweh" (:4). His word must override the word of our self talk. And if we enquire why the foreigner said to himself "Yahweh will surely separate me from His people", it was because this is what they had heard from the Jews. Their words affected the self talk of the Gentiles. But that was to be displaced by God's words.

There are many other cases where the Bible tells us to speak or not to speak in a certain way in our heart, in our self talk: "Say not, I will recompense evil; but wait on Yahweh" (Prov. 20:22); "Say not, I will do to him as he has done to me" (Prov. 24:29); "Say not, What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" (Ecc. 7:10); "Say not in your heart, Who shall ascend into heaven?" (Rom. 10:6); "Speak not in your heart saying, For my righteousness Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land" (Dt. 9:4); those who speak "with flattering lips and with a double heart" are saying one thing with their lips when their self talk is the opposite (Ps. 12:2). And we have the records of men's self-talk preserved for millennia in the Bible. Thus we learn what Abraham "said in his heart" thousands of years ago (Gen. 17:17), what Abraham's servant 'spoke in his heart' (Gen. 24:45), what Esau said in his heart about his brother (Gen. 27:41); what David said to himself about Saul (1 Sam. 27:1); what Jeroboam said in his heart about the kingdom (1 Kings 12:26); what the wicked say in their heart about God and His judgment (Ps. 10:6,11,13; 14:1; 53:1); Ecclesiastes is the author writing down in words in later life what he realized had been the self talk of his youth (Ecc. 2:1,15; 3:17,18); what the king of Babylon said in his heart about Jerusalem and himself (Is. 14:13; 47:10); what the king of Tyre said to himself about himself (Ez. 28:2).

At the end of the book of Esther, many Gentiles became Jews. And yet they it seems were not fully accepted into the Jewish community. Yet Is. 56 stresses God's special interest in them, and His intention they too should go up from Babylon to Zion along with the Jews- and equally offer acceptable sacrifices in the rebuilt temple. There may be reference to how the returned exiles married Gentiles and then separated from them at the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Perhaps this is saying that this was unnecessary if those foreigners had joined themselves to Yahweh.

Neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree- The context is of Gentiles who had become Jews (:6) and who were keeping the Sabbath and trying to be obedient to the covenant. These Gentiles are called eunuchs. One suggestion is that the Jews were hostile to these proselytes, and during the required circumcision process they actually castrated them. Or falsely extrapolated from the need for circumcision to demand they be castrated if they wanted to be Jews. Another option may be that these eunuchs were Jews who had become loyal to the Babylonian empire and were despised as such. And yet they had repented.

Isaiah 56:4 For thus says Yahweh, To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and hold fast My covenant-

Perhaps the "eunuchs" refer to the Jews who had been made eunuchs in Babylon, who were officials in the Babylonian and Persian empires, like Nehemiah. Is. 39:7 had distinctly prophesied: "they will be eunuchs in the king of Babylon's palace". Perhaps the idea is that they were going to return and find meaning and an eternal name through having returned to Zion and quit the good life and senior positions of Babylon. It's possible that these Jewish eunuchs / officers of Babylon were called "foreigners" by their brethren, who resented how they had been senior political and social figures within Babylon.

We note the stress on "Me", "My Sabbaths... My covenant... My salvation... My righteousness... My desire... My holy mountain... My house... My altar". God was absolutely putting all of Himself into this new covenant. Which we now can take hold of. This is choosing the things that please / delight God; and the same phrase is used three times of how the Jewish exiles did not choose what pleases God, but rather chose the idols which do not please God (Is. 65:12; 66:3,4). Yet they made those choices beneath the umbrella of external devotion to Yahweh. Life is a string of choices, and God looks carefully at those choices.

The classic case of a foreigner who was a eunuch is in the account of the Ethiopian eunuch being baptized into the Lord, after having been rejected [we can deduce] by the Jerusalem authorities and not allowed to enter the temple beyond the court of the Gentiles (Acts 8:27). The scenario in Isaiah 56 thus again 'came near' to fulfilment in the first century. But again, God's people refused it. And now after a gap of 2000 years, it seems we have another chance. Again the day of the Lord draws near- but God's people must accept it. But for all time, the new covenant, membership in God's people, is here thrown open to the rejected and marginalized, summed up in the Gentile and eunuch. Their lives, like those of so many today caught up in postmodern hopelessness, were of futility and abandonment. But God could powerfully transform them. Although Abraham isn't mentioned specifically in Is. 56, we could think that there is an allusion to him- for he was a foreigner in the promised land, and was unable to have children by Sarah. The foreigner lacked land [foreigners couldn't own land in a foreign land] and the eunuch lacked children. The promises of land and seed were the basis of the promises to Abraham; and those promises were the basis of the new covenant which God was now offering to all men. Including the foreigners and eunuchs at the time of the restoration.

The foreigner is often mentioned together with "the poor", as life as an immigrant was economically difficult in the family and kinship based economy of the ancient world. But eunuchs were in this case senior servants of a king or empire. The mention of foreigners and eunuchs thereby presents the picture of the spiritually marginalized,

both rich and poor, who were apparently powerless to come close to God as they wished to. For there was no ritual of purification which could make a Gentile not a Gentile or a eunuch not a eunuch- let alone to empower them to become 'ministers' / priests. These are exactly the types whom God rejoices to bring close to Him.

Seeing the old covenant precluded foreigners and eunuchs from priestly service or entry to the sanctuary, the covenant they "held fast" was not the old covenant. The very passage which excluded foreigners and eunuchs from the people of God (Dt. 23) was read to the exiles in Neh. 13 as the basis for demanding their divorce from foreigners. The returned exiles chose to remain under the old covenant rather than accept the new covenant. What they should've done with their foreign wives was to bring them into the new covenant. In Is. 66:2 we read of God dwelling with those who 'trembled at His word'. The initial application would be to Ezra 9:4 [the only other place we read this phrase] where some amongst the returned exiles trembled at God's word and divorced their Gentile wives. Although actually the better response would have been not to divorce those women, but to lead them into covenant with Israel's God. So these who trembled at God's word responded to the word, but in a less than ideal way. Still God was thrilled with them.

So when we read here in Is. 56 of gentiles and eunuchs holding fast to the covenant, this was the new covenant offered now to just individuals within the community of exiles, who were urged to "hold fast" the righteousness imputed from God which was part of the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31:32 and Ez. 20 (see on :2).

It seems a reasonable assumption that Hezekiah chose to be a eunuch for the Kingdom's sake. There is the implication in Is. 56:3-8 that his example inspired others in Israel to make the same commitment. They are comforted by Isaiah: "Neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold (the same Hebrew word is used *five times* about Hezekiah, 2 Chron. 29:3,34; 31:4; 32:5,7) of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house, and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off". Hezekiah had lamented that he would die without a seed (Is. 38:12; Is. 53), and so did those who had also become (in their minds?) eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom. There was that human desire for a seed, a "house" to perpetuate their name. But they are promised a name in God's house (family) in the Kingdom, better than of sons and daughters in this life. This alludes to Ruth 4:15, where Ruth is described as being better than sons to Naomi. In other words, the Ruth: Naomi relationship, featuring as it did a willingness to deny marriage for the sake of the God of Israel, was a type of our relationship with God. In its restoration context, it has been suggested that this passage was a comfort to Nehemiah, who appears to have been a (physical) eunuch, and hence barred from entry to the temple which he was devoted to. Hence his words: "Who is

there, that *being as I am* would go into the temple…?" (Neh. 6:11). Isaiah is comforting him and those like him that they would eternally live in the temple.

Isaiah 56:5 to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off- The Gentiles who truly joined themselves to Yahweh would be "better than" the ethnic Jews, God's previous "sons and daughters". Or we can read this as saying that their eternal memorial and being before God would be infinitely better than having had children in mortal life.

All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6). The "name" will be eternal; their personality and being will endure literally for ever. Again we see pointed `up the eternal, critical importance of the character / personality we allow to be developed in us in this life. It will literally be "eternal glory" to them. And not the fading glory given by men, engraved on war memorials and tombstones. "Forever in our hearts", "We will remember them" etc. are all time limited. One day soon, those people will be eternally forgotten and nobody will remember them, in the spectrum of infinite time. People like to think that their memory continues in the hearts of their children and descendants. The eunuch had no such hope; but in fact neither does any man, for he too will soon be totally forgotten. But God will remember these eunuchs eternally, their name will be eternal, in God's memory- far greater than any memory of themselves preserved in the hearts of any immediate descendants. The word for "memorial" is used for a memorial monument (1 Sam. 15:12). Absalom built one as he had no children. Eunuchs had nobody to carry on their family name; but that itself is mythical, lasting a few generations at best. But eunuchs for the Lord will have a name that endures eternally. It's as if, through perpetuating their name, God Himself is erecting an eternal monument to remember the sacrifices and devotions made by some obscure "eunuch", someone who was excluded and forgotten by the religious people of God- but eternally glorified by God. Ez. 43:7-9 criticizes the Jews for burying the dead bodies of their kings and making [memorial] "doorposts" to them in the temple, in the belief this would eternally memorialize them. Indeed they are told to remove those bodies. For the eternal memorial is in a character remembered and eternally preserved by God, re-articulated in a bodily form for ever. And the personality of the eunuchs and Gentiles was to be memorialized eternally within the

walls of God's house, as if they were the royalty whose memorials God did not want inside His house. The eunuchs may have felt a 'cutting off' of their manhood; but the name they would be given would never be cut off.

Isaiah 56:6 Also the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh- The same word is used of the foreigners joining the exiles in asking the way to Zion and saying "Let us join ourselves to Yahweh in an everlasting covenant" (Jer. 50:5). That didn't happen at the time of the restoration. So it has been reframed and reapplied to us now. This is the time envisaged in Zechariah when "Many nations shall be joined to Yahweh in that day, and shall be My people; and I shall dwell in the midst of you" (Zech. 2:11). This was the new covenant offered now to just individuals within the community of exiles, who were urged to "hold fast" the righteousness imputed from God which was part of the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31:32 and Ez. 20 (see on :2). But this new covenant wasn't only open to Jews or Israelites; it was also open to the repentant minority of Gentiles which the prophets often foresee. On the basis of this new covenant, a new, multiethnic people of God could be formed; and that is what is happening today. But it could have happened then too, and the story of Jonah is surely to underline the possibility. As noted throughout Is. 13 onwards, the judgments upon the Gentiles in the land are only because they have refused to repent. God's desire was that the Gentile "briers and thorns" upon whom He would march (Is. 27:4) would "take hold" of Him and make peace, entering into covenant with Him as He offered. Is. 27:5 likewise speaks of this latter day 'taking hold' (s.w.) of Yahweh by the remnant of the judged Gentiles.

To minister to Him and to love the name of Yahweh, to be His servants, each one who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it, and holds fast covenant- Ministering and being Yahweh's servants is the language of priesthood. The new covenant offered to the exiles was not a repeat of the Mosaic covenant. Now, Gentiles who took hold of the new covenant could serve on an equal footing. Is. 56:6 defines what is meant by “a house of prayer for all nations”- it was for those of all nations who “join themselves to the Lord, to serve him and to love the name of the Lord… every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and *taketh hold of my covenant*”. “The people of the land” were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God’s intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel’s temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not.

But these things have all been reapplied to we who accept the new covenant today. We have joined ourselves to the Lord (in baptism, in our case) *in order* to be His slaves. We

love our Master, and are committed to Him and His cause 24 hours / day. And the future Kingdom will involve the same; for quite simply "His servants shall serve him" in that age, continually and eternally (Rev. 22:3). We have noted earlier that we now read no more of the singular "servant" after Is. 53, but rather of plural "servants". His suffering would enable the true Israel to become "in" Him, and thus become the servants within the one perfect servant. And the opportunity to become "in" Him was open to the Gentiles. Hence they are His "servants".

The sabbath is emphasized. But the sabbath was the sign of the old covenant relationship between God and His people Israel (Ex. 31:13,17). Yet the Gentiles and eunuchs, which we can take as a summary of all those religiously excluded from Israel, would enter the new covenant, which has no element of Sabbath keeping. Paul, a great preacher of the new covenant, describes the Sabbath as irrelevant to new covenant living, and at best a matter of personal conscience. But the foreigners and eunuchs are characterized by sabbath keeping. I suggest that the idea was that these Gentile proselytes had sought to enter covenant relationship with God under the old covenant, and therefore kept the Sabbath. But in reward, they were given the new covenant. This is why there is no mention of them being circumcised, which was the sign of entry into the old covenant. Or we could see the focus on the sabbath [which we also see in Ezekiel's teaching of the exiles] because the Gentiles kept it from the viewpoint that it looked ahead to the restored Kingdom. As Abraham Heschel called it, "a sanctuary in time". Their keeping of it was to be rewarded in that they would indeed have an eternal part in the restored Kingdom of God on earth; their faith thus expressed would be turned to sight.

We must not fail to recognize how radical was the statement that the "ministers" in the restored city and temple would be Gentiles (Is. 56:6). For "ministering to Yahweh" is the language of the Levites and priesthood. The priesthood was going to be radically changed; clearly enough, a new covenant is in view. We must compare this with the statement that the restored Zion and people of God would be the ministers, whilst Gentiles would be their servants: "Gentiles shall stand and feed your flocks, and foreigners shall be your plough men and your vine dressers. But you shall be named the priests of Yahweh; men will call you the ministers of our God" (Is. 61:5,6). The contrast appears to be between the "Gentiles" and the "you" who will be "the ministers of our God". That "you" is defined in Is. 61:3 as the restored Zion / people of God. But Is. 56:6 says that Gentiles and eunuchs would be the "ministers of our God". We conclude that "Zion" is being redefined to include Gentiles, eunuchs and whoever wants to be "in" the Servant Israel. But "Gentiles" are still mentioned as if it were unbelievers; but believing foreigners / Gentiles are included in the people of God and spoken of differently: "foreigners will not drink your must for which you have laboured… foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines, but you shall be called priests of Yahweh" (Is. 62:8; 61:5,6).

Isaiah 56:7 Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples- See on :6. Their sacrifices, those of the Gentiles, were not just those they offered for themselves, but for others; for they were also to be ministers / servants of the sanctuary (:6). Hence GNB "accept the sacrifices you offer on my altar".

The Sabbath was polluted, as Nehemiah recorded, and the Gentiles were mixed with and affirmed in their idolatry, rather than converted and brought to worship in the temple. And so the revelation of Yahweh's salvation and righteousness in the Kingdom was deferred. The way Jews and Gentiles ate together at Nehemiah's table (Neh. 5:17) pointed forward to what was almost possible. But in the end, they mixed with and adopted the ways of the Gentiles, and their leadership arrogantly developed a theology that said that dirty Gentiles could never be saved; for salvation, they reasoned, was only for Jews. The idea that the temple was to be a place for Gentiles also to worship not only didn't come true; but the very opposite happened. The Jews became intolerant of the Gentiles, nationalistically proud, and rejected the Samaritans from worshipping in the rebuilt Jewish temple. And therefore the Samaritans had to build their own temple on Mount Gerazim. Historical records suggest that the Samaritans dearly wished to worship in the Jews' temple, and only built their own one because the Jews disallowed them. See M. Gaster, *The Samaritans* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1925) p. 28 ff. .

The Ezekiel prophecies of Ez. 40-48 had an intended and possible fulfilment at the time of the restoration under Ezra, but this was nullified by Israel's lack of response; and therefore, at least in principle, the prophecies had their fulfilment delayed until the second coming. This enables the prophecies to fit in with others which speak of some kind of centralized worship system in the future restored Kingdom (e.g. Is. 2:2-4; 56:7). Or it could be that these prophecies of Isaiah are likewise talking about what was potentially possible for a restored, obedient Israel; particularly at the time of the restoration from Babylon. The lesson that comes out of all this is the extent to which God is willing to work with us, to tailor His purpose according to how far we are prepared to work with Him, and in that sense to allow Himself to be limited by us. There could be no greater inspiration to a maximal commitment to His purpose and His work.

Some of the Bible's 'prophecies' are command more than prediction. The Lord Jesus criticized the Jews for trading in the temple because "Is it not written, My house *shall be* called of all nations the house of prayer" (Mk. 11:17). We can easily read this as meaning that one day, a 'house of prayer for all nations' was to be built in Jerusalem. But in that case, why should not the Jews trade in the temple there and then, well before this was to happen, say, 2000 years later? The Lord surely means that the prophecy that the temple "shall be called..." a house of *prayer* was a command more than a prediction. It

“shall be” a place for *prayer* and not *trading*. The ‘fulfilment’ of this statement was dependent upon them praying there and encouraging all nations to pray there; yet they could limit the fulfilment of the ‘prophecy’ by stopping Gentiles praying there, and by discouraging prayer there because of their trading policies. Thus the Lord saw the prophecy as more of a command than mere prediction. ‘Prophecy’ really means the speaking forth of God’s word, rather than the foretelling of the future. The prophecies of Ezekiel about the temple can be understood more as command than as simple prediction. This is how Israel were to behave and how they were to rebuild the temple. The Lord several times quoted an Old Testament passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: “My house shall be called an house of prayer”, leaving His hearers to continue: “…for *all* people”. He recited Ps. 8:2: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise”, leaving them to complete: “…that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger”. For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given. The fact is, the Kingdom of God 'came near' to the Jewish exiles. But they didn't rebuild the temple according to the patterns given, and excluded Gentiles rather than welcoming them to it. By driving the merchants out of the temple (Mk. 11:17), the Lord Jesus cleared the way for this prophecy to come true at His time; for the Kingdom again 'drew near' to possible fulfilment in the first century. As Isaiah's prophecies have laboured, it was God's intention to bring the exiles from Babylon to Zion. But they refused. And so He will bring to Zion the Gentiles and eunuchs, LXX "I will lead them in to my holy mountain"- and they will not only come to Zion, but will serve as priests in His new temple. Ez. 44:9-11 says otherwise: "No foreigner… shall enter into My sanctuary… But the Levites… are to be ministers in My sanctuary". Again we have a case of a prophetic scenario not being obeyed, and so another one is presented, with some nuances on the initial scenario. None of these things immediately happen at the time of the restoration; and so again, it has been reapplied and reinterpreted, in relation to the Gentiles coming into God's spiritual house. Clearly enough, the promise here requires the old covenant to have come to an end, under which "no one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off" can enter the assembly, and "No Ammonite or Moabite [i.e. foreigners] shall be admitted" (Dt. 23:1,3). Clearly God was eager to put a new covenant into operation even at the time of the exiles. This is why the rebuilt temple is called a "house of *prayer*", when earlier it had been a place for sacrifice, "a house of *sacrifice*" (2 Chron. 7:12).

Isaiah 56:8 The Lord Yahweh who gathers the outcasts of Israel says, Yet will I gather others to him, besides his own who are gathered-

Gathering the outcasts is alluding to Dt. 30:4, speaking of Yahweh gathering the "outcasts" of Israel after their repentance: "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth / land [which they were at Babylon], from there Yahweh your God will gather you". But this gathering of the outcasts was to be God's response to Israel's repentance in exile, when they "call to mind among all the nations... and return to Yahweh your God and obey His voice according to all that I command you... with all your heart and with all your soul; then Yahweh your God will turn your captivity and have compassion on you. He will return and gather you from all the peoples where Yahweh your God has scattered you" (Dt. 30:1-3). The promise of Is. 56:8 is that this regathering of God's people will include a gathering of "others"- the Gentiles and eunuchs. But this scenario didn't work out, in that exiles didn't repent, as the rest of Is. 56 bitterly laments. And "yet will I gather others..." was to come true, in a longer term than intended, in the gathering of the Gentiles to Zion. They are gathered "to him", to Israel, in that the Jerusalem / Zion that is above becomes the mother of us all. And "Israel" becomes the servant called "Israel". The Lord surely has these ideas in mind in teaching that He has "other sheep", the Gentiles, whom He must also bring / gather (Jn. 10:16).

This verse is connected with :7 and explains it, according to the LXX. The Gentile "others" are going to be accepted by God on an equal footing with the ethnic Jews, and even become "ministers" in the sanctuary on the same basis as the Levites (:6). They would be "gathered" to the "ensign", the standard pole, in Zion. This now refers to the cross of the Lord Jesus (Is. 11:12; 43:5 s.w.). The exiles "gathered" from the nations were to come to Zion along with the repentant Gentile remnant who were likewise "gathered". This is to become the multiethnic ecclesia- LXX "for I will gather to him [Israel] a congregation / ekklesia". That ecclesia is based around the hope of Israel, for they are gathered "to Israel". They would gather themselves (Is. 60:4) and yet be confirmed in this by being gathered. Likewise all who respond to the call of the new covenant are confirmed by the Spirit in that response. See on Is. 57:13.

Isaiah 56:9 All you animals of the field, come to devour, all you animals in the forest- But despite all the wonderful spiritual potentials outlined in :1-8, the reality was that the people would not respond. Instead of the repentant Gentiles gathering themselves to Zion, they would like wild beasts gather together to yet again devour God's people for their impenitence. The language is so similar to Jer. 12:9, the judgment on Judah's leaders before the exile. And now after the exile, their leaders had learnt nothing from their sufferings and needed the same rebuke: "Go, assemble all the animals of the field, bring them to devour". The idea might be, as hinted at in Zechariah, that God was going to judge the returned exiles with another judgment, captivity and possible return to Babylon (Zech. 5, being taken to the land of Shinar). We can take Is. 56:9 - 57:21 as one

section. The chapter break inserted between Isaiah 56 and 57 is unfortunate. Thus the "way" of "unjust gain" in Is. 56:11 is repeated in Is. 57:17. From Is. 40 onwards, God has offered an amazing grace to the exiles. He has used every argument possible to answer every possible objection to His grace. But the love of God is related to His wrath, and such loving grace cannot be repeatedly rejected without judgment. Now we start to read about this.

Isaiah 56:10 His watchmen are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they can't bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber- The initial reference is to the false prophets at the time of the return from exile, like Tobiah, Sanballat and Noadiah (Neh. 6:12–14). They were blind watchmen and dogs who didn't bark. We naturally enquire what they were supposed to be warning of? What impending catastrophe was in view for the returned exiles? I suggest that God had in mind to punish them for their apostacy, send invaders against them again, and return them to exile [Zech. 5 predicts them being taken back to Shinar / Babylon]. This never happened, but God had it in mind. The watchmen of God's people would not see the gathering of the wild beasts of the nations in judgment against them (:6). The LXX suggests this blindness and lack of knowledge was given to them, as confirmation of how they didn't want to see: "See how they are all blinded: they have not known".

Isaiah 62:6,7 speaks of watchmen [= the prophets, Ez. 3:17; Jer. 6:17; Hab. 2:1] set upon Jerusalem's walls as watchmen, keeping no silence [in their prophesying] until Jerusalem was established. For the link between the prophets and standing on a watchtower, see Hab. 2:1. But false prophets arose, as we see in Ezekiel's experience amongst the exiles. Watchmen upon the walls were supposed to be looking for something- for the approach of the Messianic messenger with good tidings of Judah's full return from captivity, of which Isaiah had spoken in Is. 52:7,8. But most of Judah preferred to stay in Babylon, took up a collection for the few who did return... and no Messiah could appear with that news. God had promised this- but He asked to be put in remembrance of His promises (Is. 43:26), i.e. He asked for those watchmen to be His 'rememberancers', even though He cannot in that sense forget them (Ps. 119:49; Jer. 14:21). In all this we see an exquisite picture of how God works with men, how His promised faithfulness and omnipotence all the same has built into it a requirement for human prayerfulness and response. The reality was that the watchmen / prophets of Israel were blind, ignorant and sleepy.

Isaiah 56:11 Yes, the dogs are greedy, they can never have enough; and these are shepherds who can't understand: they have each turned to their own way, each one to his gain, from every quarter- "Can never have enough" are the same words as the lament in Is. 55:2: "And your labour for that which doesn't satisfy?". They were as greedy dogs

who could 'not be satisfied', obsessed with personal gain, and disregarding the free feast of fat things Yahweh had prepared for them in Judah. Again we detect that it was a love of the soft life of materialism in Persia which was the root cause for the exiles not responding to the invitation, and the book of Esther therefore has a sad ending, portraying the Jews as wealthy and popular. See on Is. 57:17.

The language here of false religious leaders doing anything for "gain" is that used by Ezekiel in describing how things were among the exiles (Ez. 13:19 "You have profaned Me among My people in order to get handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to kill the people who should not die, and to save the people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies"; Ez. 22:25 "There is a conspiracy of her prophets in its midst, like a roaring lion tearing the prey: they have devoured souls; they take treasure and precious things"); and those exiles who returned may well have taken these attitudes with them.

"Their own way" is "the way of their own heart" (Is. 57:17), for the inner heart defines our way in life. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. And the Lord died to redeem all who want it from having gone their "own way" (Is. 53:6). These are those who have refused that great redemption and opportunity for psychological reversal. And in this case, they stayed in their "way" for money, for their own gain; we could render: "turned their own way to their own gain". The attitude of the leaders was that of the people. They mutually influenced each other. And yet the death of the servant could and can save even from that self centered narcissism. "From every quarter" is better "without exception". Hence God's shock that there was not one righteous amongst them.

A spirit of self-indulgence and of slumber, laziness, avarice and selfishness… that in reality was what the Babylon life had become for the Jews, and those who returned to Judah maintained it. They didn't want to quit it. Further, they had covered it with a veneer of spirituality, claiming Yahweh as their God- on a merely cultural level. For they hypocritically continued their quiet idolatry, as alluded to in Is. 57:3-13; 65:1-7. Whilst also being religiously exclusive and xenophobic towards 'Gentiles' and 'eunuchs', those whom they had excluded from their community: "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you" (Is. 65:5). They entered into idol worship, but perhaps subconsciously justified it by refusing to allow Gentiles to participate in *their* Jewish religion. The height of their hypocrisy and ingratitude was in that they who had been released from debt slavery by Divine redemption, forced their own brethren into debt slavery (Is. 58:6,9).

Putting the various pictures together of the weaknesses of the exilic community [found in Is. 56:9–12; 57:3–13,17–21; 58:1–14; 59:1–8; 65:1–7,11,12; 66:3–6,17], it sounds so much like the church of today; and exactly those characteristics are what turn people

off the church. We could argue that the community of exiles was divided into various parts, each of which is addressed for various failures. But my suggestion is that the overall picture is quite credible- of a community that had all these weaknesses ongoing at the same time. Indeed they would quit idolatry- but their other weaknesses remained, and thus they developed into the xenophobic hypocrites they were at the Lord's time. The corrupt state of the priesthood and leadership at the time of the restoration is criticized in Hag. 2:10-14 [" 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me', says Yahweh; 'and so is every work of their hands. That which they offer there is unclean"] and Zech. 7:4-10 "Don't oppress the widow, nor the fatherless, the foreigner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart". These are the very same criticisms of the priests and leaders at the time of the restoration in Is. 56-58. Zechariah 5 [the vision of the stork and the ephah] speaks of the moral filth of the returned exiles in the land, and God's plan to return them to "Shinar" / Babylon. Indeed, Zechariah's visions give a peek behind the scenes into how God from Heaven saw the abominations going on in the land soon after the restoration from Babylon. Here in Isaiah we have more literally spelt out what was happening.

Isaiah 56:12 Come, say they, I will get wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, great beyond measure- This is the way the flesh reasons; that life shall continue as it is today. Living for the moment is the temptation we continually battle with. Faith is all about looking to the future, and beyond the very narrow horizons of the immediate present. Drunken feasts are used as a metaphor of judgment; they were drinking their own condemnation, and what was so tragic was that they could have worked towards the reestablishment of God's Kingdom and their own place in eternity. The context in the next chapter is of their idolatry so we can assume these drunken feasts were part of idol worship rituals; like the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 11, they turned the worship of the true God into a form of idolatry. Again we see that the false prophets / teachers of :10 are condemned not to much for theological error arising from incorrect intellectual process in expounding God's word, but for moral false teaching. This is likewise the nature of false teaching in the New Testament. The same language about being filled with strong drink is used in Is. 5:11 of how the Jews were before the exile. Priest and prophet before the exile are accused of just the same: "They also reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink. They are swallowed up by wine, they stagger with strong drink. They err in vision, they stumble in judgement" (Is. 28:7). The exile had failed to reform them, as God had intended. "And tomorrow shall be as this day..." is the language of hard core alcoholism. And that is just the picture used of Zion in Is. 51, an alcoholic lying drunk and naked in the dust, being abused as she lay there, chewing the dregs of the alcohol to get a little bit more alcohol out of it. God had offered to take her hand and help her arise, be clothed with royal garments, brush the dust off her, and be remarried to Him in

glory. She preferred to wallow in her alcoholism, addicted to the wine of her own condemnation. She did this when God had insisted He had given the exiles His Spirit, He had enlivened their dead bones (Ez. 37); and yet they refused and resisted the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers had done and just as they would in the first century (Acts 7:51): "They shall know that I am Yahweh their God, in that I caused them to go into captivity among the nations, and have gathered them to their own land; and I will leave none of them any more there; neither will I hide My face any more from them; for I have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, says the Lord" (Ez. 39:28,29). The Spirit was poured out upon the dry bones, but they refused to come to life and stand up and return to Zion. They resisted the Holy Spirit. Salvation again 'came near' in the first century and again they refused. But they were resisting that which cannot be resisted; they couldn't resist the spirit by which Stephen spoke (Acts 6:10), yet he says they resisted the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). This is the miserable position of all who refuse to the good news of the Kingdom.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 57

Isaiah 57:1 The righteous perishes, and no man lays it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the coming evil-

"None understanding / considering" connects with Is. 56:11: "these are shepherds who can't understand". The chapter break between Isaiah 56 and 57 is unwarranted. This is all the same section, beginning in Is. 56:10. The idea is that the shepherds of the righteous didn't understand. And yet the righteous were still righteous, despite having bad shepherds. And that is the case within so much of organized, religious Christianity today.

This is probably alluding to what God did to Josiah (2 Kings 22:20 cp. 23:29). The allusion is to Josiah dying in peace without having to witness the Babylonian judgment and exile of Judah. For that is the referent of "the coming evil" in Jer. 22:10; 2 Kings 22:16-20. Perhaps the idea is that nobody much had reflected upon that; and this leads straight on from the criticism of the shepherds in the previous verses. They had not protected the righteous and were not bothered about the death of the faithful. The same word for "righteous" translated 'saints' is found in Ps. 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints". The people were committing the same sins they had before the exile. They had not repented nor been transformed by their experiences; just as so many suffer so much but to no avail. And so the cycle would have to repeat. Or we could conclude that this was happening to the righteous amongst the exiles. They were suffering real persecution even unto death from the false prophets. Jewish tradition claims that Isaiah and Ezekiel died violent deaths at the hands of the Jews, and likely there is some truth in that. We notice the parallel here between "righteous men" and "merciful men". "Mercy" alludes to the covenants which they were faithful to, but they all the same were characterized by "mercy" as the lead characteristic of those who accepted them and were transformed by them internally.

Isaiah 57:2 He enters into peace; they rest in their beds, each one who walks in his uprightness-

The resting of the righteous in their beds could refer to their sleeping in death, at peace and awaiting a certain resurrection to life. For :1 has spoken of their death. The contrast is with the wicked shepherds who are three times mentioned as getting into a "bed" of adultery before the idol shrines (:7,8).

See on Rev. 21:12. RVmg. "each one straight before him". Jer. 31:9 had prophesied of the restoration: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a *straight way*, wherein they shall *not stumble*". Likewise Is. 63:13 reminded the returnees that when they had been led through the wilderness to Canaan under Moses, they did not stumble [s.w.]. Although these righteous individuals died without seeing the restored Kingdom of God (:1), they

entered into peace and would later be resurrected to participate in it. That is the implication I see in these words.

Despite the promise of a "straight way" to Zion, both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to have a Babylonian military escort on the journey back; they weren't sure that they would be given "a straight way" with Yahweh's protection. Neh. 4:10 records that "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is *decayed* [s.w. "stumble", Jer. 31:9], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". They were easily discouraged by the words of the surrounding world, by the apparent hopelessness of their task; and thus they stumbled. Ezra 8:21 LXX describes how Ezra fasted for them to be given a "straight way", as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfill the prophecy. Note how Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim featured "straight" progress; the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to "keep in step with the Spirit"... They were to walk "each one straight before him" (Is. 57:2 RVmg.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). Ps. 107:2,7 RV speak of Israel being gathered out of the nations and being led in a "straight way" to Zion, as they had [potentially] been enabled to do on their departure from Egypt. Yet then they spent 38 years walking a distance coverable in just 11 days- because they did not walk in the "straight way".

Isaiah 57:3 But draw near here- They would draw near to Yahweh in judgment, and likewise Yahweh drew near to the returned exiles in judgment for the very issues which Isaiah 57 raises: "I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be an alert witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the perjurers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and who deprive the foreigner of justice" (Mal. 3:5). But those who did these things are asked to draw near to Him in judgment. We are on our way to judgment, and God is on His way to us. Judgment day is our meeting. Our whole lives are to be lived realizing that we are on our way to judgment: "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him in the street. Lest the adversary deliver you to the judge and the judge deliver you to the officer and you be thrown into prison... For as you are going with your adversary before the magistrate, on the way give diligence to be rid of him. Lest he drag you to the judge and the judge shall deliver you to the officer, and the officer shall throw you into prison" (Mt. 5:25; Lk. 12:58). As "draw near" in Is. 41:1; 45:20; 48:16, in an ongoing present sense, this is the language of a summons to judgment. Judgment is in essence ongoing now, and we shouldn't imagine that God is not paying attention and will only open the books at judgment day. And so those amongst the exiles who were advocating paganism are called to judgment, right then.

You sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the prostitute- They were not in God's eyes the true Israel. The same ideas are used by Ezekiel about the exiles (Ez. 16:3,45). The prostitute and sorceress was Babylon; they had so assimilated with Babylon that they were no longer the sons of Zion but of Babylon. The language of sorcery and being sons of a prostitute is that found of Babylon (Is. 47:9-15). They shared Babylon's judgment- after having been urged to flee Babylon lest they share in it. They had been replaced as God's "servants" by the sons of the Gentiles who were now "in" the servant. To call someone's mother a prostitute or a sorceress was the height of rudeness and provocation in their society. It was an almost unthinkable thing to do. But God does it here, concerning His own people who had effectively rejected His Heavenly Fatherhood. And He is saying their father was an adulterer and their mother a whore, whom their father had used. The idea is similar to that in Ez. 16:3,45 ("your father an Amorite, your mother a Hittite"). Again we see how the criticism of the exiles is now repeated about them after they had returned to the land.

We note that "the prostitute" is also a sorceress, and we will read in :9 that the exiles sent their messengers even to *sheol*, to the underworld, seeking help from the spirits of the dead. And we find just that same parallel between a prostitute and a sorceress who leads men into the occult in Prov. 2:16-18: "The prostitute who has forgotten the covenant of her God; for her house leads down to death, her paths to the spirits of the dead". Their prostitution had a religious connotation to it.

Isaiah 57:4 Against whom do you sport yourselves?- 'To take delight'; and their delight ought to have been in the things of Yahweh rather than their idols and materialism (Is. 55:2; 58:14; 66:11 s.w.).

Against whom do you make a wide mouth, and stick out your tongue?- The language of persecution and mockery (Ps. 35:21). We note the mocking body movements, as in Ps. 35:21: "They opened their mouth wide against me"; "They shoot out the lip", "they gape upon me" (Ps. 22:7,13). Lacking expletives in their language, this kind of behaviour was common. Quite possibly they didn't actually literally make these contemptuous body movements. But they effectively despised the prophetic word that they could be saved and redeemed into God's reestablished Kingdom. Just as they had done before the exile (2 Chron. 36:16). And this therefore how He saw their behaviour, as if they were sticking their tongues out at God's word. Despite all their external appearance of being religiously Israelite.

Aren't you children of disobedience, a seed of falsehood- See on :3.

Isaiah 57:5 You who inflame yourselves among the oaks- The same word in Is. 61:3 of how they should have been trees of righteousness. The continual usage of language

about Yahweh worship in the context of idol worship suggests that they were justifying their idolatry as a form of idol worship. For at no time did God's people ever formally annul their relationship with Yahweh. As they had drunken feasts in the name of Yahweh worship (Is. 56:12), so they inflamed themselves in sexual lust as part of the same rituals.

Under every green tree; who kill the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks?- Offering of children to idols was continuing even amongst the exiles, and Ezekiel appears to allude to it (Ez. 6:13,21). They did it under clefts of the rocks, thinking it would be hidden. When instead they should have been as Moses, cowering there in fear and respect of Yahweh's majesty and glory.

The language here suggests Canaanite religious practices, especially the child sacrifices specifically in valleys (mentioned in 2 Kings 23:10). The references to wadis, clefts of the rock, terebinths etc. sound very much like the geography of Palestine rather than Babylonia. I suggest therefore that these words are addressed to the returned Jewish exiles in the land; who claimed to do works of righteousness for Yahweh (:12) at the same time as idolatry.

Isaiah 57:6 Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion; they, they are your lot; you have even poured a drink offering to them- There is a word play between the Hebrew for "smooth stones" and "portion". The reference may be to some idolatrous practice involving smooth stones. But the word for "smooth stones" also means deceit or flattery, and is used about the idols the exiles worshipped in Ez. 12:24. Yahweh was the portion of His people, but through idolatry done in His Name, He was no longer their portion (Dt. 4:19; Jer. 10:16). Clearly the idea is that they had now returned to the land [s.w. "You shall inherit the land by lot", Num. 33:54] and yet they were worshipping idols in their inheritance. "They are your lot" could also mean that as an adulteress she should be stoned with those stones.

You have offered an offering- This again confirms the impression that they were offering to the idols as a form of Yahweh worship.

But shall I be appeased for these things?- Judgment was going to have to come for them (Jer. 5:9), rather than the restoration of the Kingdom which had been possible. Rashi: "in the face of these shall I relent from doing harm to you?". The question is left rhetorical. Could God be appeased? He could not, only His love for His people could appease Himself.

Isaiah 57:7 On a high and lofty mountain you have set your bed; there also you went up to offer sacrifice- This is surely an allusion to mount Zion. It could be that the returned exiles committed adultery with their idols there, and that idea is confirmed in :8; or that

they used other high mountains as an equivalent of mount Zion. If the temple mount is in view, then we have the tragic picture of the returned exiles committing spiritual adultery in the temple area, rather than enabling the glorious prophecies of a restored Zion to come true. They had set up a giant bed of adultery on mount Zion (:8). To 'go up' to a mountain means to worship. She 'goes up' to this mountain but also 'goes up' to the bed of adultery (:8). We have here the image of the prostitute going up a high mountain- clearly showing that the image of prostitution means 'to worship other gods'. But in :9, she sends messengers to the grave, alluding to her worship of the dead and seeking their help and blessing. She "debased" herself to *sheol* (:9). She traverses as it were between the "high and lofty" place, and the depths of the earth. This is the language of God, dwelling in the high and lofty place- "the high and lofty one that inhabits eternity" (:15) but by grace, a grace as far as heaven is above earth, lives with the humblest of hearts on earth. The Hebrew word for "the humble" in :15 is that translated "debased" in :9. Her gadding about, as it were, between the heights and the depths, contrasts with the totally 'other' life she could enjoy- of fellowship with God Almighty by His grace. Life with Him in joyful humility was a complete inversion of how she was living. What an honour it is to be able to persuade men and women that there is this totally 'other' way. May we devote our lives to trying to get others to accept and live it.

Isaiah 57:8 Behind the doors and the posts you have set up your memorial- It seems that within the rebuilt temple in Zion there was idolatry going on (see on :7). Or the door posts could refer to their own homes, where God's law ought to have been written for a memorial (Dt. 6:9; 11:20); but instead they effectively had there a memorial to their idols, right at the heart of domestic life. The verse goes on to imply sexual sin; the "memorial" may refer to a sign, perhaps a phallic symbol, used by prostitutes or to signpost a brothel. It contrasts with the eternal sign or memorial to the righteous (Is. 55:13; 56:5).

For you have uncovered to someone besides Me, and have gone up; you have enlarged your bed, and made you a covenant with them: you loved their bed wherever you saw it- This is the whoredom with other gods amongst the exiles spoken of in Ez. 16:25; they were doing the very things for which they had gone into exile for (Jer. 2:20; 3:2; Hos. 4:12). Covenant relationship with Yahweh is intimate, an exposing of our nakedness before Him in a way we cannot do to anyone or anything else. They had rejected the new covenant which was offered for a covenant with idols. They had made their bed bigger in order to get more lovers into that bed at the same time. For all their loudly proclaimed religious piety, that is in fact what they were doing at the time of the exile and restoration. And she also went to their beds. The Jewish commentator Rashi renders the difficult Hebrew here: "for while with Me, you uncovered [us] and went up [to their bed]". As if she cast off the bedding, got out of bed with God and went to their bed. "Gone up" would refer to going up not to Zion but to the high places of the idols. Or we could read:

"for away from me thou hast uncovered and ascended and enlarged thy bed". And she not only had them in her bed, but went to their bed, literally "You loved their bed and provided a place for it". This would imply they were constructing idol shrines in the land upon their return to it.

We are naked before God (Heb. 4:13). But relationship with God is here described as exposing your nakedness before God. The figure therefore speaks of our realization of who we actually are- accepting that we are in fact anyway naked before God. The idea of nakedness with God suggests the situation in Eden before Adam sinned, when man walked naked with God without shame. The conclusion surely is that this to some extent is possible now in covenant, marital relationship with God. It leads to the kind of transparency before God which David achieved in the Psalms, telling God precisely how you are and how you feel, despite those feelings not being very spiritual, and despite not being in a good place spiritually.

Isaiah 57:9 You went to the king with oil and increased your perfumes, and sent your ambassadors far off, and debased yourself even to Sheol- "The king" is "Moloch", hence GNB "You put on your perfumes and ointments and go to worship the god Molech. To find gods to worship, you send messengers far and wide, even to the world of the dead". By such sin, they brought themselves down to the grave. Just as they had sent ambassadors to other nations in seeking help against the Babylonians and Assyrians, now they were doing just the same. All this arose because Babylon sent its ambassadors to Judah and they accepted them and later their gods, as noted on Is. 39. But now they were sending their ambassadors to the nations, seeking help and relationships rather than being exclusively for Yahweh.

The connection would be with Ez. 23:16 which speaks of how before and during the exile, the Jews sent messengers to Babylon to get their idols. Now they had returned from Babylon, they were doing just the same. The point is being made time and again that the exile hadn't reformed Judah; they were doing what they had done before it. And here we have another example.

Isaiah 57:10 You were wearied with the length of your way; yet you didn't say, 'It is in vain'. You found a reviving of your strength; therefore you weren't faint- Not only is the logic of choosing God's way so powerful, but the way of the flesh is not satisfying. Sin became a weariness to Israel even before they reaped the punishment for it (Is. 57:10); their mind was alienated from the lovers they chose; they left the one they left the God of Israel for (Ez. 23:17). They always wanted *new* gods; they were never satisfied with their idols (Jer. 44:3). GNB "You think your obscene idols give you strength, and so you never grow weak" reveals the classic situation of the addict. They continued in the

addiction because they apparently were getting some strength to continue in it from the addiction.

"You weren't faint" means surely that they did not feel weak despite God's corrective judgments. This is just how they were before the exile: "You smote them and they did not become sick" (Jer. 5:3). They simply resolved to continue in their ways, both before the exile (Jer. 2:25; 18:12) and now the same after it. Although exhausted by sin, they found a second wave to continue in it. Is. 51 has called them alcoholics and this is the same image.

Isaiah 57:11 Of whom have you been afraid and in fear, that you lie, and have not remembered Me, nor laid it to your heart?- This connects with their fear of the Babylonian leadership, which meant they didn't take seriously the offer of restoration to Judah and the reestablishment of the Kingdom (Is. 51:12). And this resulted in their 'lying', breaking covenant with Yahweh through not having their covenant with Him laid "in your heart".

One thing that works against truthfulness is the neuroses that come from fear, the fearful tensions that arise between our real self and the false self. Fear and truth are opposed. This isn't merely psychotherapeutic babble. The life of brave faith, the life that is lived in the overcoming of fears, the fearless breaking out of our comfort zones... this is the true life, the life in which we have no need to lie nor believe in lies. But of course it's hard, because we think that the truth, the reality, is what we see around us; whereas faith is believing in what is not seen. Yet actually what is *not* seen is the reality, and what *is* seen is very often a lie. And the true life is a life of faith in those things which are not yet visibly seen.

Haven't I held peace even of long time, and you don't fear Me?- God's patience and lack of immediate judgment against sin ought to lead to yet greater awe and respect of Him; but for many, it becomes a reason to think they can continue in sin. The "long time" refers to the years of exile (as stated in Is. 42:14); for He had not been silent at their sins when the Babylonians conquered Judah. And yet :17 LXX speaks of the exile as just a "short time". Time is relative; God had been silent a long time in that He did not further judge their sins. And so now He was offering unconditional forgiveness [if they would accept it], the period of His separation from them was just a short time compared to the eternity He now offered them. GNB "Who are these gods that make you afraid, so that you tell me lies and forget me completely? Have you stopped honoring me because I have kept silent for so long?".

Isaiah 57:12 I will declare your righteousness; and as for your works, they shall not profit you- This is embedded within condemnation of Israel for idolatry. So we are to read this

as irony, with GNB: "You think that what you do is right, but I will expose your conduct, and your idols will not be able to help you". When exactly this happened historically is hard to say; but it will surely come true at the last day. It was idols which would "not profit" (s.w. 1 Sam. 12:21; Jer. 2:8, and about the Egyptians whose idols they accepted, Is. 30:5,6). Their "works" were their idols; and so we have the abiding lesson that any trust in human works is effectively idolatry. Our performance based society makes intensely relevant to us.

Isaiah 57:13 When you cry, let those who you have gathered deliver you; but the wind shall take them, a breath shall carry them all away: but he who takes refuge in Me shall possess the land, and shall inherit My holy mountain- "Those who you have gathered" may refer to their collections of idols. Finally all these things will be fulfilled when the wind of the day of judgment reveals all things for what they are (Mt. 7:26,27). Instead of allowing themselves to be gathered by God, back to the land to Himself (see on Is. 56:8), they instead gathered idols to themselves. This is the essence of idolatry; a trusting in our own works (:12), rather than the faith to let God work in us. The allusion may be to the image vision of Dan. 2. The Jews who associated themselves with Babylon would share her judgment, and be blown away by the wind; whereas the faithful remnant would grow into the mountain which would begin as the holy mount in Zion, and then spread to cover the earth. We note the offer of possession of the land and mount Zion is now made to "*he* who takes refuge in Me", and not "they". This is in line with the refocus of Yahweh upon individuals rather than the collective, national group (see on Is. 56:1,2).

Isaiah 57:14 He will say, Cast up, cast up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of My people- The context has spoken of Israel's idolatry, and so the stumbling-blocks to be cleared refer to their idolatry. This teaches that a level way must be made amongst the Jewish people, i.e. the stumbling blocks and 'valleys' must be removed from their path. "*Cast ye up*, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people" is therefore a command to God's people to undo the generations of false shepherding which Israel have experienced: "They have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not *cast up*" (Jer. 18:15 s.w. "cast... up" in Is. 57:14). Once we have prepared the way in this sense in the last days, then the highway is in place over which the Lord Jesus will return. This is how vital our work is for the Jewish people. Then the essence of the prophecies of the way to Zion in Is. 40 will come about. But for the exiles, their way was blocked by their addiction to idolatry.

All obstacles in the way of their salvation will be removed; only the wicked who persist in their impenitence are excluded from the promised blessing. The language of a highway being made is used in Is. 40:3 to refer to a literal highway for the return of the

exiles through the desert; but now this figure has been reapplied and reinterpreted. It is understood here as meaning a path would be made spiritually for every man who wishes to make the journey from Babylon to Zion; it becomes a figure for the removal of spiritual obstacles to the redemption of God's people, however they are defined. This section began in Is. 56:11 with the lament that "they have each turned to their own way". They "walked in the way of their own heart" but the new way being made was to give them a new way spiritually (Is. 57:17,18). Truly God makes a way where there is no way. And God would lead His people in that way (:18), in response to how they were "backsliding in the way" (:17). He would as it were grab them as they slipped back, and lead them in the way. As promised, "I will heal your backslidings" (Jer. 3:22). Those apparently gripped in addiction to sin can miraculously be turned around.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a broken and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite- The contrast is between the immeasurable highness of God, and how He loves dwelling with those who have been brought down to the lowest point. This is repeated in Ps. 34:18; 138:6. The revival of the dry bones of Judah through the gift of the Spirit is what is in view here. The same word for "revive" is used in Ez. 37:5 "I will cause breath [spirit] to enter into you, and you shall live [s.w. revive]". But the Jewish exiles refused that, and so the new covenant and associated gift of the Spirit have now been given to all who want it. The humbled or depressed spirit initially referred to the exiles- the idea was that there would be revival and lifting up for those humbled and brought down / depressed by their own sins and the judgment of them. These are exactly the types who respond today to the new covenant Gospel.

The dwelling of God "in the high and holy place" clearly alludes to His dwelling in the *shekinah* between the cherubim, over the ark, in the Most Holy place (Ex. 25:22; 26:34). Access to this was only possible for the High Priest for a few moments each year. But God here says that He permanently dwells there "with him also who is of a broken and humble spirit". Just as David felt he lived permanently beneath the wings of the cherubim, so God is here saying that He will dwell permanently with the humble- in contrast to the nervous High Priest entering His presence for a few moments each year. His greatness is shown in the way He dwells with the humble, the broken, the depressed, the lowly. For they have always been the majority of those who are His true people. Indeed "to the poor [in spirit and materially] the Gospel is preached".

This wonderful statement comes within the context of a withering exposure of Judah's sins, beginning at Is. 56:9. Their idolatry, sacrilege on the temple mount, literal and spiritual adultery, abuse of their brethren… all makes a devastating read. Especially when put together with the related criticisms of them in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai,

Zechariah and Malachi. And yet it is in this context that God says He is eager to dwell with the basest of men. If they open their hearts to Him. Those exiles who seemed way too far gone, incurable, could in fact be inhabited by God through His Spirit. And nobody today can therefore ever feel that they are too far gone for God's Spirit to change and indwell.

The idea may be that when and if Yahweh returned to Zion, He would again dwell in the holiest place (LXX), the *shekinah* would again be seen in the Most Holy place; but no less would He dwell in the hearts of the humble, those with broken spirits like David's after his repentance. This is in line with the refocus of Yahweh upon individuals rather than the collective, national group (see on Is. 56:1,2). We note the juxtaposition of ideas- the exalted lofty one, dwelling in the hearts of men. It's the same idea as in Is. 55:7-9; the God whose thoughts are not the thoughts of men can have His thinking experienced and shared by mere men. Yet the temple system of Ez. 40-48 had no "Most Holy place". Perhaps the idea was that seeing they had refused to rebuild the temple as asked, God would instead send His Spirit into the hearts of repentant people to "revive" them. This is exactly what He offered the exiles under the new covenant. See on :16.

Israel had lost their hold on true doctrine, many scarcely knew the Law (Is. 57:4,5; 59:3). They got drunk at the temple feasts (Is. 36:10-12; 58:3,4), like Corinth they had an "eat, drink, for tomorrow we die" mentality (Is. 22:12,13); they committed all manner of sexual perversions, along with almost every other form of doctrinal and moral apostasy (Is. 5:11-13,24; 8:19; 9:15; 22:12,13; 24:5; 27:11; 28:7; 30:10; 31:6; 44:8-20; consider the similarities with Corinth). This list is worth reading through. And consider the terrible implications of their perversion in Is. 66:17. But the early chapters of Isaiah sternly rebuke Israel for their *pride*- there is not a whisper of all these other things until later (Is. 2:11-22; 3:16-20; 5:15; 9:9). And even throughout the later rebukes, there is the repeated criticism of their pride (Is. 13:11; 16:6; 23:9; 24:4; 25:11; 26:5; 28:1,3,14; 29:4; 30:25; 50:33; 57:15). This is why Isaiah's prophecies of Christ stress His humility (Acts 8:33), and the "lofty", "high", "exaltation" of God. These words, common in Isaiah, are those translated “pride" in Isaiah's condemnations of Israel's arrogance; as if to say that *God* was the only one who could be 'proud'.

Isaiah 57:16 For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always angry; for the spirit would faint before Me, and the souls who I have made- GNB "I gave my people life, and I will not continue to accuse them or be angry with them forever". Because God is the creator of His people, He will not be angry with them forever; He created them and therefore intends to live eternally with them, and somehow get over the barrier created by their sin. This continues the allusion to a court case which began in :3. Yahweh will not endlessly contend in court with sinners- otherwise He would end up destroying all His creation, those in whom He had placed His Spirit. He would cut short His quite

legitimate contention and judgment of His people in order to save at least some. Verse 15 has just spoken of God reviving the hearts of the repentant. The LXX suggests that here we have an extension of that thought: "I will not take vengeance on you for ever, neither will I be always angry with you: for my Spirit shall go forth from me, and I have created all breath". The gift of the Spirit was to be given when the judgment of God finished. At the end of the 70 years there could have been a restoration based around the gift of the Spirit to revive the hearts of the repentant (:15). But they weren't interested in repentance nor in true spirituality (see on :17).

The prophets spoke of the amazing grace and eternal love of God for Israel, how His wrath endured but for a moment (Is. 54:8; 57:16); and yet Israel asked: “Will He be angry for ever?” (Jer. 3:5). It was more than frustrating for the prophets; they shared God’s feelings of having poured out so great a love, to see it ignored and disregarded, no time to look at it, too busy sowing my seeds, weeding my garden, having coffee... God is angry with sinners, but He will not be angry for ever because “from me proceeds the spirit, and I have made the breath of life”; His passionate, constant outpouring of energy into His creation means He simply won’t be angry with man for ever. But amongst the Jews there was a revulsion against the idea of God having passion, being angry, and His children sharing those same emotions. It’s the same basic approach as the obsession we have today with ‘nice speak’- don’t be too committed, go so far but no further, don’t appear extreme. Here the spirit of the prophets must be our urgent example- we are to have passion for the positions we adopt. And of course that involves us in being careful, Biblical and prayerful about what positions we adopt. It was the passion with which the Lord Jesus held to His positions that so endeared Him to the Father. Because He so loved righteousness and hated iniquity, the Father so highly exalted Him (Heb. 1:9).

Ps. 103:9 says that the reason "He will not always accuse" or legally "contend" is because we are in covenant relationship with Him, and that relationship is based upon grace. I take this to mean in practice that God doesn't always 'take up' with us the issues of our sins. He deals with some sin by overlooking, by not accusing. Just as we also do in a loving relationship. And when He does judge sin, when He does accuse, that judgment [for us who are in covenant relationship with Him] is not proportionate to our sins (Ps. 103:10). A similar idea is in Is. 57:15,16, which seems to be saying that those with whom God lives, i.e. those in covenant relationship with Him, will not be constantly accused of their sins. Their sins are accepted as being an ever present reality, but God will not 'take up the matter' with them regarding these sins- because He lives with them in covenant: "I also live with people who are humble and repentant, so that I can restore their confidence and hope. I gave my people life, and I will not continue to accuse them or be angry with them forever" (GNB).

It is a repeated theme that the nature of God's anger is that it doesn't last; unlike human anger which can burn for a lifetime in the hearts of people: "Many a time turned He his

anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For [because] He remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passes away and returns not again" (Ps. 78:38,39). Likewise "He will not always chide; neither will He keep His anger forever. Like as a father pities His children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. For [because] He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:6,13,14). The basis of His turning away from anger is not so much human repentance but His pity on His creatures. As argued in Is. 45:18, Yahweh will not undo His own creation. The continuance of His anger would mean the destruction of the souls which He Himself has made.

Isaiah 57:17 For the iniquity of his covetousness was I angry, and struck him-

The LXX gives another take: "On account of sin for a little while I grieved him, and smote him, and turned away my face from him; and he was grieved, and he went on sorrowful in his ways". The "little while" would then connect with God's previous description of the exile as but a "little while"; and yet it had not brought His people to repentance. See on :11. GNB speaks of God abandoning His people, which is how Zion [wrongly] felt in Is. 54: "I was angry with them because of their sin and greed, and so I punished them and abandoned them. But they were stubborn and kept on going their own way".

Note God's special hatred of covetousness, a malaise that is ever stronger in our world, bombarded as we are online by visual images of things we would like to have. No longer might we hanker for a holiday in a resort in our own country; now we are bombarded by images of worldwide destinations. Jer. 6:13 shows this was their problem also before the exile, and they had not been reformed: "For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness". If we enquire why idolatry was so attractive to the Jews, the answer is 'covetousness'. Worship this or that idol, make a sacrifice to this god… and you will get prosperity, good harvests and wealth. Truly does Paul comment that "Covetousness is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). The mentality is identical to that behind the attraction of the prosperity Gospel today; it's a covering of crude human covetousness with a religious veneer. The book of Esther reveals the wealth of the Jewish exiles and also the extent of their assimilation and their idolatry [Mordechai = Marduk etc.]. It is unlikely they suddenly dropped all that on their return to Jerusalem. We would rather expect God to give their idolatry and marital unfaithfulness to Him as reason for His anger. But rather it was their covetousness which is cited here, the petty materialism which so took a grip upon them that they turned to idols in the hope of some petty material blessing. See on Is. 56:11.

I hid Myself and was angry; and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart- I noted on :16 that the Holy Spirit would have been given to the exiles to change their hearts- if they wanted it and if they were brokenhearted like David for their sins. But they didn't want that transformation- and went on backsliding in the way of their heart / spirit rather than accepting God's heart and Spirit. The implication is that God's hiding of His face during

the exile was in fact to elicit their seeking of His face. And yet they refused. And this partially explains the apparent silence of God in our lives; to elicit a more intense search for Him.

Is. 30:20 describes the reestablished Kingdom as a time when Judah's repentant eyes would "see" the God who had taught them through the sufferings of defeat and exile (see note there). Their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him (s.w. Job 3:23; 13:24) just as God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally, the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family / school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me… and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7).

Isaiah 57:18 I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners- The "ways" seen by God were the ways of :17, where His people were "backsliding in the way of his heart", mentally in a downward spiral. But God can heal and lead men who are even in that dire situation. This is the power of His Spirit over the human spirit. Because of God's pity for His creation, seeing their sinful ways, He says He will heal them. Elsewhere He says this healing will be done after their repentance (Hos. 6:1; 14:4; Jer. 3:22). Now He offers to heal them anyway, on the basis of His pity felt for them as He observed their miserable, sinful ways. Likewise Jer. 30:17 speaks of this same healing coming because of how God's Name is being mocked by the Gentiles who see Judah's sinful ways; not because of their repentance: "I will restore health to you, and I will heal you of your wounds, says Yahweh; because they have called you an outcast, saying, It is Zion, whom no man seeks after".

Is. 53:5 has already explained that "by his stripes we are healed". The death of the suffering servant would lead to healing, in that through the Lord's death, the Spirit is given to His people. It was Judah's backsliding that would be healed (Jer. 3:22; Hos. 14:4), the psychological free-fall of man into sin. The work of the Spirit is therefore fundamentally mental and spiritual, meaning that the [humanly] incurable wounds would be healed (Jer. 15:18 s.w.; Lam. 2:13 "who can heal you?"). Having lamented the lack of spiritual transformation in the people, God now looks forward to how ultimately He will give His Spirit to His people (see on :15-17). He will heal and lead by His Spirit, the Comforter which gives comfort. We would perhaps have expected Him to offer this healing and restoration to those who repented. But these is no mention of this; rather does this follow on from God's statement in :17 to the effect that if He endlessly contends with His sinful people He will end up destroying them. So despite having "seen his (sinful) ways", God now proposes to "heal him" and lead him back to Him, even if he is stubborn to follow. He would "create" peace with Him in order to effect this healing (:19).

Isaiah 57:19 I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace, to him who is far off and to him who is near, says Yahweh; and I will heal them- See on :18. The idea may be "Peace to him that is far off (in Babylon), and to him that is near" (in the land). But as explained on :17,18, God appears to be saying that if He endlessly contends with His sinful people He will end up destroying them. So despite having "seen his (sinful) ways", God now proposes to "heal him" and lead him back to Him, even if he is stubborn to follow. He would "create" peace with Him in order to effect this healing (:19). And so He is willing to give peace with Him both to those far from Him, and those who had come near to Him. It was only the stubbornly and insistently "wicked" who would not be calmed / given peace (:20). LXX "peace to them that are far off, and to them that are nigh" is quoted in Acts 2 and Ephesians of God's offer to the Christian church. Seeing the exiles refused this offer. The offer of healing (:18) and then peace (:19) is at the heart of the new covenant in Jer. 33:6 "I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them; and I will reveal to them abundance of peace and truth". That new covenant was rejected by the returned exiles; but has been accepted by all in Christ today.

Isaiah 57:20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea; for it can't rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt- As noted on :15-18, the Spirit was offered to the exiles, and we have read of the peace this would bring if it was accepted (:18,19); and I suggested on :18,19 that God was willing to as it were force through His healing with even those who were "far off" from Him. But if it were stubbornly refused, then there could be no peace in the hearts or experience of the unspiritual. The wicked amongst Israel would be like the sea of the Gentiles, always associated with casting up and endlessly recycling dirt.

Isaiah 57:21 There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked- See on :20. "The wicked" are the Jewish exiles of Is. 48:18 who refused the potential peace with God which was offered if they repented and returned to Judah to reestablish His Kingdom of peace. This conclusion is not so much a threat from an angry God, but rather His lament that despite offering peace with Him through unconditional forgiveness- the wicked chose to refuse it.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 58

Isaiah 58:1 *Cry aloud*- The first 12 verses in this chapter are similar in essence to Is. 1:1-31. This is just one of many connections between the later part of Isaiah (Is. 40-66) and the earlier part (Is. 1-35). The two sections are connected by the historial interlude of Is. 36-39, where Isaiah works with Hezekiah towards repentance, and then has to judge him for his pride and collapse of faith, concluding that his sons shall go into captivity in Babylon. As I explained on Is. 36-39, Hezekiah sinned quite badly and let the baton drop. A Messianic Kingdom could have been established after the defeat of the Assyrian invader outside Jerusalem, but this possibility was ultimately deferred until our last days. But God didn't give up working with Judah. At the time of the restoration, there could again have been a Messianic Kingdom, the temple of Ez. 40-48 could have been rebuilt; but due to short termism and lack of repentance, this didn't happen. Therefore the same appeals are made to the returned exiles as were made to Judah in the days of Isaiah and Hezekiah.

This appeal in :1 is therefore in order that the returned exiles got a grip on their spirituality and relationship with God, so that yet another disaster and invasion could be avoided, and the Kingdom of God re-established in the land. But such invasions came under Antiochus and others, as Daniel 11 outlines. Again the land and people were dominated by their enemies. The appeal to repent so that this would not happen had already been made by Isaiah in his own day, in the context of Hezekiah and the Assyrian invasion. This explains the copious connections between the first half of Isaiah and the second half, the so-called Deutero Isaiah.

Is. 58:1,2 is a criticism of Judah in exile and also of those who did return to the land- they sought God daily, and yet abused their brethren (Is. 58:6), just as recorded in Neh. 5:15. If they had ceased from their sins, "*Then* shall your light break forth as the morning", *if* they had fed the hungry etc, *then* would've been fulfilled the Messianic Kingdom prophecies of the light of Zion rising above the Gentiles etc (Is. 58:10,12 cp. Is. 60:1).

But who is being asked to "cry aloud" or 'proclaim' this call to repentance? The second half of Isaiah begins with this same invitation to 'proclaim' to Judah the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. The same Hebrew word is used so often in Is. 40. John the Baptist, the Elijah prophet, was the one asked to make this proclamation (Is. 40:3 s.w.). And it is the Christian preachers who take over the proclamation (Is. 40:6 = 1 Pet. 1:24). Initially, it was the ministry of the prophets like Haggai and Zecharahiah who made this call for repentance to the exiles (Zech. 1:4,17; 7:7,13, the prophets cried / called out aloud for Judah's repentance but were not answered). But it went largely unheeded: "When I called [s.w. "cry aloud"], none answered" (Is. 50:2; 65:12; 66:4; Hos. 11:2; Zech. 1:4). And the prophets themselves didn't make the call as they ought to have done: "None calls [s.w. "cry aloud"] for justice..." (Is. 59:4). John the Baptist likewise called for

Judah's repentance, as did the early Christian preachers; and we are to make this call to Israel in the last days. And finally it will be heeded; a minority in Israel will respond, albeit due to the tribulation to come upon the land, and then the Messianic Kingdom shall finally come. The One who ultimately makes the "call" or 'crying aloud' is the Lord Jesus, the Messiah (Is. 61:1,2 "... to proclaim / call out / cry loud liberty... to call out the time of Yahweh's acceptance / the acceptable year of the Lord"). But He works through the voice of His people, those who are in Him. This is how in practice He will make this appeal / proclamation / crying out aloud to Israel, both now and in the very last days. The calling out to repent is on the basis of the fact that God has called out / proclaimed His radical acceptance. If we accept it, then sin is no longer any barrier between Him and us.

Don't spare- Literally, don't restrain. It's the same phrase as used in Is. 54:2 about Judah not holding back but lengthening the cords of their tent as far as they can. The idea is that the extent of the fulfilment of God's purpose is in our hands. These prophecies all had potential fulfilments in the time they were given; the preacher to Israel should be aware that according to his or her success, so the extent of the progress of God's program goes forward.

Lift up your voice like a trumpet- As noted above, there are many connections here with the crying out / proclamation of forgiveness and therefore the call to repent, which we find in Is. 40. In Is. 40:9 the same phrase is used, of lifting up the voice to tell Jerusalem that there is good news- her God "shall come", through manifestation in His Son, and re-establish Israel's Kingdom as God's Kingdom. Yet there the voice is lifted up in calling for repentance. The reality of the possibility of being part of His Kingdom is of itself a call to repentance. Anyone who says yes to those "good tidings", the Gospel, will naturally be moved to repentance by doing so. The trumpet being the crying aloud or proclamation sounds like the proclamation of the day of atonement. But the spirit of that day was to be proclaimed to men as an ongoing experience, which is very much in the spirit of the Lord Jesus now that the ritual feasts have been ended. Now the atonement and the subsequent appeal for repentance to accept it is to be proclaimed to all men, all the time.

And declare to My people their disobedience, and to the house of Jacob their sins- The family of the historical Jacob were very weak spiritually, and yet from them came the foundations of God's people. This was and is to be remembered as an encouragement in our witness. These words are quoted in Mic. 3:8; he was one of the prophets called upon to make this proclamation, both in Isaiah's day and yet also, as with Isaiah, his words therefore also have reference to the exiles who had returned and needed to repent.

Isaiah 58:2 *Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways*- The word "yet" is such a

challenge. They were disobedient, sinful and rejected by God. "Yet" they sought God daily, offering the daily sacrifices ('seeking' in Hebrew thought is to worship), and enthusiastic to have His word explained to them. One can attend meetings regularly, love the worship, and genuinely enthuse to intellectually, academically understand the Bible. And "yet" do no righteousness, and actually forsake the spirit of what "God" is all about. This is the problem with religion. If left at mere religion, it can blind us to true spirituality. They 'delighted' to know God's ways and to 'draw near to God', perhaps a reference to prayer or sacrifice. But this same category of persons chose the things which Yahweh did *not* delight in, and also "delighted in their abominations" (Is. 65:12; 66:3,4 s.w.). The abominations there listed were not idol worship; their arrogance and exclusivity was as if they offered pig's flesh to God. Their legally correct sacrifices were therefore seen as no better than that. This dualism in the human nature is encouraged by religion, if our faith is left at mere religion. These verses are one of the greatest challenges to all involved in serving God through organized religion. Prayer, sacrifice, worship, Bible study, attendance at meetings... can all be performed as just one pole of a dualistic, religious mindset. Whilst we get on and "delight" in displeasing God. Once we appreciate the challenge, we will no longer be shocked at the hypocrisy rampant in all forms of organized religion; that a person can do all these things, appearing a stalwart member of a church, and yet at the same time be involved with things which disgust God.

As a nation that did righteousness, and didn't forsake the ordinance of their God, they ask of Me righteous judgements; they delight to draw near to God- The call to repentance of :1 was not heeded exactly because of the veneer of religion which these Jews then had. This is the problem with religion. It shields us from the piercing appeal for repentance and real, live relationship with God. "Did righteousness" is the phrase translated "do justice" in Gen. 18:19, which was to be a feature of the true seed of Abraham. As noted above, Israel went through all the motions of religious worship, but did not "do justice". The historical accounts in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi give many examples of this; and the lack of justice was expressed in terms of how they treated their own brothers. If the Jews had 'done righteousness' at the time of the restoration, then it would have hastened the revelation of God's justice in the re-establishment of His Kingdom on earth at that time (Is. 56:1 s.w.). For it is Messiah who would 'do justice' in His Kingdom (Jer. 23:5; 33:15 s.w.). The commands of Ez. 40-48 about rebuilding a Messianic temple included the command to 'do righteousness' (Ez. 45:9). But the Jews didn't do this, and thereby precluded the possibility of those prophecies coming true at the restoration.

Isaiah 58:3 *'Why have we fasted', they say, 'and You don't see?*- Zech. 7:5 says that the Jews at the time of the restoration fasted, but not to God. And here we see part of a major theme in Biblical teaching about spirituality- that spiritual disciplines can be

performed, but not really, in God's book. We can pray and worship, but without achieving real prayer and worship; we can pay lip service to the idea that God's word is inspired and His real voice to us, and yet let the words glide over us. We can give, but for the sake of appearance and the praise of men. And so they fasted, but not to God. And complained that God apparently didn't recognize it. If they had *really* fasted on "the fasting day", then the whole Babylonian invasion and exile could have been averted (Jer. 36:6,9); they fasted but were not heard (Jer. 14:12). But now the captivity had ended, still they had not learnt that lesson.

Why have we afflicted our soul, and You take no knowledge?'- The day to 'afflict the soul' in fasting was specifically the day of atonement, the only fast required under the Mosaic law (Lev. 23:27 s.w.). They kept the day of atonement legally, but with no recognition of sin; just as we can keep the Lord's supper with no sense of our sins, no flame of passion to respond to His grace witha similar grace. Lev. 23:29 even taught that the soul who would not afflict themselves would be cut off from the people of God. But that is an example of the Law of Moses revealing how God judges the heart; for no priest could ever ascertain whether or not a worshipper was afflicting their soul as required. If we do not repent, and afflict our souls for our sins, then we likewise are signing ourselves out of God's true people. And only we know whether or not we do this. For such affairs of the heart cannot be judged by human eyes.

Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and oppress all your labourers- If they had truly afflicted their souls in repentance and in awe of their receipt of God's forgveness, then they would have reflected that grace to others, which is God's pleasure or will. And that principle is true of us too. We are not to be like the unforgiving servat who demanded what was owed; the AV renders "oppress" as "exact" (Mt. 18:28). Perhaps the Lord had this teaching in mind when constructing His parable. The oppression of their workers was the kind of thing going on at the restoration (Neh. 5). Israel failed to do God's pleasure and instead kept His laws whilst doing their own pleasure or will; and therefore the prophecy of the suffering servant who was to do God's pleasure at the restoration was changed in fulfilment from Israel as a people to Messiah as a person (Is. 53:8). The same word for "pleasure" is used in :13 of how these Jews did *their* pleasure on the Sabbath rather than God's pleasure. We can so easily serve God for our own pleasure, in ways which simply reinforce our natural passions and personality types. The challenge to us is indeed piercing and insistent.

Isaiah 58:4 *Behold, you fast for strife and contention, and to strike with the fist of wickedness: you don't fast this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high*- As noted on :3, the restored Jews fasated for their own pleasure rather than God's. They took pleasure from being more righteous than others, endlessly striving and contending with others as to how fasting should be done, even inventing new fast days (Zech. 7:5;

8:19). All the Law required was fasting on the Day of Atonement. The endless controversies over interpretation and ritual which have characterized the walk of so many Christians may well have been simply for their own "pleasure" and justification of striking other believers with a wicked fist. The Catholic and Orthodox churches argue bitterly about ritual, and the Protestant denominations argue over interpretation of Bible passages. Much of this was nothing to do with personal relationship with God, making your voice heard in His ears in highest heaven; but rather in order to put others down that we might appear the better. For the way the Jews criticized others for not fasating as they considered they ought to was effectivly striking their brother with a wicked fist. The allusion is to how righteous Naboth was struck down with a wicked fist when a fast had been proclaimed (1 Kings 21:9-13).

Isaiah 58:5 *Is such the fast that I have chosen? The day for a man to afflict his soul?*- As noted on :3, the only fast "chosen" or proclaimed by God was that on the Day of Atonement, when every person was to afflict their soul. The Jews kept this feast insincerely, bowing their heads like a bulrush blown in the breeze. All such false humility, using phrases like "Of course, we're all sinners" insincerely, is so abhorrent to God.

Is it to bow down his head as a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to Yahweh?- The repentance and contrition required by the Day of Atonement was internal, rather than an external use of sackcloth. Judah had gone into exile exactly because they had rent their garments and not their hearts (Joel 2:13). And the restored Jews had not learnt that lesson. The Day of Atonement was the "acceptable day", and the acceptable day is now every day for us as Christians (2 Cor. 6:2). We are to live our whole lives, every day, in the spirit of the Day of Atonement; both confessing sin and receiving the pronouncement of forgiveness which fills us with all joy and peace.

Isaiah 58:6 *Isn't this the fast that I have chosen: to release the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?*- See on Is. 42:7. These are the same words as in Is. 52:2: "Release yourself from the bonds of your neck, captive daughter of Zion!". The Jews didn't perceive the soft life of Babylon as chains around their necks, and so they didn't loose themselves and leave. See on Is. 51:14. The same words are used in Is. 58:6 of how the exiles refused to release the bonds they had placed upon their brethren. As Nehemiah comments, this was the height of ingratitude- to have been released from debt slavery by Divine redemption, but to force your brethren into debt slavery. And yet they were themselves in bondage, needing release, if only they would realize their true position. But God was simply so positive about His people- Is. 51:14 appears to be a descriptive statement

about the Jews, but in reality it wasn't true: "The bound down one hastens to be loosed". Sadly, they didn't respond to the exhortation to loose themselves from the bands upon them (Is. 52:2). They preferred to stay in bondage, as so many do today, despite God willing them to seek release as He did with the exiles.

As noted on :3 and :4, the result of keeping the Day of Atonement properly was to release the bonds of others because our bonds of sin and its consequence have been released. Instead, the resotred Jews at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah were bringing their own brothers into bondage to them, taking their lands from them and then making them their slaves. Such releasing of others from their bonds, both to us and others, can happen on any day; the Day of Atonement was to be realized in the daily experience of the believers.

Consider how the Lord brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord". This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10), Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2. Is. 58:6 AV: "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free (cp. Dt. 15:12 re freedom of slaves, s.w.), and that ye break every yoke?" is in the context of an insincerely kept year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's time, after the Sennacherib invasion; andalso at the time of the restoration. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47 and for "preach / proclaim the acceptable year" in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for 'jubilee' means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It's as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off… and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them. And the very fact that *Yahweh* has released others means that we likewise ought to live in a spirit of releasing others from their debts to us: "The creditor shall release that which he hath lent… *because* the Lord's release hath been proclaimed" (Dt. 15:2 RV).

There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every

Israelite “to let the oppressed go free…loose the bonds”, and to “undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke” (Is. 58:6) as Christ did (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah’s first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as ‘in’ him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. “He was oppressed”, as Israel at that time were being “oppressed” by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory.

The passage in :6-13 seems to be a reference to an insincerely kept day of atonement in Ezra or Nehemiah’s time, as well as Hezekiah's. The Jewish nobles were oppressing the poor and thereby keeping the feast with no meaning. If they had properly kept the feast, *then* the promised Kingdom conditions would have burst forth to the world around them. But they were too caught up with their own self-benefit to be bothered to show true care for their brethren. If they had, *then* the glory of Yahweh would have entered the temple, just as Ezekiel 43 had prophesied would happen, if the Kingdom was built as commanded. Notice how Isaiah 60:1-3 speaks of how Zion’s light would certainly come and give light to the world- even though the prophecy was actually conditional on Judah keeping the Sabbath and caring for their poor brethren: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee… And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising”. Nehemiah repaired the breaches, Ezra laid the foundations of the temple…the prophecy of Isaiah 58 was fulfilled on the surface, but not in its Kingdom sense, because they failed to keep the Sabbath etc. Isaiah 58:10 says that *if* they drew out their soul to the hungry, if they allowed themselves to feel the hunger of others, *then* would their light rise and their darkness be as the noonday. And thus the prophecy of Isaiah 60:1,2 that Zion's light is going to dawn was conditional upon the Jews caring for their hungry amongst them- even though in that passage, the condition isn't directly stated. The restoration was therefore only a sham of what was possible.

There are several links between Is. 58 and Neh. 5, where we read of poor Jews who had to mortgage their vineyards and even sell their children in order to pay their debts. The “oppressed” or “broken victim” of Is. 58, to whom we are invited to proclaim deliverance, were therefore in the very first instance those under the throttling grip of poverty, who had become bondslaves because of their debts and now had no hope of freedom, apart from the frank forgiveness of a year of Jubilee. We take a like message to Westerners overburdened with mortgage payments, to those suffering from absolute poverty in the developing world, and to all those with a sense of debt and being trapped within their life situation. We pronounce to them a year of Jubilee, a frank forgiveness, a way of real escape and freedom.

Isaiah 58:7 *Isn't it to distribute your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor who are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you not hide yourself from your own flesh?*- The leaders of Judah in Nehemiah's time were abusing their brethren. Their receipt of grace should have led them be generous to their poor brethren, rather than exploiting them. And that principle is true for us; for the restoration is used in the New Testament as a type of our redemption from the Babylon of sin and this world. And yet too many like to kid themselves that their response to grace is to do the opposite; to cast out their own brethren from their houses and then ignore their need, physically and spiritually.

Isaiah 58:8 *Then your light shall break forth as the morning, and your healing shall spring forth speedily; and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of Yahweh shall be your vanguard*- This is the language of the establishment of the glorious Messianic Kingdom (Is. 60:1,3,19,20). That Kingdom could have been established then, if the returned exiles had lived as they should have done; and so the prophecies have been deferrred in fulfilment until the Lord's return. The light of Zion was Messiah; this figure could have arisen then at the restoration. But he didn't, and the true fulfilment was in the Lord Jesus, who was the light which arose in the darkness (:10; Mt. 4:16; Lk. 1:79). "Healing" translates a word meaning 'restoration'; the Kingdom of God in the form of Israel's Kingdom would have been restored. The same ideas are found in Mal. 4:2, where again the promise is repeated, that the Messianic sun of righteousness could have arisen at the restoration with healing in His beams. But that had to be delayed in fulfilment until our last days. Judah at this time were spiritually weak; "your righteousness" doesn't refer to their own, but to that of Messiah as "the Lord our righteousness". The Messiah figure bearing this title could have appeared at the restoration from Babylon (Jer. 23:6; 33:16; 51:10). It could have come "speedily" had they heeded these prophetic words. But it didn't, and was delayed. Yahweh's glory is parallel with "your righteousness", and this again should be read as a Messianic title. As Paul explains in Romans, it is through faith in Jesus as Messiah and identification with Him that His righteousness becomes ours.

Is. 40 opens with a picture of the triumphant march in glory from Babylon to Zion. This is a great theme in Isaiah, and it speaks of our path from the world to God's Kingdom. Yahweh goes both in front (Is. 52:12) and behind, as the vanguard (Is. 58:8). Just as He is both the one to whom Israel owe their debt, and the one who redeems them from it by paying it off. He is involved in us, including our history of sin, around and above us, all the way through.

Isaiah 58:9 *Then you shall call, and Yahweh will answer; you shall cry and He will say, 'Here I am'. If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the putting forth of the finger,*

and speaking wickedly- The Jews complained that despite their fasting, God was not answering (:3). The answer is that they were abusing their brethren, as recorded in Nehemiah 5. They were not only enslaving their brethren literally, but by placing heavy legalistic burdens upon, putting forth the finger in accusing them of spiritual inferiority (see on :4). This doing down of our brethren is the very opposite of the response to grace and restoration which we have received in Christ. It is called here "speaking wickedly". By treating our brethren like this, we place a barrier between God and ourselves, as John's letters also state; and our prayer experience will reflect that barrier.

Isaiah 58:10 *And if you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul: then your light shall rise in darkness, and your obscurity be as the noonday*- As noted on :8, Zion's light refers to the coming of Messiah. His coming was and is dependent upon the spirituality of the Jews and their repentance. And that shall only come in the last days as a result of a tribulation and holocaust like none other in their history. "Darkness" and "obscurity" are used in Isaiah to refer to Judah's sinfulness and also their judgment for that sin. Despite all that, if they had shown love and justice to the poor, then Messiah's light would have broken in upon that darkness.

Isaiah 58:11 *And Yahweh will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in dry places, and make strong your bones*- The allusion is to how Yahweh "guided" (s.w.) Israel in the desert and satisfied them with food and water (s.w. Ex. 16:8,12 "bread to the full"), strengthening their bones for the wilderness journey. This guidance is typical of our journey after baptism towards God's Kingdom (1 Cor. 10:1-3). But our experience of that guidance will in fact be eternal [the idea behind "continually"]. The kind of Divinely guided life we experience now shall eternally continue. If they satisfied the soul of others in need (:10 s.w.) then their soul would be eternally satisfied. There is an absolutely direct connection between what we do for others now, and what God shall do for us eternally. This is not to say that salvation itself is upon the basis of works- for it is by grace alone. Yet it is also true that how we live now shall be reflected eternally in the nature of our eternal existence. At the time of the restoration, the Jews were not satisfied (Hag. 1:6 s.w.) despite all their efforts to achieve self-satisfaction. And lack of satisfaction was part of the repeated experience of an Israel who put their own pleasure first (Lev. 26:26; Ps. 59:15; Ecc. 1:8; 4:8; 5:10; 6:3; Is. 9:20; Ez. 16:28; Hos. 4:10; Mic. 6:14). Yet the righteous are often described as being satisfied both in this life and in the restored Kingdom; David and the righteous died "full" or satisfied (s.w.) with their days (1 Chron. 23:1). We see evidence of this all around us; those who make their own satisfaction their priority live unsatisfied lives.

And you shall be like a watered garden- This is exactly the language of Jer. 31:12 about the restored Kingdom; it really was possible at the time of the restoration. Eden could have been restored.

And like a spring of water, whose waters don't fail- If they did all these things of :6-13, there would be no drought; but Malachi records how there was drought, because they had not fulfilled these conditions. And so the promises were reapplied and rescheduled. Therefore the Lord promises believers even now this experience of being like an ever bubbling spring, through the experience of the Holy Spirit gift (Jn. 4:14; 7:38,39). It's a case of now but not yet. We can begin to experience now the kind of life we shall eternally have in the Kingdom; in this sense, in the language of John's Gospel, we have eternal life now.

Isaiah 58:12 *Those who shall be of you*- These words are inserted by the translaters. Literally, "Of you..."; the reference could be to an individual, not the nation.

Shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations- This all alludes to Neh. 13:22. The restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah could have been far more glorious. There was an external appearance of rebuilding, but actually the Kingdom of God was not restored in Israel because the people simply didn't want it. This is why some rejoiced but others wept when the temple was dedicated; those who wept did so because they realized that this was not in fact the temple of the restoration prophecies.

And you shall be called The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in- Neh. 6:1 says that there was no breach [s.w.] in the walls. But that was only external. The restoration prophets use this word to describe the breach between God and Israel which was not filled at that time because the potential Messiah figures didn't or couldn't do so (Is. 30:13; Ez. 13:5; 22:30), failing to be the prophet like unto Moses who did stand in that breach (Ps. 106:23 s.w.). Am. 9:11 speaks of the possibility of reviving the tabernacle of David that had fallen, and closing up the breach at the same time as the ruins were revived. But this didn't happen; for this prophecy was to have its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus (Acts 15:16).

Isaiah 58:13 *If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy day of Yahweh honourable; and shall honour it, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words*- Judah abused the Sabbath, as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, wishing to trade with the Gentiles on that day; Am. 8:5 speaks of their longing for the Sabbath to end that they might get on with their trading. The Sabbath was intended to be a time when Israel would hear *God's* words and not speak their own words; to stop talking, and listen. We too can in essence make that same mistake, going through the motions of

religion when our hearts are set upon our next social or business meeting. We should "delight" in God's ways; and if we do, then we shall eternally delight ourselves in them (:14). We can begin to live the Kingdom life now. For throughout our eternity, the ways and things of God shall be our eternal focus. And they ought to be now as far as possible. In this sense, we can live the eternal life now.

Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah's record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfil the Messianic prophecies about them which existed.

Isaiah repeatedly stated that the surrounding nation would come to Zion and share in her joy. Ex. 23:12 had commanded that the Gentile who lived with Israel must keep the Sabbath. *If* the Jews had not done *their* pleasure on the Sabbath, *then* the Messianic Kingdom could have come (Is. 58:13,14). But instead the Gentiles who lived around Jerusalem traded with the Jews on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:16 RSV), they intermarried, and Israel / Zion was *not* a city set on a hill to enlighten the surrounding world; because they preferred to be influenced by the world around them, rather than vice versa.

The Sabbath was a release from the everyday things of life, the need to search for food (in the wilderness years), to work, from doing one's own pleasure and speaking words which relate to one's own earthly desires (Is. 58:13,14). It is therefore fitting that in our present experience of life, these necessary daily things will not obsess us; and if we may be made free from them, we will " use it rather" . Sodom was condemned for this revelling in the legitimate daily activities of life- attending and organizing weddings, eating, drinking... So let's drive away our nervousness at the idea of serious commitment; we are a priesthood, the centre of our lives is the service of God, His tabernacle is what we camp around by night and carry by day.

Isaiah 58:14 *Then you shall delight yourself in Yahweh*- This describes how eternally, in the restored Kingdom of God, we will 'delight outselves' in Yahweh; and yet we can do this now. For the same word is used of how He should be our delight now. Ps. 37:4,11 make the same point- we are to delight in Him now, so that we shall eternally do so. We are to live the Kingdom life now. If the things of God are to be our eternal delight, they should be now. The things of the Kingdom are not to be a mere hobby or occasional interest for a few hours / week, but the delight of our souls in every way, reflected in our attitudes to everything in our lives.

And I will make you to ride on the high places of the earth- To ride on high places could mean to bask in triumph and victory. The earth / *eretz* / land promised to Abraham [the common reference of *eretz*] was not fully under Jewish control when they returned from

the captivity in Babylon. But it could have been. And the "high places" of the land of course recall the places of idolatry. They could have triumphed over all their historical sins and temptations.

And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father- "Jacob" rather than the other patriarchs is repeatedly mentioned in the restoration prophecies because he was clearly the weakest in spiritual terms, and yet from that weakness was led to great heights, had righteousness imputed to him, and was restored to the land of promise by God's grace. He therefore became an appropriate pattern for the returned exiles. The Hebrew translated "feed" also means "to eat"; this word is so commonly used about Jacob 'eating' at various points in his life when covenant relationship was being celebrated and ratified. The list is impressive: Gen. 25:34; 27:19; 28:20; 31:46,54. The idea would be that the covenant with the patriarchs could have come true to that generation, if they followed the path of Jacob. And as Jer. 31 emphasizes, the promises to the patriarchs were in fact the new covenant which we too share in.

For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it- It was spoke just as that same mouth had stated that within 40 days, Nineveh would be destroyed. But God can change and adjust His stated purpose in accordance with human repentance and response, or lack thereof.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 59

Isaiah 59:1 Behold, Yahweh's hand is not shortened that it can't save; neither His ear heavy, that it can't hear-

The first eight verses are Yahweh's legal indictment of the exiles. In :9-14 we appear to have their confession; but as in Hosea, it could be that these are the words God would like them to say, recognizing especially that their failure was above all in their hearts. His answer to such a confession is then in :15-21, a prophecy of the work of the Lord Jesus and the eternal consequences of the gift of the Spirit.

These words cut to the deep subconscious belief in their hearts, that God was too weak to save them. Even though the people probably didn't verbalize this belief in these actual words. To deny we will be saved is to say that God is unable to save. Yet Is. 58:2,3 says they fasted, bowing their heads like bulrushes, and prayed to God, apparently seeking Him, approaching Him and asking Him for His commands. LXX "they trust in vanities [idols], and speak empty words" (:4). But here we learn that they prayed without real faith that God heard them. Hollowness in prayer, words lacking meaning and a lack of any sense that our words are heard in Heaven… are the enemies of every spiritual man. They didn't believe He could save them, and yet God's response in :16 is that "His own arm brought salvation to Him". The salvation, the saving, was achieved. But the

exiles didn't believe it or didn't want the psychological upheaval which it takes to believe this and claim it for oneself.

The context is that although *their* ears were "heavy", God's ears were not heavy to them, if they would pray in repentance (s.w. Is. 6:10). Again Isaiah is answering all the possible excuses given by the exiles for not repenting and returning to the land. In Is. 50:2 the idea of Yahweh's hand being shortened is used as an excuse not to respond to God's call to quit Babylon for Zion: "Is My hand shortened at all, that it can't redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?". The idea was that His ability to act, His hand, was somehow limited or 'reaped down'. They assumed the fact they had been reaped in the harvest of judgment meant that their God had been (Is. 17:5; Jer. 9:22; Hos. 8:7; 10:13). They simply refused to accept the repeated prophetic message that it was the God of Israel who brought judgment upon Israel. They treated Him as the surrounding peoples treated their gods- always saving them in trouble, and if they didn't, then the god had died with them.

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear- God's apparent silence and inaction was not because His hand was shortened, i.e. He was unable to act or limited in possibility. The limitation of possibility was because of their sins. His ear was not intrinsically deaf (:1), instead He would not hear because of their sins at the same time as their prayers. Their prayers were "hindered" in the sense of 1 Pet. 3:7. We note that the exiles were praying, at the same time as doing all their sins. They didn't totally give up on God. But God doesn't hear this kind of prayer, that seeks to use Him as a background insurance policy whilst man continues his sinful ways in the foreground.

Is. 30:20 describes the reestablished Kingdom as a time when Judah's repentant eyes would "see" the God who had taught them through the sufferings of defeat and exile (see note there). Their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him (s.w. Job 3:23; 13:24) just as God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally,

the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family / school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me… and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7).

So this is describing how things had been during the exile. God had hidden His face during the exile (Jer. 33:5; Ez. 39:23,24) but only for a moment (Is. 54:8). That was now over; but the Jews spoke as if His face was still hidden. Like many religious people, they preferred to consider that although God exists, He is not available for intimate personal fellowship. They complained God had still hidden His face from them because of the sins of their ancestors (Is. 64:7). When that was not now how He saw it. Typical of all men, at the start of the exile they had put the blame on God rather than on themselves, considering that He had "covered Yourself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through" (Lam. 3:44). The years of exile hadn't reformed their thinking and feeling about God. Yet despite this self admitted sense of separation from Him, they were very zealous in their religious devotion to Yahweh, fasting and attempting to sacrifice. But one can do all the religious stuff with a self admitted lack of personal relationship with God.

Isaiah 59:3 For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness- The lies spoken may well have been to God, in dishonestly proclaiming they were His covenant people when instead they were involved in child sacrifice and perhaps other murders related to their idolatry. Their defilement with blood meant they were ritually unclean, and this unable to serve Him. In the same breath as they proclaimed His covenant, they were muttering words of wickedness.

The idea is of total defilement with blood in the heart, the hands, the fingers, the lips, the tongue and the feet (:7). They were guilty of murder, and Isaiah has previously alluded to their practice of child sacrifice; and quite likely the murder of Ezekiel and other prophets. The Hebrew for "defiled", *ga'al*, is effectively the same word as the common word for 'redeemer', *go'el*. In all this condemnation, there is the hint that they can be redeemed by blood from their defilement, even at their worst defilement [*ga'al*] they were not far from redemption [*go'el*]- and it is the blood of the suffering servant that is hinted at as the price paid for their redemption. Isaiah began by lamenting that their hands were defiled by blood (Is. 1:15). Again and again, we see that the exile had not at all refined or transformed them. "Mutters" is LXX "meditates". The mind meditates, the

tongue speaks. But the tongue is put for the mind because our words reflect our thinking- ultimately, even if we may think we're clever enough to think one thing and say the opposite. Is. 59:3-7 quote the six or seven things which Yahweh hates and are an abomination to Him from Prov. 6:17-19: "proud eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood [LXX "the blood of the just"]; a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness who utters lies, and he who sows discord among brothers" LXX "An unjust witness kindles falsehoods and brings on quarrels between brethren".

Isaiah 59:4 None sues in righteousness, and none pleads in truth- God is now legally arraigning His people, noting that they sued each other over untrue allegations and the pleas made in response were likewise untrue. They were characterized by untruth. And this theme continues in their idealized confession of sin, when they admit the same: "truth is fallen in the street... Yes, truth is lacking" (:14,15). By contrast, God is rightly accusing them of their untruth, and their intended confession in :10-13 is absolutely truthful. It is this utter truthfulness and transparency, before both God and man, that God so seeks. Thus David reflects in his repentance that God had made him know truth in his most inward parts (Ps. 51:6); he thus achieved the Divine requirement that the righteous speak truth within their hearts (Ps. 15:2). Repentance is in this sense knowing the truth: "we should turn from our iniquities, and accept Your truth" (Dan. 9:13). For to sin is to "wander from the truth" (James 5:19- which isn't talking about wandering from some intellectual point in a statement of faith). If we "walk in darkness" and are disobedient, we do not "do the truth" (1 Jn. 1:6; 2:4). He that does "the truth" comes to the light so that his deeds may be reproved (Jn. 3:21). This is what worship of God in spirit "and truth" looks like (Jn. 4:23, said in the context of the repentant Samaritan woman)- not so much intellectual doctrinal purity, but transparent confession of sin.

AV "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth". The prophetic intention was that Zion would be 'called' the city of "righteousness" (Is. 1:26 s.w.). But the individual Jews were not interested in appealing for justice and truth. The day when the earth would be governed in "righteousness and... truth" was not going to come whilst Judah themselves didn't love the things of the Kingdom and refused to live the Kingdom life themselves (s.w. Ps. 96:13). It was Messiah who was to be girded with "righteousness and... truth" (s.w. Is. 11:5). But not one candidate of the various potentials had acted like this. The prophecies were therefore reapplied and deferred to the Lord Jesus.

They trust in vanity, and speak lies- "Vanity" is the usual term for idols. Idolatry is a worship of nothingness, and again this is the essence of so much in the empty, contentless world of today. This is the modern day idolatry. And it is manifest in 'speaking lies'. A lack of attention to truth and disinterest in truth and ultimate reality leads to personal dishonesty, a speaking of lies.

They conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity- There is a theme in Isaiah of conceiving, suffering pain in labour- but bringing forth in vain (Is. 26:18; 33:11; 59:4). And so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was no bringing forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24).

These words [and :7 LXX] are quoted in Romans 3. Eliphaz thought there were only a few very sinful people in the world (Job 15:35); but His words are quoted by the Spirit in Is. 59:4 concerning the whole nation of Israel; and this whole passage in Is. 59:4-8 in turn is quoted in Rom. 3:15-17 concerning the whole human race. This same path of progressive realization of our sinfulness must be trodden by each faithful individual, as well as on a communal level.

LXX "they trust in vanities, and speak empty words" would mean that they trusted in idols, and therefore their prayers to God were empty words. See on :1.

Isaiah 59:5 They hatch adders' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he who eats of their eggs dies; and that which is crushed breaks out into a viper- GNB "The evil plots you make are as deadly as the eggs of a poisonous snake. Crush an egg, out comes a snake!". The people in view appear to be teachers or leaders, because they have people who as it were eat their eggs.

Isaiah 59:6 Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands- GNB "But your plots will do you no good—they are as useless as clothing made of cobwebs!". Their acts of violence would not ultimately be covered before God by carefully spun webs of excuses and self justification. "Their works are works of iniquity" (:6) parallels "their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity" (;7). As discussed on :8, thoughts lead to works, to a path of life.

Isaiah 59:7 Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their paths- See on :4. This is quoting Prov. 1:16. Again we note the parallel between thoughts and paths; the path of a man's life is a reflection of his thoughts. And our thought patterns are the absolutely essential core of all spirituality and relationship with God. There is clearly the accusation that the restored exiles were guilty of plotting murder, and they did shed innocent blood. The reference may not be solely to child sacrifices, and the sacrifice of other vulnerable individuals; but to actual plans to kill the prophets such as Isaiah.

Verses 7 and 8 are quoted from the LXX in Rom. 3:15-17: "their feet run to wickedness, swift to shed blood; their thoughts also are thoughts of murder; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they know not, neither is there judgment in their ways; for their paths by which they go are crooked, and they know not peace". Here in Is. 59 these verses are part of a legal arraignment of the returned exiles. They are quoted in a similar legal context by Paul- but the arraignment is applied to every man: "For we before laid to the charge [legal language] both of Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin. As it is written..." (Rom. 3:9,10). Paul then goes on to quote Is. 59:7,8 as part of the arraignment against every man. The intended statement of repentance in :10-13 must therefore be ours, so that we in turn might receive the comfort of salvation in the Messiah through His work and the gift of the Spirit (in :14-21). It is part of the true Christian experience to have this conviction of sin, to as it were stand in court with God and be and feel condemned- and then receive the amazing pardon of grace.

Isaiah 59:8 The way of peace they don't know; there is no justice in their goings: they have made them crooked paths; whoever goes therein does not know peace- The context is of their thoughts, and thoughts are man's "ways" or "goings" and "paths"; just as in :7 their thoughts are their paths. It is the path of daily, hour by hour thought which is the key to spiritual life. And it is the highway, the mental path, from Babylon to Zion, which the Spirit prepares and offers to those who want to accept these offers in our age. But we are to be those "who have set their hearts on a pilgrimage" (Ps. 84:5). "The way of peace" refers to that offered to all exiles and Gentiles who would accept the new covenant in Is. 57:19,21: "peace upon peace to them that are far off, and to them that are nigh... there is no peace to the wicked". These people were false teachers, because they had others who would walk in their ways; hence GNB "no one who walks that path will ever be safe". The leadership of the exiles was deeply corrupt, as we find implied between the lines of Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi.

Isaiah 59:9 Vindication remains far removed from us and deliverance does not reach us: we look for light, but behold, darkness; for brightness, but we walk in obscurity-

The first eight verses have been Yahweh's legal indictment of the exiles. In :9-14 we appear to have their confession; but as in Hosea, it could be that these are the words God would like them to say, recognizing especially that their failure was above all in their hearts. His answer to such a confession is then in :15-21, a prophecy of the work of the Lord Jesus and the eternal consequences of the gift of the Spirit.

The hope of Zion's light and the brightness of her Kingdom morning was precluded by the behaviour of the Jews and their idolatry. The restored Kingdom could have come then, but it didn't- because of them. So much potential was wasted; and :11 also laments this. But we can also read this as not just Isaiah's lament that the window of deliverance had been removed from them; but also as the cynical words of the exiles. Passages like Ezekiel 18 imply a certain bitterness of Israel towards their God, considering that He had dealt with them unfairly, and inappropriately punished them for the sins of their fathers. Despite Yahweh having enabled their exit from Babylon, they complained: “Vindication remains far removed from us and deliverance does not reach us” (Is. 59:9). This was an awful spurning of the great salvation enabled for them. They remonstrated against God’s message of deliverance from captivity: “Can prey be taken from a warrior? Or can prisoners of a tyrant be rescued?” (Is. 49:24). They thought their salvation was too hard even for God. They made the same mistake as all who reason that their situation or personality is too far gone for God to redeem. For the ‘salvation’ of the exiles in Babylon is alluded to in the New Testament as a prototype of our salvation in Christ. The good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15; Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21). Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14).

This walking in darkness and obscurity, LXX "perplexity", must be compared with how at the same time they asked God to explain His laws to them (Is. 58:2 "they now ask of me righteous judgment, and desire to draw nigh to God"). But they were merely saying the words; in reality they were perplexed and stumbling in darkness. Because they didn't really want to understand, therefore "God" was perplexing to them. But Isaiah will go right on to prophecy the arising of Zion's glorious light out of darkness and obscurity: "Your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh is risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the land, and gross darkness the peoples; but Yahweh will arise on you, and His glory shall be seen on you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Is. 60:1-3). The penitent people of God longed for this, but thought it was unattainable. The good news of Is. 60 is that it would come about for them. The Kingdom, salvation… appears unattainable to us if we mope in our sinfulness, but the good news of the Gospel of the Kingdom is that it is attainable.

Isaiah 59:10 We grope for the wall like the blind; yes, we grope as those who have no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the twilight; among those who are lusty we are as dead men- Darkness at noon was what happened at the crucifixion; this was the judgment upon Israel for their attitudes, because the killing of their own King and Messiah was the ultimate climax and final term of all their sinful behaviour. The apostate Jews have been condemned earlier in this chapter; the words we now are reading in :9-14 are now as it were spoken by them. Perhaps they are an imagination of the kinds of words these people would speak and the feelings they would feel in their day of final condemnation; recognizing in every detail their sins, but tragically too late. The time for such confession is now. All their human strength, appearing as "lusty", was now as death itself. Their stumbling at noonday was the curse for disobedience to the covenant (s.w. Lev. 26:37). The language of :10,11 clearly alludes to the curses for breaking the covenant in Dt. 28:29; groping at noon as the blind gropes in darkness with no one to save them: "You shall grope at noonday, as the blind gropes in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways… and there shall be none to save you". They were recognizing that the old covenant was broken, and that they were utterly helpless. And to those amongst the exiles who perceived this, God was offering a new covenant, as detailed in Ezekiel and Jeremiah; see on :12. We too have been offered that same new covenant, but we will only want it if firstly we recognize our condemnation under any other scheme of relationship with God. And our deep sense of helplessness.

Isaiah 59:11 We roar all like bears, and moan bitterly like doves- Perhaps suggesting both men and women were in lamentation. This is the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the condemned, roaring like the waves who cannot pass over the bound set for them at the beach (s.w. Jer. 5:22), unable to enter the kingdom. One moment they will be roaring, the next moaning quietly; the same word is used of how they had muttered or uttered false words (:13). By doing so, they were living out their own condemnation.

We look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us- Salvation was near, but they felt it was near but so far. Therefore it was far, however potentially near it had come. They experienced the feelings of the rejected ahead of time in this confession, the sense of "O wretched man that I am". And then here and in Is. 60 are assured of salvation. The salvation and justice of the restored Kingdom was precluded by the behaviour of the Jews and their idolatry. The reestablished Kingdom could have come then, but it didn't- because of them. So much potential was wasted; and :9 also laments this. But this is also the picture of the condemned Jews at the last day, desperately wanting salvation, but finding it now too far from them.

Isaiah 59:12 For our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify

against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them- The confession of sin in :12-15 was perhaps God's fantasy about His people's repentance, the kind of thing we see in Hosea's fantasy about Gomer's return to him. Or it could have been Isaiah's *pro forma* expression of repentance which he intended Judah to make. Or as suggested previously on these verses, this is the recognition of sin by the condemned but all too late. They realize all too late that their sins have not been taken away from them, for they had refused the sin bearer. Their own sins testified at the day of judgment "before You" and called for their own condemnation.

The three Hebrew words for "transgressions", "sins" and "iniquities" occur together in the description of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:21), over whom the unforgiven sins of Israel were confessed. Clearly the connection is deliberate. The exiles were to confess every aspect of sin, believing that although they could not be forgiven under the old covenant [which they had broken], they could all be dealt with through the blood of the day of atonement. And that looked ahead to the Lord's sacrifice. Their looking for a new covenant or way to salvation was going to be met by the offer of a new covenant later in this chapter.

"Our transgressions are with us" means that they were ever aware of them now- they were in touch with their own conscience. Which is what repentance looks like in practice- not forgetting that we have been purged from past sins, as Peter puts it. This is how David was in Ps. 51:3 (“my transgressions I know, and my sin is before me continually”). Even in this life, they had been called to judgment ahead of time- and confessed that they were witnesses against themselves asking for their own condemnation. This meeting of God in judgment is an essential part of true conversion and repentance. Those who won't really confess their sins and be convicted of condemnation have never really 'met' God. For all their supposedly true theology. This elicits true self knowledge; they confess in :13 that the problem was that they had conceived sin in their heart, and their self talk had been of "falsehood". Quite some introspection and confession. Realizing what God has been saying all along, as discussed on :8, that man's essential problem is his own untruthful thinking in his heart. This set them up as ideal, grateful recipients of the new covenant (see on :10)- for it offered the Spirit working in the heart, the laws which they could not and did not keep, now written in their hearts. At a time when Zion would be called the "city of truth" (Zech. 8:3). And this offer of this new covenant is therefore God's response to this penitence in :21: "As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says Yahweh. My Spirit which is on you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth". This clearly alludes to the new covenant.

Isaiah 59:13 transgressing and denying Yahweh, and turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of

falsehood- We see the common Biblical parallel between thoughts and words; hence GNB "Our thoughts are false; our words are lies". "Uttering" is the word used in :11 for how the condemned will mutter or moan in condemnation; but by muttering false words in their hearts, they were living out their own condemnation experience. "Uttering" is also the word God has used in His arraignment of them in :3. They were rightly accused of having uttered false words: "your tongue mutters [utters] wickedness" (:3). Here they absolutely accept that. This is the path of repentance, to repeat God's words about human sin and own them as true of us.

Isaiah 59:14 Justice is turned away backward, and righteousness stands afar off- This contrasts with the frequent statements that Yahweh's truth righteousness was "near" in the sense that His restored Kingdom could so soon have been established. But now it was far away, because the window of opportunity was now closed because of their impenitence. Thus GNB "Justice is driven away, and right cannot come near".

For truth is fallen in the street, and uprightness can't enter- As just noted, the righteousness which was to enter Zion by the highway prepared in Is. 40 was not going to enter. There was an open, public, unashamed rejection of God's "truth", His covenant. GNB "Truth stumbles in the public square, and honesty finds no place there". The street or square may refer to the place of judgment, the law court. The injustice there meant that the Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 8:16 was disallowed of fulfilment.

Righteousness as it were stood outside the city, unable to enter because of their perversions; and uprightness likewise wanted to enter the city but had been precluded by them. And yet Yahweh at this time had brought His righteousness and salvation very near to them: "I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off and My salvation shall not wait; and I will place salvation in Zion" (Is. 46:13). They realized indeed that it was a case of so near, but so far. Salvation, righteousness, uprightness… had come so near to them. But their behaviour meant it had not come, and so, it stood far off. So near, but so far. And that is the sad experience of so many who hear the Gospel of their salvation. Salvation comes very near to them, but if they persist in their ways- it is far from them. What joy, therefore, for those like us who realize salvation came near but we declined it… to repent, and find that we can after all have that great salvation! It's only by conviction of sin that we see the wonder of the Gospel. This is why those who have never done much 'sin' *as the world wrongly perceives sin* find it hard to be truly committed and zealous for God. Conviction of sin is utterly necessary for living relationship with God. Churches that began as convicted sinners in repentance… atrophy over the generations to middle class, bubble mentality religious people with no fire in their souls.

Isaiah 59:15 Yes, truth is lacking; and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey-

"Makes himself a prey" may mean the man has to submit to extortion. LXX "And truth has been taken away, and they have turned aside their mind from understanding". Those who 'don't understand' do so not simply because of intellectual failure, but because they do not want to understand. "He who departs from evil" is the term used about Job (s.w. Job 1:8; 2:3); and he too became a "prey" to evil. Job represents not only the exiles, but the righteous remnant amongst them who departed from evil but suffered all the same.

Yahweh saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice- The lack of justice and honesty might seem relatively small issues compared to the murder and gross idolatry mentioned as going on at the time. But the prophets often make clear that it is attitudes to justice which reflect the essence of a person's spirituality.

In the Lord Jesus we see a heart that more than bled for the salvation of others. He didn't live out His perfect life in isolation from others, withdrawn from society, insulated from the world's pain. Is. 59:15-20 speaks of how He came to perceive that really there was nobody apart from Him who could bring about such great salvation to the world: "And the Lord saw it, and it displeased [s.w. grieved] him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke" . So many of these phrases and ideas are picked up in the New Testament and applied to the Lord Jesus in His time of dying. It was His grief that inspired Him.

Scripture repeatedly speaks as if God notices things and is then hurt by what He sees (Jonah 3:10; Gen. 29:31; Ex. 3:4; Dt. 32:19; 2 Kings 14:26; 2 Chron. 12:7; Ez. 23:13; Is. 59:15 cp. Lk. 7:13). If He knew in advance what they were going to do, this language is hard for me to understand. But God is therefore hurt and 'surprised' at sin- He saw Israel as the firstripe grapes, but they were worshipping Baal even then (Hos. 9:9). Thus God can allow Himself to feel an element of surprise- and this was a shock to Jeremiah, who queried: "Why are You like a man who is caught by surprise...?" (Jer. 14:9).

Isaiah 59:16 He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor-

This lack of a single righteous person has been mentioned in :4: "None speaks justly". The implication is that there was not even a righteous remnant, not a single man who was right with God. And so instead of giving up with His people, God raised up the Lord Jesus, His arm, His righteousness, Yahweh our righteousness. Truly, our salvation is all of grace. It is the Lord Jesus and the gift of the Spirit through Him (:21) that is the answer to the confession of moral helplessness in the preceding section. God's people

considered His arm was too short to save (:1); but God here says that somehow His arm [in the Lord Jesus] *will* bring salvation. Somehow He will save at least some. The implication, thinking it all through, is that God considered that an acceptable level of faith and obedience was quite possible for at least some of His people, so that they might be saved there and then. He was amazed there was not one sufficiently righteous. This Divine 'amazement' is a window onto the question of whether God sees all human beings as inevitable sinners, structurally abhorrent to Him. He clearly doesn't. His 'amazement' that nobody made the grade, despite all His historical experience of human sin, would make no sense in this case. He had declared that His salvation had drawn "near" to that generation (Is. 56:1); it was absolutely attainable. It's not that God hates our guts as humans, but graciously made a way to save us through His Son. That is mere Calvinism. Salvation was attainable by the exiles, God was surprised not even one person 'made it'- and so He had to extend His grace, His plan to save, by His saving arm through His Son.

None of the potential Messiah figures worked out; and it seems about nobody responded to the prophetic call for the exiles to repent. God was 'desolated' ["wondered"]about this, so great were His hopes for some response. And yet God wished to try to save them anyway by His dramatic intervention, which was to come to full term in the person and work of His own son. LXX suggests this was by His pure mercy and grace alone: "so he defended them with his arm, and stablished them with his mercy".

Therefore His own arm brought salvation to Him; and His righteousness, it upheld Him- see on Ex. 2:11,12. The arm of Yahweh, the practical articulation of His power, is ultimately the Lord Jesus. God sent His prophets to appeal to Israel for repentance. They *could have lead to repentance*. But Israel would not. The marriage feast was totally ready and waiting for the Jewish people; they could have had it. But they didn't want it, and so the course of human history was extended. Therefore finally God sent His Son. The Lord Jesus Himself was amazed that no other man had achieved the work which He had to; and therefore He clad Himself with zeal and performed it (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16 cp. Rev. 5:3,4). God knew that salvation in the end would have to be through the death of His Son. But there were other possible scenarios for the repentance and salvation of mankind, which no man achieved. And so, as in the parable of the servants sent to get fruit from the vineyard, there was left no other way but the death of God's only Son. There is a clear parallel between Is. 59:16 and Is. 63:5. The same words are used, but there is one difference. In Is. 59:16, "His righteousness, it upheld Him", but in Is. 63:5 it was God's fury which upheld / sustained Him. The Messianic arm of Yahweh which brought salvation did so only because as Son of Man, the Lord Jesus is the only human who can rightly judge sin on behalf of God's anger. His necessary anger / wrath in judging sin is therefore part of the wider nexus of the absolutely legitimate salvation He achieved through the Lord Jesus.

We may well enquire as to the sense in which Yahweh apparently saved Himself, for wriggle as we may, that is what the Hebrew demands: "His own arm brought salvation *to Him*; and His righteousness, it upheld Him". Possibly the idea is that His purpose with His people was failing, not one had responded. The gracious offer of the new covenant had been spurned. And so He worked out His purpose through the work of His Son to at least save some, and thus saved His entire project with man from failure. He upheld His saving purpose, His desire to have a people. His "arm" is the Lord Jesus; it cannot be that the idea is that the "arm" saved Himself. The arm saved Yahweh; and Is. 53 is clear that the arm of Yahweh is the Lord Jesus in His death on the cross. Likewise Is. 63:4,5: "the year of My redeemed has come [the 70 years had ended and salvation was now possible]. I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore My own arm brought salvation to Me". The idea of Yahweh using His hand and arm to save is in Dt. 32:36-41; He uses His own arm to save when His people are as it were finished, at the end, from their own sins: "Yahweh will judge His people and have compassion on His servants when He sees that their power is gone, that there is none remaining, shut up or left at large... See now that I, even I, am He... There is no one who can deliver out of My hand. For I lift up My hand to heaven and say, as surely as I live forever... My hand takes hold on judgment".

Isaiah 59:17 He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a mantle- Yahweh's arm which was to bring salvation (:16) required that the saviour referred to act as a high priest; hence the usage of priestly language here for the breastplate; indeed all the items of clothing here are described with words which are found in the description of the high priestly clothing in Ex. 28. The "garments" are s.w. Ex. 28:3,4. The "helmet" alludes therefore to the high priestly mitre; the "mantle" to the priestly "robe" (s.w.) of Ex. 28:4,31 etc. And yet the suffering servant had been named "Israel, he was representative of all God's people. And so these words are applied to us, in that we are "in Christ" and all that is true of Him is true of us- even His High Priestly work for sinners. Thus Paul's description of the warrior of the Gospel in Ephesians 6 composites together various descriptions of Messiah's clothing in the servant songs (Is. 11:5 = "loins girded with truth"; Is. 49:2 "mouth like a sharp sword"; Is. 52:7 "bring good tidings / publish salvation" = "the preparation of the Gospel of peace"; Is. 59:17 "breastplate of righteousness"; Is. 59:17 "helmet of salvation"). We are to be Christ to the world.

Isaiah 59:18 According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, wrath to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the islands He will repay recompense- The adversaries and enemies of God's people are the enemies of God Himself and His Son. The salvation to be achieved by Yahweh's arm, His Son (:16,17) required the judgment of

sin. Clothed as it were in high priestly clothing (:17), the priest-king-saviour will finally do justice- at the day of judgment. Their judgment will be according to what they did (Is. 59:18; 65:6); although Jer. 16:18 says that some will be recompensed double. By contrast, the exiles were not receiving punishment according as their deeds deserved, but less (Ezra 9:13). These different degrees of recompense suggest that Divine judgment is far more complex than a simple 'measure for measure'. The greater complexity is because He weighs motives and inflexions of meaning attached to actions which all require different judgments. And then on top of that, there is the credit He gives for forgiveness, and for the prayers and faith of others influencing the final outcome of judgment in any given case.

Isaiah 59:19 So shall they fear the name of Yahweh from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun- The judgments upon the surrounding nations were intended to bring forth repentance and acceptance of Israel's God, from east to west.

For He will come as a rushing stream, which the breath of Yahweh drives- AV "the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him". This elsewhere refers to the pole lifted up, the Lord Jesus, lifted up as crucified as the rallying point of faith in the midst of the stream of Divine judgments.

Isaiah 59:20 A Redeemer- "*A* redeemer" [although the text is unclear] rather than "*the* redeemer" could suggest there were other potential redeemers which could have arisen before the Lord Jesus came. As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el*, redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave..." (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren

Will come to Zion- No redeemer came to Zion as planned because the Jewish lack of repentance precluded it. So under inspiration, Paul changes this to "the redeemer shall come out of Zion" (Rom. 11:26), thereby combining the sense with that of Ps. 14:7.

And to those who turn from disobedience in Jacob, says Yahweh- The LXX and Rom. 11:26 have "shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob". The ambiguity is because man's turning away from sin is also a gift from God, in this case that requested in Lam. 5:2. Repentance and not just forgiveness is given from God; this is His grace to the extreme. Those who turn from sin are turned from sin by the Lord. The blessing promised to Abraham was not only forgiveness of sins, but that the Lord Jesus would turn away Abraham's seed from their iniquities (Acts 3:26). Yet we only become Abraham's seed by repentance and baptism. Our repentance and desire not to sin is therefore confirmed after our baptism. Paul's citation of this is deliberately altered to teach the truth that the *majority* of Israel will not turn before He comes. To them He will come and turn ungodliness away from them (Rom. 11:26). But Israelite repentance is a condition for the Lord's return. LXX "the deliverer shall come for Sion's sake, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" suggests that the work of the Lord Jesus was to come to Jerusalem and through His Spirit (:21), turn Israel away from their sins. Acts 3:25,26 shows Peter in Jerusalem claiming that the gift of the Spirit, promised in the new covenant promises to Abraham, would result in turning Israelites away from their iniquities. But that promise is to all in the new covenant. It is to "you... your seed... your seed's seed" (:21), and that is surely alluded to in Acts 2:38,39: "you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to him".

Isaiah 59:21 As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says Yahweh. My Spirit which is on you, and My words which I have put in your mouth-

The covenant- the new one- was to be "with them", and yet a singular individual is addressed, who was full of God's Spirit and spoke God's words. That individual is the Lord Jesus, and because of Him the covenant can be made with "them" plural, God's wayward people. GNB offers: "And I make a covenant with you: I have given you my power and my teachings to be yours forever, and from now on you are to obey me and teach your children and your descendants to obey me for all time to come". This is God's response to the repentance of the previous section. It's why Peter urges his audience to repent so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. And that receipt of the Holy Spirit is the ongoing experience of all who day by day experience "Godly repentance". The arrogant and spiritually self satisfied, living in a religious bubble, don't experience this.

In a restoration context, this seems to be the same idea as in Hag. 2:5: "The word which I covenanted with you, as well as My spirit, remains amongst you". God was still seeking to propel forwards His Kingdom purpose, despite the weak commitment of His people. Just as He did at the Red Sea, and just as He does to this day. God's spoken word of covenant was to save His people, and His Spirit would continually work to bring this about.

This would be achieved if they accepted the Spirit, part of the package offered in the new covenant. His words would be written in their hearts too. Having Divine words put in the mouth meant they were to be as Aaron and Moses before Pharaoh (s.w. Ex. 4:15); for it was also Moses who was covered in the shadow of Yahweh's hand as He passed by in the parallel passage in Is. 51:16. Remember that they were bidden flee Babylon before she fell to the Medes. The servant figure need not have feared the king of Babylon, he was intended to go to him and plead as Moses "let My people go". But the exiles feared men, perhaps one particular ruler of Persia or Babylon, whom they thought would not allow their restoration; see on Is. 51:12. They feared him rather than God, and so they didn't flee Babylon as asked.

Shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says Yahweh- The promise of the new covenant and the associated gift of the Spirit was that if they said "yes" to it, then they would be preserved eternally faithful. For the Messianic Kingdom would then begin. A connection between Joshua and Israel is developed here, which describes the new covenant which God will make with Israel in the Messianic Kingdom in terms evidently reminiscent of Joshua- as if the new covenant was made with him, thereby enabling him potentially to be part of a Messianic Kingdom even in his day: "And as for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: my Spirit that is upon thee ["Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him" Dt. 34:9; Num. 27:18-23], and my words which I have put in thy mouth [Dt. 18:18- God's words were put in Joshua's mouth], shall not depart out of thy mouth ["this book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth", Josh. 1:8, s.w.], nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says the Lord, from henceforth and for ever". See on Josh. 1:6. But these things were to come true in the greater Joshua, the Lord Jesus.

From henceforth and forever- The Spirit would abide in them for ever. In other words, the sense of Spiritual strength from God which Israel will have will not just diminish into nothing, it will not just fade away. I think this is one of the saddest aspects of our present spiritual experience. You see a keen young brother emerge from the waters of baptism, entering the new covenant, throw himself into the study and preaching of the word, he grows spiritually... and then he slips, slips and slips, until he slides down the slippery path into the world. We go to a Bible study, a Bible conference, we read the word of the new covenant together in intense fellowship. And then it all slips away, we lose the reality of our calling, we're strong for the next day, perhaps the day after, and then back to base level. But then we will spiritually run and not faint, walk in the new and living way and not be weary. This is surely one of the most wonderful aspects of the Kingdom life; constant growth, no regrets, no looking back over our shoulder, no sense

of spiritual anti-climax. No more fading away spiritually, instead the energy of constant growth.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 60

Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh is risen upon you-

This prophecy of the arising of Zion's light out of darkness follows right on from the confession of the penitent that they would so love this, but it seemed unattainable because of their sins. See on Is. 59:9 ("we look for light, but behold, darkness; for brightness, but we walk in obscurity"). "Is come" is rendered by the Jewish rabbi Ibn Ezra: "Your light has set", citing a similar construction in Gen. 28:11. This means the idea is that their natural light would disappear and be replaced by the light of God's glory. Hence :19 "The sun shall be no more your light by day". Is. 51:17; 52:2 had called upon the drunk, depressed Zion to awaken herself and arise: "shake yourself from the dust and arise". Now that call is repeated. To awaken and make arise such a hopeless case... is again the work of the Spirit. See on Is. 61:1, where again the psychologically incurable is cured.

LXX "Be enlightened, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee". We could read this as the exiles having to respond to the light that had come near them. They didn't, they refused to be enlightened, and so the light didn't arise within the rebuilt temple as intended. The literal visible shekinah glory could have arisen upon Zion. But it was precluded by the Jews' refusal. And so it was applied to the arising of the Lord Jesus at His first coming. He was again the light that shone in gross darkness, but failed to dissipate that darkness for all Israel: "This light shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot understand it" (Jn. 1:5). And so He will arise ultimately as the literal light of the world at His return. Zion's light was reapplied to the Lord Jesus both in His ministry and His return to earth. He was the sunrise ["the dayspring from on high"] at His first coming (Lk. 1:78) and the arising sun of righteousness at His second coming (Mal. 4:2). He was "the light of the world", but in John's Gospel, the "world" is often the Jewish world.

The idea is that Zion's faces would be enlightened [LXX "be enlightened"] in reflection of the glorious light rising upon them. This is the picture of Is. 58:8,10 where if the exiles repented, "Then your light shall break forth as the morning... *your* light shall rise in darkness". The dawn of God's glory would be seen in them, they would be a reflection of how the light of God's glory would arise in the darkness of the Gentile world. This would be through the "Servant" being the light of the world, and those in Him likewise being that light (Is. 42:6; 49:6). The literal possibility of this was in the shekinah glory returning to Zion as spoken of in Ez. 40-48; particularly in Ez. 43:2,4 where the glory enters the temple gates and the whole earth shines from it, as if it is so bright and transformative that it makes even the dust of the earth [which man is made of] to shine in reflection of it: "and the earth shined with his glory". This was precluded by Judah's disbelief and disobedience. They looked for light but were still in the darkness (Is. 59:9 "we look for

light, but behold, darkness; for brightness, but we walk in obscurity"). The possibility was and is that their faces shone with the shining light of God's glory: "Then you shall see and be radiant" (:5). But it comes gloriously true in the dust of human believers today, in hearts of believers transformed by the spirit of the Lord Jesus: "But we, with an unveiled face and reflecting the glory of the Lord, are all transformed into his likeness from glory to glory by the Lord the Spirit... God that said: Light shall shine out of darkness, He shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6). And so :19,20 conclude that eternally, Zion's light is God's light, "*Your* sun shall no more go down... for Yahweh shall be your everlasting light". This is more than reflection; it is the light of God's glory being the personal light of Zion. They too become radiators of the light: "Then you shall see and be radiant" (:5). The light sources merge. Our lives now must be all about shining forth the light of God's glory, His characteristics, His Name, into the darkness. For this is what we shall eternally do. We "shine as lights in the [darkness of this] world" (Phil. 2:15), the only points of light.

Ezekiel's restoration prophecies in Ez. 40-48 had spoken of Yahweh's glory coming to Zion- if Israel were obedient and built. Is. 60 presents the picture of that glory having arrived, just as Is. 40 begins the prophecy with the picture of God's glory leaving Babylon and travelling to Zion. But that depended upon the way for that glory being prepared, and it was not, in that Israel didn't repent. Yet God was apparently prepared to send His glory to Zion anyway, despite the disobedience to the commands to rebuild the temple. Such was His enthusiasm to make it work. The same enthusiasm we see in His constant coaxing of men to leave Babylon and come to Zion.

Even before the exile, Israel and Judah had been invited to perceive that light, hence Is. 9:2 LXX "O people walking in darkness, behold a great light". But they didn't. And so the returned exiles, "Zion", are asked at a later stage to arise and shine because their light had come (Is. 60:1). But again they didn't, and so these prophecies of a light coming are reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who was perceived by a new Zion as the light of the world. I explained on Is. 30:26 how the coming of Zion's supernaturally bright light is to come therefore when Babylon falls; and this has therefore been deferred to the latter day fall of Babylon.

"Arise" is the word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival.

Zion's light would certainly come and give light to the world- even though the fulfilment of the prophecy at the restoration from Babylon was actually conditional on Judah

keeping the Sabbath and caring for their poor brethren: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee… And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising”. Nehemiah repaired the breaches, Ezra laid the foundations of the temple…the prophecy of Isaiah 58 was fulfilled on the surface, but not in its Kingdom sense, because they failed to keep the Sabbath etc. Isaiah 58:10 says that *if* they drew out their soul to the hungry, if they allowed themselves to feel the hunger of others, *then* would their light rise and their darkness be as the noonday. And thus the prophecy of Isaiah 60:1,2 that Zion's light is going to dawn was conditional upon the Jews caring for their hungry amongst them- even though in that passage, the condition isn't directly stated. The restoration was therefore only a sham of what was possible.

Let’s remember that the exiles were symbols of us. We in this life are passing through “the time of our exile” (1 Pet. 1:17 RSV). The restoration command to the exiles in Babylon to arise and shine, as their light had come (Is. 60:1) went unheeded by them; they preferred to stay in Babylon. And so this is reapplied to us as the new Israel in Eph. 5:14.

The LXX suggests that the coming of this light of Zion depended upon their being willing to accept it: "Be enlightened, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come".

Isaiah 60:2 For behold, darkness shall cover the land, and gross darkness the peoples; but Yahweh will arise on you, and His glory shall be seen on you- As always, the blessing of Judah is to be for the blessing of the nations. Their light was to impact the gross darkness of the Gentile world. We are called to mission, for our very experience of God's light is so that we may not just rejoice in it ourselves, but by its nature, light dissipates darkness. And the darkness is the state of the Gentile world. But light rises upon the new Zion, the true people of God. The Jewish exiles were still in darkness, because they were of the spirit of Babylon still. They had to repent and confess that they had been looking “for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows” (Is. 59:9). If they had done this, then Yahweh's glory would have visibly been seen above Zion.

The darkness contrasts with the light which dawns mentally, internally, in minds which have desired to be enlightened (:1 LXX). Darkness covering the earth is the language of Gen. 1; we as the readers / audience are left in expectation of a new creation being spoken about. But we are also given the impression that Israel was being treated as Egypt whom they trusted in, suffering the plague of darkness. But 'covering with darkness' is a phrase only used elsewhere of death (Job 23:17; Ecc. 6:4). It was through death and judgment that the new life and creation could come forth. The land, of Israel, and "the peoples" (Gentiles) are paralleled here; for it was the Divine intention that the

judgments upon the surrounding world would also be those upon Israel, and yet out of that was to emerge a repentant remnant of Jews and Gentiles who would merge into a new multiethnic people of God in the day when Yahweh would arise in glory. In a literal sense there was to be the light of God's glory in Zion when He personally dwelt there.

Isaiah 60:3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising- Isaiah 60:1-3 reasons that Zion's light was soon to come, but Judah were to reflect that light as if it had already come; in the same way as God's light was to rise, so Judah were to arise as if they were that light. The message is that they were to believe that the Messianic light of the world was to arise soon, and were to act as if that time had already come; they were called to live the Kingdom now life, to showcase God's Kingdom to the world. In this sense, Zion's sons are described as coming from all parts of their dispersion and being about to come to Zion; and yet they are described as having already "come" (Is. 60:4). The mixing of the tenses, present and future, is to suggest that they were to believe that this *would happen* and to act now as if it was already happening. "You shall see and be lightened" (Is. 60:5 RV)- and yet they were to act as if their light had in fact already come (Is. 60:1). Yet Judah sadly didn't believe that the restoration prophecies would come to pass, and so they didn't act as if they would come true. Instead of being a light to the world, they accepted the Gentile darkness instead of God's light. Mazdak, the Persian god of light, effectively became their god, instead of Yahweh.

The image is of Jerusalem as the sun ["your sunrising"], the centre of a solar system in which the other nations flowed to her, bringing tribute. This is all a deconstruction of how Persia saw herself, as shown in the uncovered reliefs. The problem was that the ease of life in Babylon had led the Jewish exiles to prefer to remain there, rather than giving it all up for life in the ruins of a peripheral, marginalized Jerusalem. The Persians had made Mizpeh and not Jerusalem the administrative capital of Yehud [their name for Judah]. Jerusalem was marginalized. But the exiles were being shown by these prophecies that Babylon or Persepolis in fact was not the sun at the centre of a solar system of Babylonian or Persian empire. A new order was to be established, with the once peripheral, marginalized Jerusalem at the centre, and the nations with their tribute flowing to *her*. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is likewise a total, radical reversal of the 'gospel' of this world. Archaeological evidence, especially from Persepolis, reveals that the Persian kings portrayed themselves as sun disks, with nations and kings streaming to them bearing tribute. This image is in turn deconstructed by the Biblical prophecies of the nations willingly and eagerly submitting to the Messianic king, and eagerly bringing tribute offered from the heart and not simply because they have been defeated. Nations and kings would instead freely choose to flow to Jerusalem (:3).

Isaiah 60:4 Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather themselves together, they come to you- "Lift up your eyes" suggests a dejected Zion, looking at the ground, unwilling to see her great future potential. The 'coming / assembling' and 'drawing near / gathering' of the exiles (s.w. Is. 43:5) would have been primarily fulfilled at the restoration (same words in Neh. 1:9). But most of the exiles remained in the lands of their captivity, just as people resist the Gospel's call today. They had to themselves bring and gather themselves (Is. 45:20; 49:18; 60:4), so that God would confirm this by bringing and gathering them (Is. 43:5; Jer. 31:8; Ez. 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; Zech. 10:10). See on Is. 56:8. And so today with all who wish to be in God's Kingdom; our desire to be there and first moves towards it will be confirmed many times over by God's work through His Spirit.

Your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms- Literally "shall be nursed on the side", i.e. carried on the hip, the Eastern way of carrying young children. See on :3. The LXX suggests it would be as a result of the children born in exile returning along with the repentant Gentiles of the lands of their captivities: "lift up thine eyes round about, and behold thy children gathered: all thy sons have come from far, and thy daughters shall be borne on men's shoulders". This is a commonly expressed prophetic vision. It didn't however come about, and the essence of it has therefore been delayed and reapplied. The later feeding miracle occurred on the other side of Galilee to Magdala (Mt. 15:39), suggesting the miracle occurred in Gentile territory, with people present from "far off" (Mk. 8:3; hence the guests "glorified the God *of Israel*", Mt. 15:31). Surely there were Gentiles present at that meal, and the LXX uses this phrase to speak of how Gentiles from "far off" would come and sit down at the Messianic banquet of the last days (Is. 60:4; Jer. 26:27; 38:10; 46:27).

Isaiah 60:5 Then you shall see and be radiant, and your heart shall thrill and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you- "You shall see and be lightened" (Is. 60:5 RV). See on :3. "Turned" is AV "converted", suggesting there would be repentance amongst the nations of their captivity; see on :4. The nations around Israel were to repent and bring their presents to them. This began to happen after the destruction of the Assyrians in Hezekiah's time, but he entered into covenant with the Gentiles rather than bringing them to the God of Israel, the light of Zion. Perhaps Nehemiah was some kind of potential Messiah- for in Neh. 5:17 the surrounding Gentiles ‘came up’ to him and shared in the luxurious temple meals (a common Kingdom prophecy- the same Hebrew words are used for the Gentiles ‘coming up’ to the temple in Is. 60:5,11; Jer. 16:19; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). Those meals could have been the Messianic banquets. But finally at the last day, all these prophecies shall be fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus, despite all the previous failures in fulfilment.

"Shall thrill" is literally to throb. It is the same idea as in Jer. 33:9, where the new covenant would result in the same feeling for the Gentiles as they entered the covenant: "they shall fear and tremble [throb] for all the good and for all the peace that I procure". This was the possibility for the Jewish exiles had they accepted the new covenant. It is possible for us too if we accept it, and is a picture of that glorious day when these things shall become a reality for us, when faith shall be turned to sight. The new covenant offered God's law to be written in human hearts; it is about the transformation of the heart through the gift of the Spirit. The idea of the heart being "enlarged" is found in Ps. 119:32, where David asks for an enlarged heart in the sense of a heart big enough to keep God's commands; to be obedient to His law: "I will run the way of your commandments, for You enlarge my heart". Another way of saying that the law would be written in his heart. Our hearts / minds are now so narrow, we are all naturally small minded, tending to focus simply on the immediate; the gift of the Spirit changes our hearts to a far wider spiritual horizon. Paul has this image in view in 2 Cor. 6:11-13, where the Corinthians were being small minded and not seeing the bigger spiritual picture: "O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also". Spiritual maturity, not being children, involves having a wider heart and removing the limitations and restrictions that the flesh places upon us.

Isaiah 60:6 The multitude of camels shall cover you, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praises of Yahweh- The gold and frankincense brought from the east recalls the gifts of the wise men to the infant Jesus. The conversion of the Gentiles [proclaiming the praise of Yahweh] which was possible at the restoration didn't happen, and so it was reapplied and reinterpreted. They would proclaim Yahweh's praise just as the Israelites themselves would (Is. 63:7) because the Gentiles would now identify themselves with the Israelites in forming the new multiethnic people of God which was to be formed on the basis of repentance and acceptance of the new covenant. This giving of tribute was not forced; it was not the subjugated having to give up all they had as spoil. They willingly give this as a proclamation of their praise of Yahweh; the flocks they bring are in order to offer freewill sacrifices to Yahweh (:7) because they have from the heart accepted Him as their God. This is a deconstruction of the common idea of tribute payments after a change of king.

Isaiah 60:7 All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you- Kedar and Nebaioth were sons of Ishmael. The idea may be that finally the Jew - Arab conflict within the family of Abraham is resolved, and they too come to offer sacrifice to Israel's God.

They shall come up with acceptance on My altar; and I will glorify the house of My glory- Is. 60:7 prophesied that God would "*glorify* the *house* of my glory", LXX "my house of prayer shall be glorified". But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes "to *beautify* [s.w. "glorify"] the house of the Lord" (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God's special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building "cieled houses" for themselves (Hag. 1:4). The word for "cieled" occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Isaiah 60:8 Who are these who fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?- This may be descriptive of the sails of the ships bringing Zion's children home. The reference is to the exiles returning to Judah along with the repentant Gentiles. LXX "Who are these that fly as clouds, and as doves with young ones to me?"; GNB "What are these ships that skim along like clouds, Like doves returning home?". Perhaps in view is the dove returning to Noah's window once the flood of Divine judgment receded.

Isaiah 60:9 Surely the islands shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your sons from far- No specific location may be in view, as "ships of Tarshish" was a phrase used like "an Indiaman" was once used to refer to a long distance trading vessel. Thus GNB "They are ships coming from distant lands, bringing God's people home". The text can also read "the ships of Tarshish *as* at the first", referring to how they brought gold and silver in the days of Solomon and the earlier kingdom of God which was now to be restored. There is another such allusion to Solomon's times in :13.

Their silver and their gold with them, for the name of Yahweh your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified you- The Gentiles will be converted because of how God had saved and glorified His sinful people; for these Gentiles had been host nations for the Jewish exiles and were well aware of their sins. It is God's grace to sinners which is observed by others and causes them to turn to Him- and this is always the most powerful tool in the work of conversion, rather than advertising theological, abstract truths and expecting the general public to fall down in amazement before them. It is this grace to Israel which is at the core of Yahweh's Name. The nations will be deeply impressed by God's amazing grace to Israel and will come to their wonderful God. This verse isn't saying that they will come to as it were congratulate the Jews and the state of Israel.

Isaiah 60:10 Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you- It could be that their refusal of Gentile help to build the temple, insisting that *only* Jews work in it (Ezra 4:3 cp. Neh. 2:20), was actually going too far; by being so exclusive, they were disallowing the fulfilment of the prophecies both in Zech. 6 and in Isaiah, that Gentiles would help in the final rebuilding of Zion. As with some of us, their quite correct refusal to allow "the adversaries of Judah" (Ezra 4:1) to fellowship with us in the work can lead us to an exclusive approach to fellowship, that actually disallows the essentially outgoing and inclusive spirit of the God we serve. The Jews returned from Babylonian having swung to the opposite extreme from their earlier worldliness; they returned proud and refusing contact with the Gentile world, considering themselves saved by their own strength. And this is perhaps reflected in the way they refused on principle to allow any Gentiles to help them in the building work. Is. 60:10,11 had foretold: "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee [as in the decree of Cyrus]...Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night"; and them as Ez. 43 had also described, "I will glorify the house of my glory" (Is. 60:7).

The reality was that the walls were built from a motive not of glorifying Zion in fulfilment of prophecy, but for defence *against* the Gentiles. But the gates had to be shut to keep the Gentiles out (Neh. 13:19), lest they yet further corrupted the Jews who were eager to trade with them on the Sabbath rather than convert them to the God of Israel. Instead of bringing their goods through the gates to lay before Yahweh, they brought in their goods to sell to His people in trade. But returned Judah didn't act as a nation of priests, the food the Gentiles brought in to Zion was to be sold for profit to the Jews. They failed to be a missionary nation, and rather were mere trading / economic partners on an equal footing [cp. the church today?]. The prophecy that the gates would be always open will now only come true in the future Kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 21:25,26).

For in My wrath I struck you, but in My grace have I had mercy on you- As explained on :9, the Gentiles will be converted because ["for in My wrath..."] of how God had saved and glorified His sinful, condemned people by grace; for these Gentiles had been host nations for the Jewish exiles and were well aware of their sins. It is God's grace to sinners which is observed by others and causes them to turn to Him- and this is always the most powerful tool in the work of conversion, rather than advertising theological, abstract truths and expecting the general public to fall down in amazement before them.

God had struck them, they had not repented as planned- and so by grace He has mercy on them. That's the idea. Earlier in Isaiah there has been the lament that "the people turn not unto Him that strikes / smote them [s.w.], they do not seek Yahweh" (Is. 9:13). The implication is that they have not turned to Yahweh and experience His grace. The intention of the striking / smiting was that the people repented: "Come let us return unto Yahweh... for He has smitten, and He will bind up" (Hos. 6:1). But the people didn't return / repent. "I have smitten you... yet you have not returned / repented unto Me" (Am. 4:9). This is specifically stated as true of the exiles who returned to Judah: "I smote / struck you with blasting and mildew... yet you turned / repented not to me" (Hag. 2:17). What was God to do? It's not simply that the Divine smiting of His people ceased if they repented. That hadn't worked: "In vain have I smitten your children [s.w.], but they received no correction" (Jer. 2:30); "You have stricken them, but they have not grieved" (Jer. 5:3). Because of this, the prophecies came true that said Yahweh would smite His people without pity (Ez. 7:9; 9:5,7). When Ezekiel saw this in vision, he begged God to somehow cease from this, lest God's people cease to exist (Ez. 9:8). That prayer was answered, in that Yahweh still sought a way to end the smiting and to save them. We may therefore reflect how this word for "struck" is used of the suffering servant, who "gave my back to the smiters" (s.w., Is. 50:6), "they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek" (Mic. 5:1), so that He was considered "smitten / struck by God" (Is. 53:4). His suffering servant, the Lord Jesus on the cross, took that striking / smiting for them. So that by simple identification with Him, they might be saved from that Divine punishment. For He had taken it. This all explains God says here in :9 that God has struck them, but by grace will have mercy upon them. The grace was in the fact that they had not repented at the 'striking' as intended; but He did not strike them His people to total destruction as He had planned. By grace He saved them, through the work of His Son.

Isaiah 60:11 Your gates also shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, and their kings led captive- AV "Therefore your gates...". The “therefore” connects with the preceding verse, as if the gates would always be open in order to constantly welcome repentant Gentiles. When the city and temple were rebuilt, Gentiles would come and feed Israel’s flocks and

name them all “the priests of the Lord” and bring them food to eat in tribute (Is. 61:4-6). And yet Nehemiah had to close the gates of Jerusalem to stop Sabbath trading, thereby precluding the fulfilment of this prophecy at the time. The prophecy will therefore come to final fulfilment in the new Jerusalem to be established at the Lord's return (Rev. 21:25). Although clearly the fulfilment may not be strictly literal, but will be a reinterpretation and reapplication of these words which initially could have had a literal fulfilment at the restoration.

Isaiah 60:12 For that nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; yes, those nations shall be utterly wasted- Connecting with :11 ["for..."], the nations of the land would either perish, or enter into the open gates of Zion in covenant relationship with Yahweh. Thus a situation would come about whereby the earth was only populated by those in covenant relationship with God. This again is a reversal of how things were under the "light" of the Babylonian and Persian sun god Mazda. For under that empire, the very same words are used of how "that nation and kingdom that will not serve you [Babylon] shall perish" (Jer. 27:8,10). Now Zion was to replace Babylon.

Isaiah 60:13 The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the fir tree, the pine, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious- But Haggai lamented that instead, Judah dwelt in “cieled houses”, they used the exotic trees of the land for their own homes, whilst the house of Yahweh lay desolate. Thereby the prophecy of Ez. 43:7 was precluded from fulfilment: "the place of His throne, the place of the soles of His feet, where He will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever". The intention was that the ark would no longer be His footstool (Jer. 3:16; Ps. 99:5; 132:7; 1 Chron. 28:2), but He Himself would be dwelling in the temple. The idea was that as cedars had been sent from Lebanon for the building of the first temple, so they would again; the impression is of a restored Kingdom of God in Israel as it previously was, but to an even greater extent. See on :9. The place of Yahweh's feet is His footstool, and that is the place of worship (Ps. 99:5; 132:7; 1 Chron. 28:2). In that worship will be God's glory.

Isaiah 60:14 The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending to you; and all those who despised you shall bow themselves down at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The city of Yahweh, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel- This prophecy started to come true after Haman’s demise: “the sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet”. But Judah didn’t do their part in fulfilling the rest of the prophecy, which speaks of a rebuilt Zion. The promise that Judah's persecutors would bow before them was only partially fulfilled in Haman's destruction; the main fulfilment now awaits

the Kingdom, although in a reinterpreted form (Rev. 3:9). The renaming of the city is like that of Ez. 48:35 "Yahweh is there", because the idea was that He would literally come and dwell in Zion; the kingdom of heaven was to be transferred to earth. This wonderful possibility didn't come about at the restoration because the returned exiles didn't rebuild the temple and operate it according to the commandments of Ez. 40-48.

Isaiah 60:15 Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no man passed through you, I will make you an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations- The hatred was by God as well as man: "I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). This was the wrath of love unrequited and spurned. God is emotional and speaks in anger, and truly had these feelings; but the pole of His love is greater than that of His judgment. We note how God as it were takes the blame for Israel being "forsaken"; they had forsaken Him (s.w. Is. 1:28), but He expresses it in terms of Him having forsaken them.

Isaiah 60:16 You shall also drink the milk of the nations, and shall nurse from royal breasts-

At first blush, this seems a strange change of image; Zion likened to a baby being nursed by foreigners. The implication is that she has been reborn, which may be connected with the idea elsewhere that she is given new names (Is. 61:6; 62:4,11,12). This continues the figure of Is. 49:21: "Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has conceived these for me, since I have been bereaved of my children, and am solitary, an exile, and wandering back and forth? Who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?'". Children born through another were still reckoned as the wife's children (Gen. 16:1; 30:1). The children of Zion were therefore suckled by the Gentiles (Is. 60:16).

And you shall know that I, Yahweh, am your Saviour and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob- As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el*, redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave..." (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

Isaiah 60:17 For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron- Possibly the idea is that for the brass taken away from the temple, the Jews would be repaid as if it had been gold. The generous provisions of Cyrus may have been an initial fulfilment of this. The language of Israel's return from captivity as found in Isaiah and Ezekiel all has evident reference to the second coming and the final establishment of the Kingdom. It isn't just that Israel's return under Ezra and Zerubbabel was a type of that final homecoming. It could have been the Kingdom- had they obeyed the prophecies. It was all about a potential Kingdom of God. But they were too caught up with their own self-interest, with building their own houses rather than God's; and so it was all deferred. Using the prophetic perfect, God had prophesied that at the time of the restoration, He would come and dwell in rebuilt Zion (Zech. 8:3)- just as Ezekiel's prophecy had concluded: "The name of the city from that day shall be, Yahweh is there" (Ez. 48:35). Clearly, Ezekiel's prophecies could have been fulfilled at the restoration; God was willing that they should be. But human apathy and self-interest stopped it from happening as it could have done. When the foundation stone of the temple was laid, there should have been excited acclamation: "Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4:7). But instead the old men wept when the foundation was laid, knowing that the temple was nothing compared to what it ought to be (Ezra 3:12). The glory of the restored temple was prophesied as being far greater than that of the former (Hag. 2:9); Is. 60:17 alluded to this in prophesying that "For brass [in Solomon's temple] I will bring gold, and for iron [that was in Solomon's fixtures] I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron". But it simply didn't happen, because God's people were satisfied with a small, inglorious temple so that they could get on with building their own "cieled houses" (the same word is used in describing how the temple of Solomon was "covered", or cieled, with cedar). And the old men wept at the fact that the glory of the new house was *less than* that of the earlier one.

I will also make your officers peace, and righteousness your ruler- "Officers" is the word commonly used for "visitation", in the sense of the enemies of Judah judging and dominating her in the day of her visitation. "Ruler" or AV "exactor" is the word for "taskmaster" and has been used by Isaiah of Judah's dominators and abusers (Is. 9:4; 14:2,4); the reference is to the repentance of Israel's historical abusers and their being given peace with God and imputed righteousness, so that they might also enter covenant with Yahweh along with a repentant Judah. All this was due to the way the Lord Jesus was "oppressed" as Israel's representative (Is. 53:7) and thus became the basis for righteousness to be imputed to all who had been oppressed and had oppressed others. Or the idea may be that instead of a taskmaster or "exactor" forcing tribute and taxation from subject peoples, the Gentiles instead would be motivated by "righteousness" to give all they have freely for God. The experience of peace with God,

which usually refers to the peace of sin forgiven, would be instead of "officers", of men enforcing submission and tribute.

Isaiah 60:18 Violence shall no more be heard in your land, desolation nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise- "Salvation" is literally "Jesus". But Nehemiah records how the walls and gates were given very mundane names, connected to what merchandise was traded there [e.g. fish]. And so they chose not to make 'Jesus' their wall- and so His coming was deferred or re-interpreted. Yet Nehemiah encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (Neh. 9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfill the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion's gates in Messiah's Kingdom would be praise. The "violence" in view was not only that of foreign invaders, but the violence done by the Jews to each other (s.w. Is. 59:6; Jer. 6:7). We note that the promise of peace is limited to "within your borders". The initial intention was that the Kingdom would be reestablished within the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

Isaiah 60:19 The sun shall be no more your light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light to you: but Yahweh will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory- It seems that Yahweh Himself would have dwelt in Zion, the "brightness" of the cherubim would have returned there (s.w. Ez. 1:4,13) resulting in a visible light which would have eclipsed the need for light from the sun and moon (Is. 4:5,6, "shining" is s.w. "brightness"). Such great potentials were wasted. But these things will come true in the last days and are alluded to in Rev. 21:4 as having literal truth when the Lord Jesus returns. This would be the fulfilment of the promise to David, that his glorified kingdom would be as the "brightness" after the rain of judgment (2 Sam. 23:4 s.w.). But until then these things are reapplied in a spiritual sense to the way the Lord Jesus, who is the light of God's glory, is to be the light of our world in which we live, move and understand life. He who has no light can find "brightness" in Him (s.w. Is. 50:10). This was hinted at even in Prov. 4:18, where the path of the just is as the "brightness" (s.w.) shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Isaiah 60:20 Your sun shall no more go down, neither shall your moon withdraw itself; for Yahweh will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended- "The sun" and "the moon" of :19 were to be replaced in importance by "*your* sun… *your* moon". Their relationship with God would never again go down or be withdrawn. Constancy in relationship with God is one great joy of our eternal state. This will be what eternity is all about; the sun and moon may still exist, but such physical things will have no significance compared to the wonder of constant relationship with God. We need to remember this when constructing pictures of the future "Kingdom of God" in purely

literal, physical terms. See on :1,19. Sun and moon were not to be destroyed, but to be replaced in function by the light of Yahweh. Hence LXX "nor shall the moon be eclipsed". The sun and moon, as in Joseph's dreams, may refer to the leadership of Israel. They would no longer be eclipsed by captivity and exile, although they would be replaced in function. "Withdraw" is the word for "gather", used of the gathering of Judah into captivity (Is. 16:10; 17:5; 24:22; 33:4). These words are quoted as being true of God's future Kingdom on earth (Rev. 21:4); they were reapplied to a later fulfilment rather than coming true at the restoration.

The days of mourning refer to the days of exile, as demonstrated by the mourning of the book of Lamentations and Ps. 137:1. But the exiles preferred to stay in exile; and thus precluded the possibility of these words having any primary fulfilment. "Days of mourning" is a phrase used several times for funeral mourning. There would be final comfort over the loss brought about by death- ultimately, through the resurrection of the dead. "The days of mourning" refer to the ritual of mourning for a set number of days. God is saying that the mourning period has now ended. And yet they refused that good news, and continued to mope and deny themselves the joy of relationship with God.

Isaiah 60:21 Your people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified-

"Your people" means the people of Zion. Zion is now interpreted as God's people, seeing that God's offer to re-create literal Zion as His dwelling place had been spurned by the Jewish exiles and those few who had returned to the land. Literal Zion was the place God had chosen to dwell in (2 Sam. 7:10,11; Ps 132:13; 68:16; 87:2,3). But now His "chosen" place for dwelling was the hearts of His people. Zion was His people. Is. 60:21; 62:11,12 is clear: "Your [Zion's] people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever… Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your salvation comes…'. They shall call them The holy people, The redeemed of Yahweh: and you shall be called Sought out, A city not [any longer] forsaken". Is. 60:14 LXX likewise: "And the sons of them that afflicted thee, and of them that provoked thee, shall come to thee in fear; and thou shalt be called Sion, the city of the Holy One of Israel". The parallel between Zion and His people had always been there: "He chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved" (Ps. 78:68).

"All righteous" again shows that the salvation of God's people is through being declared totally spotless, through their association with "Yahweh our righteousness". The earlier "servant" of Isaiah's prophecies is now all those in Him. In our day, this requires baptism "into" Him and a life lived in Him, moved by the same Spirit which is in Him, as His body. Their salvation would be on account of their identity with the Messianic "branch", the Lord Jesus; they would be "in Christ" and thereby saved. Inheritance of the land forever is the language of the Abrahamic covenant; this would come true because of

righteousness being imputed to them. And the end result of that system of salvation, as Paul brings out in Romans, would be glory to God.

LXX suggests that what we plant in this life will be eternally preserved: "they shall inherit the land for ever, preserving that which they have planted". There is some continuity between life and personality now, and how we shall eternally be. The seeds we sow now, if sown to the Spirit, will grow into eternal things.

Isaiah 60:22 The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation; I, Yahweh, will hasten it in its time-

The spirit of this is fulfilled in the Lord's teaching that from a tiny beginning, like a grain of mustard seed, the Kingdom would grow. Also clearly in view is the promise to Abraham, the foundation of the new covenant now being offered to the exiles: "And I shall make you a great nation" (Gen. 12:2).

Hastening in its time could mean that when the time comes, the establishment of the Kingdom will be sudden ['hastened']; a nation born in a day, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Is. 66:8). But the idea of hastening of itself shows that God's plans are open to change and speeding up or slowing down. He doesn't have a hard and fast chronological timetable. Despite LXX "I the Lord will gather them in due time", this connects back to Is. 5:19, where we read that the Jews mocked Isaiah and his God, saying "Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it". There was clearly opposition to Isaiah's prophecies. The idea of judgment coming would have been mocked in these kinds of words. But we wonder whether this is really a verbatim quotation from these people; or whether God read their thoughts as effectively saying this, and as being the real implication of their positions. For there is no evidence that Judah abandoned Yahweh; rather did they claim obedience and loyalty to Him, although they claimed the same about their idols whom they worshipped in His Name. But God was not deaf to their words, or the implications of their thoughts and actions. He in fact heard their mocking 'prayer', because He here says that He will "hasten His work" (s.w.).

ISAIAH CHAPTER 61

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is on me; because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the humble. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted-

Prophets were not usually anointed; anointing is the rite whereby a priest consecrates a king or priest. Although a prophet was anointed in 1 Kings 19:16. But the figure here is of an anointed king, a prophet, who also will go on to use priestly language. And "anointed" is the word for Messiah, the Christ. When the Lord stood up in the Nazareth synagoguge and claimed to be the fulfilment of this passage, the people complained that He could not be any of those things- they knew Him, so they thought. He was not from the royal nor priestly lines. He was a carpenter, He could bind up planks of wood, but not the broken hearted. The voice that now suddenly appears is initially that of the prophets calling the exiles out of Babylon. The Chaldee has: "The prophet said, the spirit of prophecy from the presence of Yahweh God is upon me". But the exiles failed to respond and so these words became true of the Lord Jesus. Although this is not technically a servant song, the language is very similar to that of the servant songs previously in Isaiah. Anointing and being sent by the Lord with His Spirit is Is. 42:1; 48:16. And it was the servant of Is. 42:7 who was sent to open blind eyes and release the prisoners. The day of God's favour / gracious acceptance is the language of Is. 49:8.

I suggest that this :1 is another of the voices in Isaiah that appears as it were out of left field. To the exiles, this was the voice of Isaiah, or, the prophetic ministry then speaking to them. This was the possibility of Ps. 147:2 (NIV) "The Lord builds up Jerusalem, He gathers the exiles of Israel; He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds". The prophets had frequently made the point that Judah's spiritual condition was not curable. Nothing could be done to bind up their broken hearts. Indeed Isaiah begins with this statement: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it: wounds, welts, and open sores. It is not possible for them to be closed, neither bandaged, neither soothed with oil" (Is. 1:5,6 LXX). The Christ of Yahweh, however, could achieve the psychologically impossible- through the Gospel of the Spirit, He could bind up the broken hearted.

Although God has the power to heal the broken hearted, to do the psychologically impossible, they refused it; and so the Lord Jesus arose in the synagogue in Nazareth at the start of His ministry in Lk. 4, read these words, and said that "Today this scripture is fulfilled" in Him. He had just received the Spirit (Lk. 4:14,15) and then entered the synagogue and applied Is. 61:1,2 to Himself, the Messiah anointed with the Spirit. But the people took him to the cliff in Nazareth and tried to kill Him there and then, after initially gasping at the gracious words He spoke. When however He underlined that there were no miracles for them, even though there had been for other neighbouring villages- the powre of self interest and pride turned them the other way. They were so furious in their rejection of Him- for they had no power to execute people being under

Rome, and such lynching would have carried heavy consequences for them. And so the promise is offered to us under the new covenant. To proclaim the "year of favour / acceptance" is cited by Paul when he urges us to understand that now, in our lives, in this dispensation, is the acceptable time or today of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2 "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"). The Lord clearly alludes to the humble, broken hearted, prisoners etc. in His beatitudes, which are His opening mission statement. He clearly built them all upon Is. 61:1, on the basis that He was the fulfilment of the preacher of those things, and His message of the Kingdom was the answer for the poor, humble, imprisoned etc. Thus Matthew as well as Luke have the Lord open His ministry with reference to Is. 61.

The sending forth of Isaiah was the sending forth of God's word to His people (s.w. Is. 6:8; 9:8). Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh. The man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached. In the immediate context, Isaiah himself was the servant messenger sent forth (s.w. Is. 42:19; 48:16; 61:1); but he was largely rejected, and Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh (Heb. 11:37). And so the messenger came to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. He came to proclaim “the opening of the prison”, or “the opening of the eyes to them that are bound” (Is. 61:1 RVmg.)- He came to open blind eyes, to change the self-perceptions which imprison most of humanity. But that was possible if they wished to see. The Israelites were seen as grasshoppers by their enemies- and so this is how they came to perceive themselves (Num. 13:33). Prov. 23:7 RV observes: “As he reckoneth within himself, so is he”. We are defined by our own self-perception. We must come in the end to perceive ourselves from God’s perspective and not according to how men perceive us.

Lk. 4:18 parallels “the poor” with “the brokenhearted… the captives… the bruised”. The whole mission of Jesus was to bring good news to the poor (Is. 61:1,2 cp. Lk. 4:18–21; Mt. 11:5). This doesn’t mean that the materially rich are outside the scope of the Gospel. It means that we are all “the poor”. Therefore the huge emphasis on helping the poor applies to the poor themselves- to be generous to the poor in spirit. You don’t need money in your pocket to be generous to “the poor”. Paul could say that although he was poor, he made many rich (2 Cor. 6:10). The initial appeal of these words was to the exiles, who were not materially poor. But they were depressed and poor in spirit. The good news to the poor is the Gospel, and is fulfilled by preaching it to the poor in spirit- not good deeds for the materially poor.

To proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to those who are bound- The allusion is to the proclamation of the year of Jubilee on the day of atonement. The Jubilee hinted at return to originally held land, and that was so relevant to the exiles: "It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family” (Lev. 25:10). All debts- the huge debt of Judah's sin- were cancelled. The *go'el*

had redeemed them; the Lord Jesus gave His life a ransom payment for many. The release of prisoners alludes to how there was an amnesty given to prisoners when a new king was enthroned. The initial reference is clearly to the exiles imprisoned in Babylon. The cross was that enthronement, the lifting up of the Lord on high, when in the eyes of the world- this was the lowest point any man could be brought to. The year of jubilee depended on the calendar. But the Lord Jesus stated that "this day is this scripture fulfilled". He was the Lord of history, and so proclaimed the jubilee there and then. With the implication it was now an era of Jubilee and not just a year. Through the cross, freedom was obtained for the spiritually imprisoned; but that jubilee is to be proclaimed by us. And so the Lord Himself quoted Is. 61:1 about Himself: He proclaimed liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. For the exiles refused to accept they were imprisoned and largely didn't want the freedom proclaimed. But this passage is evidently behind Peter's assertion that after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus preached to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:18,19). His resurrection was the basis of His command to go into all the world and preach the word; and thereby His preachers went out to do and continue the work which He personally had done. Those who are bound are expanded into "the bruised" in Lk. 4:18; alluding to the temporal bruising of the heel of the seed of the woman by sin, the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). The opening of the prison in practice means, for now, the opening of blind eyes to the wonderful spiritual vista of the Kingdom and things of the Lord Jesus.

The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:4,5. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life.

These words have often been taken as a kind of credo for Christians to try to implement social justice in the world. But that is not at all the context, nor the original intention, nor the way in which these words were interpreted by the Lord when He quoted them about Himself. The literally poor may hear the Gospel and remain poor. The prisoner serving a life sentence may believe these words but remain in prison. The literally blind will have their spiritual eyes opened, but will not necessarily gain physical sight. The message is of the greatest psychological reversal imaginable- that depressed sinners, poor in spirit, imprisoned by sin, can be released. And the mortal shall finally be clothed in

immortality with eternal joy. Social justice is not in view here. The literal prisoner remains in prison, even whilst rejoicing at the great reversal that has happened to him due to accepting the message of the Anointed one. It is "good news", the Gospel, that is brought to the oppressed- not a package of housing and welfare benefits.

Isaiah 61:2 To proclaim the time of Yahweh's grace, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn- "Time" is "year", alluding to the year of Jubilee of :1 being proclaimed. We note the contrast between a *year* of grace and the singular *day* of vengeance. When reading this passage (Lk. 4:20,21), the Lord Jesus stopped His reading after "the year of Yahweh's grace"; because the "day of vengeance" had been postponed by His work until the last day (2 Thess. 1:7-9). The comfort of the mourners was that spoken of in Is. 40; the coming of Messiah was to be prefaced by comfort to the mourners, those who mourned for their sins. It is not those generally in sorrow who are in view, but those who mourn their sins in repentance. Or we could think that the Lord stopped short of quoting "And the day of vengeance" because He had dealt with judgment. His focus was upon the wonderful transformation and salvation now possible.

AV "To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD". Just a few verses earlier we have read the same word; of how "in My favour / acceptance have I had mercy on You" (Is. 60:10). This grace was now being proclaimed. By the sinful behaviour of the returned exiles, they had precluded the day of God's acceptance of them. "Grace" here is the word for "acceptance". And it is acceptance which is such a huge need in human psychology… we crave acceptance by parents. And above all, at least subconsciously, by our Heavenly Father. And we have that acceptance in the Lord Jesus. It is the word God used when He reprimanded them for their hypocrisy: "Will you call this an acceptable day to Yahweh?" (Is. 58:5). The word is used of how Yahweh refused to "accept" the offerings of the returned exiles (Mal. 2:13), just as He had refused to accept them before the exile (Jer. 6:20). Therefore the Lord Jesus made this proclamation of the acceptable year to Israel in His hometown of Nazareth (Lk. 4), and to all who would follow Him by making this passage the basis of the beatitudes. Which are the opening manifesto of His Kingdom message. And He closed the scroll without quoting "And the day of vengeance…". We note the contrast between the *year* of Yahweh's acceptance / grace, and the *day* of vengeance / redress. God's focus is far more upon acceptance than necessary vengeance / redress.

The "comfort" of the mourners is that pronounced in Is. 40, "Comfort, comfort My people". But it was a comfort that had to be accepted. Initially, this "comfort" would have been in the restoration of Zion: "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted *in Jerusalem*" (Is. 66:13). Those who mourned "in Zion" (Is. 61:3) would be comforted "in" Jerusalem / Zion. But the Jews refused this. And so the comfort is now offered to God's new people through the work of the

Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, and will come to full term when the Lord returns to Jerusalem to visibly establish His Kingdom.

Isaiah 61:3 To appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give to them a garland for ashes- The good news / Gospel of :1 was not only deliverance from sin but also deliverance into a new condition; beauty instead of ashes, joy instead of mourning and praise instead of despair. Zion is specifically the temple mount. At the rebuilding of the temple [which was not according to the plans given in Ez. 40-48) some Jews had wept [because it clearly wasn't the restoration that was possible] and others rejoiced because it was at least a temple of sorts. Those who mourned in Zion were therefore those who mourned both for their own disobedience and for the dysfunctional state of God's people, and how they had missed so much potential in the things of the Kingdom. That despair for the people of God, and for our own personal failures, is perhaps the hallmark spanning the generations of all God's genuine people. And that mourning in and for Zion shall be turned to joy finally, and even now. As noted on :1, these words are initially offered to the captives in Babylon. Those who at the same time mourned in Zion would then refer to the poor of the land who had remained and not gone into exile. It seems from Jer. 41:5 that even when the temple site had been destroyed, the faithful from amongst those "poor of the land" brought bloodless sacrifices to the temple site; and they did so in mourning, with shaved beards, torn clothes and having gashed themselves in mourning: "There came men from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even eighty men, having their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and having cut themselves, with meal offerings and frankincense in their hand, to bring them to the house of Yahweh". LXX adds "striking their breasts". Here we have evidence for mourners in Zion. Doing their best to serve their God despite not having a temple and being unable to meet all their obligations. Joy was promised for them, and for all those of their spirit down the generations.

"Garland" is literally a bonnet, and is used of the bonnets with which the priests were to be clothed in the restored temple (Ez. 44:18; Ex. 39:28). But they refused to build and operate the structure of Ez. 40-48 and so precluded any possibility of this being fulfilled in them; and they didn't mourn for their sins.

The oil of joy- The term is only used for the anointing of the sinless Messiah, the Lord Jesus (Ps. 45:7 = Heb. 1:9). But His anointing will become that of all who are "in Christ". Anointing with oil was used to consecrate both priests and kings. Ps. 45:7 uses "the oil of joy" to describe the coronation ritual. The mourners will be suddenly exalted not only to joy, but to kingship. King-priests to reign on earth (Rev. 5:10). These people who in this life were so depressed and unsure of themselves, the mourners and poor in spirit, will become rulers and priests for others, to bring them to God. Such a huge transformation.

And surely this is the secret desire of every spiritual person- to be a blessing to others, to bring others to God and His salvation in Jesus.

For mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness- Mourning is contrasted with being planted as trees of righteousness, confirming the suggestion on :2 that the mourning in view is of penitence, rather than sadness in general. Sorrow and mourning shall flee away in that forgiveness and salvation will finally come. The joy which replaces the mourning is the joy of good conscience with God. Nehemiah in his mourning for the state of his people began to fulfill Is. 61:3, concerning how those who wept over Zion would be given joy- but the prophecy continues to speak of how the old wastes of Zion would be rebuilt and repaired, and the Messianic age ushered in. He didn't go on to fulfill this. Mourning being turned into joy would have happened if the mourning exiles (Ps. 137:1; Lam. 1:4) had accepted the new covenant offered them (s.w. Jer. 31:13 "I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow"); but they rejected it. And so this comes true in the experience of those in our age who accept that covenant.

As noted on :1, although this is not technically a servant song, the language is full of reference to the earlier servant songs. A "spirit of heaviness" is literally a failing spirit, a spirit of almost giving up; the same word used for the "dimly burning" wick that the servant was to fan into life in Is. 42:3. Those now clothed with the garment of praise had at one point been dimly burning wicks, about to go out and lose it all- but for the amazing efforts of the Messianic servant, our Lord and Saviour. Our saviour in that He revived our faith and kept it burning. Truly we shall look back and reflect how we very nearly lost it all, lost the wonderful eternity we will then reside it- were it not for His careful, sensitive efforts in keeping our flame burning and growing. And we are to reflect His efforts for us in how we attempt to keep the weak flame burning in others. Every one of us who will finally be saved will have been the dimly burning, smouldering wicks that nearly went out completely.

That they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh, that He may be glorified- This is the time of Ez. 34:29 (s.w.), and also of Is. 60:21 "Your people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified". Their salvation would be on account of their identity with the Messianic "branch", the Lord Jesus; they would be "in Christ" and thereby saved. Inheritance of the land forever is the language of the Abrahamic covenant; this would come true because of righteousness being imputed to them. And the end result of that system of salvation, as Paul brings out in Romans, would be glory to God.

Isaiah 61:4 They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations- "Arise / raise up" is the word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to

"Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival.

And they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations- The temple still lay "waste" (Hag. 1:4,9) just as it had lain "desolate" [s.w. Jer. 33:10,12] after the Babylonian destruction. The 'restoration' was in fact not really a restoration at all, in God's eyes. Thus Ezra sat down desolate [AV "astonied"] at the news of Judah's apostasy in marrying the surrounding women; using the very same word as frequently used to describe the 'desolate' Jerusalem that was to be rebuilt (Ezra 9:3 cp. Is. 49:8,19; 54:3; 61:4). He tore his priestly garment (Ezra 9:3), as if he realized that all Ezekiel's prophesies about those priestly garments now couldn't come true (s.w. Ez. 42:14; 44:17,19). Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah's record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfill the Messianic prophecies about them which existed. And this seems to have been foreseen in this prophecy, because it speaks of the desolations of "many generations", implying a far longer desolation than the 70 years exile in Babylon.

But "desolations of many generations" is literally 'the perpetual / eternal generations'. Jer. 25:9 had said that Zion was to be "perpetual desolations / ruins". Is. 61:4 promises a restoration of the perpetual / eternal desolations which were the judgment for Judah's sin in Jer. 25:9. This was by amazing grace alone. Just as we ask for punishment of eternal death for sin to be undone in our case. But it is by grace alone.

This physical rebuilding of Zion and the cities of Judah is clearly presented as being part of the re-established Kingdom of God on earth, with Gentiles serving the Jews (:5). But this great potential didn't happen. The exiles precluded it by their lack of real faith and apostacy. These things were reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who was the supreme temple of God; in Him Yahweh dwelt, as John's Gospel often states. But that temple of His body was destroyed, and rebuilt in His resurrection: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn. 2:19).

Isaiah 61:5 Gentiles shall stand and feed your flocks, and foreigners shall be your plough men and your vine dressers- This is all because "But you shall be... priests" (:6). The picture is of all their secular matters being attended to by Gentiles so that they might focus upon their priestly work. This is surely the hope and dream of every servant of God; to have all secular issues taken care of, so they can focus upon spiritual things.

Isaiah 61:6 But you shall be named the priests of Yahweh; men will call you the ministers of our God-

We must not fail to recognize how radical was the statement that the "ministers" in the restored city and temple would be Gentiles (Is. 56:6). For "ministering to Yahweh" is the language of the Levites and priesthood. The priesthood was going to be radically changed; clearly enough, a new covenant is in view. We must compare this with the statement that the restored Zion and people of God would be the ministers, whilst Gentiles would be their servants: "Gentiles shall stand and feed your flocks, and foreigners shall be your plough men and your vine dressers. But you shall be named the priests of Yahweh; men will call you the ministers of our God" (Is. 61:5,6). The contrast appears to be between the "Gentiles" and the "you" who will be "the ministers of our God". That "you" is defined in Is. 61:3 as the restored Zion / people of God. But Is. 56:6 says that Gentiles and eunuchs would be the "ministers of our God". We conclude that "Zion" is being redefined to include Gentiles, eunuchs and whoever wants to be "in" the Servant Israel. But "Gentiles" are still mentioned as if it were unbelievers; but believing foreigners / Gentiles are included in the people of God and spoken of differently: "foreigners will not drink your must for which you have laboured… foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines, but you shall be called priests of Yahweh" (Is. 62:8; 61:5,6). Another approach is to understand that the Jews will be made priests, and the Gentiles elevated to the position of Israel. Thus the true Israel will finally fulfil their intended potential to be a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6).

Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). "Men", the Gentiles, would treat Israel as their priests. The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

You will eat the wealth of the nations, and you will boast in their glory- The Hebrew is difficult, literally "in their splendor you shall *be substituted* in their stead". The idea seems to be that the Gentiles will not glory in their own wealth, but rather in how much they can do for Israel.

Isaiah 61:7 Instead of your shame you shall have double- LXX "thus shall they inherit the land a second time". Or the idea may simply be that they inherit double what they ought to, such is God's grace to them and desire to load them with double blessing (Is. 40:2; Zech. 9:12), just as He gave double to Job as representative of restored Israel (Job 42:10).

And instead of dishonour they shall rejoice in their portion- Their "portion" is parallel with "their land". But they didn't rejoice in their land because they preferred the softer life of Persia, as the book of Esther makes clear; rather than returning to a desolated land and rebuilding God's Kingdom there.

Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be to them- "In their land" the Jews would receive "everlasting joy"- but they didn't want to return to their land to receive it.

We could render Is. 40:2: "Indeed, she will receive double from the hand of Yahweh in exchange for all of the suffering on account of her sins". This double blessing is that of Is. 61:7: "Instead of your shame you shall have double; and instead of dishonour they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess double". It is in Is. 53 that we have the explanation as to how suffering for sin can lead to this double blessing- it was through the suffering servant, representative of Israel and yet morally perfect.

LXX "Thus shall they inherit the land a second time, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head". Verse 10 LXX likewise stresses the intense eternal joy: "and they shall greatly rejoice in the Lord. Let my soul rejoice in the Lord… the garment of joy". This in turn is building upon earlier such prophecies in Isaiah: "Yahweh's ransomed ones will return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy will be on their heads. They will obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away" (Is. 35:10, repeated in Is. 51:11). Joy is such a major theme, especially the eternal nature of that joy.

Isaiah 61:8 For I, Yahweh, love justice, I hate robbery with iniquity; and I will give them their recompense in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them-

We could render: "For I am the Lord, Who loves justice, hates robbery in a burnt offering". And yet Malachi rebuked the returned exiles for offering God stolen animals. Thus they precludes the wonderful potential possible. A love as strong as God's is going to also elicit the emotion of hatred and anger when that love is rejected and abused. He "hated" (s.w.) Judah's insincere worship and relationship with Him (Is. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4). But it is hard to separate the sin from the sinner. That distinction may be helpful for us in order to avoid judging others too personally, but God it seems doesn't make that decision. He gave Israel into the hands of those who hated her (s.w. Ez. 16:27,37)

and in that sense He hated her. The feelings of hatred which Hosea had for Gomer due to her abuse of His love were those of God for Israel: "There I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). God is not simply "love" in the abstract. He is love for real, with all the emotion and psychological complex which goes along with love; and this will include hatred if that love is abused.

Isaiah 61 gives a detailed prophecy of the restoration and how it could flourish into God's Kingdom, and then adds that "I hate robbery for burnt offering"; as if to say that *if* Judah offered with the right spirit and showed justice, *then* the everlasting covenant would be entered with them. But this just didn't happen. They themselves disallowed it. Malachi laments that the exiles offered such stolen animals for sacrifice; and Ez. 22:29 laments that the "people of the land" robbed [s.w.] the poor; and now we learn, that they even sacrificed some of the stolen animals to God.

"I will make an everlasting covenant with them" references the offer of the new covenant to the exiles. They refused it, preferring to keep parts of the old covenant which was already broken. And so it has been offered to us.

Isaiah 61:9 Their seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which Yahweh has blessed- The implication seems to be that the children of the repentant exiles would be known among the nations, as if they would travel amongst them revealing by example and teaching the Abrahamic covenant. They would be the fulfilment of the promises of blessing upon the seed.

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels-

We naturally enquire who is speaking here. Quite possibly the same voice as in :1, which I suggested was initially Isaiah or the prophets. The same language will be used in Is. 62:1-3 about Zion, the redeemed community, being made righteous by God's huge efforts, and thus being a witness to the Gentiles: "For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace... until her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The nations shall see your righteousness... you shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of Yahweh shall name... You shall also be a crown of beauty in the hand of Yahweh, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God". This recalls the mitre or "garland" here spoken of. It could be that Isaiah personally grasps the wonder of his personally being part of these general prophecies of "Zion". Just as we are to grasp the wonder of our personal part in these collective prophecies. We shall be priests for the

nations; our desire to bring others to God will then finally be realized. Yet we must develop that desire now, and not simply be a religious attender or box ticker.

Isaiah as representative of the true Israel rejoices in prospect of salvation, imagining and understanding how his salvation was due to being clothed as a high priest; being, in our terms, "in Christ". The LXX uses the language of the High Priest: "he has put a mitre on me as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with ornaments (NEV "jewels") as a bride". The jewels would then allude to the precious stones of the breastplate. It is the Messianic priest, the Lord Jesus, who is in view; and all those who are in Him. The idea is that high priest is getting married, and as he would clothe himself with these things to go into the sanctuary on service, he now does so in order to marry. His service of his wife is therefore in being her loving high priest.

We have been clothed with God's righteousness (Is. 61:10; Rev. 3:18) , and therefore we should be clothed with humility too, as our response to this (1 Pet. 5:5). And the element of unreality here is that God as it were dresses up His own bride. Israel is so often set up as the bride of God (Is. 54:5; 61:10; 624,5; Jer. 2:2; 3:14; Hos. 2:19,20). This is why any infidelity to God is spoken of as adultery (Mal. 2:11; Lev. 17:7; 20:5,6; Dt. 31:16; Jud. 2:17; 8:27,33; Hos. 9:1). The very language of Israel 'selling themselves to do iniquity' uses the image of prostitution. This is how God feels our even temporary and fleeting acts and thoughts of unfaithfulness. This is why God is jealous for us (Ex. 20:15; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15)- because His undivided love for us is so exclusive. He expects us to be totally *His*.

Isaiah 61:11 For as the earth brings forth its bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord Yahweh will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nation- The returned exiles, or [later] all who wished to become part of God's restored Kingdom, would be empowered by the water of the Spirit (see on Is. 44:3) to "spring up" on what had previously been dry ground (Is. 44:4). That Spirit would be articulated partly through the prophetic word (Is. 55:10 s.w. "bud" AV). This will be the restored Eden, where Yahweh had caused the vegetation to "spring up" (s.w. Gen. 2:5). This springing up or growing would be in the fulfilment of the promises to David of the establishment of the Kingdom of his seed (s.w. 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 132:17). But the springing up would be of a community of people, the plural seed who were "in" the singular Messianic seed. And this is now experienced through baptism into the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:27-29). It is "righteousness" which would "spring up" (s.w. Is. 61:11); the work of the Spirit would result in the seed becoming righteous through their spiritual transformation. And yet it will also be on account of their status as "in" the "branch of righteousness" which will "spring up" (Jer. 33:15). The work of the Spirit will be, and is, to transform the plural seed in practice into what they are by status in the

Messiah- righteous. And it is this power, this gift, this Divine 'causing' us to be righteous, which every spiritual person so thirsts for.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 62

Isaiah 62:1 For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest-

God had long kept silent during the exile (Is. 42:14 "I have been silent a long time, I have been quiet and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a travailing woman"; 57:11 "Have you stopped honoring me because I have kept silent for so long?"; 64:12 ; 65:6 "Behold, it is written before Me [perhaps referring to Is. 62:1]: I will not keep silence, but will recompense"). But now He says He will not be silent again, but will restlessly work for the restoration of Zion. It could be argued that although the exiles precluded Him achieving His immediate hopes and intentions for them at that time, He has been restless in His work to restore Zion- from the time of the restoration up until this day. The potentials for God's people were and are so huge. God doesn't simply offer them to us. He proactively works without rest in order to try to realize them. Which means doing all He can to get us to respond.

The question is, Who is speaking here? Isaiah, or God? It seems to me that it is Isaiah, but, with the spirit of God in him. So that effectively these are also God's feelings and appeals. This theme continues. God will not keep silent (:1) and neither will those who pray to Him (:6). Their restlessness means He too is not at rest. Just as Boaz was not at rest [s.w.] until he had secured Ruth as his bride. At times the prophets are found pleading with God to change the word which they themselves had pronounced and knew to be justified. Is. 62:1-7; 51:9 even appear to be Isaiah's challenge to the Lord to not let His judgment remain on Zion- Isaiah will not keep silent, nor will his fellow prophets, until God acts. He begs God to not restrain Himself, and to take note of the desolation caused (Is. 63:15; 64:8-12).

The statement that God will not "rest" for Zion's sake (Is. 62:1) must be understood in the context of the faithful at that time urging God *not* to "be still" [same Hebrew word translated "rest"] for His people (Ps. 83:1; Is. 64:12). This is an allusion to Boaz not being at rest until he had redeemed Ruth and Naomi; see on Is. 49:26. God is *not* at rest, He is *not* distant from us; and yet His people in Babylon felt that He was. It's no wonder that we are tempted to feel the same. Yet we must give Is. 62:1 it's full weight- God is answering the complaint of His people by stating that no, He will never rest for them. In this same context we read that He that keeps Israel will "neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4).

We must give Is. 62:1 it's full weight- God is answering the complaint of His people by stating that no, He will never rest for them. In this same context we read that He that keeps Israel will "neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). The fact that *God* will never 'hold His peace' for His people's sake (Is. 62:1) means that *we* should likewise not 'hold our peace' for them (the same Hebrew is used in Is. 62:6). In our prayers for them, we are to give God no rest (Is. 62:7). And so the connection between Is. 62:1 and 6 leaves us with an amazing challenge: *His* restless activity and concern for His people should be

ours. It *must* be ours, if we are His children. Being bored from having 'nothing to do' just isn't part of the believer's life; His huge activity, the endless surging of His Spirit, is to be replicated in us as we too seek the good of others. If this connection is firmly established between His activity and ours, His Spirit and ours... then quite naturally we will seek to maximize our time for Him and be minimalists in the hours we spend upon the things of this life. As He never slumbers nor sleeps in His restless activity and thought for His people, so we shall likewise be in the Kingdom age; and our desire to be there is not because we fancy an eternal tropical holiday with palm trees blowing in the mind, but because we wish to be more closely aligned with His activity, with His Spirit, and not be held back by the limitations of our current natures.

Until her righteousness- The Lord Jesus, "the Lord our righteousness". The Gentiles will not congratulate Zion on her righteousness; rather will they be in awe of the way that such a sinful people have been justified by grace and had righteousness imputed to them through the Lord Jesus, Yah's salvation, Yahweh their righteousness (Jer. 23:6). And thus righteousness and salvation are here paralleled. Imputed righteousness in Christ will be the basis of Zion's salvation. They will see in practice the outworking of all Paul's exposition of these things in Romans. And gasp in wonder. And want it to be true for them too. The salvation and righteousness of Zion will be the Lord Jesus, likened to a burning lamp or torch. That is the very image He uses of Himself as the light or torch of the world, having spoken of how on the cross He would be lifted up on a piece of wood. The burning torch is Him crucified. The world will see that Israel have been saved because of the cross of the Lord Jesus counting them righteous by faith and thereby saving them. And they will likewise come to it. And so later we will read of Him crucified as the lifted up banner which brings all men to Him.

Go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns- It seems that Yahweh Himself would have dwelt in Zion, the "brightness" of the cherubim would have returned there (s.w. Ez. 1:4,13) resulting in a visible light which would have eclipsed the need for light from the sun and moon (Is. 4:5,6, "shining" is s.w. "brightness"). Such great potentials were wasted. But these things will come true in the last days and are alluded to in Rev. 21:4 as having literal truth when the Lord Jesus returns. This would be the fulfilment of the promise to David, that his glorified kingdom would be as the "brightness" after the rain of judgment (2 Sam. 23:4 s.w.). But until then these things are reapplied in a spiritual sense to the way the Lord Jesus, who is the light of God's glory, is to be the light of our world in which we live, move and understand life. He who has no light can find "brightness" in Him (s.w. Is. 50:10). This was hinted at even in Prov. 4:18, where the path of the just is as the "brightness" (s.w.) shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Some prophecies are dependent on prayer for their fulfilment. This is an example: "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the

righteousness thereof go forth as brightness". But this is dependent upon prayer: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem... ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest *till* he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (:6,7). The prophecy that "I will not rest" was dependent for fulfilment upon the faithful continuing to pray and thereby not giving Him rest. Of course, they pray from their own freewill; there is the possibility they won't pray, and thereby, surely, there's the possibility the statement "I will not rest" is purely conditional on our prayers...?

Isaiah 62:2 The nations shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of Yahweh shall name-

Being given a new name meant a change of status and yet also of changed character. We think of Jedidiah-Solomon, Eliakim-Jehoiakim, and Mattaniah-Zedekiah. Time and again, these Isaianic prophecies make the point that the whole world will be converted to Him because of the outpouring of His grace upon His people. They who crucified His Son will be declared righteous, through the work of the Lord. And will be visibly glorified. This declaration of sinners as righteous will be so powerful that the world will be converted. The new name given to Israel will reflect how they are counted righteous and are now righteous; for Hebrew names reflect character. Sinners being now counted righteous need to have a new name. This will all work out for each of us personally when we have a new name written upon us at the Lord's return (Rev. 3:12 surely alludes here in the promise of "a new name"). But all these things also have a fulfilment in the way the Lord Jesus was lifted up on the cross, and thus would gather all men to Him (Jn. 12:28).

They would perceive that their righteousness was in the Lord Jesus, "the Lord our righteousness", and that He was the glory of the people of Israel (Lk. 2:32). As is the case today, the witness to the Lord Jesus is most powerfully through the people whom He has redeemed. Their new name would be related to their being counted righteous; just as today, baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus means we are covered in the clothing of His righteousness.

The "new thing" promised in Is. 43:19 was the new covenant of Jer. 31:22,31, a new heart and a new spirit within them (Ez. 36:26), being called by a new name (Is. 62: 2) and the creation of a new 'heavens and a new earth' (Is. 65: 17). But that "new thing... springs forth now; don't you perceive it?" (Is. 43:19). It could have happened to the exiles, indeed God made it start to spring forth then. But they refused it. It has been offered to the world now, and so few of us grasp it.

Isaiah 62:3 You shall also be a crown of beauty in the hand of Yahweh, and a royal

diadem in the hand of your God- It is God's people who are in His hand (Dt. 33:3). The idea is that God is crowned with His people, they are His glory, and He is theirs, just as Paul's converts were his joy and crown. This is an amazing conception- that we who are so small and morally weak, can ultimately be God's crown. Because He is getting married; we recall from Song 3:11 how in royal wedding ceremonies, the bridegroom wears a crown. But that crown is His bride. It's all about glorifying Him. Cities with battlements were seen as crowned, as the wall and battlements were like a crown around the head, with the head being the temple / palace. Yahweh has the walls of Zion on His palm (Is. 49:16), and now He actually has the crown in His hand, He will place it upon her head. Or, upon His own head. The exiles were bitterly aware that in the destruction of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, "the crown is fallen from our head" (Lam. 5:16). That crown had in fact been placed upon God's people when they entered the covenant with Him at Sinai. He put "a beautiful crown on your head" (Ez. 16:12). That had been destroyed by the Babylonians; hence the significance of Is. 62:3 saying that Zion shall now have a crown of glory. The curse for disobedience, in all forms, would now be taken away. The exiles refused that, but it has been offered in a more essential sense to all God's new people now.

Or we can read all this as the language of a glorious royal wedding. The dejected, alcoholic Zion lying in the dust and abused by men now has shaken the dust off her as invited to, and now she has a name change (:3), a crown and a diadem- all the language of marriage. To none less than God Almighty.

Isaiah 62:4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall your land any more be termed Desolate: but you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for Yahweh delights in you, and your land shall be married-

This is all similar language to Is. 54:1,5,6: "more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife... For your Maker is your husband... Yahweh has called you as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off". However we look in vain for some description of Zion's change that has elicited this change in God's feelings for them. We might be more comfortable reading that to the effect that 'When Zion repents, then...' God will act like this. But it seems the initiative is all His. His core love for Zion leads Him to simply be passionate for them and remarry them. The initiative is all His. Quite possibly this is how finally it will have to be between God and Israel. He saves them because He cannot contain His love for them any more. The land was to be desolate because they had broken the old covenant (Lev. 26:33). It could be that the hint is that the end of that curse was because the old covenant had completely ended. God is loving His people and relating to them now on the basis of a new covenant. In the context of the exiles, the desolation of the land had been part of the Babylonian judgment (Jer. 4:27). But they are identified with that land, which shall be

freed from curse and married to God. We see in this the literal, physical element in God's plan of redeeming His people; that redemption is to be eternally enjoyed in a land, in fact in an earth cleansed from the curse. As so many scriptures make clear.

The names don't have to be taken literally, and some versions present them translated, e.g. ESV "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married". We could render: "You will no longer be called an abandoned woman, and your land will no longer be called a desolate one. Rather, you will be called My joy is in her. Your land will be called a married one". We note the continued importance and role of the literal land. The land is portrayed as a young woman in Song of Solomon. Salvation happens somewhere, it will be actual and realized in reality. Which is why the Abrahamic promise of the land are preserved as a literal theme and reality throughout the Bible. Salvation will be realized in the Kingdom of God on earth.

The word for "forsaken" has already been on the lips of Zion in Is. 49:14. But God had insisted that she had never actually been "forsaken" by Him: "Zion said, Yahweh has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me. [But, Yahweh replies…] Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet I will not forget you! Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands…". She never was really "an abandoned woman". But that's how she saw it and felt it, it was the wrong narrative Zion chose to believe about herself. And God here in Is. 62 doesn't correct that. He simply rejoices that she will no longer call herself abandoned nor forsaken, nor be perceived that way by others. All wrong narratives and false perceptions about God and His love will finally, eternally, be corrected. Those who could never quite believe God loved them will be eternally surprised by joy. And that is a profound truth. Some even labour today beneath doctrinal, theological misperceptions of God. But the eternal outpouring of His saving love will sweep them all away for ever. It's very easy to notice the misperceptions and mistaken narratives of others. But we have them ourselves. And they shall be no more. All corrected by God's love.

LXX "thy land shall be inhabited"; this fits with the meaning of the names given, for "Beulah" = "Inhabited by Yah"; "Hephzibah" = 'delight of Yah'. But the Hebrew Masoretic text reading "married" connects with how God speaks of how He would remarry Zion in the same way as her sons would remarry her (:4,5)- but her sons chose to stay in Babylon, and so the joyous wedding ceremony God envisaged didn't happen. They preferred to nurse their own negative self-image, that Yahweh had forsaken them (Is. 49:14).

God not only forgives, but He delights in doing so (as Mic. 7:18 "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the disobedience of the remnant of His heritage? He doesn't retain his anger forever, because He delights in loving kindness"); the way He is spoken of as 'delighting' in spiritually weak Israel is part and parcel of Him lavishing

grace as He does (Num. 14:8 "Since Yahweh delights in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it to us - a land which flows with milk and honey"). It must be so awful to have such a wonderful spirit of lavishing grace and love, consciously giving out life and patient forgiveness to so many; and yet not be appreciated for it, to have puny humans shaking their fist at God because they die a brief moment of time sooner than they think they should, to have tiny people arrogantly questioning His love. Seeing that God is Almighty, and God could have made [and could re-make] His creation to 'understand' and respond in a robot-like way... and seeing God has real and deep emotional feelings... it all makes God almost a tragic figure.

Isaiah 62:5 For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons shall marry you- See on Is. 49:14. LXX makes this more relevant to the exiles returning and living in Zion: "And as a young man lives with a virgin, so shall thy sons dwell in thee". But most of the sons of Zion didn't return there, preferring Babylon; and of those who did, most wouldn't live in Jerusalem but preferred living outside the city and developing their own farmsteads (see on Neh. 11:1,2). "Sons" is *banayich* but this is also a form of *banah,* to build. Her sons were to be her builders. The land and physical city of Jerusalem is likened to a female and the exiles as the young man. But the truth was that by declining the invitation to return to the land, the exiles were declining marriage. Hence NRSV: "For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you". God built Zion and so He marries His own creation; we recall Ps. 147:2 "Yahweh builds up Jerusalem".

But :4 has said that it is Yahweh as the man who delights in the young woman Zion. The exiles are therefore asked to identify with Him. So God likens Himself to the young man marrying the virgin of Zion; even though she has acted as a whore, He sees her now as a born again virgin. It seems evident that there must have been some kind of previous creation(s), e.g. for the creation of the Angels. God existed from infinity, and yet only 2,000 years ago did He have His only and His *begotten* Son. And that Son was a human being in order to save humans- only a few million of us (if that), who lived in a 6,000 year time span. In the specter of infinite time and space, this is wondrous. That the Only Son of God should die for a very few of us here, we who crawled on the surface of this tiny planet for such a fleeting moment of time. He died so that God could work out our salvation; and the love of God for us is likened to a young man marrying a virgin (Is. 62:5). Almighty God, who existed from eternity, is likened to a first timer, with all the intensity and joyful expectation and lack of disillusion. And more than this. The Jesus who didn't pre-exist but was like me, died for *me*, in the shameful way that He did. Our hearts and minds, with all their powers, are in the boundless prospect lost. His pure *love* for us, His condescension, should mean that we also ought to reach out into the lives of all men, never thinking they are beneath us or too insignificant or distant from us. No wonder 1 Jn. 4:15,16 describes believing that Jesus is the Son of God as believing the love that God has to us.

And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you- This suggests that Yahweh's joy over the restored state of Zion was a reflection of the joy which the exiles showed over her. They should have responded to the decree of Cyrus with real joy, according to Ps 126:1-3: "When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad". But their joy wasn't *so* ecstatic. They were happy for those who chose to return and gave them material help to this end, but the majority didn't feel the joy personally. This Divine rejoicing over God's people is that of the God who rejoices in fulfilling His covenant with His obedient people (Dt. 28:63; 30:9). It will be a mutual joy, with Yahweh's people rejoicing in Him (s.w. Is. 61:10; 65:18) and He in them (Is. 62:5; 65:19) because they have entered the new marriage covenant with Him (Jer. 32:41). There is the marriage and also the "rejoicing over" or 'cheering up'. This is the language of a honeymoon. Redeemed Zion shall have eternal joy because the honeymoon state endures eternally. God's joy is her joy. It is the ultimate picture of ecstatically joyful, mutual relationship. And this is ours for ever. But it has to start now.

Isaiah 62:6 I have set watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day nor night: you who call on Yahweh, take no rest-

Verse 7 will suggest these "watchmen" are those who pray for God not to rest until He has made Zion His wife. But He places them on the walls and orders them to give Him no rest. It's as if He overrules even prayer, in order to advance His purpose. He may have prayer as a precondition, but then He provokes and commands His people to pray... straining at the very limits of human freewill in order to achieve His saving purpose. He is not simply open to answering prayer. He places prayer on the hearts of people, so that they pray, so that He can respond. Surely we have all experienced having a specific situation placed upon our heart to pray for regarding another person, even though that situation is unknown to us- and we find that in fact they were in just that situation when we had been praying for them. My dear brother Spiro felt that "Duncan is in trouble by a bridge in Ukraine" during the Russia-Ukraine war, and so I was. Unknown to him at the time. He prayed those words, and I was delivered. At the very time he prayed.

The broken down walls of Jerusalem (as described in Nehemiah) were as it were engraved on the palms of God Almighty so that "Your walls are continually before Me" (Is. 49:16). But in that imagination, God says that He had placed watchmen on those walls to give Him no rest until He had restored those walls. Daniel surely took this seriously, for he prayed three times / day toward Jerusalem for her restoration- and was willing to give his life in order to continue publically doing so. He was noted for thus serving his God "continually" (Dan. 6:20 "whom you serve continually"), without rest.

And we see Daniel's recorded prayer of Dan. 9 as being focused upon the restoration of Jerusalem. But Daniel was as it were "set" by God to do this. So why then did the restoration not happen? Because God will not override human freewill, nor reduce man to a puppet. Despite the constant prayer of the likes of Daniel, and God's restless to restore Zion as seen throughout Isaiah... there was not a sufficient freewill desire for it from His people. And so it didn't happen. But His people are to pray for this blessed situation to come about, when Zion shall repent and be saved by grace, and the Gentiles marvel at it (see on :1). The same words are found in Ps. 83:1 "God, don't keep silent. Don't keep silent and don't be still"- until Israel are permanently saved from their enemies and established as God's Kingdom on earth.

The watchmen may specifically refer to prophets, who earnestly pray and seek for the fulfilment of their words. But Judah's prophets at the time of the 'restoration' were false and lazy, as described in Is. 57,58. They were watchmen who were blind and sleepy.

The watchmen were looking for the return of the exiles from Babylon and were giving Yahweh no rest until He brought this about. But they were "set" there, just as God gives repentance. He gave them that mindset. See on :1.

Prayer is a way of making us realize the presence of the God who is always present. God's people are told to "keep not silence" in their prayers to God (Is. 62:6). But the same Hebrew word is translated "Give Him no rest" in the next verse (Is. 62:7). Insofar as the voice of prayer is never silent world-wide, so far God is never, in that sense, at rest. The extent of His activity for us is simply *huge*.

Is. 62:6,7 speaks of watchmen [= the prophets, Ezekiel 3:17; Jer. 6:17; Hab. 2:1] set upon Jerusalem's walls as watchmen, keeping no silence [in their prophesying] until Jerusalem was established. For the link between the prophets and standing on a watchtower, see Hab. 2:1. Is this not a reference to Malachi, Haggai and Zechariah prophesying as the basis upon which the newly built walls of Jerusalem would be preserved, and the city develop into the Messianic Kingdom hoped for? Note that the rebuilt Jerusalem of Ezra's time and the latter day Jerusalem are the same thing in Isaiah; the Kingdom could've come then. Watchmen upon the walls were looking for something- for the approach of the Messianic messenger with good tidings of Judah's full return from captivity, of which Isaiah had spoken in Isaiah 52:7,8. But most of Judah preferred to stay in Babylon, took up a collection for the few who did return... and no Messiah could appear with that news. God had promised this- but He asked to be put in remembrance of His promises (Is. 43:26), i.e. He asked for those watchmen to be His 'rememberancers', even though He cannot in that sense forget them (Ps. 119:49; Jer. 14:21). In all this we see an exquisite picture of how God works with men, how His promised faithfulness and omnipotence all the same has built into it a requirement for human prayerfulness and response. The reality was that the watchmen / prophets of Israel were blind, ignorant and sleepy (Isaiah 56:10).

Compare the following passages:

“I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Is. 62:6,7)

with

“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph. 1:15-17).

The ideas of praying without ceasing and making mention occur in both passages. Surely Paul had the Isaiah passage in mind. It seems that he saw the ecclesia as the spiritual Zion. In the same way as Zion’s watchmen were exhorted to pray for her without ceasing until the Kingdom is established there, so Paul prayed for the spiritual growth of his brethren. The implication is surely that once a certain level of spirituality had been achieved, then the Lord will return to establish His Kingdom.

Isaiah 62:7 And give Him no rest, until He establishes and until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth-

Jerusalem will be made a praise to the whole earth not because the Gentiles praise Jerusalem for being Jerusalem. Rather, the praise will be in that people will be motivated to praise God because of the extreme grace and salvation experienced by Jerusalem.

See on :6. This was partially fulfilled by a minority praying for the restoration of Zion during the 70 years captivity; Daniel and his friends are evident examples. Several passages in Isaiah (e.g. Is. 64:8-12) record model prayers for Zion’s restoration. But the prayers dried up after the return; Isaiah’s exhortation was ignored. The returnees did keep silence, and therefore Zion was not established as a praise in the earth.

Our prayers are to give the Father no "rest" (Is. 62:7), no cessation from violent warfare (Heb.). Isaiah had prophesied that God would not rest until Zion be restored. Watchmen would be set upon Zion’s walls who would give Him no rest until the walls be rebuilt (Is. 62:1,6,7). At this time, Zion was felt by God to be the “apple of his eye” (Zech. 2:8). This prophesy started to be fulfilled straight after the Babylonian invasion when Jeremiah urged the desolated people to pray: “O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease” (Lam. 2:18). The prayerful remnant gave *themselves* no rest; and thus was fulfilled the prophecy that *God* would have no rest. Sincere prayer according to God’s will meant that there was a strange mutuality between the Father and those who prayed to Him.

Both He and they considered Zion to be the apple of their eye; and thus the prayers were ultimately answered and Zion was restored.

What we bring to our mind in prayer, we bring to God's mind. Those who pray for Jerusalem “keep not silence”- and therefore they give God “no rest” (Is. 62:6,7). But the Hebrew word for “keep not silence” and for ‘give no rest’ is one and the same! There’s a clear play on words here. If we give ourselves no rest in prayer, then we give God no rest. His Spirit or mind becomes our spirit or mind, and vice versa. And hence the telling comments in Romans 8 about our spirit / mind being mediated to God in prayer through Jesus, in His role as ‘the Lord the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:26,27). Yet God Himself had stated that He will not rest nor hold His peace for Zion’s sake (Is. 62:1). Yet His doing this is conditional upon His prayerful people not allowing Him to rest due to their prayers.

The failure of the restored exiles to fulfill these things led to their reapplication and reinterpretation. Paul in Rom. 1:9 ["unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers"] is surely alluding to Is. 62:6,7: “On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth”. Paul saw the Gentile believers in Rome as spiritual Jerusalem. It’s not that God forgets and needs reminding, but rather that by our prayers for others we as it were focus His special attention upon them. Paul several times states that he is day and night, continually in prayer for others. He likely had the Isaiah passage in mind; his brethren in Christ were now for him the Jerusalem upon whom his hopes were set, rather than upon the physical city as had been the case in Judaism.

Isaiah 62:8 Yahweh has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength, Surely I will no more give your grain to be food for your enemies; and foreigners shall not drink your new wine, for which you have laboured-

Oaths were made by lifting up the hand toward Heaven and appealing to God. As God could swear by no greater (Heb. 6:13), He is represented as swearing by himself. "No more" suggests this speaks of an eternal state, in the Kingdom. And God vows eternity for us on His own eternity. The idea of God no more giving their grain and wine to their enemies alludes to the curses for breaking the old covenant in Dt. 28:30,31. The idea is that the curse for disobedience will be permanently ended, "no more" to be experienced. This will only be true in God's Kingdom.

To lose the fruits of agricultural labour to invading foreigners was part of the curses for breaking covenant with Yahweh. He promises here, therefore, not to punish sin any more. This would be because of His right hand and strength, terms which apply to His manifestation in His Son the Lord Jesus (Ps. 80:17). Such a situation implies the emergence of a situation where sin has already been appropriately punished, and Israel

are not going to sin any more. The intention of the new covenant was to place God's Spirit within His people so that they didn't sin and were immortalized. If this Spirit is within us and is already beginning to work, we likewise have thereby the guarantee that we too shall emerge into the Kingdom of God, immortal and unable to sin (Eph. 1:14).

Isaiah 62:9 But those who have garnered it shall eat it, and praise Yahweh; and those who have gathered it shall drink it in the courts of My sanctuary- The "it" refers to the new wine made from grapes they had themselves gathered (:8). The allusion is to the commands to bring their tithes and offerings to the sanctuary and eat them there, rather than in their homes (Lev. 19:23-25; Dt. 12:17,18). This at best would be fulfilled in essence rather than to the letter in the final fulfilment of the last days. The new covenant offered to the exiles was not the same as the Mosaic law, which was the old covenant which they had broken. But the flavour of this idea of bringing tithes and eating them in the sanctuary suggests that this was intended to have happened at the time of the restoration. So much potential was wasted. "In the courts" shows that clearly the primary scenario envisaged was of the temple being restored and the exiles bringing their produce there. The allusion is to the keeping of the feasts, when the first-fruits were eaten with rejoicing before Yahweh (Dt. 12:17). The "gathering" refers to the ingathering feast of Dt. 20:6; 28:30. The new covenant offered to the exiles promised this kind of thing in Jer. 31:5: "Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy its fruit". There could have been a temple system restored, had they followed the commandments for this in Ez. 40-48.

Isaiah 62:10 Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way of the people! Cast up, cast up the highway! Gather out the stones!-

The gates could be those famous gates of Babylon, as if this again is a call to leave Babylon. But GNB may be right: "People of Jerusalem, go out of the city and build a road for your returning people! Prepare a highway; clear it of stones!". Zion would then refer to the repentant remnant in Zion, who were to go out of their gates and remove any stumbling blocks which were preventing the exiles in Babylon from returning. This didn't happen at the time. But the true Zion likewise appeals to the Jews to leave spiritual Babylon and accept God's wonderful plan for them. We note that our message to the world also involves removing and not placing stumbling blocks for them. Putting verses 10 and 11 together, the idea may be that "Zion" goes out of her gates to prepare the way for the nations to come to her. Her message is that she is proclaiming to the end of the earth that she has been redeemed, and that in fact Yah's salvation ['Jesus'] is coming for them. And because of the stellar, supremely parade example of His grace to Israel, the nations come. And "they shall call them The holy people, The redeemed of Yahweh: and

you shall be called Sought out, A city not forsaken". The Gentiles will marvel at God's grace to Zion, and themselves seek a similar salvation.

This prepared highway is a major theme of Isaiah, e.g. Is. 26:7 "The way of the just is uprightness; You who are upright make the path of the righteous level". This is the language of Is. 40. The way was open for the exiles to return as righteous, justified by faith, to a restored Zion; and if they made that journey, Zion's gates were open to them (see on Is. 26:2). That way was potentially prepared at the restoration, but the exiles chose to remain in Babylon and Assyria, and those who did return did so without accepting the call to repentance which is part of the making straight of the path to Zion. But it was all potentially prepared. It is for us now to walk in that path likewise to Zion. In the future it seems there may be literal highways prepared leading to Zion for the repentant remnants of the nations (see on Is. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 62:10; Jer. 31:21).

Is. 40:3, which is quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25). We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25).

Lift up a banner for the peoples- LXX "the Gentiles". Clearly enough, the bronze serpent lifted up on the "standard" or pole was a symbol of Christ crucified. But time and again throughout Isaiah, we read that a "standard" or ensign will be "lifted up" in order to gather people together to it (Is. 5:26; 13:2; 11:12; 18:3; 62:10). This was the idea of an ensign lifted up. Thus our common response to the cross of Christ should be to gather together unto Him there. And we need to take note that several of those Isaiah passages are speaking about what shall happen in the last days, when divided Israel will unite on the basis of their acceptance of the crucified Jesus. They along with "the peoples", the Gentiles, will come by the same path to eternal fellowship with Yahweh and with each other in Zion. The banner lifted up finally refers to the Lord on the cross, drawing all men unto Him (Jn. 12:28). Paul alludes here when he says his preaching has placarded forth the crucified Christ to the Galatians (Gal. 3:1). A banner was lifted up to rally men and to lead them forth as an army; which is to be human response to the Lord's death on the cross. The same idea is in Is. 49:22; 59:19.

Isaiah 62:11 Behold, Yahweh has proclaimed to the end of the earth- The ends of the *eretz* were Babylon and Persia, where the exiles were. They were being asked to repent and quit exile because their salvation was coming. But they stayed put.

Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your salvation comes- "Your salvation" could refer to Joshua-Jesus, the high priest, returning from Babylon. But Joshua didn't live up to the

conditional prophecies made about him in Zechariah. Ezra and Nehemiah seem to have taken over the priestly and kingly work of Joshua and Zerubbabel respectively. Nehemiah's record concludes on the negative note that Judah had forsaken Zion (Neh. 13:11). Nobody wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there; the Levites even went and lived outside it where they had "fields", because they weren't given their tithes (Neh. 13:10. Lots had to be drawn to get people to live there (Neh. 11:1). It became a ghost town, when it should have been inhabited as a town without walls for the multitudes of returned exiles joyfully dwelling there (Zech. 2:5). It was God's intention that ten men (a reference to Israelites of the ten tribes?) would take hold of the skirts of a Jew (i.e. one of Judah) and come with him to worship in the new temple (Zech. 8:23). But in fact the opposite happened. So few wanted to live in Jerusalem, that the rulers had to cast lots to force one in ten Jews to go and live in Jerusalem (Neh. 11:1). And the ten tribes didn't really unite with Judah, but went off and got lost in the Gentile world.

Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him'- The "reward" of God will be in the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham (Gen. 15:1 s.w.) in salvation (Is. 62:11), at the time when Judah were restored from captivity and accepted the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:16). This huge potential is all deferred to the last days, when the Abrahamic covenant will be finally fulfilled in the return of the Lord Jesus to earth bringing His rewards with Him (Rev. 22:12).

If we translate Is. 40:9 as "His payment is with Him; His wages are before Him", we have an obvious connection to the ideas discussed on Is. 40:2- Israel's sin is their debt and they are therefore in slavery; but Yahweh steps in and redeems them by meeting the payment. This is the same idea as in Is. 62:11. It's as if Israel sold themselves into slavery to pay their debt, but their wages were paid by God and He actually pays off the entire amount owed, acting as their kinsman redeemer. But He is also the one to whom the debt is owed! He is thus presented as absolutely involved in both the debt and its resolution; in both our sin and our redemption from it.

Isaiah 62:12 They shall call them The holy people, The redeemed of Yahweh: and you shall be called Sought out, A city not forsaken-

See on :11. There was envisaged a new nomenclature for anything related to God's people, land, temple and city. This didn't happen to the restoration, with the gates of Jerusalem being given totally secular names such as "fish gate". The "they" in view are those who love at the ends of the earth / eretz promised to Abraham (:11), in Egypt, Babylon and Persia where the Jews were exiled. Those who had hosted Judah in captivity and witnessed their idolatry and hypocrisy would marvel at the extent to which they had been redeemed and not forsaken by their God, when He had every reason to have treated them otherwise. This wonderful testament to Divine grace didn't happen at

the time of the restoration; but it will do so in the last days. And therefore Jerusalem will be "sought out", as the Gentiles "seek" the ensign / standard pole in Zion (Is. 11:10), which the New Testament interprets as the cross of the Lord Jesus.

Zion is now interpreted as God's people, seeing that God's offer to re-create literal Zion as His dwelling place had been spurned by the Jewish exiles and those few who had returned to the land. Literal Zion was the place God had chosen to dwell in (2 Sam. 7:10,11; Ps 132:13; 68:16; 87:2,3). But now His "chosen" place for dwelling was the hearts of His people. Zion was His people. Is. 60:21; 62:11,12 is clear: "Your [Zion's] people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever... Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your salvation comes...'. They shall call them The holy people, The redeemed of Yahweh: and you shall be called Sought out, A city not [any longer] forsaken". The parallel between Zion and His people had always been there: "He chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved" (Ps. 78:68).

ISAIAH CHAPTER 63

Isaiah 63:1 Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This one who is glorious in his clothing, marching in the greatness of his strength?-

An enquiry "Who is this who comes...?" is the language of watchmen, as in "Who goes there!?". We have just read in Is. 62 of the watchmen on Zion's walls, eagerly looking for the coming of a Messiah to establish the Kingdom of God. We can take it that this is the answer to their prayers. "Who is this?" means what kind of person. The answer is not in a name; but that He is mighty to save through speaking righteousness. Edom [Esau] is the epitome of the enemies of God, a representative nation [see on :4]. There's clearly a word play going on- "red" is *adom*, the same consonants as Edom / Esau, the red one. Likewise the root 'bzr', Bozrah, is connected to *bazir*, "vintage". The 'red one' is however now the Messiah, empowered to judge men because He is the Son of Man, red as Edom is red; and perhaps hinting at His final identity with Esau in order to save him through judgment. The watchmen however see a King, dressed in royal red clothing, not clothing merely spattered with blood. Hence GNB "splendidly dressed in red". The language is rather more than meaning 'blood stained'. Royal robes were dyed red, and He is wearing a splendid red robe, as if coming to His own wedding. Zion likewise has been asked to dress in her beautiful wedding garments: "Put on your beautiful garments, Jerusalem" (Is. 52:1). And the bridegroom has "put on the garments of vengeance for clothing" (Is. 59:17). But the Messianic Saviour wearing blood stained clothing clearly sends our minds to the Lord's sufferings on the cross. It is a kaleidoscope of images. The blood stained saviour sums up those different images- the blood of His enemies whom He has slain, and His own blood resultant from His death to save. Clearly the prophecy of Judah is in view: "He has washed his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes" (Gen.

49:11). So the red garment of the bridegroom is also the sign of victory over enemies, stained with their blood. The judgment of the enemies, initially the fall of Babylon and Persia, was required to prepare the groom for the wedding with his bride. Thus indeed, the wrath of God is the love of God. His wrath and His love are two sides of the same coin. Isaiah 63 is a classic exemplification of this- Yahweh's wrathful judgment of His enemies is praised as His love for His people (:7).

The blood stained garments of the Lord Jesus clearly also refer to His death. His clothing was literally blood stained. But through a kaleidoscope of images, the figure is also used here of His latter day judgments. To save us requires Him to judge and destroy the present system of man. The Lord said as much, in describing His death on the cross, in blood stained garments, as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31). Likewise Lot was saved by the destruction of Sodom. Noah and his family were saved by the water of destruction of their surrounding world. And as the world was destroyed by water, so baptism in water saves us, Peter argues. Perhaps the implication is that the world will suck God's people into it unless it is destroyed. This perhaps is what Paul was driving at in his otherwise enigmatic words in Gal. 6:14. He argues that the Lord's cross means that the world is crucified to me, and I am crucified to the world. We are no longer part of the world, because of the cross- because there was the judgment of this world, there the world was crucified: "far be it for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). All this explains why the response to the gory description of bloody judgments on the world… is praise and thanksgiving that God has saved His people (Is. 63:7 "I will make mention of the loving kindnesses of Yahweh and the praises of Yahweh, according to all that Yahweh has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His grace"). This is why Is. 63:1 LXX opens this section by describing the Lord as "I that speak of righteousness and saving judgment". The judgment of the world saves His people. "The day of recompense" for the world is "the year of redemption" for God's people (:4). All this points up the colossal, radical division between God's people and the world. In no way can they have a foot in both camps.

The warrior Messiah will come having judged all Judah's enemies and not just Babylon. This was the initial intention- that the exiles would flee Babylon before Babylon and the nations were judged. They didn't, and so Babylon wasn't judged as planned. We note the parallel between Edom and Babylon in Ps. 137:7,8: "Remember, Yahweh, against the children of Edom, the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it! Raze it even to its foundation! Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, he will be happy who rewards you as you have served us". But the essence will come true, in the return of the Lord Jesus to save His people, having judged all Israel's enemies and not just Babylon. Babylon is called "Edom" here because the final fulfilment of all this will be in God's judgment of all nations [playing on Edom = Adam], and Edom being associated in the

prophets with "all nations". And He will specifically judge 'Esau', the Arab nations surrounding Israel, in the last days. His blood stained clothing is here linked with His having judged His enemies, but it also speaks of His death, which was "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31; 16:11). The language is picked up in Rev. 14:19 [the treading of the winepress of God's wrath] and Rev. 19:13 [the Lord dressed in a garment dipped in blood, enabling His followers to follow Him in white clothing, righteousness achieved by His sacrifice]. The winepress will only be trodden when it is full, which is in the last days (Joel 3:13). So Is. 63 is thus applied to the latter day judgments of the Lord Jesus in the land. The Lord coming from Edom is perhaps used in a general sense for being victorious in judgment, based on the victory song of Jud. 5:4: "Yahweh, when You went forth out of Seir, when You marched out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled".

The usage of 'Edom' is perhaps because in the final latter day fulfilment, the Lord Jesus will judge Israel's historical enemies. In Dt. 33 and Hab. 3, we have the latter day picture of "God" coming from Seir, which is Edom, from Teman, Sinai, Midian and other territories surrounding Israel, inhabited by her Arab enemies. And in Ez. 35 we have a horrendous picture of the latter day judgment of Edom, clearly in the last days. For it is a time when the rest of the earth rejoices, and finally Edom comes to know Yahweh. Revelation has similar scenarios, where the earth / land promised to Abraham is pictured full of the bloody judgments of the Lord Jesus in the last days. And yet 'Edom' is similar to 'Adam'; this is also the final judgment of man.

These verses appear to be the Divine fantasy, a potential prophecy, about the Messiah saviour judging Babylon and then also Edom on His way to Zion along with the repentant remnant of both Jews and Gentiles. This is a repeated theme in the prophets- that Babylon was to fall and the nations judged, and thereby both elicit repentance from a Gentile minority and also release the Jews. These things didn't happen as they could have done at the time of the restoration of the exiles. But they will in essence be fulfilled in the future work of the Lord Jesus.

According to Jewish tradition, Nehemiah's real name was Zerubbabel, the branch (*Sanhedrin* 38a)- perhaps the same Zerubbabel as mentioned in Haggai and Zechariah. The Hippolytus Chronicle 7:3:37 even claims Nehemiah was a direct descendant of David and in the direct kingly line. His name, 'comfort of Yahweh', invites us to see him as the potential fulfilment of the Is. 40:1,2 prophecy about a Messiah figure arising to the exiles, giving them God's comfort. At the time of Judah's redemption, while the temple had been trodden down by her enemies, the promised Messiah figure of Is. 63:1-3,18 was to come from Edom and Bozrah - both code names for Babylon. The words "Bozrah" and "Babylon" have similar root meanings ('high / fortified place'). And he was to lament how the people of Judah were not with him- "of the people there was none with me". But this is the very spirit of Nehemiah, when he returns to Jerusalem from Babylon and looks around the 'trodden down' city at night, not telling the people of the

Jews about his inspection- i.e. the people were not with him (Neh. 2:11-16). But all potential fulfillments of this prophecy failed, and so the prophecies were reapplied and reinterpreted with reference to the Lord Jesus.

It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save- So often, God's righteousness is associated with His salvation. Paul in Romans writes much about this. 'Rightness' means also 'justice'. By grace, we are counted right in Christ, and thereby will be saved. Yet in the world, there is huge angst about the issue of justice. It is inbuilt into our natures to feel outrage at injustice. It's not fair, it's not right… that I was treated like this, that they did that to her, that this or that group in society are not equally treated. And these are the conflicts which are the endless narrative of human history and existence. The sense of not having been given justice makes for depression, obsessions, anger, bitterness… But for those of us in Christ, we who were unjust have been counted right, we have found the ultimate experience of justice; and can rest assured that finally, all shall be made right, justice shall eternally be done at the Lord's return. Not for us lifetimes spent in resentment, bitterness, endless restimulation of issues of past injustice. For we have been saved, by grace, and 'right' has triumphed in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, Yahweh's salvation and righteousness.

"It is I…" are words found on the lips of the Lord that night on the sea of Galilee (Mt. 14:27; Jn. 6:20).

Isaiah 63:2 Why are you red in your clothing- In the context of the answer in :3, we could assume that the force of the question is "Why are you *alone* red…?".

And your garments like him who treads in the wine vat?- Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. "Treads" is the same Hebrew word used in Num. 24:17 of how the Messianic star out of Jacob would tread down Israel's historical enemies, who would be as it were reincarnated in the last days. This is the time of the 'treading down' of all the peoples of the *eretz* who were against Israel (s.w. Jer. 25:30), the 'treading down' of the daughter of Babylon (Jer. 51:33 s.w.). But it was not just Gentiles whom the Messianic figure was to tread down; "the Lord has trodden the virgin daughter of Judah as in a winepress" (Lam. 1:15; Mic. 1:3 s.w.). The judgment of Babylon and her supporters, epitomized by Edom (:1), was to be at the same time as the judgment of the apostate people of God. And out of a trodden down wine vat there comes wine- the symbol of blessing and the new covenant.

Isaiah 63:3 I have trodden the wine press alone; and of the peoples there was no man with Me: yes, I trod them in My anger, and trampled them in My wrath-

The spirit of Christ was in the prophets (1 Pet. 1:11). So often we read of His sense of loneliness, and surprise and disappointment that there were none to help, and He had to do His work "alone". Consider the emphasis: "I have trodden the wine press alone; and of the peoples there was no man with Me" (Is. 63:3); "I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore My own arm brought salvation to Me" (Is. 63:5); "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His own arm brought salvation to Him" (Is. 59:16); "Why, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer?" (Is. 50:2); "When I look, there is no man; even among them there is no counsellor" (Is. 41:28). And surely the Lord alluded to this in observing, as He faced the cross: "you shall be scattered, every man to his own home, and you shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:32). It explains His inability to hide His disappointment that in Gethsemane, the disciples fell asleep: "Could you not watch with Me one hour?" (Mk. 14:37). All the disciples forsook Him, fled and left Him alone (Mk. 14:50). Likewise from the cross He looked for comforters, for some human to pity Him, and found none: "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; for comforters, but I found none" (Ps. 69:20). He was left like a solitary bird in a ruined building: "I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins..." (Ps. 102:6,7). Several times Job says the same things. "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mt. 27:46) is to be read in the context of feeling forsaken by all men. The Lord was human, and so He felt strongly the need for social support from others. For this is natural to all psychologically healthy people. But He didn't find it. And neither, finally, do all those in Him. We walk alone with the Lord, and face our deepest crises, and death itself, with Him alone. Regardless of how apparently well connected we are with support groups. This is the nature of what it is to be "in Christ". It explains why all in Christ have our support groups removed, in essence. That we might say with Paul "But the Lord stood with me", even though all others forsook him. The existential loneliness of the cross, and the Lord's entire ministry, is in fact programmatic for all those individuals in Him. All His people in some way have the same experience. Only someone within a tight religious bubble, who has not received His Spirit, would find what I am saying here somehow strange and not understandable. Surely Paul alludes to these things in saying that when on trial for his life, "No man stood with me, but all forsook me" (2 Tim. 4:16).

The way the Saviour is "alone" would allude to the way that no other man rose up to the call to be the prophesied servant of the Messianic prophecies (Is. 59:16). The judgments are likewise performed by Him "alone" in the sense that the judgments upon the nations will be supernatural and only later will a repentant remnant be used as Yahweh's "weapons of war".

And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, and I have stained all My clothing- There is a connection between the Lord's death and the judgment of the world; "now is the judgment of this world" He commented, with reference to His upcoming crucifixion (Jn. 12:31). He alone has the right to judge, because He alone had our nature and never sinned. The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. His holy mind would have been on these Messianic prophecies of Is. 63:3 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

The kaleidoscope of images continues, in that "stained" is the word for defilement. Blood defiled. It is the word used for how the exiles were "defiled": "Your hands are defiled with blood" (Is. 59:3), and for how the priests of the time were likewise polluted / defiled with blood (Neh. 7:64; Lam. 4:14; Mal. 1:7). Through the unique achievement and nature of the cross, the Lord identified even with the condemned; just as God was afflicted in all the afflictions of judgment He brought upon His people. But He was dressed in glorious red clothing. It was through being made a curse for us on the cross that the Lord judged the world, and was dressed in glorious clothing. And all these images will be brought together at His return.

Isaiah 63:4 For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come- This is the very phrase used about the final judgment upon Edom in Is. 34:8: "Yahweh has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause [legal case] of Zion". But the judgment upon Edom in Is. 34 appears to also be upon all nations: "For Yahweh is enraged against all the nations and angry with all their armies" (Is. 34:2). There is a clear similarity between the Hebrew words for 'Edom' and 'Adam', mankind. Edom is a representative nation, as in Ez. 36:5 ["against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave my land to themselves as a possession"]; Am. 9:12 [ESV "that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations"]; Obadiah 15 [the judgments upon Edom are "For the day of Yahweh is nearly upon all the nations!"]. We note the contrast between the "day" of judgment, and the "year" of redemption. Which is interpreted by Paul as the period of salvation we now live in. God's focus is far more upon our salvation than upon judgment. Heb. "the year of My redemption", alluding to the Jubilee year. The exiles refused that redemption at the end of the 70 years, and so as explained on Is. 61:2, the time of redemption has become the age of redemption. Open to all, Gentiles or Jews, from then onwards. See on Ex. 2:11,12. This is the year of Jubilee pronounced in Is. 61. We note the difference between the single "day" of vengeance

compared to the whole "year" of redemption. Saving is by far God's preferred activity. Those to be redeemed are not simply "Israel", but those of them who want the redemption which will come about through the "vengeance" of the judgments. For as explained on :2, the Jews are to be judged along with the Gentiles.

This chapter was quoted by Judas Maccabeus, who killed 20,000 from Edom in his campaigns against the Idumeans (:1); and John Hyrcanus, his brother Simon's son and successor, also defeated the Edomites and forced them to become proselytes to the Jewish religion, and to be circumcised. At best it could be argued that the Maccabees were potential fulfillments of the prophecies, but they failed to do so. And so the final fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus in the last days.

Isaiah 63:5 I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore My own arm brought salvation to Me; and My wrath, it upheld Me-

Just as the Lord was alone in judging the nations, so He was alone in redeeming His people. LXX brings this out: "I looked, and there was no helper; and I observed, and none upheld: therefore my arm delivered them, and mine anger drew nigh". See on :3. The salvation of God's people is related to His wrath on the nations. It is that wrath on the world which saves His people. The initial intention was that God would destroy Babylon and bring His people to salvation; indeed, this was why He appealed for them to leave Babylon lest they be destroyed along with Babylon. Most of them remained, and so God reapplied and rescheduled this great salvation. This is why the blood stained saviour sums up different images- the blood of His enemies whom He has slain, and His own blood resultant from His death to save.

The arm of Yahweh, the practical articulation of His power, is ultimately the Lord Jesus. The way the Saviour is "alone", as in :3, would allude to the way that no other man rose up to the call to be the prophesied servant of the Messianic prophecies (Is. 59:16). None of the potential Messiah figures worked out; and it seems about nobody responded to the prophetic call for the exiles to repent. God was 'desolated' ["wondered"]about this, so great were His hopes for some response. And yet God wished to try to save them anyway by His dramatic intervention, which was to come to full term in the person and work of His own son.

God sent His prophets to appeal to Israel for repentance. They *could have lead to repentance*. But Israel would not. The marriage feast was totally ready and waiting for the Jewish people; they could have had it. But they didn't want it, and so the course of human history was extended. Therefore finally God sent His Son. The Lord Jesus Himself was amazed that no other man had achieved the work which He had to; and therefore He clad Himself with zeal and performed it (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16 cp. Rev. 5:3,4). God knew that salvation in the end would have to be through the death of His

Son. But there were other possible scenarios for the repentance and salvation of mankind, which no man achieved. And so, as in the parable of the servants sent to get fruit from the vineyard, there was left no other way but the death of God's only Son. There is a clear parallel between Is. 59:16 and Is. 63:5. The same words are used, but there is one difference. In Is. 59:16, "His righteousness, it upheld Him", but in Is. 63:5 it was God's fury which upheld / sustained Him. The Messianic arm of Yahweh which brought salvation did so only because as Son of Man, the Lord Jesus is the only human who can rightly judge sin on behalf of God's anger. His necessary anger / wrath in judging sin is therefore part of the wider nexus of the absolutely legitimate salvation He achieved through the Lord Jesus.

We may well enquire as to the sense in which Yahweh apparently saved Himself. Possibly the idea is that His purpose with His people was failing, not one had responded. The gracious offer of the new covenant had been spurned. And so He worked out His purpose through the work of His Son [His "arm"] to at least save some, and thus saved His entire project with man from failure. He upheld His saving purpose, His desire to have a people. His "arm" is the Lord Jesus; it cannot be that the idea is that the "arm" saved Himself. The arm saved Yahweh. "The year of My redeemed has come" meant that the 70 years had ended and salvation was now possible. But the exiles didn't want it. The idea of Yahweh using His hand and arm to save is in Dt. 32:36-41; He uses His own arm to save when His people are as it were finished, at the end, from their own sins: "Yahweh will judge His people and have compassion on His servants when He sees that their power is gone, that there is none remaining, shut up or left at large... See now that I, even I, am He... There is no one who can deliver out of My hand. For I lift up My hand to heaven and say, as surely as I live forever... My hand takes hold on judgment".

Isaiah 63:6 I trod down the peoples in My anger, and made them drunk in My wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth- Blood from the sacrifices was poured out on the earth to symbolize that life is God's alone. This is the scene of Is. 34:6, where Yahweh has a great sacrifice to make in Bozrah and Idumea, which is the context here too (:1). The implication could be that through their heavy judgment, they would become an acceptable sacrifice to Him; see on Is. 34:2,6.

Isaiah 63:7 I will make mention of the loving kindnesses of Yahweh and the praises of Yahweh, according to all that Yahweh has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His grace- This song of praise to God is thanking Him for the amazing destruction of His enemies in :1-6. The same words would be said by the Gentiles; they would proclaim Yahweh's praise just as the Israelites themselves

would (Is. 60:6). The Gentiles would now identify themselves with the Israelites in forming the new multiethnic people of God which was to be formed on the basis of repentance and acceptance of the new covenant. This praise is to be the result of His judgments upon the wicked, both of Israel and the Gentiles. Hence LXX "The Lord is a good judge to the house of Israel; he deals with us according to his mercy, and according to the abundance of his righteousness". The term "the house of Israel" suggests that both Judah and the ten tribe kingdom would be united by the experience of grace; and that is indeed the basis for unity amongst God's people to this day.

Isaiah 63:8 For He said, Surely, they are My people, children who will not deal falsely: so He was their Saviour- The idea is "He had said", in His heart, at the time when He entered covenant relationship with them. He said in His heart that "surely" they would be faithful to Him as they promised. But He was to be bitterly disappointed. His love was such, and the hope that goes with love, that God as it were limited His omniscience to have such feelings. LXX "and he became to them deliverance", a profound prophecy of how God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. The eagerness of the God who was in love with His woman Israel is quite something. "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie!" (Is. 63:8), He triumphed. But this was because of His mercy and love to them (:7). That love as it were blinded His eyes to their sin. And this is the basis of our being counted righteous if we are in His beloved Son. But with Israel, "*then* I saw that she was defiled… *then* my mind was alienated" (Ez. 23:13,18). How does this square with the omniscience of God? He stopped restraining His omniscience. He saw them for who they were, unfaithful, and reacted. He did everything He could for His vineyard, and was then so bitterly disappointed when it brought forth wild grapes (Is. 5:4).

The Father is ever seeking for some positive response, and is highly sensitive to it. He told Moses: “If they will not believe… neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign [but] if they will not believe also these two signs…” (Ex. 4:8). The God who knows the end from the beginning gives the impression that He is sure they will believe- even though they didn’t. He is so seeking for faith in His creatures (cp. “surely they will reverence my son”, Mt. 21:37, and Ex. 19:21 cp. 20:18). In this, Isaiah says, He shows His matchless grace: “For He said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: *so* [therefore] He was their Saviour… but they rebelled, and vexed His holy [gracious] spirit” (Is. 63:8,10). Our tendency is to notice the negative in others, and let it outweigh the positive. God works quite the other way. He hopes for positive response, and even speaks as if He will get it when He knows He won’t.

Isaiah 63:9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity he redeemed them; and He bore them, and carried them all the days of old-

LXX and GNB stress how this salvation was personally a result of God's deep intense involvement: "out of all their affliction: not an ambassador, nor a messenger, but himself saved them, because he loved them and spared them: he himself redeemed them, and took them up, and lifted them up all the days of old".

If we stick with the Masoretic Text, the Angel of God's face ["presence"] could refer to the Angel with whom Moses spoke face to face, and possibly the one who passed before Moses and allowed Moses to only see his back parts. Judaism speaks of this Angel who so intensely manifests God as Metatron. The same grace shown in saving Israel from Egypt, despite them still carrying the idols of Egypt with them and the tabernacle of Remphan, was to be shown in redeeming the exiles from Babylon. Just as God in love and pity carried them through the wilderness despite their unfaithfulness. And it will again be shown in the final salvation of God's people. "The angel of His presence" was the same Angel which went with Israel through the wilderness, fulfilling the promise that "My presence shall go with you" (Ex. 33:14). But that Angel was intensely representative of God; to the point that the LXX offers: "not an ambassador, nor a messenger, but Himself saved them". Thereby in all their affliction, He was afflicted; and He achieves an even more powerful identity with our experiences through the work and nature of His Son, who is far greater and more effective than the ministry of Angels. "Afflicted" is the word used in :18 of the Babylonian "adversaries" who destroyed Jerusalem. Whilst this was an act of Divine judgment, God still felt for His people all through it. Jeremiah's laments in Lamentations that God had somehow switched off from feeling for His people were therefore simply stating things as they seemed to him at the time. For in reality, in their affliction He was afflicted. The word for "afflictions" is frequently used of Israel's sufferings for their sins (Dt. 31:17,21; Neh. 9:27,37; Jer. 4:32; 6:24). It is the word used for the time of Jacob's "trouble" / affliction (Jer. 30:7). But God was Himself afflicted in the afflictions He brought upon His people.

Isaiah 63:10 But they rebelled and grieved His holy spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He Himself fought against them- see on Jn. 14:26,30; Gen. 8:1; Josh. 24:17. "His holy spirit" refers initially to the Angel of His presence (:9), for God makes His angels spirits (Ps. 104:4). They refused to follow the leadership of the Angel; for many of the exiles remained in Babylon / Persia, as the book of Esther makes clear. Likewise Israel had "rebelled" in not following God's saving plan in the wilderness and wanting to return to Egypt rather than go forward to the promised land (s.w. Dt. 9:23). And it grieved the spirit / Angel, representative of God Himself (:9). This describes the work of the Holy Spirit Angel with regard to punishing Israel in language which hints at the flood: "It repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth (land), and it grieved Him at His heart" (Gen. 6:6) connects with "They rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit (cp. grieved at the heart): therefore He was turned to be their enemy (cp. "repented"), and He fought against them". 2 Peter 3:6,7; Mt. 24:37 and Dan. 9:26 (an impressive trio) say that

the flood is a type of God's judgement of the earth at the second coming- and we know that Jesus will come with His Angels with Him to do this, in the same way as the Angels were prominent in this earlier "coming" of the Lord at the flood.

God (in the Angel of the presence) "was turned to be (Israel's) enemy" because of their sin (Is. 63:10)- likewise Job complains that his satan-Angel has "turned to be cruel to me" (Job 30:21 AVmg.).

The gift of the Spirit, a new heart and opened eyes, was to be part of the new covenant deal offered to the exiles. They refused it, and so in a different form it is now offered to all who are baptized into Christ. The same gift of the Spirit is now available to us- but we are not forced to follow where we are led, towards salvation in the same reestablished Kingdom of God on earth. Thus Eph. 4:30 is a quotation from Is. 63:10- a lament about how Israel in the wilderness "vexed His holy spirit" with their continued provocations. Ps. 78:40 says the same: "How often did they provoke Him in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert!". Putting these verses together, we see that to provoke God, to grieve Him, is the same as vexing or grieving His spirit. Paul's point was that the Ephesian believers had likewise been redeemed from 'Egypt' and had been sealed by God "with that holy spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). I understand this to mean that God's spirit works upon and merges with the human spirit in the heart and life of the baptized believer in Christ. But by turning away from that leading, we are vexing or grieving God through frustrating the way of His spirit which He has put within us. Clearly it was God whom Israel grieved in the wilderness, and it is God whom we grieve by provoking and frustrating His spirit in us.

Isaiah 63:11 Then He remembered the days of old, Moses and His people, saying, Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put His holy spirit in their midst?- It is hard to decide who is speaking here. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is a wonderful insight into the internal thoughts of God [as we have just had in :8], as He as it were rebuked His own anger- something we read of Him doing in Ps. 78:38 [see notes there]: "many times He turned His anger away, and didn't stir up all His wrath". The same idea of Him "many times" relenting is found in Ps. 106:43-45: "Many times He delivered them, but they were rebellious... Nevertheless He regarded their distress... He remembered for them His covenant, and relented according to the multitude of His graces". See on Ex. 34:27. It could be argued that this is the same "Spirit of the Lord [which] caused him (Moses) to rest: so didst Thou lead Thy people" (by an Angel in the wilderness, :14), the Spirit-Angel of :9,10. This shows God as it were looking back to the days when He led them through the wilderness by the Angel, and in wrath remembering mercy. "Where is He that brought them up... " He asked Himself. We have here an insight into the thought processes of God Almighty,

recalling, as it were, how He had been with them at the exodus. Although the pole of His love and grace wins out within His personality over the pole of judgment, a struggle is involved; and the summary conclusion that "God is love" is not arrived at without appreciating this tension and struggle within Him. Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel "found grace in the wilderness" before, and they would do again, "When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest" (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would "cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". This is why Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11). The tragedy of it all is that God had earlier lamented that the Jews did not say "Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt?" (Jer. 2:6). He remembered it, but they didn't- at least, not on the level of conviction, but at best, as merely historical and cultural memory.

Isaiah 63:12 Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses? Who divided the waters before them, to make Himself an everlasting name?- Israel were led by God's hand (Heb. 8:9; Is. 63:13); but in practice by Moses' hand (Ps. 77:20; Is. 63:12). The Name of Yahweh is not simply a word, a lexical item, pronounced something like Yahoovah or Yahweh. His Name is His character and personality, which has been developed and exhibited historically. His salvation of His sinful, idol worshipping people from Egypt exhibited and exemplified His saving grace; and He wished again to show that same "arm" and "Name" in saving the exiles and bringing them to the Kingdom of God. They too frustrated His saving plans; and so that same mighty arm is outstretched in redeeming a new people, who are to leave the things of this world and likewise allow themselves to be led on a spiritual journey towards God's Kingdom.

Isaiah 63:13 Who led them through the depths, as a horse in the wilderness, so that they didn't stumble?-

The idea is as in Ps. 106:9: "He led them through the depths as through a pasture-land". 'Wilderness' isn't a good translation here because it gives the idea of scrub land with bushes. The idea rather is of a horse galloping unimpeded in vast, empty plains. That was the spirit in which God sought to lead them through the constrictions of the Red Sea.

Jer. 31:9 had prophesied of the restoration: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". Likewise Is. 63:13 reminded the returnees

that when they had been led through the wilderness to Canaan under Moses, they did not stumble [s.w.]. But both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to have a Babylonian military escort on the journey back; they weren't sure that they would be given "a straight way" with Yahweh's protection. Neh. 4:10 records that "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is *decayed* [s.w. "stumble", Jer. 31:9], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". They were easily discouraged by the words of the surrounding world, by the apparent hopelessness of their task; and thus they stumbled. Ezra 8:21 LXX describes how Ezra fasted for them to be given a "straight way", as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfill the prophecy. Note how Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim featured "straight" progress; the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to "keep in step with the Spirit"... They were to walk "each one straight before him" (Is. 57:2 RVmg.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). Ps. 107:2,7 RV speak of Israel being gathered out of the nations and being led in a "straight way" to Zion, as they had [potentially] been enabled to do on their departure from Egypt. Yet then they spent 38 years walking a distance coverable in just 11 days- because they did not walk in the "straight way".

Isaiah 63:14 As the cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of Yahweh caused them to rest; so You led Your people- see on Dt. 34:5,6. The "rest" was the promised land as in Ex. 33:14 (also Dt. 12:9; Josh. 1:13): "My presence shall go with you and I will give you rest". And it was that same land to which Yahweh was willing to lead Israel from Babylon; but it was a redemption refused. We too as a new Israel are being led toward the "rest" of the Kingdom (Heb. 4:9). If we follow AV "the spirit of the Lord caused him to rest", we could make the referent of "him" to be Moses, who was led to his rest in death by an Angel, the "spirit of Yahweh" of :9-11. But more essentially the reference is to God leading His people as a shepherd, into the valley of rest.

To make Yourself a glorious name- See on :12. If God has been speaking previously, then this is the comment of Isaiah or the one praying the prayer. For the rest of the chapter records his prayer. Again we have 'voices' appearing in Isaiah, sometimes mid verse. And as seen in the Psalms and our own prayers, human words can suddenly be met by Divine responses.

Isaiah 63:15 Look down from heaven, and see from the habitation of Your holiness and of Your glory: where are Your zeal and Your mighty acts? The yearning of Your heart and Your compassion is restrained toward me-

We now enter the final part of Isaiah; a prayer that begins here and continues to the end of Is. 64, lamenting that God has not come through as promised for the exiles. And

Isaiah 65 and 66 are His responses to this complaint. The request for God to behold from His habitation ignores what He has said in Is. 57:15: "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite". He does and will observe the humble from His habitation. But the demand is that God forgets that requirement and just looks upon His people favourably, humble or not. God will answer this in Is. 65 and Is. 66, saying that He who indeed inhabits eternity does dwell in the hearts of men and is not distant from them.

Isaiah, or the faithful remnant, seek to remind God of His compassion shown at the exodus to an equally apostate people who took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea. He Himself had this memory within Him (:11), and they are appealing for Him to recall that and act with a similar saving grace. Or it could be that here we are being told how the situation in :11 came about. Why did God recall His previous acts of saving grace toward sinful Israel? Because He had been 'reminded' of it by this prayer of the faithful. They were His rememberancers, the watchmen on Zion's walls reminding Him, as it were, of His previous saving actions and grace towards His very immature and faithless people. The tension within His heart we commented upon on :11 had been provoked by this prayerful appeal to recall the yearning of His heart toward His people. God had earlier accepted that throughout the captivity He had been "restrained toward" Israel, but now He would be restrained no longer (s.w. Is. 42:14). But He did so because of the prayer of the faithful not to restrain Himself longer (Is. 63:15; 64:12). The tragedy is that His unrestrained desire to save and redeem the exiles was still refused by them; and perhaps there were few who really begged Him to no longer restrain Himself. For they were quite happy with their prosperous lives in Babylon and Persia. And so the events of the last days will elicit this more intense prayer, and Yahweh will finally act unrestrainedly in this earth.

The restraint of God, now removed in the announcements of restoration, had already been explained in Is. 42:14: "For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant". See notes there. Those praying this prayer were wilfully ignorant of God's wonderful assurance of activity for them. The plea for God to be more visibly active in our lives ignores the fact that He is indeed active.

Isaiah 63:16 For You are our Father, though Abraham doesn’t know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us: You, Yahweh, are our Father-

Abraham and the promises to him have often been alluded to so far in Isaiah. And that is because God was offering the exiles a new covenant, which was based upon the promises to Abraham rather than the law of Moses. The exiles are therefore wrong at

this point to appeal for a relationship with God somehow separate to Abraham and Jacob, to whom the promises were given which form the basis of the new covenant. They are also ignoring the encouragement of Is. 51:2, that as Abraham was revived from a hopeless situation and given a seed, so could they be. If they walked in his steps and faith.

The idea may be that even if [NEV "though"] Abraham and their fathers had disowned them, then God was their father- by adoption. Abraham had been promised to be father of a great nation (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5 etc.). They felt both Abraham and Jacob had disowned them. And so they are tacitly appealing to God to still be their Father- for the promises to Abraham to be reapplied to them, somehow. Those promises are the basis of the new covenant. And that was exactly what God was offering to them. Although they refused it and preferred to try to keep the old covenant. A father could disown his son, although he could not disown an adopted son. Galatians 4 plays on this theme- that as God's adopted sons, we can never be disowned by Him. *We* would have to renounce *Him*. And only a real fool would do that. God presents Himself as the adopter of those thus disowned, in Ps. 68:6, where God is described as father of the fatherless.

However Is. 64:8 predicates God's Fatherhood on the fact He is their creator: "But now, Yahweh, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and we all are the work of Your hand". Is. 45:9-11 has likewise paralleled the idea of God as Father and creator with being our potter: "Woe to him who strives with his Maker… Shall the clay ask Him who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or your work, 'He has no hands?'. Woe to him who says to a father, 'What have you become the father of?' or to a mother, 'To what have you given birth?'. Thus says Yahweh the Maker and Holy One of Israel: You can ask Me about the things that are to come, concerning My sons, and you command Me concerning the work of My hands!". Likewise Mal. 2:10: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?". God's answer to their feeling that Abraham has disowned them is not to correct them [for Abraham was dead and had not consciously done this]. Rather He reminds them that He as their creator and potter is eternally their Father, and will always have a desire to the work of His hands. The connection between creation and being a potter of clay alludes to God's creation of Adam, by molding clay into the form of a man and energizing it. But the creation and 'pottering' in view is not simply the natural creation which all men have experienced. Being Father, potter and creator is paralleled later in :16 with being redeemer. And a redeemer redeemed his blood relatives. Mal. 2:10 has the exiles lamenting that although they have broken the covenant with God, He is still their creator. We conclude therefore that the 'creation' in view is specifically that of Israel as God's people. Is. 63:8 has the same idea- "Surely they are My people, children who will not deal falsely". We each can likewise safely conclude that Yahweh chose us to be His people, and began His creative work in us. Is. 64:1 implies a new Sinai- which was the moment when God declared Israel to be His people. This was to happen again, with God re-accepting the Jews as His people and

creating a new people once again. The argument here is adopted by the Lord in Jn. 8, where He argues that the Jews of His day may be the physical descendants of Abraham, they had Abraham as their father, but in fact they were not at all "of" Abraham. Just as Paul will argue that "they are not all Israel / Jacob who are of Israel".

This statement that Yahweh is their father is, however, problematic. Because they were calling Yahweh "Father" without accepting the responsibilities of being God's children: "And I thought you would call me, my Father" (Jer. 3:19). The returned exiles however had done this just as a formality, for "If then I am a father, where is the honour due Me?" (Mal. 1:6). This prayer labours the point, twice in one verse, that the exiles did claim Yahweh as their father. That would imply that they had ditched all other spiritual fathers and gods. Which Is. 58 and Zechariah make clear they didn't. And so we could well wonder whether this prayer from the exiles fits the pattern of Mal. 1:6, calling Yahweh "Father" without honouring Him. And we recall how Isaiah began in Is. 1:2-4: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me... offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly". See on :17; Is. 64:5.

Although I argue on Is. 63:17; 64:5 that this prayer is inadequate as a confession of sin, this is also a prayer of penitence, recognizing that although Yahweh is their Father, they have not acted as the seed of Abraham and Jacob. It is such penitence from God's people which is required for His saving arm to be fully revealed in the last days.

Our Redeemer from everlasting is Your name- God's essential preference for saving grace rather than judgment is an essential part of His character; see on :11. That Name or personality was eternal and didn't change, and it is this which is being appealed to through the recollection of how He had historically articulated that grace within His Name. And His imputation of righteousness, the things of His Name placed upon His people, may be in view if we follow the LXX: "Thy name has been upon us from the beginning".

The prayer asks for God to step up to His promised duty as their redeemer. But Isaiah has repeatedly shown so far that this is just what He had done. People so often want God to do something which He has in fact already done. As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's go'el , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land You gave..." (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy

Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren

Isaiah 63:17 O Yahweh, why do You make us to err from Your ways, and harden our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, the tribes of Your inheritance- As will be discussed on Is. 64:5, this prayer continually more than hints that God is at fault. It is more of a lament, complaint and appeal, than the required total, abject confession of sin. It admits Israel's sin but attempts to blame it on God. Isaiah has stressed that God has prepared a way in the desert for them to walk, setting up signs and waymarks; not making them err from His way (Is. 48:20, 50:10, 55:1–5, 57:14, 58:1–59:15). And Is. 53:6; 56:11 have been clear enough that it was Judah's choice to turn to a wrong way: "All we like sheep have gone astray; each one has turned to his own way… they have each turned to their own way, each one to his gain". The Divine solution was for them to accept the work of the suffering servant to return them to the right way. But here, the blame for being on the wrong way is placed on God.

Asking God to "return" to them is inappropriate, given the huge play on this word *shub*. God originally said that if they returned to Him, He would return to them, and would return them to Judah from Babylon. They didn't return / repent to Him, but He decided to return them to the land anyway. But for the most part they refused to respond to Cyrus' decree to return. Isaiah had been commissioned in Is. 6:10 "Make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed". It is quite possible that Isaiah is now complaining about this, as Jeremiah did similarly. His complaint is that indeed he has hardened Judah's heart, on God's behalf. And so God shouldn't complain that Judah had a hard heart. But that is to ignore the context of the command to harden their hearts; it was a confirmation of their sin. Isaiah had then asked: "Then I said, Lord, how long?" (Is. 6:11). The reply was basically "Until there is repentance". And there hadn't been. It is however quite possible that the author [or the person praying] in Is. 63,64 is Jeremiah; because the language and style is so similar to Lamentations. There too we have accusations of Yahweh's betrayal of His people mixed alongside wonderful spiritual insights and confessions of faith, e.g. that His mercies are new every morning. Lamentations and this prayer share lots of similar language- calling Yahweh God's "enemy", calling the temple a "treasure", common use of the word "compassion" etc.

God does in fact lead men in a downward spiral as well as in an upward spiral of relationship with Him – Pharaoh would be the classic example. It is perhaps this situation more than any which we should fear – being hardened in sin, drawing ever closer to the waterfall of destruction, until we come to the point that the forces behind us are now too strong to resist… Saul lying face down in the dirt of ancient Palestine the

night before his death would be the classic visual image of it. And the Lord urges us to pray earnestly that we are not led in that downward spiral of temptation. This recognition that they have been hardened in their ways can be read as part of the confession of sin in :16. The request to restore *all* the tribes suggests that those praying this prayer have moved on from the sectarian division between Israel and Judah. Again, it is the experience of repentance and receipt of restoring grace which is the ultimate basis for unity between God's people. And yet it could be argued that :16-19 is the cynical complaint of a sector within Jewish society who accepted that they had not been as Abraham and Jacob (:16), but still lamented all the judgment which had come upon them without specifically joining the dots and realizing it was their lack of repentance which was responsible for the situation.

Isaiah 63:18 Your holy people possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary- Eternal inheritance had been promised, and compared to eternity, Judah had possessed the land only a little while before being driven out. Or as LXX "that we may inherit a small part of thy holy mountain". The mountain or Kingdom of Yahweh was envisaged as filling the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham, and only a small part of it, Palestine, was being possessed by Judah. The hope and prayer was therefore, in this case, that the entire land would be possessed. "Afflicted" in :9 is the word used here in :18 of the Babylonian "adversaries" who destroyed Jerusalem. Whilst this was an act of Divine judgment, God still felt for His people all through it. Jeremiah's laments in Lamentations that God had somehow switched off from feeling for His people were therefore simply stating things as they seemed to him at the time. For in reality, in their affliction He was afflicted (:9).

The complaint that Jerusalem was now in ruins, repeated in Is. 64:10,11, is all rather ignoring the repeated promises thus far in Isaiah. Multiple times the people have been assured that Jerusalem shall become the eternal city, an eternal "crown of glory" (Is. 62:3). But the exiles had refused that possibility, and remained in Babylon for the most part. And those who did return, were more focused on building up their own houses than God's house. So it was quite wrong of them to lament that Jerusalem was still in ruins and to ask God to do something about it. As if they expected some miraculous change overnight, regardless of their effort or spiritual state. This is the mentality of so many, whose spiritual vision is merely of whatever is immediately in front of their eyes. Likewise the complaint that the sanctuary had been trodden down is wilfully ignorant of the reason *why* this had happened- it was because they themselves had so despised Yahweh's sanctuary by performing idolatry there, as Ezekiel had clearly pointed out. Is. 57:13 had clearly promised them eternal possession- if they wanted to accept God's terms: "But he who takes refuge in Me shall possess the land and shall inherit My holy mountain". But they weren't interested in the conditions.

Isaiah 63:19 We have become as they over whom You never bear rule, as those who were not called by Your name-

As discussed on :17 and Is. 64:5, this prayer verges on falsely accusing God. He has specifically stated that His grace in seeking to save them from Babylon was because they carried His Name: "For My own sake, will I do it; for how should My name be profaned?" (Is. 48:11). Is. 43:6,7 is clear: "I will tell the north, 'Give them up!'... each one who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory". For other examples of blatantly false statements about God, ignoring what He has been saying all along, see on Is. 64:9,12.

LXX "We are become as at the beginning, when thou didst not rule over us, and thy name was not called upon us". This is a request, therefore, to start over with Israel, giving them a new covenant and a new land inheritance, but for ever. I suggested on :16,17 that we have here a confession of sin; and this involves here recognizing that they are no better than Gentiles.

Or we can read with AVmg.: "We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; thy name was not called upon them". God's Name was called upon us at baptism into the Name. This bearing of His Name means that the principles of that Name bear rule over us in our lives. The Name is called upon us; and therefore and thereby we are Yahweh's servants, dominated by His principles and character. Because the Name was called upon the temple, therefore it was simply impossible that those who realized this could worship idols in it (2 Kings 21:4,7); whatever has God's Name called upon it, whatever bears His image, must be devoted to Him alone. The Lord pointed out that this applies to our very bodies, which being in God's image should be given over to Him.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 64

Isaiah 64:1 Oh that You would tear the heavens, that You would come down, that the mountains might quake at Your presence-

Rending the heavens suggests He does this in anger rather than to as it were open Heaven to give blessings to man. The allusion is to Sinai and how He "tore asunder the nations" (Hab. 3:6). It is a request for God to destroy the heavens of Babylon / Persia and just save His people anyway. But God has had much to say about the judgment of Babylon. He had asked His people to leave Babylon leather they be consumed in her destruction. But they had chosen to remain. And so by grace He deferred the destruction of Babylon. But they complain about that. Instead they ask He send down intense heat that would make the mountains melt and boil (:2). They want the condemnation of the world without pausing to reflect that they are in that world and eagerly part of it, worshipping the same idols.

This is all the language of Sinai. As discussed on Is. 63:16, the desire is for a new Sinai, a re-creation and re-acceptance of the Jews as God's people. But again, this prayer is out of sync with all God has been saying since Isaiah 40. The Jews had broken the old covenant, and He was offering them a new covenant, as Jeremiah and Ezekiel had done. But they didn't want that. They wanted to be partially obedient to the old covenant and ignore the gracious salvation offered in the new covenant. Of course the new covenant featured a reconstituted people of God, including Gentiles this time. But they were not keen on that. The argument of those praying seems to be that if God did something spectacular, then the Gentiles would turn to Him because of His display of mighty power. And God wasn't going to do that- in the spirit of how His Son refused the call to "come down from the cross and we will believe". The LXX has "If you would open the heaven...", then the Gentiles would fear God's power. The paraphrase of the GNB gets the idea: "Why don't you tear the sky open and come down? The mountains would see you and shake with fear". But God has already explained what will draw the Gentiles to Him [and not just put them in fear of His power]- a humbled, repentant Israel proclaiming their salvation by grace and imputed righteousness through the suffering servant, lifted up as a banner to the Gentiles.

This chapter appears to be the continued request of some amongst God's people for Yahweh to no longer restrain Himself in (Is. 63:15). But that restraint had been because of their sins. There does indeed follow a confession of sin, but the plea seems to more be for immediate Divine salvation than for forgiveness. The mountains quaked at the exodus, and the prayer is that God would act again as He had acted then (as in Is. 63:15). But Is. 63:9-14 have stated that God indeed would act like that; the entire prophecy of God's intended restoration of His people is shot through with allusion to the wilderness journey and exodus from Egypt. He was willing and eager to do this. It was Israel's impenitence which precluded it.

Isaiah 64:2 As when fire kindles the brushwood- Perhaps a reference to the burning bush. *The plea was for God to act as He had done at the exodus from Egypt.* But He has repeatedly made allusion to the exodus from Egypt in His offers of a second exodus from Babylon. And they had preferred to remain in Babylon.

And the fire causes the waters to boil- The idea may be as GNB "they would tremble like water boiling over a hot fire".

To make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence!- This trembling of the nations was to happen at the fall of Babylon and her confederacy (s.w. Is. 14:9), when Jerusalem would be restored (Jer. 33:9). But the attitude of the exiles precluded these things from happening. It is one thing to pray for things, but another to live in the spirit of them and act as if we do indeed really want them; see on Am. 5:18. Likewise it was one thing to pray that Yahweh's Name be known to His enemies; but it was quite another for them to make known His Name to them, as they were intended to (Is. 12:4 s.w.). It was a repentant Israel, proclaiming salvation by an amazing grace, that would make Yahweh's Name known to His enemies. Not some physical demonstration of power and glory as happened at Sinai. His physical actions at Sinai, after all, had not made even His own people faithful to Him.

Isaiah 64:3 When You did awesome things which we didn't look for, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence- Again the plea is for God to act as He had done at the exodus; the great salvation then had been performed by grace, it was not what they had looked for. And so they ask for God to do the same; but as explained on :1, Isaiah's entire prophecy of God's intended restoration of His people is shot through with allusion to the wilderness journey and exodus from Egypt. He was willing and eager to do this. It was Israel's impenitence which precluded it.

Isaiah 64:4 For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen a God besides You, what God has prepared for him who waits for Him- The idea is that the restoration and entry into the reestablished Kingdom was going to be the most wonderful of all God's saving acts seen throughout history; and no god besides Yahweh could achieve this. But this is quoted in 1 Cor. 2:9 as if it means that God alone appreciates the wonder of what He is going to do: "Men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, besides you, what He has prepared for him that waits for him". Paul continues in 1 Cor. 2:9,10: "It is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit". The passage in

Is. 64 says that no one except God can understand the things He has prepared for the believers. However 1 Cor. 2:10 says that those things have been revealed to us. We can accept His Spirit, His mind, and perceive things from His perspective.

Paul in 1 Cor. 2:9 renders "nor perceived by the ear" as "neither have entered into the heart of man". "Him that waits for Him Paul renders as "For them that love Him". He interprets these things which are not understood by man as being the things of the Lord Jesus being Son of God and Israel's Messiah- rather than referring them to the glories of the Kingdom age to come.

But we must remember that Is. 64:4 is set in the midst of generally unreasonable criticisms of God, complaining that He is far too distant to have a relationship with. Interpretation isn't made easy by the difficulties of the text, and the way Paul quotes it in 1 Cor. 2:9 in a way different to any of the original texts. I suggest that the idea here is in line with the context, as if to say 'No human eye nor mind can see what You, God, have prepared / are planning for Your people who wait on / serve You'. And that would explain why Paul quotes this verse and then appears to alter the sense by adding: "But God has revealed them [these things no man can understand] unto us by His Spirit". He is saying that these things are revealed to us, when the verse appears to be saying that they are far beyond understanding by any human being. Paul read this verse as the cynical lament of God's rejected people; and shows that this claim is simply not the case, for those who have received the Spirit of the new covenant. If we read these words as a statement of fact, then we are left with the teaching that man has no ability to understand God's plans for him. And that was how the exiles chose to feel, as an excuse for their lack of further engagement with Him. But Isaiah alone is full of information about the things God has prepared for them who wait for Him. But only the spiritually minded perceived them. The idea that 'It's all too hard to understand God and His plans for us' is used today as an excuse for lack of further engagement with Him.

Isaiah 64:5 You meet him who rejoices and works righteousness- God is in search of man, and man is in search of God. "Meet" is the same word translated 'intercede'; that meeting is due to the intercession of the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:6,12; 59:16). Their 'meeting' is now in this life; and the heavens are electric with joy therefore when the lost sheep is found. All the Angels of heaven rejoice... when the Father meets the prodigal son. The Father (manifest in the Lord) runs out to meet the son. That story was masterfully tied back in to Is. 64:5-8: "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways...we have sinned...we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...but now, O Lord, thou art our father". The patient, hopeful father saw in the son a boy rejoicing and working righteousness; but this was hardly how *he* felt! And so it will be with Israel in the last days. And so it is with each of us now, in our times of repentance. That surpassing grace is ours; we are seen

as working righteousness when all we have is a bitter self-loathing and desire to somehow get back to God.

Those who remember You in Your ways- The faithful Israelite was to remember the ways in which they were led through the wilderness to the promised land (s.w. Dt. 8:2; 24:9; 25:17). They were to perceive the hand of God in their personal history, leading them to meeting with Him. But the exiles chose their own ways and not His (Is. 66:3 s.w.).

Behold, You were angry, and we sinned. We have been in sin for a long time; and shall we be saved?- AV "we shall be saved". In this case we would have a confident expression of faith in salvation despite recognizing that they had always sinned against Him ["for a long time" = *olahm*, eternally]. It could be that Is. 65:8-16; Is. 66:5 etc. speak of a minority of Jews who trembled at the word of prophecy and were Yahweh's servants, who had been disfellowshipped by the leaders of the Jewish community in Babylon. The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon admitted that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them.

We can however read this verse and those following as a complaint that God's judgments have been so severe, that Israel feel 'it's all too much' and have therefore not been further responsive to Him. They seem to complain that God's anger was not commensurate to their sin. But Is. 57:17 had been clear: "Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry, I struck him; I hid my face and was angry, but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart". NIV has the people concluding "How then can we be saved?". We could read this as saying that Yahweh meets in judgment the righteous man [translating "You attack even the one who takes joy in doing right"], and "we sinned because You are angry". This reading makes sense then of how the "righteous" of :5 is then stated to all the same be clothed in filthy rags in :6. We can read :6 as a complaint that God sees the righteous acts of His people as filthy rags, instead of valuing them. And so :7 laments that nobody wants to call upon God because He has turned His face away- He is playing hard to get, so, it's not worth the effort. This is all the mindset of many today. In this case, this prayer is more of a lament and appeal to God, rather than a confession of sin. It continues the spirit of Is. 63:17 "Yahweh, why do You make us to err from Your ways, and harden our heart from Your fear?". The idea is that they would continue in sin because there is no guarantee of salvation: "Shall we be saved?".

It could be argued that Is. 65,66 is God's answer to the prayer of Is. 63:7–64:11. Those texts speak of two things: a wonderful Kingdom for the repentant remnant, and His

judgments upon those Jews who refuse to repent and continue in their idolatry. And His response doesn't accept the argument that He is to blame:
64:6 “No one calls on your name” = Is. 65:1 “I held out my hands to a people who do not call on My name”
64:11 “Will you be silent?” = Is. 65:6 “I will not be silent”
63:19–64:2 requests Yahweh to judge with fire = Is. 66:16 “the Lord will judge with fire”
63:17 Challenges Yahweh to act for the sake of His servants = Is. 65:8,13,14 Yahweh will act for the sake of His servants
64:8 requests God to act for His people = Is. 65:10 Yahweh defines His people as those who seek Him, which Judah generally didn't: “My people who seek Me”
64:10 laments the loss of the "holy house" = Is. 66:1 answers this by redefining His house and explaining that a physical house was never what he wanted: “where is the house that you will build for Me?”
64:8 asks God to “look” on His people = Is. 66:2 “to this one will I look (s.w.).

In this case, Is. 65 and 66 are God's response to the prayer of Is. 63:7–64:11. This explains why those chapters offer the Kingdom of God to those who are humble and repentant, not idolaters. And it explains why the entire prophecy concludes on an apparently negative note at the end of Is. 66, threatening judgment on God's people who are apostate for Him despite all His best efforts. That is His final answer to this prayer of complaint.

Isaiah 64:6 For we have all become as one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is as a polluted garment: and we all fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away- We feel inadequate as employees, students, parents, partners… fearing we won't make the grade. And we tend to feel the same way before our God too. But in Christ, clothed with His righteousness, we need not feel like this. Indeed, we *should* not. We have tended to misquote a number of Bible verses to justify our feeling that we can never please God- e.g. Is. 64:6 "All our righteousness are as filthy rags". Yet the context is clearly of a repentance from sin, recognizing that despite all their external good works, Israel were ritually unclean before God. We *can* and *do* please God! The wonder of this should never cease to impress us. J.R.R. Tolkien truly observed: "…the chief purpose of life, for any one of us, is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks. To do as we say in the *Gloria in Excelsis*: …We praise you, we call you holy, we worship you, we proclaim your glory, we thank you for the greatness of your splendour". This admission of national sin must be contrasted with :5 AV "we shall be saved"- despite all this.

But as discussed on :5, we can read this verse as the people saying that their righteous acts were treated as polluted by God; and therefore they had given up doing them. Implying He was just impossible to please. There are ample Bible verses that teach that

God is in fact thrilled by our righteousness. Specifically in the context of the exiles: "Do well in Your good pleasure to Zion, build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You will delight in the sacrifices of righteousness" (Ps. 51:18,19); "Yahweh is well pleased for his righteousness' sake" (Is. 42:21). God loved His Son because He "loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows" (Heb. 1:9). It's simply not the case that bearing human nature somehow cancels out any righteousness that man performs. The Lord had human nature but God still loved His righteousness. It is just not so that God looks at human righteousness and despises it. God "loves him that follows after righteousness" (Prov. 15:9); "Yahweh loves the righteous" (Ps. 146:8- and so many other scriptures).

So we have here the very common syndrome of 'Whatever I do, it's no good for him / her / them; whatever good I do for them, it's never enough or never good enough'. And so the person feeling this gives up on the relationship. It is the stuff of broken down relationships. I hear it all the time when chatting with people about their relationship difficulties. And the exiles are saying this to and about God Almighty. The answer of God is in Is. 65:3,4- their apparently righteous sacrifices and religious devotions were being performed to idols. In the name of Yahweh worship. As they had done before the exile, so they did throughout the exile and therefore on their return to the land. Only some time later did they quit idolatry.

They claim that all their righteous deeds were seen as unclean by God, like a menstrual rag [Heb.] that was totally abhorrent in terms of Levitical holiness and had to be cast away. The language has a strong flavour of detestation. But this is indeed how God had said He saw their prayers and sacrifices when at the same time they were worshipping idols. God found all that hypocrisy as a smoke in His nostrils. But they ignored that. His answer to their claim of righteous religious deeds is in Is. 65:3-5,7: "A people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig's flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels; who say, “Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.” These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day… they made offerings on the mountains and insulted me on the hills, I will measure into their lap payment for their former deeds".

"And we all do fade as a leaf" is a repeat of God's opening words to the exiles in Is. 40:7. Indeed the grass withered and the flower faded because His Spirit blew upon them; but they had then been offered the word of redemption that would last for ever, and a path back to Zion. They had refused that, and now grumble at their humanity and the conditions that arise from refusing God's word of salvation. It's like complaining about death and all related aspects of the curse. God has explained the cause, the fault is ours and we have a wonderful path out of the situation.

They compare their sin to the wind, blowing them away against their will. But again this is a studied rejection of the teaching of Is. 57:13: "When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you! The wind will carry them all off, a breath will take them away. But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land and shall inherit my holy mountain". God's response in Is. 65 will be to rebuke and call out their idolatry.

Isaiah 64:7 There is none who calls on Your name, who stirs up himself to take hold of You-

On one hand, this can be read as a confession of sin. But the argument seems to be that none calls on God *because* He has hidden Himself from them. God's answer is in Is. 65:1,2. He had pleaded with His people, beckoning them to Him with open arms. They had refused. But Gentiles whose name He had not called… came to Him, hopefully of His acceptance by grace.

God has repeatedly explained why He hid His face from the exiles, and how that period had ended- if they wanted to see His face (Is. 54:8; 57:17; 59:2). We note that they hid their faces from the suffering servant (Is. 53:3). And yet this prayer is arguing that none of them made the conscious mental effort to stir themselves up because it was no use, seeing God was hiding from them and overly focused upon their sins. So like many people, they fell into a spiritual stupor because they felt it was just all too hard God was too far away and too focused on their admitted sins. This is where the message of the cross, reflection on God's words and openness to His Spirit can shake man from this malaise, from his spiritual lethargy and this mire of mediocrity. These things make us eager to persuade others of the great possibilities they have, and to turn back those who have walked away from them. We are talking about eternal life and eternal death. Nothing is more intensely serious. The prayer laments that because God is so demanding, none bothered to stir themselves up for Him. But the same word for 'stirring up ' is used of how at the restoration, God had stirred up the spirit of both Cyrus and the exiles to return to Judah (Ezra 1:1,5). But they had resisted that, preferring to remain in Babylon and the soft life. They said that they couldn't take hold upon God because He was hiding from them. But He had urged them to take hold (s.w. "stir up") of His new covenant (Is. 56:4,6), and multiple times said that He wanted to take hold of them and bring them from Babylon to Zion. The same word is in Is. 51:17: "Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem!". He urged the returned exiles to take hold of Him (s.w. Hag. 2:4; Zech. 8:9). But God was as it were never good enough for them. They are arguing that they can't take hold of God because He is maxed out on their sins and has unreasonably hidden Himself. Man today mutters all the same things until he comes to the end of his days of opportunity. The same attitude amongst the exiles was encountered by Ezekiel in Ez. 33:10, “Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we waste away in them, how should we then live?". Ezekiel's response to that was to appeal for them to repent and accept the new covenant. But they didn't. They hid

behind the excuse that God wasn't good enough and unreasonable: "Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways” (Ez. 33:20).

This is a recognition that the restored exiles had not allowed themselves to be stirred up as intended. God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would be "raised up" [s.w.]- Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to "Awake!"- the same word translated "stirred up". But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves'. God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God's grace still shines through.

Yahweh would "stir up" Cyrus (s.w. Is. 41:2,25; 45:13), so this could have been fulfilled through that stirred up "mighty man" of Is. 42:13. But he failed. The "mighty man", the *gibbor*, therefore became reapplied to the Lord Jesus (Is. 9:6 s.w.). But He will act through the stirring up of a repentant Judah (s.w. Is. 51:9,17; 52:1), seeing that no man would be 'stirred up' (s.w. Is. 64:7). All the potential candidates had refused the Divine nudges to be stirred up. There was apparently not a single one in the community who would 'hold fast' the offered new covenant (s.w. "who holds it fast" in Is. 56:2,4,6); apart from the Messianic "son of man" (see on Is. 56:2).

For You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us by means of our iniquities- Is. 30:20 describes the reestablished Kingdom as a time when Judah's repentant eyes would "see" the God who had taught them through the sufferings of defeat and exile (see note there). Their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him (s.w. Job 3:23; 13:24) just as God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and

exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally, the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family / school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me… and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7). By lamenting the fact God has hidden His face, they were refusing to accept *why* this was so. It was because of their sins (Dt. 31:17,18; Is. 8:17, 45:15, 54:8, 59:2; Jer. 33:5). But they are lamenting that, rather than being penitent about it. They seem to mind that God is not just ignoring their spiritually obnoxious behaviour. They are reasoning exactly like Cain in Gen. 4: "Behold You have driven me today away from the ground, and from Your face I shall be hid". Yahweh has already answered this objection in Is. 59:2: “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear". NIV "and have given us over to our sins" reasons as in Is. 63, that God was in fact to blame for their sins. There is no penitence here, only lament and God-blaming self justification.

Isaiah 64:8 But now, Yahweh, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and we all are the work of Your hand-

We could read this as a fatalistic comment, that God is going to do what He wants with us anyway and we have no say in the matter. Obviously missing the point [as does so much of this prayer] that it is how the clay responds which determines whether the potter makes something permanent out of it.

See on Is. 63:16. As discussed there, the connection between creation and being a potter of clay alludes to God's creation of Adam, by molding clay into the form of a man and energizing it. This is therefore a request for a new creation, possibly just asking God to ignore their wrong behaviour and to start over with them. As a kind of shortcut that avoided their personal repentance. Several passages in Isaiah such as this in :8-12 record model prayers for Zion’s restoration. But the prayers dried up after the return; Isaiah’s exhortation was ignored. The returnees did keep silence, and therefore Zion was not established as a praise in the earth. The plea was for Yahweh to continue working with them, rather than casting them away as clay which refused to be malleable in His hands.

We note that ‘God the Father’ is the only God. It is therefore impossible that there can be a separate being called ‘God the Son’, as the false doctrine of the trinity states. The

Old Testament likewise portrays Yahweh, the one God, as the Father (e.g. Is. 63:16; 64:8). As there is only *one* God, it is impossible that Jesus could be God; if the Father is God and Jesus is also God, then there are two Gods. “But to us there is but one God, the Father” (1 Cor. 8:6).

Isaiah 64:9 Don’t be furious, Yahweh, neither remember iniquity forever: see, look, we beg You, we are all Your people-

The complaint was that surely God had gone on punishing for too long. It recurs in Ps. 79:8 and Zech. 1:12. But God has repeatedly said that they time of their slavery in Babylon was over, indeed His love was such that He had cut it short. The time of redemption had come. But they had refused it. In any case, if we are convicted that sin warrants death, we can hardly complain that suffering for sin ought to be shorter.

As noted on :1, this is asking Yahweh to do what He had Himself multiple times promised to do- to not remember sin forever, and to look on His people with pity rather than grace. But He would no longer remember iniquity if they accepted the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:34). And thus man is brought to God- desiring and praying for the very things which we then realize He has been earnestly offering us all the time. As the Yiddish couplet says, "And going out to meet Him, I met Him coming towards me".

Here we have yet again a willful ignorance of God's words to the exiles (see on Is. 63:17,9; 64:5). For God has specifically said that He will not remember their iniquity forever: "Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all… he will bear their iniquities" (Is. 53:6,11).

Isaiah 64:10 Your holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation- Isaiah's later prophecies are in response to the judgment of Is. 39, that Judah were to go into captivity in Babylon and Jerusalem be desolated. This is therefore as it were a *pro forma* prayer for the captives- which it seems they did not pray, or prayed simply from the secular point of view of lamenting the loss of what were the icons of their culture and self-identity, rather than being the prayer of repentance.

As discussed on Is. 63:18, it was quite inappropriate to complain that the cities were a wilderness and the temple still in ruins. Isaiah had repeatedly offered them the gospel of the restoration of Zion and the cities of Judah: "They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities" (Is 61:4). But they had refused the conditions, or probably not even paid serious attention to such promises. Their attitude was "We want it here and now, without any terms and conditions attached".

Isaiah 64:11 Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised You is burnt with fire; and all our pleasant places are laid waste- We could comment that they parallel "Your cities" with "our house... places", as if recognizing that what is Yahweh's is theirs. Or we could more negatively respond that it was God's house, not theirs. They only mourned for the loss of it insofar as it was a reflection of what they revelled in anyway, as an expression of themselves, rather than a means of worshipping God. And their fathers not only praised Yahweh there but offered idol sacrifice there, as Ezekiel demonstrates.

We note "*our* house... *our* precious things". They saw these religious symbols as theirs, not God's. John's Gospel therefore talks about the feasts *of the Jews*, when those feasts were originally feasts *of Yahweh*. God's response will be in Is. 66, where He will remind them that He never wanted that temple anyway, and was almost glad to see it gone because He wants to dwell in humbled hearts, not physical buildings. They had forgotten what Ezekiel had told them about the reasons for the destruction of their beloved temple: "Say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and the yearning of your soul, and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword" (Ez. 24:21). It was because they thought a physical temple could save them that it was taken away. God wants relationship,. Not religion. So He took away their religion that they might come to Him in personal relationship. But they were demanding their religion back.

Isaiah 64:12 Will You refrain Yourself for these things, Yahweh?- God had earlier accepted that throughout the captivity He had been "restrained toward" Israel, but now He would be restrained no longer (s.w. Is. 42:14). But He did so because of the prayer of the faithful not to restrain Himself longer (Is. 63:15; 64:12). The tragedy is that His unrestrained desire to save and redeem the exiles was still refused by them; and perhaps there were few who really begged Him to no longer restrain Himself. For they were quite happy with their prosperous lives in Babylon and Persia. And so the events of the last days will elicit this more intense prayer, and Yahweh will finally act unrestrainedly in this earth.

The statement that God will not "rest" for Zion's sake (Is. 62:1) must be understood in the context of the faithful at that time urging God *not* to "be still" [same Hebrew word translated "rest"] for His people (Ps. 83:1; Is. 64:12). This is an allusion to Boaz not being at rest until he had redeemed Ruth and Naomi; see on Is. 49:26. God is *not* at rest, He is *not* distant from us; and yet His people in Babylon felt that He was. It's no wonder that we are tempted to feel the same. Yet we must give Is. 62:1 it's full weight- God is

answering the complaint of His people by stating that no, He will never rest for them. In this same context we read that He that keeps Israel will "neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). Much of the later chapters of Isaiah speaks of the faithful remnant in Babylon. The prayers and thoughts of that faithful minority often surface- this and Is. 62:1 is an example. Thus they fulfilled the prophecy that Zion's watchmen would give God no rest (Is. 62:6,7). But overall, the poor response of Judah seems to have led God to abandon the plan for the gloriously rebuilt Messianic temple. The plan of saving His people and reestablishing His Kingdom was reinterpreted, delayed and reapplied.

Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?- "Afflicted" is the word used in Is. 63:18 of the Babylonian "adversaries" who destroyed Jerusalem. Whilst this was an act of Divine judgment, God still felt for His people all through it. Jeremiah's laments in Lamentations that God had somehow switched off from feeling for His people were therefore simply stating things as they seemed to him at the time. For in reality, in their affliction He was afflicted (Is. 63:9). Here again we see their confession of sin tinged by misunderstanding and a lingering sense of injustice on God's part.

The prayer ends abruptly and with no humility. Here we have yet again a willful ignorance of God's words to the exiles (see on Is. 63:17,9; 64:5). LXX "for all these things thou, O Lord, has withholden, thyself, and been silent, and hast brought us very low". But God has explained His silence: "I have been silent a long time, I have been quiet and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a travailing woman, I will both gasp and pant" (Is. 42:14). The lesson is to let the Comforter / the Holy Spirit convict us of sin, to let the cross of Calvary do its work- in both convicting us and assuring us of salvation, which we accept, therefore, in grateful humility.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 65

Isaiah 65:1 I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I' to a nation that was not called by My name-

I have argued on Is. 64:5 that Is. 65 and 66 are God's response to the prayer of Is. 63:7–64:11. This explains why those chapters offer the Kingdom of God to those who are humble and repentant, not idolaters. And it explains why the entire prophecy concludes on an apparently negative note at the end of Is. 66, threatening judgment on God's people who are apostate for Him despite all His best efforts. That is His final answer to this prayer of complaint.

Heb. "I allowed Myself to be sought… to be found". This answers the previous complaint that God had hidden Himself from the exiles, hiding His face in His greatness in Heaven, and made Himself inaccessible. He was *not* playing hard to get. Those who had just made the lament of Is. 63:15-64:11 had in fact never really sought God. They had just complained that He hadn't come through for them immediately as they demanded. All their pious talking of God as their Father and how their house lay in ruins and how gutted they were about the state of Jerusalem… was all done without any seeking of God. Very seriously religious people can actually never seek nor find God. In fact, quite contrary to their claim that God was hiding from them, He protests that He has been proactively begging them to come into relationship with Him [as we have seen throughout second Isaiah]: "I said, 'Here am I, here am I'… I have spread out My hands all the day to a rebellious people". He had been calling out to them, but they refused to hear and instead falsely claimed He was hiding from them: "I will destine you to the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because when I called, you didn't answer; when I spoke, you didn't listen" (:12, repeated in Is. 66:4). The exiles were spiritually deaf and blind, according to Is. 42:18,19; 43:8. The silence of God is only apparent. He is actually in passionate communication with us, if only we will open our eyes and ears.

The idol worshipping exiles still sought Yahweh (s.w. Ez. 14:3; 20:3,31). The nation not called by Yahweh's Name would be Israel who were unknown to Abraham and Jacob and who were as if Yahweh's Name had not been called upon them, "as those who were not called by Your name" (Is. 63:16,19). The people in view are those of :2,3, who are clearly Israel. But Yahweh was willing to be sought and found by them even in that state. God set them up with the possibility to return to Judah, to establish there a Messianic-style Kingdom, giving them the commands in Ez. 40-48 for a glorious temple; but most of them preferred the soft life in Babylon, and those who did return proved small minded, selfish and disinterested in the vision of God's glory. In this context, Isaiah ends his restoration prophecies on a tragic note from God: "I was ready to be sought… I was ready to be found" (Is. 65:1) by the unspiritual exiles in Babylon. But Israel would not. He

pictures Himself standing there crying "Here am I, here am I!"- to be rejected by a people more interested in climbing the endless economic and social ladder in Babylon and Persia. We note that Is. 65:1,2 alludes closely to Is. 55:6,7: "Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call you on Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Yahweh, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon". The exiles had chosen not to seek and find Yahweh; to not call upon Him nor forsake their wrong ways and thoughts.

Yet Paul appears to quote these words out of context, at first blush, applying them to the calling of the Gentiles who did not seek God (Rom. 10:20). But this is not so out of context; for as noted on Is. 63:19, apostate Israel were effectively as Gentiles. This calling of apostate Israel was the same therefore as the calling of the Gentiles. Although we can note that many Old Testament passages are quoted in the New Testament without strict attention to context.

Or we can read Rom. 10:20,21 as applying "those that did not seek Me" to the Gentiles; and then 'the nation not called by My Name' and :2, the "rebellious people", to the Jews: "Isaiah is very bold, and said: I was found by those that did not seek Me; I showed myself to those who were not asking for Me. But to Israel He said: All the day long did I spread out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people". In Is. 63:19 the people have lamented that God treats them "as those who were not called by Your name". They go on to say that this is why they had given up calling on His Name: "There is none who calls on Your name" (Is. 64:7). So perhaps God is responding to this by saying that even though they considered themselves not called by His Name, He still appealed to them, saying "Here am I" to a nation that didn't call on His Name, i.e. the Jewish exiles, who themselves have just stated they do not call on His Name [wrongly citing His disinterest in them]. And yet Is. 66:4 will comment on this appeal to them: "When I called, no one answered; when I spoke, they didn't listen".

Isaiah 65:2 I have spread out My hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts- LXX "After their own sins". Again we see the focus of the Biblical revelation upon thoughts and mental patterns as being the essence of sin. Our thoughts are our "way", and we walk in practice according to our way. This is why the gift of God's Spirit or thinking is so essential for real transformation. Otherwise we will continue in rebellion against God.

Isaiah 65:3 A people who provoke Me to My face continually, sacrificing in gardens and burning incense on bricks- The provocation was to God's face, or LXX "in My presence", as if the temple precincts were in view; or perhaps the Angel of His presence of Is. 63:9 is in view, whom they rebelled against and grieved by refusing to repent and return from Babylon. Perhaps they had placed bricks and a garden structure there in which they

worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship. And the context is of the failure of the restored exiles; despite all the Godly influence of Ezra and Nehemiah, this is what was going on in the early generations after the exiles returned.

We note that Is. 65:3 LXX is clear that demons don't exist: “[Israel] burn incense on bricks to demons, *which exist not*”. The idols of the nations, representing as they did the supposed ‘demons’ of the cosmos, were “vanity” because what the demons and gods they supposedly represented did not exist – they are “beings that are nothing” (1 Sam. 12:21 LXX), “a thing of nought” (Jer. 14:4). See on :11; Is. 66:17.

"The gardens" may refer to the valleys around Jerusalem, where the Jews worshipped idols before the exile; and especially the high places of Topheth between the Hinnom and Kidron valleys. They had returned and were back to their old haunts. Temples typically had gardens attached to them where idolatry was performed, "under every green tree" and in groves of trees [asherah] (Dt. 12:2,3); and it seems possible that the temple the Jews rebuilt had such gardens attached. At the time of Is. 66, it seems there was a temple rebuilt: "what kind of house will you build to Me?" (Is. 66:1) God comments, as if it was so displeasing to Him. And it seems a Divine voice of condemnation boomed forth from that temple building: "A voice of tumult from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of Yahweh" (Is. 66:6). Jeremiah 7 condemns them for using the valleys for idolatry before the exile, and various terms from that chapter recur in Is. 65 and 66. Although the returned exiles did finally quit idolatry, they definitely hadn't when they first returned. The vision of the ephah in Zech. 5 is clear enough; Ezekiel is clear enough the exiles were idolatrous in the exile; Ez. 20 says that as the Israelites took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea, so it seems the exiles were going to take Babylon's idols on their exodus. Is. 66:24 concludes the entire prophecy with a picture of these people being condemned in Gehenna outside the new Jerusalem. It was idolatry in the "gardens" which led to their exile in the first place: "For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which you have desired, and you shall be confounded for the gardens that you have chosen" (Is. 1:29). They were doing it all again, hence God's extreme wrath that can be felt throughout Is. 65 and 66. I commented on Is. 57:5 that this kind of idolatry was ongoing amongst the exiles: "You who inflame yourselves among the oaks, under every green tree".

"Bricks" may contrast with the required "unhewn stone" for altars, but it can also be translated "roof". In which case we see how the returned exiles were behaving just as they had done before the exile, when the kings of Judah made altars on the roofs (2 Kings 23:12). All the sufferings of the exile had not at all succeeded in purging Judah of their sins. By grace, God had returned them to the land anyway; but that grace also hadn't succeeded in turning them from their sins.

Isaiah 65:4 Who sit among the graves and lodge in the secret places; who eat pig’s flesh,

and broth of abominable things is in their vessels- This seems to refer to various idol rituals, LXX "They lie down to sleep in the tombs and in the caves for the sake of dreams". The "vessels" may have been those of the temple which were returned from Persia to Jerusalem. Legion's situation was clearly presented as alluding to this verse; his madness was that of the returned exiles in their idolatry. His cure therefore looks forward as an acted parable to the final psychological healing of Israel through the work of the spirit of the Lord Jesus.

Lodging and sitting in graves alludes to some ritual or cult for the dead. Tombs were typically multi-generational, and in a "garden"- the "gardens" of :3. Possibly they were involved in some pagan ritual intended to somehow revive the dead bones of the kingly line that had been cut off by the Babylonians. They preferred to do this, with all the uncleanness it involved, rather than believe Ez. 21:25-27- that there would be no more king until Messiah. Or maybe they were worshipping their ancestors, whom the exiles in Ezekiel had blamed for sinning and their unfair suffering because of that. In practice, the cults of the dead involved sleeping in the tomb of the dead in order to communicate with them. Pork was considered the food of the gods, and so the ritual involved eating pork in order to fellowship with the gods. The burial caves at Lachish revealed pig bones overlaying human bones. All this was totally obnoxious to any true believer. The Jews who did this made themselves totally ritually unclean- and yet so hypocritically excluded from worship those whom they considered unclean.

Isaiah 65:5 Who say, 'Stand by yourself, don't come near to me, for I am holier than you'. These are a smoke in My nose, a fire that burns all the day- "Stand by yourself" translates the common Hebrew term "draw near", which is that commonly used about drawing near to Yahweh in worship and offering. So the idea is that others were being told that they could do their worship "by yourself" and not with those who considered themselves spiritually superior (LXX "I am pure", see on Is. 66:17)- even though they were offering unclean offerings to Yahweh themselves (:4). This shows that the mentality of 'guilt by association' has always been engrained amongst God's people. It takes away any sense of self-examination and self awareness. For those saying this to the faithful remnant were idolaters and seriously morally compromised. This hypocrisy provoked the strongest wrath in God, and we must remember that whenever the guilt by association mentality emerges in our own thinking. See on Is. 66:5.

These are the people of Is. 66:4 who are said to "hate" their brethren whom God accepted: "Your brothers who hate you, who cast you out for My name's sake, have said, 'Let Yahweh be glorified, that we may see your joy;' but it is those who shall be disappointed". The hypocrisy was extreme, classifying other worshippers as impure and not wanting to be defiled by worshipping with or near them. Whilst worshipping idols,

doing pagan rituals for the dead, eating pigs and being defiled by contact with dead bodies and tombs. It leads God to break His apparent silence with a cry of judgment (:6). Rejecting other believers and judgmental attitudes to others within His people is clearly seen as the worst possible sin.

The exiles in Ps. 80:4 complained: "How long will You be angry against the prayer of Your people?". God had explained to the exiles quite clearly why their prayers made Him angry. They were a smoke in His nostrils because they offered them whilst burning the incense of prayer to other gods (:3): "These are a smoke in My nose, a fire that burns all the day" (Is. 65:5). He has stated there why He was angered by their prayers. And their response is not to repent, but instead to ask 'How long till You just get over it?'. They ignored all the reasons *why* their prayers were angering God: "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!" (Is. 1:15 NIV); "though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ez. 8:18); "as He called, and they refused to listen, so they will call, and I will not listen" (Zech. 7:13). All these words were spoken to the exiles. We too can totally overlook God's conviction of us of our sins, and simply complain that He doesn't remove the consequences. That in fact is exactly what most people do. They lament all the outcomes of living in a fallen creation, without taking any serious personal responsibility for their sins.

Isaiah 65:6 Behold, it is written before Me- This may be a reference to the 'book of deeds' kept before God. Sins can be blotted out from this book (Is. 43:25), or left there. This book along with the "book of life" form the "books" that will be "opened" at the last day. The implication is that the judgment of this gross hypocrisy would be at the last day. This sets the scene for the descriptions we will read of His future Kingdom as the reward for the faithful, at the time when the hypocrites are condemned and repaid. The double "I will recompense" is because if God speaks twice, He will surely do it. The verse will go on to use the metaphor of receiving wages. "Written before Me" is the language, therefore, of book keeping. Their sin was on God's record book, and the wages for it would be paid out in full amount (:7 Heb.).

Their self righteousness, insisting they were pure and condemning others when they were such idolaters, was what so deeply incited Yahweh's anger. Isaiah's words were written before God; the word spoken and preserved through Isaiah was and is also written in Heaven before God.

I will not keep silence, but will recompense, yes, I will recompense into their bosom- Their judgment will be according to what they did (Is. 59:18; 65:6); although Jer. 16:18 says that some will be recompensed double. By contrast, the exiles were not receiving punishment according as their deeds deserved, but less (Ezra 9:13). These different degrees of recompense suggest that Divine judgment is far more complex than a simple

'measure for measure'. The greater complexity is because He weighs motives and inflexions of meaning attached to actions which all require different judgments. And then on top of that, there is the credit He gives for forgiveness, and for the prayers and faith of others influencing the final outcome of judgment in any given case. The repayment "into their bosom" means right at the centre of their heart and being. The judgment process will make them fully realize how awful they were and the implications of their actions.

Isaiah 65:7 Your own iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, says Yahweh, who have burned incense on the mountains, and blasphemed Me on the hills; therefore will I first measure their work into their bosom- We doubt whether the Jews literally uttered blasphemy against Yahweh on the idol shrines in the mountains or hills. But that was the implication of their worshipping other gods, and Yahweh heard their actions as speaking like this. I suggested on :3 that this idolatry may have been taking place in the temple; therefore "mountains" and "hills" may be an intensive plural referring to the one great mount, the hill of Zion where the temple was located. Thus in :9 "My mountains" (AV) become LXX "My holy mountain" (singular). It was this category of idolater who also ordered the faithful remnant to worship away from themselves (see on :5).

"Recompense" speaks of the day of final judgment when the books are opened (see on :6). From now on until the end of Is. 66 we have the contrasting destinies of the wicked and the righteous. Condemnation for the wicked contrasted with the joys of living in God's eternal future Kingdom. This is why the passages about that Kingdom are interspersed with passages about the fate of the condemned. We have here a preview of the outcome of judgment day. Their sins would be punished "together" with the sins of their fathers. Whereas we see from Ez. 18 that the exiles argued that they themselves had done nothing wrong, and were unfairly being punished for their fathers' sins. God's point consistently is that in fact the returned exiles were now doing just what their fathers had done, burning incense to other gods etc.

Isaiah 65:8 Thus says Yahweh, As the new wine is found in the cluster and one says, 'Don't destroy it, for a blessing is in it:' so will I do for My servants' sake, that I may not destroy them all- GNB "No one destroys good grapes; instead, they make wine with them. Neither will I destroy all my people—I will save those who serve me". However that is a paraphrase, and "One says, 'Don't destroy it'" could be another voice in Isaiah, that is perhaps the work of the intercessor, the Lord Jesus. Or we could say that the idea seems to be that the grape harvest was generally bad, but for the sake even of a minority, the vine of Israel would have been saved. Hence LXX "As a grape-stone shall be found in the cluster, and they shall say, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do

for the sake of him that serves me, for his sake I will not destroy them all". But it was this remnant which were being so abused by the hypocritical religious leadership; see on :5.

The shortening of the days for the sake of a remnant is predicted in Is. 65:8,9: “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed [Jesus] out of Jacob… and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there”. The “elect” are paralleled with “my servants”. Because of them, the minority of faithful fruit, the whole tree is not destroyed. This is exactly the image of the fig tree parable; because of the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the tree of Israel, the whole nation will not be cut off and they will be saved by the coming of the Kingdom. The Lord’s description of the shortening of the days uses some rather odd past tenses: “Except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect’s sake… he shortened the days” (Mk. 13:20 RV). One wonders if we have here an allusion back to the days of Noah, where again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages would therefore seem to be teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

Isaiah 65:9 I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of My mountains; and My chosen shall inherit it, and My servants shall dwell there-

Reference to the seed and inheriting land is another reference to the promises to Abraham, the foundation of the new covenant which had been offered to the exiles. The "seed" and "inheritor" are singular; they parallel the plural "chosen" and "servants". This is the great theme of Isaiah, and also of Paul. It is by being "in" the seed, the suffering servant, that God's people are saved. In our times this begins with baptism "into Christ". "Mountains" is an intensive plural for the one great mountain, Zion, called in Is. 66:20 "My holy mountain Jerusalem", and referred to throughout Isaiah in a Kingdom context (Is. 2:2-4; 11:9; 25:6-8; 27:13; 56:7; 57:13).

See on :8. AV: “And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there”. His obedience would enable the peoples’ establishment as the Kingdom, upon the "mountains", perhaps an intensive plural for the one great mountain, Zion. See on Is. 66:21. Or as with LXX, the reference could be to Yahweh's intention to lead the repentant Judah out of Babylon to the "mountains", the one great mount, Zion: "And I will lead forth the seed that came of Jacob and of Juda, and they shall inherit my holy mountain" (see on :7).

The reason why there are no accusers against us, not even our own sins, is because we are “God’s elect” (Rom. 8:33). The supreme chosen one of God was of course the Lord Jesus, “My elect, in whom My soul delights” (Is. 42:1). And yet later on in the servant songs of Isaiah, "My elect” clearly refers to the people of Israel (Is. 45:4; 65:9,22). The true Israel of God are therefore those counted as somehow “in” the elect one, the singular servant of God, Messiah Jesus. Those baptized into Him are therefore His elect. And how do we know we are “God’s elect”? If we are baptized into Christ, “mine elect”, then for sure we are. And further, we have heard the call of the Gospel, we have been called- so, we are God’s elect, His chosen ones. Of course the objection can be raised that the whole idea of calling or election may appear unfair. Indeed, the Greek word for “elect” can carry the idea of ‘the favoured / favourite one’. There is no ultimate injustice here. The chosen One is the Lord Jesus, beloved for the sake of His righteousness, His spirit of life. Those who respond to the call to be “in Him” are counted likewise. And all this is the way, the method used, in order for God to be the one who counts us as right in the ultimate judgment- for “It is God that justifies”.

Isaiah 65:10 Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down in, for My people who have sought Me- This mentions Achor [where Israel were judged for not possessing the land for the right motives] as a place of special blessing in the reestablished Kingdom of God on earth- it’s as if God’s grace rejoices in inverting things, pouring out His richest blessing upon the places of our darkest failures. And we in daily life, in the interactions we have with others, are asked to reflect this same kind of grace. As Hosea’s children were to be renamed, Lo-ammi becoming Ammi, so the valley of Achor would become a door of hope (Hos. 2:17), and Jezreel, scene of Israel’s rebellions, would become the place of joyful reconciliation between God and His people. As discussed on :1,2, "My people who have sought Me" includes the Gentiles- anyone who seeks God is a member of His people. The rejected Jews had no sense of seeking God, no dimension of struggle in the search, no element of expending effort to seek and find Him… because they were "religious", with all the questions supposedly answered, all boxes neatly ticked by their inherited religion and assumption they 'had the truth'.

Isaiah 65:11 But you who forsake Yahweh, who forget My holy mountain, who prepare a table for Fortune, and who fill up mixed wine to Destiny-

These "who forget My holy mountain" are those who have just lamented "Your holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised You is burnt with fire; and all our pleasant places are laid waste. Will You refrain Yourself for these things, Yahweh?" (Is. 64:10-12). They had forgotten God's mountain; they referred to the temple as "our"

house, not God's. Mere surface level religiosity is here revealed for what it is. They didn't treat God's mountain as holy because they offered their idol offerings there. And the implication is that they did this after the return from exile.

"That spread a table for Gad, and fill up mixed wine (as Is. 5:22) to Meni". This alludes to how a table was spread with food and drinks as a meal for the gods. The idea of the shewbread in the tabernacle was similar. But the Jews were doing just as the Corinthians would do, eating the food of demons / idols along with the Lord's supper. Meni is the antithesis of Gad, the god of evil destiny. Gad was the popular god of fortune in Babylon; clearly they had been idolaters in Babylon, and that didn't stop as soon as they arrived in Judah. Yet Isaiah has been clear that Yahweh is the source of both good and evil (Is. 45:5-7).

See on Gen. 49:19. The hypocrisy of this group is stunning; they worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship, and yet disfellowshipped and persecuted the faithful remnant (see on :5). They 'forgot' Zion in that they didn't want to return there, and constructed a theology which allowed them to remain in Babylon and worship Yahweh through idol worship.

It is significant that the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) used the word *daimonion* for “idol”; this is the word translated “demon” in the New Testament. “Idols” in Ps. 96:5 is translated “demons” in the Septuagint; and the Septuagint uses the same word in Is. 65:11 to describe Gad, the Syrian god / idol of fortune. See on :3. GNB "who ignore Zion, my sacred hill, and worship Gad and Meni, the gods of luck and fate". It was not that they totally rejected Yahweh worship; rather they ignored Zion for the sake of the gods of the nations.

Isaiah 65:12 I will destine you to the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because when I called, you didn’t answer; when I spoke, you didn’t listen; but you did that which was evil in My eyes-

"Destine" is the same word as "Meni", the god of destiny of :11. The tragedy was that if they had called to Yahweh, even despite all their sins, He would have heard them (see on :1). And although they didn't do that, He took the initiative and called to them through the prophets such as Ezekiel, who ministered to the exiles; and they refused to hear. They bowed down to their idols; and thereby were self-condemned, effectively bowing down to their own executions.

And chose that in which I didn’t delight- The context is their choice of sacrificing to idols; but in Is. 1:11 the same term is used of God's lack of delight in the sacrifices offered to Him. It seems that they worshipped the idols in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is an abiding temptation for all God's children- to worship our idols in the name of worshipping God.

Isaiah 65:13 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, My servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, My servants shall rejoice, but you shall be disappointed-

There is a rapid 'back and forth' between descriptions of the destinies of the wicked and the righteous. We are being given a picture of the two contrasting groups at the day of judgment. We need to keep that ultimate picture ever before us.

Is. 65:8-16; Is. 66:5 etc. speak of a minority of Jews who trembled at the word of prophecy and were Yahweh's "servants", who had been disfellowshipped by the leaders of the Jewish community in Babylon (see on :5). The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon admitted that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them. And so they would not partake of the Messianic banquet, being left hungry and thirsty whilst the "servants" drunk and ate at it, and finally being left "ashamed" [s.w. "disappointed"] in the shame of final condemnation.

Isaiah 65:14 Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall wail for anguish of spirit- This is the weeping and gnashing of teeth of final condemnation. The wailing and anguish will be because they see ["behold"] the believers in the Kingdom, and themselves cast out (Lk. 13:28). The sense of the eternity they have missed, which could have been theirs, will be psychologically unbearable for them. This is far worse than any 'hell fire judgment' of popular but mistaken tradition.

Isaiah 65:15 You shall leave your name for a curse to My chosen- This is the same threat in the context of the exiles as Jer. 29:22.

And the Lord Yahweh will kill you; and He will call His servants by another name- GNB "I will give a new name to those who obey me" is alluded to by the Lord Jesus, when He promises to write a "new name" upon all those who have been finally faithful, at the last day when He returns (Rev. 3:12). This is part of the wider theme of a new vocabulary being used at the time of the restoration (Is. 62:2,4,12), looking forward to the completely "new" naming and understanding of things in the future Kingdom. The contrast is between being given a new and eternal name, having character and personality immortalized- and being killed, dying and being no more, nothing, eternally forgotten.

Isaiah 65:16 So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth- "The God of truth" is as LXX, "the true God" in comparison with the idols they worshipped (:11). The picture is of all peoples in the *eretz* promised to Abraham swearing only by Yahweh. This could have come true at the restoration, but was precluded by Judah's impenitence and failure to exhibit the Gospel to the Gentiles in the "earth".

Because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My eyes- This didn't come true at the restoration, but it will ultimately at the last day (Rev. 21:4). If we can accept that God allows His power (i.e. His omnipotence) to be limited, it becomes easier to accept that there are circumstances He allows His omniscience (i.e. His knowledge) to be limited. Thus the God who by nature cannot forget and for whom time is nothing, can therefore have the capacity to not remember our sins on account of the Lord's death (Is. 63:25). God clearly speaks of limiting His omniscience in Is. 65:16, saying that "the former troubles... are hid from my eyes". God forgets our sins; and yet God knows everything that happens and is thought today, and also yesterday. And yet, He limits that total knowledge by forgetting our sins. In Am. 8:7 God swore He would never forget Israel's sin. Yet the same word is used in Is. 65:16 of how God hid their sin from His eyes. God restrained His omniscience. He erased His own permanent memory as it were.

God's comment that the former things will be hidden from Him is in the context of His response to their complaint in Is. 64:7: "You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us by means of our iniquities". God is here saying that He will hide His face from the sins of His faithful people. Their sins will be as "former troubles" that He forgets, and they will too. God has forgiven many sins, but the record of them is still in the Bible, and therefore with Him. So 'forgetting' means that He sees them differently. However it has been observed that a healed memory isn't the same as a deleted memory. Memory can be healed without literal deletion or amnesia. The amnesiac loses personality, as we see in dementia. To delete memory is to delete personality. It is surely how we deal with the memories which will change. As God will forget such former troubles, so His saved people will 'forget' their past, neither God nor they will have painful flashbacks. The forgetting of the former things is paralleled with no more crying (:16). Just as God's joy is to be that of His people (:17). Initially, the "former things" could have referred to the pain and tearful laments [think of "Lamentations"] regarding the Babylonian exile; this is the sense of the term in Is. 43:18,19: "Don't remember the former things, and don't consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing. It springs forth now; don't you perceive it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert". In the fuller picture, it refers to the lives of all God's people in this world. These words are thus applied in Rev. 21:4: "neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (ESV).

Isaiah 65:17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind-

Tenses in Biblical Hebrew are hard to strictly render. Here, we could translate "Behold [look at what I'm doing], I am creating a renewed heavens and a renewed earth...". In which case we see there was perhaps still the possibility that this Kingdom situation could have been brought about for the exiles had they repented. This would explain why these "Kingdom" prophecies don't speak of any Messianic figure, which we would rather expect in any serious prophecy of the future Messianic Kingdom. The new heavens and earth of Is. 66:22 clearly initially refer to the new system of things possible at the restoration. The context there is of exiles who "escape from the nations" coming on mules and donkeys back to Zion, having Levites and keeping the Sabbath. This forms an inclusio with how Isaiah began, addressing the corrupt 'heavens and earth' of Jewish society: "Hear, heavens and listen, earth" (Is. 1:2).

"Behold" [also in :18, used twice in directing attention to the Kingdom] is the word also twice used in :1; God had said "Behold, behold" but the arrogant exiles had refused to behold. They were asked to "behold" the future Kingdom. Those who had responded now will behold- the Kingdom. The vision of the Kingdom we now have is God's answer to the complaint in Is. 64:4 [see notes there] that whatever future God has planned for His people cannot be understood by His people. Here we now have a very concrete description of the possible future Kingdom.

The whole passage in Is. 65:15-25 is alluded to and partially quoted in Rev. 21. But there are some differences. The "former things" which pass away are called the "first heavens and earth", to be replaced by the new heavens and earth. Literal heaven and earth will not be destroyed. The extremely hyperbolic language is used to describe how great will be the passing away of "former troubles... former things". It will be as radical a mind shift as if literal heaven and earth were destroyed. We therefore must not have minds focused upon the present troubles and "things", the heaven and earth, the system, that now is. All interest in politics, saving the planet, personal regrets and griefs etc. is all misplaced- our focus is to be upon the future heavens and earth. For all the causes of grief and mourning in our lives shall radically pass away, they shall be reconfigured in our understanding, even if the memory per se is not as it were deleted. We may feel we may never get over the death of a child, or some gross injustice, the stuff of anxiety, PTSD, what seems permanently etched in human memory and consciousness, "impact statements" regarding 'permanent' trauma as a result of human actions. But all those things shall then be reconfigured in our understanding. All this shall pass. The tears shall pass away. Eternal joy shall be upon our heads.

The "new thing" promised in Is. 43:19 was the new covenant of Jer. 31:22,31, a new heart and a new spirit within them (Ez. 36:26), being called by a new name (Is. 62: 2) and

the creation of a new 'heavens and a new earth' (Is. 65:17). But that "new thing… springs forth now; don't you perceive it?" (Is. 43:19). It could have happened to the exiles, indeed God made it start to spring forth then. But they refused it. It has been offered to the world now, and so few of us grasp it.

The former things which would not be remembered refer primarily to Israel's sins. They would not be remembered in that they would be forgiven. For that is a common enough usage of the term 'not be remembered'. The new system ["heavens and earth", contrasting with the sinful heavens and earth of Judah in Is. 1] would be therefore without sin. That is the primary feature of this new creation. Is. 65:17-19 describes the new creation of Zion as it was possible at the restoration, when the former heavens and earth would not come into mind. The former “heavens” of Solomon’s temple *did* come to mind, and the old men mourned because of how far superior the former had been (Ezra 3:12). The voice of weeping *was* heard in the streets of Zion, as Judah mourned for their sins of marrying the surrounding nations and breaking the Sabbath. And so these things are applied in spiritual terms to the latter day, eternal Kingdom of God on earth.

Isaiah 65:18 But be you glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy- "But" carries the idea of "rather". Instead of thinking and moping about things which shall be forgotten eternally (:17), we should instead look forward to what shall be the vast majority of our existence- life in God's Kingdom. We should rejoice now that we will be an eternal joy and rejoicing. And that joy and rejoicing will be a reflection of God's joy and rejoicing (:19). His joy will be ours. Rejoicing "forever", eternal joy upon our heads, is a redefinition of "joy". For "joy" in this life, but its nature, can never be permanent. It is a cusp of emotion and feeling that has to recede and decline. The joy we are promised has an "eternal", permanent dimension to it which we can't now imagine. The new creation in view is of psychological attitudes within people, "joy", because the former things of their sins are not remembered against them (see on :17). And this new creation has started now in the hearts of all who allow God's creative Spirit to work in them (2 Cor. 5:17).

Isaiah 65:19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people-

It could be argued that Is. 65,66 form an inclusio around the book of Isaiah, linking back to the opening descriptions of Jerusalem in Isaiah 1. There, Jerusalem was presented as a city of blood, full of sin, worse than Sodom and with a dark future of judgment. Now we read of Jerusalem cleansed and in eternal joy. The message is not simply that Jerusalem will be made wonderful; in the context of Isaiah, it is the message of sin forgiven and man transformed.

This Divine rejoicing over God's people is that of the God who rejoices in fulfilling His covenant with His obedient people (Dt. 28:63; 30:9). It will be a mutual joy, with

Yahweh's people rejoicing in Him (:18; s.w. Is. 61:10; 65:18) and He in them (Is. 62:5; 65:19) because they have entered the new marriage covenant with Him (Jer. 32:41).

And there shall be heard in her no more the voice of weeping and the voice of crying- See on :17. The "weeping" is that of the condemned in :14, or the weeping in repentance. They will weep but then be mercifully slain in the second death. And then the faithful will no longer hear this reminder of those who chose other gods. This absence of mourning could have been possible there and then for the returned exiles, had they fully accepted the new covenant: "Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says Yahweh; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy" (Jer. 31:16). They chose not to. And so what they refused has been developed into something yet more wonderful, to be experienced eternally by God's true people at the last day. The same thing is taught when we reflect on the promise to the Jews in Is. 30:19: "For the people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you will weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the voice of your cry; when He hears you, He will answer you". They refused this, and so in the Kingdom, God will answer *before* His people call to Him (Is. 65:24).

Isaiah 65:20 There shall be no more there an infant of days, nor an old man who has not filled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, and the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed- This appears to describe the reestablished kingdom possible for the restored exiles. The simple idea is that lifespans would be greatly increased, although mortality would remain (see on :22). This didn't happen then, and so the essence of it will do so at the return of the Lord Jesus to ultimately restore the Kingdom. But the letter of it may not be fulfilled; for eternal life is what will then be given, and not simply increased mortal lifespans. We note that for a sinner to live a long time would be part of the severity of his judgment; to simply exist, rejected, whilst the Kingdom is established... is going to be a fate worse than death. It confirms the point the Lord makes several times- that the punishment of the wicked is going to be in terms of their own psychological trauma, weeping and gnashing of teeth in anger at themselves. Rather than any physical torture by gleeful saints or an angry God. It is for us now to realize this and to be wise, living the Kingdom life now, without reserve. This is why this prophecy is quoted in Rev. 21:4 with the additional statement that there shall be no more death "for the former things have passed away". Initially, the prophecy spoke of a Kingdom situation for the exiles, with longer lifespans, no Messiah visibly reigning, but still with mortality. This scenario didn't come about, and so it becomes the basis of something even better- eternal life in the Lord's future Kingdom for all believers, of whatever ethnicity.

Verses 20-22 speak of not labouring in vain, not building and planting for another to enjoy that labour. This is all taken directly from the curses for disobedience in Dt. 28:30,39-41: "You will build a house and not dwell therein. You will plant a vineyard and

not use its fruit... You will plant vineyards and dress them but you shall neither drink of the wine nor harvest them... You will father sons and daughters but they shall not be yours, for they will go into captivity". These curses were specifically experienced by the exiles [children going into captivity], but in a wider sense, all sinners experience the sense of labour in vain. It is part of the curse in Eden. Even those who build and plant and enjoy that labour will not do so for very long- for they shall die and another shall dwell in that house and eat of the tree they planted. So we have here the picture of the curse being lifted, vanity no more, pointlessness banished for ever, and the consequences for sin removed. Both our own sins, and those of others.

Isaiah 65:21 They shall build houses and inhabit them themselves; and they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit- The idea is as in :22, that they would not build and then lose what they had worked for to others. But very few houses were built in Zion, because the people preferred to live on their farms, in their cieled houses, outside the city (Nehemiah 7:4). They planted vineyards, but sold the fruit to others- on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15,16). The possible fulfilment in a reestablished Kingdom of God at the time of the restoration was thus again precluded. The essence, although maybe not the literal letter of all this, will come true in the eternal Kingdom to be established at the Lord's return. Then, there will be ultimate satisfaction in existence; and the eternal enjoyment of the fruit of the lives we are now living. We are therefore moulding right now the nature of our eternity. It's not that our works shall save us, but that we will live with the eternal fruits of what we do for the Lord's cause and people in this very brief life. See on :22.

Isaiah 5 has lamented how God planted a vineyard and never ate its fruit. The imagery has continued in Is. 65:8 where God does in fact find some good grapes and makes wine from them. Just as we noted on :18 that our joy in the Kingdom will be God's joy, so we too will share the joy of planting the vineyard and seeing and eating the fruit of it. But the context requires a spiritual and not literal understanding of the vineyard and its fruit. For physical eating of home grown grapes for infinity would be rather strange, and is surely not the idea. Rather the idea is that our labour for others spiritually will be rewarded eternally. Thus Paul talks of having eternal joy in seeing his converts in God's Kingdom. But if we make no spiritual effort for others in this life, no sending encouraging messages, no prayer for others, no concern for their path to the Kingdom, no patient leading of them... we will not have much to rejoice over in the Kingdom. The theme is continued in :22, where we read of planting a tree and eating the fruit- and the days of that tree shall be eternal, as long as the days of God's people. Who will then be living eternally. In their lives, they had been a tree of life to others: "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; he who is wise wins souls... A gentle tongue is a tree of life" (Prov. 11:30; 15:4).

Isaiah 65:22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree shall be the days of My people, and My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands- LXX "they shall long enjoy the fruits of their labours". See on :21. This phrase is alluded to by Paul when he reflects that his labour for others spiritually will result in him seeing the fruit of his labour (Phil. 1:22). This will be the fruit of the righteous in the eternal Kingdom- seeing the eternal effect of their work for others. The initial fulfilment could have been in increased lifespans ["as the days of a tree", not eternal, but long] in the Kingdom of God in Israel which could have been reestablished at the restoration from Babylon (see on :20). But Israel's impenitence precluded this. And so the essence of it will be fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus, although to a far greater extent- eternal life, rather than enjoying the fruit of good works for a long time ["long enjoy"], as the days of a tree, which all the same dies at some point. Is. 60:21 has spoken of how every saved person in God's Kingdom will have been the 'work of God's hands': "Your people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified". They will each be "the work of the hands of the [Divine] potter" (Lam. 4:2); "we all are the work of Your hand" (Is. 29:23; 64:8). And so likewise, the work of our hands will abide eternally. But that work that abides eternally will be the work we did for others spiritually, in helping them to the Kingdom. All other work was pointless, as Ecclesiastes brings out. We note how 'the work of men's hands' is very often used in the Bible for idols.

Isaiah 65:23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for calamity; for they are the seed of the blessed of Yahweh, and their offspring with them- "Their offspring with them" refers to the perceived blessing of generations living together, of parents seeing and living with their children and grandchildren. That aspect refers to the possibility of fulfilment at the restoration. But the children brought forth are surely not to be understood physically; they are the seed of Abraham, they are the children spoken of Zion spoken of in Is. 66:8 who shall be brought forth unto salvation. As explained on :22, the labour in view can be understood as our spiritual labour for others, which we will then perceive was not in vain. Again, Paul has this phrase in view about our work in Christ not being in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

If we choose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen here as a characteristic of all worldly life). But the day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travails" (Is. 13:8; 1 Thess. 5:3). The Lord seems to have alluded to this when He spoke of how the faithful just before His coming would be like a woman in travail, with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of acceptance at Christ's return (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut

us off. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man... shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14).

Isaiah 65:24 It shall happen that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear- This speaks of the closer relationship with God possible under the new covenant. This could have been the exiles' experience had they accepted that new covenant. But they refused that. And so the essence of it comes true for we who have accepted the new covenant (Mt. 6:8). And this will be even moreso in the future, eternal experience of the Kingdom of God. Our focus should be more on the *quality* and *nature* of the Kingdom life, rather than the mere eternity of it.

The idea of calling and answering has been seen earlier in this chapter. God called, and the faithful answered (:1,12). In response, God will answer *before* His people call, seeing in advance what they will ask. This speaks of intimacy of personal relationship, whereby long term partners, parents and children, know what the other is going to say before they say it; they know what the other is going to want or ask for before the other verbalizes it. The exiles had a worked example of this in Daniel's experience, when as he prayed it was made apparent to him that actually the prayer had already been heard and answered ("While I was speaking, and praying... yes, while I was speaking in prayer [a double emphasis!], the man Gabriel... touched me", Dan. 9:20,21). And so it shall be eternally between God and man, the experience heightened and deepened by the fact that under the new covenant, God will write His law upon our hearts. But that wonderful experience starts now: "Even before you ask Him, your Father knows what things you need" (Mt. 6:8, which surely alludes here). Here again we have the end of Isaiah alluding back to how the prophecy opened: "When you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you. Yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear" (Is. 1:15). As second Isaiah developed, God urges them: "call upon Him while he is near." (Is. 55:6). They are then encouraged that He will answer: "At that time you will call and Yahweh will answer. You will cry for help and he will say, “here I am!"" (Is. 58:9). But now, He will answer *before* they call. Such is the utter transformation possible, that a situation arises where before man prays, his request is known and answered by his loving God. And so the basis for condemnation is that the other Jews had resisted that transformation: "Because I called, and you did not answer" (:12). Those who did answer God's call now find that He not only answers their call, but He does so before they call! Likewise we note the transformation of Zion from a barren prostitute in Is. 1 and earlier in second Isaiah, to a woman who not only has children, but gives birth before she goes into the pain of labour (Is. 66:7).

Isaiah 65:25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox- Perhaps the curse of Eden was to be ameliorated in the restored Kingdom. But

wild animals are frequently used in the prophets as symbols of Israel's aggressive neighbours (see on Is. 5:5), with Israel and Judah presented as lamb and ox. But in the restored Kingdom, these tensions amongst the nations within the *eretz* would have been no more; this is the force of "feed *together*". This didn't come about, but it shall eternally do so at the Lord's return. The lions in Is. 5:29,30 clearly represent the Babylonians and Assyrians; but here the prophetic hope was that the lion would be tamed and live in Zion, the holy mountain. The vision was of Judah's enemies being judged and repenting, and coming to live in the restored Kingdom. Israel's enemies would become harmless, and through repentance as a result of their judgment, come to live in God's restored Kingdom. This was precluded at Isaiah's time by Hezekiah's wrong attitude to the Babylonians, and Judah serving their gods rather than bringing them to Israel's God. And so the prophecy will come to a much grander fulfilment in the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus on earth. The tensions between Jews and their neighbours are humanly irreconcilable, just as many situations are. The "they" who shall not hurt and destroy in God's holy mountain are the animals here mentioned- they clearly represent Israel's surrounding enemies. Here we have the promise of eternal peace and reconcilliation. But the connections with Is. 11:5 surely mean there will be a literal application to the natural creation. It seems impossible for carnivores and herbivores to live together, eating vegetation. This requires not the destruction of e.g. lions, but their complete mental and physical restructuring. Just as will happen to people. Memory will not be destroyed but will be somehow remapped.

And dust shall be the serpent's food- The allusion is to Gen. 3:14, as if to say that there will be an eternal reminder of the past existence of sin and its judgment. Snakes don't eat dust, but their location in the dust may give that impression. The idea is that the serpent will as it were remain 'down'. There will be no more possibility of temptation, sin and temptation will never revive, thanks to the Lord's work on the cross- which makes for the ultimate, perfect environment.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says Yahweh- The situation in view was still confined to Yahweh's "holy mountain", Zion. The initial intention of the prophecies was that the Kingdom would be reestablished in Judah and Zion when the exiles returned from Babylon. But Dan. 2:44 had spoken of the returned exiles as a stone becoming a mountain which would fill the *eretz*. That didn't happen at the time, and so a far more glorious and global extension of the "mountain" of God's Kingdom came into view, through the work of the Lord Jesus.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 66

Isaiah 66:1 Thus says Yahweh, Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: what kind of house will you build to Me? And what place shall be My rest?-

I have argued on Is. 64:5 that Is. 65 and 66 are God's response to the prayer of Is. 63:7–64:11. This explains why those chapters offer the Kingdom of God to those who are humble and repentant, not idolaters. And it explains why the entire prophecy concludes on an apparently negative note at the end of Is. 66, threatening judgment on God's people who are apostate from Him despite all His best efforts. That is His final answer to this prayer of complaint. The returned exiles had built a temple, but it was not what God had asked for according to Ez. 40-48. That temple had been the intended place for God's throne and footstool for His feet: "this is the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel" (Ez. 43:7). But He was not going to be enthroned in the temple they had built in disobedience to Ezekiel. "What kind of house is this…?" could be the sense. He was going to dwell now in the humble hearts of individuals, not a building. There is now no call for repentance. God is stating His final decisions.

I discussed on Is. 65:3 how the returned exiles are condemned for idolatry in "the gardens". Temples typically had gardens attached to them where idolatry was performed, "under every green tree" and in groves of trees [asherah] (Dt. 12:2,3); and it seems possible that the temple the Jews rebuilt had such gardens attached. At the time of Is. 66, it seems there was a temple rebuilt: "what kind of house will you build to Me?" (Is. 66:1) God comments, as if it was so displeasing to Him. And it seems a Divine voice of condemnation boomed forth from that temple building: "A voice of tumult from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of Yahweh" (Is. 66:6). They had not learnt from God's response to David's desire for a temple: "Will you build Me a house for Me to dwell in?" (2 Sam. 7:5). Surely God is alluding to this. He is taking them right back to how He never wanted a physical temple. He instead wanted relationship with man, dwelling in human hearts. This section concludes with God's promise to immortalize the seed and name of His people: "so your seed and your name shall remain" (:22). "Seed" and "name" are what God promised in contrast to David's desire to build a physical temple. The "place" of God's "rest" alludes also to David's desire to find a "place" for the ark, and for it to permanently have a "resting place" (Ps. 132:5,8). God is yet again showing that this was misplaced idealism, missing the essential desire of God to abide / dwell in human hearts. The Lord's later teaching about 'abiding', largely recorded in John's Gospel, shows for all time that the 'abiding / resting / dwelling' is to be in human hearts through the Holy Spirit.

LXX "And of what kind is to be the place of my rest?". See on Ps. 132:8. The answer was that God recognized that the idea of a reestablished Kingdom and temple wasn't going

to happen with the restored exiles, and instead He was going to focus upon dwelling in the hearts of humble individual hearts.

Is. 11:10 had spoken of how the Messianic figure possible at Isaiah's time could have restored the Kingdom, "And his resting place will be glorious". This could simply refer to a literal appearance of glory upon mount Zion, as hinted at in several prophecies. But this was precluded at the time by Judah refusing this "rest" (Is. 28:12 s.w.). Or His resting place could be the hearts of those who "trust" in Him (Is. 11:10), a resting place chosen by Him because the temple on Zion had not been rebuilt as required and therefore God chose to dwell in the hearts of individuals instead.

The later chapters of Isaiah speak of the faithful remnant in Babylon. The prayers and thoughts of that faithful minority often surface- e.g. “Will You refrain Yourself for these things, O Lord? Will You hold Your peace?” (Is. 64:12; Is. 62:1). Thus they fulfilled the prophecy that Zion’s watchmen would give God no rest (Is. 62:6,7). But overall, the poor response of Judah seems to have led God to abandon the plan for the gloriously rebuilt Messianic temple. Is. 66:1,2 records Him reflecting that “Where is the house that you build unto Me?” [i.e. they had not built it as He required in Ez. 40-48], and instead deciding to focus on dwelling in the hearts of the contrite faithful minority who trembled at His word. Ezekiel was sent to preach to the early captives, with the message that they were responsible personally for their exile- even though they insisted they were innocent and were suffering unjustly for their fathers' sins. Ezekiel 18 and other passages labour the point that they personally, sitting their in captivity, were serious sinners. God even warned Ezekiel ahead of time that those captives were "a rebellious nation" (Ez. 2:3), just as wicked as their fathers. There was active opposition to Ezekiel's witness to the exiles- they persecuted him as with "briars and thorns", behaving as scorpions to him (Ez. 2:6). His face had to be hardened against their faces (Ez. 3:8). This was in the very early days of the exile. Jewish tradition has it that Ezekiel was murdered at the command of senior Jews in Babylon. See *The Lives And Deaths Of The Prophets* in J.H. Charlesworth, ed., Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1985). The same book claims that Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh, and Jeremiah was stoned to death by the Jews.. By the time of Isaiah 66, we see that even well after the restoration had happened, there was still major persecution of the faithful remnant and their prophets. Thus Isaiah speaks of the reapplication of the promises about building a temple- that temple would now be in the individual lives of a faithful remnant. Zech. 4:7 had prophesied that if Zerubbabel lived up to his potential, then a flat tableland would be prepared as a "platform" [Heb.] on which the new temple could be built. But this didn't happen- and so this language was reapplied to the work of John the Baptist in making the rough places of men's hearts smooth, in order for them to accept Jesus, the true temple.

Isaiah 66:2 For all these things has My hand made, and so all these things came to be, says Yahweh- The contrast is between what God has made, and the man who trembles at God's word. It's as if God is searching for something which He Himself has not created, in the sense that He created the physical world. Perhaps the implication is that when a human being responds to the word of God, then there begins a totally free creation by the believer in his or her own life. God in one sense is the author of the new creation of human hearts- and yet the parallelism in Is. 66:2 seems to imply that the difference between us and the natural creation is that we are in some sense not created by God in that same way, but rather have we allowed God's word to mould us as, and to respond to that word, in ways which we have control over... and thus we offer ourselves to God as a creation which we have made, and in which He thereby takes extra pleasure.

But to this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a broken spirit, and who trembles at My word-

This looking of God to man is an idea found elsewhere, each time in the context of the restoration of the humbly penitent. In Ps. 33:13,18 "Yahweh looks down from heaven... the eye of Yahweh is towards those who fear him and towards those who hope in his mercy". The broken spirit is one who hopes in God's merciful forgiveness. In Ps. 102:19-22, Yahweh again "looked down from the height of his sanctuary, from the heavens Yahweh has looked down towards the earth... to hear the sighing of the prisoner (cp. the exiles in Is. 49:9; 61:1), to loose the children / bands of death (the exiles, in Is. 51:14), so that they might declare the name of the Lord in Zion". The poor and broken spirited man is based upon David in penitence after the sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 51:17). And he is presented by Paul in Romans as every man; "Yahweh is close to the broken hearted, and he will save the crushed of spirit" (Ps. 34:16). And ultimately the poor, smitten spirited, crushed hearted man is the suffering servant: "He was smitten... crushed for our iniquities" (Is. 53:4,5), in whom God tabernacled in fullness. We note that the singular is used, "to this man... to him", rather than 'to these people...'. "To this man will I look..." is God's answer to the lament in Is. 64:9: "See, look, we beg You, we are all Your people". They assumed that because they were all Jews, therefore God must "look" to them. God's answer is that He looks to individuals who have the right heart. He is now and finally dealing with individuals, not an ethnic or social group. One of the dangers of denominational Christianity is the impression held that all within the denomination will be saved. Just as the Jews thought that being Jewish would save.

"Poor" is the word usually translated "afflicted". Isaiah's prophecies continually emphasize that God is fully aware of their "affliction" at the hands of the Babylonians, and would have mercy upon them in it (Is. 49:13; 51:21; 54:11 s.w.). Remember that

these words were primarily addressed to the exiles. It was the poor who were to enthuse about the reestablishment of Zion (Is. 14:32; 41:17; 54:11 s.w.). The book of Esther makes clear that there were many wealthy Jews in Babylon / Persia. It was the simple pull of materialism which kept many of them from responding to the Gospel of quitting all that for the sake of the restored Kingdom of God. And it is the same today where "to the poor the Gospel is preached" with most response.

The initial application might be to Ezra 9:4 where some amongst the returned exiles 'trembled at God's word' [the only other place we read this phrase] and divorced their Gentile wives. Although I have argued on Is. 56:4 that actually the better response would have been not to divorce those women, but to lead them into covenant with Israel's God. So these who trembled at God's word responded to the word, but in a less than ideal way. Still God was thrilled with them.

Is. 66:1-5 seems to anticipate that the actual rebuilding of the temple would be nullified by an incorrect attitude to the sacrifices, and more important would it be that individuals in Judah trembled at God's word. The Jews did tremble at the word (Ezra 10:9). But it was a momentary thing; they came to see the building of the walls as more important than keeping a trembling spirit. Works eclipsed spirituality. Yet Isaiah had taught that the trembling at the word was more essentially important than building temples. But Judah paid no attention in the long term. So these verses speak of God's change of purpose after the failure of the exiles to restore the Kingdom as intended. The idea could be that God is here asking His people to not bother trying to build the temple, and stating that He will now focus upon individual relationships with humble minded individuals, through His Messiah Son who trembled at His word.

Isaiah 66:3 He who kills an ox is as he who kills a man- The man under the Old Covenant who made his offering of, e.g. an ox, at a place other than at "the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" was viewed as having shed blood and therefore was to be cut off from the congregation (Lev. 17:3,4). The Law foresaw that there would be this tendency, to worship God away from the rest of the congregation. Those who did so were condemned in the strongest terms: their sacrifice of an animal was seen as the murder of their brother, whereas they would have seen it as an expression of their righteousness. "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man" (Is. 66:3) refers back to this, making it parallel with idolatry and proudly refusing to let God's word dwell in the heart. Later Isaiah is criticizing the exiles in Babylon for their refusal to 'return', both to their God and to their land. Perhaps in view is their attempt to offer sacrifices in Babylon, away from the sanctuary.

He who sacrifices a lamb, as he who breaks a dog's neck; he who offers an offering, as he who offers pig's blood; he who burns frankincense, as he who blesses an idol. Yes, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations-

NEV "As..." is perhaps unnecessary. The sacrificer of a lamb to Yahweh was also sacrificing a dog to the idols, offering to Yahweh and also offering pig's blood to idols. Is. 57:5,8,13 has already accused the returned exiles of idolatry and child sacrifice. Zech. 5 and other restoration prophets clearly speak of their idolatry. This is what was going on during the exile, and it continued when the same people came to Judah: "You defile yourselves in the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things. When you present your gifts... you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day... When they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it" (Ez. 20:30,31; 23:39). Thus they were fulfilling their own condemnation, to go into exile and "serve other gods" (Jer. 16:13). The Apocrypha records how Mattathias the Hasmonean killed a Jew who stepped forward to offer a sacrifice to an idol, long after their return from Babylon. Ezra 9:1 is clear: "The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands and are following their abominations, even those of the Canaanites...".

The Hebrew words used here for memorial, meal offering and frankincense clearly allude to Lev. 2:1-3, where this is seen as "the most holy of the offerings": "When anyone offers an oblation of a meal offering to Yahweh... the priest shall burn the memorial thereof on the altar... he shall put frankincense on it... it is the most holy of the offerings of Yahweh made by fire". And they were making it the most unholy, mixing it with the pig's blood used in their idol worshipping rituals for the dead mentioned in Is. 65:4. Here we have God's answer to their complaint in Is. 64:6 that God was despising their righteous acts, e.g. sacrifices. They laboured under the common misconception that if a man does some sacrifice or good deed for God, this must cancel out his gross sins so that they don't count. This betrays a total lack of understanding and faith in Divine atonement and grace.

What is criticized in later Israel is the tendency to worship Yahweh through offerings to Yahweh (even though they had no temple or sanctioned sanctuary), whilst at the same time as offering sacrifice to other gods. Is. 66:3 speaks of this dualism in worship. An ox was sacrificed to Yahweh whilst a man child was killed in worship of the idols; a lamb was slain as a dog was struck down to an idol; an offering was brought to Yahweh as pig flesh was eaten in an idol ritual; incense was offered to Yahweh, suggesting this happened within the temple precincts, whilst idols were kissed. And the new Israel made just this same blasphemy in the way some in the Corinth ecclesia ate of the Lord's table and also at the table of idols ["demons"]. Paul wasn't slow to bring out the similarities when he wrote to the Corinthians. It is this kind of dualism which is so wrong; to be both Christian and non-Christian at the same time, to mix the two. But differences of interpretation between equally dedicated worshippers of Yahweh, or believers in Christ, were never made the basis of condemnation. We note that the apostate exiles in Babylon still felt the need to sacrifice to Yahweh, even though they

worshipped idols; such is the strength of the culture of traditional religion. And we have that same pull within our own psychological wiring.

Isaiah 66:4 I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears on them; because when I called, no one answered; when I spoke, they didn't listen; but they did that which was evil in My eyes-

This continues God's response to their lament in Is. 63:15-64:11 that God was hiding from the exiles and had gone off contact. He has begun His response in Is. 65:1,2 by saying that in fact He had been begging them to come to Him, holding out His hands all day long. He had been calling to them and speaking to them, but they had refused to respond. They were unlike their ancestor David, who could say in Ps. 34:4 "I sought Yahweh and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears". Condemnation is to have our fears brought upon us, as Job experienced in this life: "the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me" (Job 3:25). Condemnation by God is the subconscious fear of every man; it is the ultimate fear of displeasing the parent: "What the wicked dreads, it will come to him" (Prov. 10:24). Death is "the king of terrors" (Job 18:13); man lives all his life "in fear of death" (Heb. 2:15). And that dread is what the Gospel saves us from. God thus meets man at the point of his greatest psychological and subconscious need. God is able to delude men. He sends strong delusion that men may believe a lie, if they don't love His truth (2 Thess. 2:11). We think of Him putting a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets (1 Kings 22:18-22); "If the prophet is deceived when he speaks a word, I, Yahweh, have deceived that prophet" (Ez. 14:9). "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonoured among themselves... God gave them up to vile passions. Their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature... receiving in themselves that reward of their error which was due... as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not appropriate" (Rom. 1:24-28) might even allude here. Because they chose what God did not delight in, He chose their delusions. This is a fate to be feared more than death itself.

We note all the personal pronouns, "I", "My"- and "Yahweh" occurs 18 times in this chapter. This is God Himself passionately speaking and acting, in answer to the complaint in Is. 64 that God was too distant from them.

God deceived prophets to speak things in His Name which were actually false (1 Kings 22:20-22; Ez. 14:9). He chose Israel's delusions by making their idols answer them (Is. 66:3,4). Jeremiah feared God had deceived *him* (Jer. 20:7)- showing he knew such a thing was possible. Dt. 13:1-3 warns Israel not to believe prophets whose prophecies came true although they taught false doctrines, because they may have been raised up to test their obedience. God deceived Israel by telling them about the peace which

would come on Jerusalem in the future Kingdom; they didn't consider the other prophecies *which were given at the same time* concerning their imminent judgment, and therefore they thought that God was pleased with them and was about to establish the Messianic Kingdom; when actually the very opposite was about to happen (Jer. 4:10). This is why the Bible is confusing to those who wish to believe their word rather than God's. God had called them back to Zion, and they had refused to respond. They preferred to worship their idols in the name of Yahweh worship; and so God confirmed them in those delusions.

And chose that in which I didn't delight- The context is their choice of sacrificing to idols; but in Is. 1:11 the same term is used of God's lack of delight in the sacrifices offered to Him. It seems that they worshipped the idols in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is an abiding temptation for all God's children- to worship our idols in the name of worshipping God.

The contrast is with how the foreigners and eunuchs chose that in which God did delight (Is. 56:4). The same phrase is used three times of how the Jewish exiles did not choose what pleases God, but rather chose the idols which do not please God (Is. 65:12; 66:3,4). Yet they made those choices beneath the umbrella of external devotion to Yahweh. Life is a string of choices, and God looks carefully at those choices.

The connection with Is. 1:11 ["I don't delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of male goats"] is just one of many connections between Isaiah 1 and Is. 65,66. The Jews had begun in this situation with God, and despite the long span of Isaiah's prophecies, through the events of Hezekiah, the exile and restoration- they were still as they were. All that grace had not achieved any transformation in them. The clear points of connection suggest a single authorship for the book of Isaiah, forming an obvious inclusio or bookends to the entire prophecy. They were rebels ("rebels against him", Is. 1:28), and as rebels would be condemned ("they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me", Is. 66:24). The vision opens with "your cities are burned with fire" (Is. 1:7) and concludes with again Judah being judged by fire, eternally (Is. 66:15,16). God begins by saying how much He hated their feasts, "new moons, Sabbaths, and holy gatherings: I can't bear with evil assemblies" (Is. 1:13), and concludes with the picture of every Sabbath and new moon "all flesh [the new Israel, including Gentiles] shall come to worship before Me" and go and look at the carcasses of the condemned Jews (Is. 66:23,24). In Is. 1:29 they are condemned for their idolatry in "gardens": "you shall be confounded for the gardens that you have chosen". And nothing had changed at all by the time of Is. 66:17, where even in the restored Jerusalem they were committing idolatry in the gardens. They were threatened with the sword (Is. 1:20 "you shall be devoured with the sword"), and so it came to pass: "For by fire will Yahweh enter into judgment, and by His sword" (Is. 66:16).

Isaiah 66:5 Hear the word of Yahweh, you who tremble at His word- The double reference in Is. 66:1-5 to trembling at Yahweh's word is a definite prediction of the situation in Ezra 9:4; 10:3, where the same rare Hebrew word is used regarding how those of the exiles who repented for their marriage out of the Faith trembled before the word in repentance. Then, at that point, the Kingdom blessings could have been brought about, as described in the rest of Is. 66. But again, there was no staying power in their repentance. By Nehemiah's time, and by Malachi's time even after his, marriage out of the Faith was still their weakness.

Your brothers who hate you, who cast you out for My name's sake, have said, 'Let Yahweh be glorified, that we may see your joy;' but it is those who shall be disappointed- See on :24. The religious leadership used the old argument of exclusionists- that Yahweh's Name will be glorified through separation from those considered substandard or spiritually different within the community of believers. The faithful remnant were therefore disfellowshipped by the corrupt religious leadership of the Jews in Babylon; see on Is. 65:5. And for this they would face the shame (s.w. "disappointed") of condemnation. Such behaviour provokes the intense anger of Yahweh.

The gross hypocrisy was that these men said they disfellowshipped their brethren for the sake of Yahweh's Name; but Is. 65:1 has stated that they themselves didn't call on His Name: "I said, 'here I am, here I am,' to a nation that did not call on my name". As noted on Is. 65:6, this gross hypocrisy was so intensely abhorrent to God. Suffering "for My Name's sake" is applied by the Lord to us His people now: "But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not Him that sent me" (Jn. 15:21; cp. Mt. 10:22; 24:9).

We note how the hypocritical Jews were rejected by their "brothers". In this context we will read in :20 of how "they shall bring all your brothers out of all the nations for an offering to Yahweh". The true brothers of the faithful Jews were faithful Gentiles. Again and again we see God's redefinition of His Israel, His temple and Zion. Paul's argument about Israel in Romans could be understood as saying that God has only not "cast away His people whom He foreknew" in that He has redefined that people as all the faithful, who were 'foreknown' unto salvation. For as Paul says, "They are not all Israel who are of Israel".

These hypocrites mocked the faithful, sarcastically saying to the effect 'Oh may God be glorified when you reach this great joy of salvation and inclusion of Gentiles you are on about, and we watch it all!'. The reality was that the faithful would indeed have eternal joy (see on :10). And there would be the greatest inversion; those humble, faithful ones

would look on at the dead bodies of the condemned hypocrites, who would lay down in the second death in sorrow and shame.

Isaiah 66:6 A voice of tumult from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of Yahweh that renders recompense to His enemies- The enemies of the humble, excluded believers (:5) were Yahweh's enemies. He was identified with those humble, excluded ones. The city and temple which they had refused to return to was to the source of this Divine voice of judgment against them in Babylon. The city and temple would be restored, and from there would come judgment against these awful hypocrites. Or we could read this statement and what follows as meaning that God was going to judge the temple, whilst ensuring a glorious future for the redefined Zion (:7 and forward). These people who proclaimed their extreme religious piety were in fact the enemies of God, and will be revealed as such at the last day. Their lament that God was silent (Is. 64:12) is here answered; God will indeed cry out very loud, from the temple, and His message will be of their condemnation.

Isaiah 66:7 Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she delivered a son-

"Pain" is, unusually, in the singular- as if not one birth pang will be felt. The Hebrew words in :7,8 for pain, sorrow and labour are all found in descriptions of condemnation: "Pangs and sorrows will seize them, they will be in pain like a woman in labour" (Is. 13:8); "how greatly to be pitied you will be when pangs come on you, the pain as of a woman in travail!" (Jer. 22:23); "when Your chastening was on them. Like as a woman with child who draws near the time of her delivery and is in pain and cries out in her pangs; so we have been before You, Yahweh. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we gave birth, it seems, only to wind" (Is. 26:16-18). The idea may be that she is saved from condemnation, she gives birth before the pain, sorrow and labour come upon her; whilst the condemned go through those things, give birth to nothing, and die in labour. That is exactly the image of 1 Thess. 5:3: "then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape". In the ancient world, the image of a woman in "pain, sorrow and labour" immediately raised the fears that she might die- for death in childbirth was so common. The labour of childbirth is the picture of condemnation (Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; Hos. 13:13 "The sorrows of a travailing woman will come on him. He is an unwise son"; Ps. 48:6 "Trembling took hold of them there, pain, as of a woman in travail"). The implication is that this is how [figuratively] the rejected will die. It will be suffering in vain; "we gave birth, it seems, only to wind" (Is. 26:18). Whereas "Zion" is spared that condemnation. We might also be able to deduce from the figure that labour [=condemnation] was

about to come on- for the woman gives birth to live children. This would then be a case of how the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18).

We note the transformation of Zion from a barren prostitute in Is. 1:21 and earlier in second Isaiah, where she is presented as a beaten up woman who had lost her children, to a woman who not only does have children, but now gives birth before she goes into the pain of labour. Such is the power of Divine transformation. The idea is similar to how in Is. 65:24, a situation arises where before man prays, his request is known and answered by his loving God. This is in such contrast to how Isaiah began: "When you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you. Yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear" (Is. 1:15). Such is the utter transformation possible. This is the triumphant tone of how Isaiah finishes- the message is of utter transformation, and that is made clear by the images connecting with those with which Isaiah began. And in passing, that is an argument for the unity of Isaiah.

The image suggests that the curse that arose as a result of Eve's sin will be ended. All consequences of Zion's sin shall be eternally removed. This is a theme often presented in Isaiah- that the curses for disobedience will be removed. All the frustration, mortality... will be no more. The image of a miscarriage and stillbirth has been used of Zion in Is. 37:3. But that shall be no more. It isn't even alluded to because of the joy of the birth. The idea is more or less as in GNB "My holy city is like a woman who suddenly gives birth to a child without ever going into labor". The implication is that the final travail or birth pangs of God's faithful people will be cut short in the last days (Mt. 24:22). This "son" who suddenly appears in Zion will utter the voice of Yahweh which judges the hypocrites amongst His people (:6). Ultimately this is speaking of the revelation of God's Son, the Lord Jesus, after the travail of the faithful daughter of Zion is cut short by His grace.

Isaiah 66:8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children-

"Who has heard?" and "Who has seen?" is God's answer to the lament in Is. 64:8 that nobody can ever see or hear what God has prepared for His people. God is responding to that by saying that the most amazing transformation and salvation by grace is going to be realized by "Zion".

AV "Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day". That is, to produce its grass, flowers, fruit etc. The idea is, that it usually requires much longer time for it to mature through long slow growth. Likewise a nation develops over a very long time. But God was willing to turn the unspiritual exiles into spiritually mature people in a moment. They refused this, and so it shall come gloriously true for us at the last day as we stand before

the Lord's judgment seat. "We shall be changed" as Paul says. And that change clearly means moral and not just physical change.

As explained on :7, a singular "son" was to be brought forth after the travail of the faithful daughter of Zion is cut short. But here we find that this son is in fact plural "children", an entire nation with their own land. The restored people of God in their restored land, the Kingdom of God on earth, would be suddenly brought forth out of the sufferings of the faithful minority in Zion. Whatever primary application this could have had to Hezekiah's time and other sufferings of Zion, the ultimate application is to the appearance of the Lord Jesus and a new nation "in Him" after the sufferings of Zion, geographically and spiritually, shall be cut short by grace (Mt. 24:22).

Isaiah 66:9 Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? says Yahweh: shall I who cause to bring forth shut the womb? says your God- This can be read as an implicit criticism of the words of Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion, who lamented that the children had come to be born but there was no strength to bring them forth (Is. 37:3). God is saying that He will certainly bring forth the new nation of Zion out of their trauma at the hands of their invaders. He is not powerless, and therefore Hezekiah was wrong to imply this. Why the children were not brought forth at Hezekiah's time was because of the lack of spirituality in the daughter of Zion, rather than because of God's limited ability.

God likens Himself to a midwife; He would not bring or lead to the place of birth, and then hinder it. "I who cause to bring forth" would have been understood definitely as a reference to the midwife who was then believed to have the power and knowledge to induce labour. In fact He is the most amazing midwife, leading Zion to the birthing stool [NEV "the birth", but it should be read as a noun not a verb], inducing her birth and then delivering her with no pain nor labour. We noted above that pain and labour is the language of condemnation. God is here promising to save us from that, even though like every woman, we fear it and sense it is an inevitable trauma that awaits us. But God as the perfect midwife will "bring to the birth", to the birthing stool, to judgment day- and deliver us. We recall that in Is 42:14, God has likened Himself to a woman in labour, gasping in pain to bring Zion to the birth. Although He is God, He shows by this connection in His word that He is aware of Zion's potential pain, and seeks to save her from it. God as the amazing midwife has 'herself' given birth.

Possibly Paul alludes here in saying that the God who has begun a good work in us will work to complete it in the day of judgment. God will not bring to the birth and then shut the womb. The image has been used in Is. 37:3; “the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth”. But God would give the strength to do this.

Isaiah 66:10 Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her: rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn over her-

The joy is because of the amazing birth of so many in a moment- the joy of salvation finally achieved for God's people in Jerusalem. This is part of the wider, massive emphasis in the prophets upon the joy of the redeemed people of Zion, a joy so deep it as it were gets into the fibre and structure of the physical creation: Is. 25:9 "This is Yahweh! We have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation!"; 35:1,2 "the desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose. It will blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing"; 35:10 and 51:11: "everlasting joy will be on their heads. They will obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away... The ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy shall be on their head"; 41:16 "You will rejoice in Yahweh"; 49:13 "Sing, heavens; and be joyful, earth; and break forth into singing, mountains"; 56:7 "I will make them joyful in My house of prayer"; 61:10 " I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation"; 62:5 "as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons shall marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you"; 65:13,18,19 "My servants shall rejoice... My servants shall sing for joy of heart... I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; and there shall be heard in her no more the voice of weeping"; Jer. 31:13 "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together; for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow"; 32:41 "I will rejoice over them to do them good"; Joel 2:21,23 "Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in Yahweh your God"; Zeph. 3:14,17 "Sing, daughter of Zion! Shout, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem... He will rejoice over you with joy, He will calm you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing"; Zech. 2:10 " Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion; for, behold, I come, and I will dwell in the middle of you". This joy will not be like joy as we now experience it, a time limited cusp of emotion that fades. It will be eternal. And that is what we must look forward to and not keep playing the tape of our past sadnesses in this brief life. Everlasting joy shall be upon our heads. Tears and mourning will be no more. The former things shall be forgotten. So we are not to keep remembering them now. The Jews were hearing this message of joy in the context of being part of the Persian empire. The ideology of the Achaemenid Dynasty was that the empire had some Divine calling to expand worldwide, thus bringing joy to the people within it. The message of eternal joy in God's coming kingdom was a deconstruction of this.

LXX has in view the people of Jerusalem rejoicing along with the Gentiles in a Divine feast in the last day, the marriage supper of the lamb: "Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and all ye that love her hold in her a general assembly". This Divine rejoicing over God's people is that of the God who rejoices in fulfilling His covenant with His obedient people (Dt.

28:63; 30:9); and the Gentiles who now love Zion will join in with it (:11). It will be a mutual joy, with Yahweh's people rejoicing in Him (:18; s.w. Is. 61:10; 65:18) and He in them (Is. 62:5; 65:19) because they have entered the new marriage covenant with Him (Jer. 32:41).

Isaiah 66:11 That you may nurse and be satisfied at the comforting breasts; that you may drink deeply, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory-

Zion is portrayed here as a woman in all her rightful glory, with ample breasts feeding and delighting so many at once. This is the inclusio that matches the description of Zion in Is. 1:21 as a prostitute, an image continued in Isaiah, where she is pictured as laying drunk in the dust with abusive men walking over her like she was the street, having lost her children and her husband, and now barren. And Zion had thought: “Yahweh has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me” (Is. 49:14). This is the extent of transformation God can work. So never think that "I am too hurt… too damaged… too bitter… too angry… too depressed… too far gone in addiction… to ever change". Radical transformation is possible, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is indeed good news to take to the world of lost people around us. Truly Zion shall "say in your heart, ‘Who has conceived these for me, since I have been bereaved of my children, and am solitary, an exile, and wandering back and forth? Who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?’" (Is. 49:21).

Clearly enough, Zion has God in her and with her. The bookend to this is also in Is. 1:2, which began the entire prophecy with God lamenting that He had nourished [breast fed] and raised children, who had now turned against Him: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me". He has the pain of a spurned parent. Although those children were no more, He presents at the end as the parent with loving, adoring children happily dependent upon Him. Again, the story of Job shows all this lived out. He had disobedient children who died, but he ended his days with many children and somehow without any indication of pain at the loss of his previous children.

This continues the image of Zion's sufferings bringing forth a new nation (:8,9). Just as a newborn baby is immediately nursed at the breast by the mother, so these Gentile converts would be. The implication is that the new nation of Yahweh brought forth is multiethnic.

This part of Isaiah began with this call to "comfort" Zion (Is. 40:2) and now concludes with her being a comforter to the newborn nations: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her: rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn over her; that you may nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts" (Is. 66:10,11). Paul surely has this

in mind when he teaches that we use the "comfort" we receive from God to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:4).

Isaiah 66:12 For thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream: and you will be nursed. You will be carried on her side, and will be dandled on her knees- LXX suggests that the nations would come to Zion carrying the children of the repentant Israelites: "their children shall be borne upon the shoulders, and comforted on the knees". This is in view in other restoration prophecies; the idea was that the fall of Babylon would elicit repentance and migration to Zion, not only of the Jews but of the peoples amongst whom they lived, after the pattern of Egyptians joining in with the exodus. See on :11. But the ambiguity of the text is intentional; the Gentiles would nurse the children of Israel, and Israel would nurse the Gentiles (:11). This reflects the unity of Jew and Gentile within this new nation, which is to come forth from the sufferings of Zion in the last days.

Isaiah 66:13 As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted in Jerusalem- The "comfort" continues the picture of a newborn baby being nursed at the breast of the mother. God Himself likens Himself to a nursing mother, an unusual and radical figure in the male-dominated culture of the time. But this "comfort" was offered to the exiles in Is. 40:1; but they then refused it. Finally it will be accepted, and even now it can be experienced through acceptance of the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, given to all who accept the new covenant.

The "comfort" of the mourners is that pronounced in Is. 61:1,2. But it was a comfort that had to be accepted. Initially, this "comfort" would have been in the restoration of Zion. Those who mourned "in Zion" (Is. 61:3) would be comforted "in" Jerusalem / Zion. But the Jews refused this. And so the comfort is now offered to God's new people through the work of the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, and will come to full term when the Lord returns to Jerusalem to visibly establish His Kingdom.

Isaiah 66:14 You will see it, and your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like the tender grass-

This speaks of the mental and physical change in those who are saved. Their physical bodies ["bones"] will be energized by the same Spirit that now dominates their minds ["heart"]. This is the scene of Is. 60:5 "Your heart shall be enlarged", and our physical bodies will be transformed into a body like that of our Lord (Phil. 3:21). The dry bones of Ez. 37 will now flourish, because the wind of the Spirit of the new covenant is breathed into them, and they accept it. This could have happened at the restoration from Babylon, but is now reapplied to the final revival of God's people.

And the hand of Yahweh shall be known toward His servants; He will have indignation against His enemies- To know Yahweh's hand is to recognize His hand in the sense of His power and ability; and "His enemies" will know this also, through their experience of final condemnation (s.w. Jer. 16:21; Ps. 109:27). The physical restoration of Zion and the Kingdom would likewise make His hand known to His servants (s.w. Is. 41:20). If all are to "know" Yahweh finally, either through salvation by grace or through condemnation- we logically must know Him now, with all that having relationship with Him implies and demands ['knowing' in the Hebraic sense].

The reference to God's servants is His answer to the lament in Is. 63:17 that all Judah were God's "servants" and they expected better treatment from Him. Here He is saying that they are in fact His enemies, and His true servants are the humble, broken believers, of whatever ethnicity, whom they had rejected. Earlier God had spoken of Israel as His servants: "You, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend" (Is. 41:8,9). Now He makes a difference between the apostate majority of Israel, and His true servants. By calling the apostate Jews His "enemies", He makes the point that they aren't His "friends". His friends are His servants, whom the majority had rejected. And in the wider teaching of Isaiah, God's servants are those who are "in" the suffering servant, the Lord Jesus. Which has always been a very small minority of the Jewish people. Truly "they are not all Israel who are of Israel". The "enemies" are those of :6; and this forms an inclusio with Is. 1:24, where God says He will "avenge Myself of My enemies", referring to the Jews. Nothing has changed, from start to finish of this long prophecy. They have not repented, and remain God's enemies. God's "enemies" are typically the Gentiles and Babylon(Num. 32:21; Nah. 1:2,8; Ps. 68:22; Is. 42:13; 59:18); but the majority of the Jews were to share the world's condemnation and Babylon's judgment, being treated likewise as God's enemies. And so it will be for the rejected of the new Israel, who will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

Isaiah 66:15 For behold, Yahweh will come with fire, and His chariots shall be like the whirlwind; to render His anger with fierceness, and His rebuke with flames of fire- This would perhaps initially have been fulfilled through the cherubim returning to Jerusalem, as envisioned by Ezekiel- fire, chariots, whirlwind is all cherubim language. That didn't happen because God's people didn't "return" to Him, and so this full "return" didn't then happen. But it will come the more gloriously true in the last days, when the Lord Jesus returns in flaming fire taking vengeance (2 Thess. 1:8). See on :18. This coming of Yahweh in judgment in this way is a quote from Jer. 4:13: "Now I will also utter judgements against them. Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us!". And so it had happened in the Babylonian invasion. But they had learnt nothing from it and now the same judgment was to be repeated. We note God's intense anger; an “uproar” (:6),

"rage" (:14), “His anger with fury” (:15). This gives perspective to Paul's comment that we are saved from God's wrath through the Lord.

"Yahweh *will* come" is His answer to the complaint in Is. 64:1 "Oh that You would tear the heavens, that You would come down!"- with the assumption that such a theophany would justify Israel and condemn their enemies. God's response is that He will indeed "come", but with judgment upon the unspiritual Jews.

Isaiah 66:16 For by fire and by His sword will Yahweh plead judgement on all flesh; and the slain of Yahweh shall be many- The sword of Yahweh will come down in judgment upon the peoples of the *eretz* and perhaps on the resurrected former abusers of His people (see on Is. 26:21). It may take the form of literal fire, as He destroyed Sodom, and as also mentioned in 2 Pet. 3. But His sword comes down as part of His 'pleading with all flesh' (see on Is. 27:1). This can be read as an allusion to judgment; but there is still the idea of pleading. The threat of the sword descending is His appeal, His pleading for repentance.

Or we can read the 'pleading' as taking someone to court. So that God is the plaintiff and also the judge. This is the idea of Ez. 38:22 "I will [legally] contend with him". The "all flesh" who are judged may be the same "all flesh" who worship God in :23. As in :19, they are the "survivors" of judgment. And that is a wider theme- God's saved people pass through the condemnation process at some point in this life, and thereby repent. We too bow in condemnation before the cross of the Lord, are baptized into death, thereby recognizing ahead of time that we are rightly condemned to the wages of sin- and only thereby are we saved.

Isaiah 66:17 Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves to go to the gardens, behind one in the midst, eating pig’s flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, they shall come to an end together, says Yahweh- We can read "behind one in the midst" as meaning 'one after another. Or "Behind one in the midst" could be an allusion to some ritual from a cult for the dead, performed in garden tombs; see on Is. 65:4. It could be the same rite described in Ez. 8:7-11, where a single leader stood in the midst of a group of worshippers: "... seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand". In which case we see that the exile hadn't purged the exiles of their sins of idolatry- they just returned to them as soon as they got back to the land. I suggested on Is. 65:3 that these gardens may have been within the temple precincts. And LXX adds "and eat swine's flesh in the porches", the temple porches. But it may refer to some idolatrous sanctuary in exile, which the exiles used as a form of Yahweh worship. It was this same group who pronounced themselves 'purified' and abused and disfellowshipped the faithful remnant (Is. 65:5 LXX "I am pure"). Isaiah ends with particular condemnation of

this group; it was their hypocrisy and disfellowship of their brethren which clearly elicited God's maximum wrath.

Isaiah 66:18 For I know their works and their thoughts- Again we note the parallel between works and thoughts. The state of the heart, our thinking, is of such paramount importance to God.

The time comes, that I will gather all nations and languages; and they shall come, and shall see My glory- "All nations" usually refers to all nations within or around the *eretz* promised to Abraham. They will all be gathered to judgment, and perceive God's glory-which will be manifest in Israel, the parade example of the glory of His saving grace towards sinners (Lk. 2:32). I suggested on :15 that the initial fulfilment could have been in the visible return of the cherubim to Zion, and they are repeatedly associated with the glory of the God of Israel (Ez. 9:3; 10:19; 11:22). This would then have fulfilled the prophecy of the glory of Israel's God entering the rebuilt Zion in Ez. 43:2. But the exiles didn't rebuild nor operate the temple system of Ez. 40-48 and so this was precluded. The greater fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus as the image of the glory of God, returned to Zion and enthroned there before literally all nations. The gathering of the nations will be that of Zech. 14:2: “And I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem”, leading to the Lord's return to Zion.

Isaiah 66:19 I will set a sign among them-

The "them" may refer to the condemned of Israel. The Hebrew can be repointed to read "A sign of reproach". A mark would be set upon them as it was upon Cain. Perhaps this means that some of the condemned will be sent around the world to witness to God's truth and judgment.

Or we can understand that the "them" is repentant, accepted Israel. They will have a sign / token placed upon them, just as circumcision had been the "sign" of the old covenant (s.w. Ex. 31:13 etc.). "Among them" can as well be "upon them". The token of the new covenant is the Spirit, and so this may be here in view.

The idea of taking the Gospel world-wide in the great commission was alluding to Is. 66:17-20. Here those who are spared the ‘Gehenna’ of the last day judgment will have a sign placed on them, as upon Cain, and they will then be sent “unto the nations... and they shall declare my glory among the gentiles”. The rejection process glorifies God’s righteous Name, and this world-wide exhibition of the rejected will actually bring men “out of all nations” to God, just as Israel’s condemnation was an “instruction” unto the surrounding nations. The connection shows that in our obedience to the great commission, we go forth as condemned men who in our case, like the disciples, have known the wonder of grace. Mark’s record stresses three times in the lead up to the great commission that the disciples “believed not”; and then, he records how they were

told to go and preach condemnation on those who believed not (Mk. 16:11,13,14,16). They were humbled men who did that.

And I will send such as escape of them to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the islands afar off, who have not heard My fame, neither have seen My glory; and they shall declare My glory among the nations-

The "them" who "escape" could refer to the minority of the condemned Jews who survive the latter day judgments, those of Zech. 14:2: "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city will be taken, the houses pillaged, and the women raped. Half of the city will go out into captivity, and the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city". Perhaps "such as escape" are "the rest / remnant of the people" of Zech. 14:2. Meeting with these condemned Jews with a Cain-like mark upon them will lead the nations to repent. Always the reality of condemnation is part of the appeal. The cross is in this sense "the judgment of this world".

"The nations" refers to these peoples who could earlier have come to repentance and to Zion, but they refused. Prophecies like Is. 18:7 were to have a deferred fulfilment in the last days, when repentant Jews are sent to call in to Zion these "tall" peoples; those who draw or make tall the bow (s.w. "tall" peoples, Is. 18:7). The witness was to be by those Jews and Gentiles who 'escaped' from Babylon, by grace (s.w. Jer. 50:28; 51:50) and repented (Ez. 6:9). Their united experience of grace would be such a powerful witness.

Paul's desire to go to Spain (Rom. 15:24) indicates a commitment to taking the Gospel to the very ends of the world he then knew. He may well have been motivated in this by wishing to fulfill in spirit the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 66:18,19, which describes how Tarshish (which he would have understood as Spain) and other places which “have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory” will be witnessed to by those who have seen His glory and have “escaped” from God’s just condemnation by grace. Paul sees this as referring to himself. For he speaks in Rom. 15:19 of his ambition to take the Gospel to Spain; and in that same context, of how he will bring the Gentile brethren’s offering up to Jerusalem. This is precisely the context of Is. 66- the offerings of the Gentiles are to be brought up to Jerusalem, as a result of how the Lord’s glory will be spoken of to all nations. So Paul read Isaiah 66 and did something about his Old Testament Bible study; he dedicated his life to taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he encouraged them to send their offerings to Jerusalem. He was no mere theologian, no academic missiologist. His study and exposition of Old Testament Scripture led to a life lived out in practice, to hardship, risk of life, persecution, loneliness, even rejection by his brethren. It is also significant in passing to note that Is. 66:19 speaks of nations which occur in the list of nations we have in Genesis 10, in the context of the effect of Babel. It is as if Paul sees the spreading of the Gospel as an undoing of the curse of

Babel and the establishment of the Kingdom conditions described in Is. 66. By his preaching of God's Kingdom and the reign of Christ, he brought about a foretaste of the future Kingdom in the lives of his converts. And we can do likewise.

Isaiah 66:20 They shall bring all your brothers out of all the nations for an offering to Yahweh, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and on mules, and on dromedaries, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says Yahweh- I explained on :19 that the "them" are the repentant minority of Jewish exiles. It seems they are sent to bring their impenitent brethren back to Yahweh and to Zion. This is the key to successful preaching; repentant, forgiven sinners sharing the experience of grace.

As the children of Israel bring their offering in a clean vessel into the house of Yahweh- The offering they brought would have been of their converts; and Paul uses this idea in speaking of his converts as a sacrifice. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV "instruments"] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah's 'Kingdom' passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The restoration of the kingdom could potentially have happened at the time of Ezra. LXX "their sacrifices with psalms".

Isaiah 66:21 Of them also will I take for priests and for Levites, says Yahweh- "For" may mean that they were to be instead of the priests and Levites, rather than 'being' priests and Levites. The "them" appears to refers to the Gentile converts. A new priesthood is in view. This would have been part of the new covenant offered to both Jews and Gentiles at the restoration, had they responded. This again was the intention for the restored exiles; for the work of the Lord Jesus put an end to the priesthood.

In the restoration from Babylon context, Is. 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD". This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zechariah 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and 'bearing the glory', i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was *conditional* on Joshua's obedience: "This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey" (Zech. 6:15). Because Joshua failed, he didn't have urim and thummim, therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the 'Kingdom' prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration feature "the servant"- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Is. 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and

my servants [plural] shall dwell there". His obedience would enable the peoples' establishment as the Kingdom.

The restoration prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 commanded: "Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, they be holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things". The same words are found in Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65- it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ezekiel 13:9: "neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. These were two engraven stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zechariah 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraven stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfill Ezekiel 42:13.

Isaiah 66:22 For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, says Yahweh- Ez. 44:15 uses the same word: "But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall *stand before me* [s.w. "remain before me"] to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord GOD". But Ezra had to confess, using these very words of Isaiah and Ezekiel which he would have been familiar with: "O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot *stand before thee* because of this" (Ezra 9:15). They hadn't lived the Kingdom life, and therefore the Kingdom prophecies could not come true in them. It makes a profitable exercise to consider all the times that Ezra and Nehemiah allude to the words of Isaiah and Ezekiel. It must have been heartbreaking for them to see the possibility of fulfilment within their grasp, and yet to know that their people didn't see the wonder of it all.

So your seed and your name shall remain- This is more than a bald statement that they would be immortalized. Their seed and name would remain, just as Yahweh's seed and Name would- for they would be identified with Him. But we shall each be given a name which is eternal, a unique reflection of our personality and character. Our struggles towards the person of Christ uniquely refracted through us will be eternally memorialized. Who we are now is who we shall eternally be. This points up the crucial importance of spiritual mindedness.

An immortalized seed and name is what God promised to David, as His response to the desire for a physical temple. See on :1.

The new heavens and earth of Is. 66:22 clearly initially refer to the new system of things possible at the restoration. The context is of exiles who "escape from the nations" coming on mules and donkeys back to Zion, having Levites and keeping the Sabbath. See on Is. 65:20, where the new heavens and earth refers to a situation where people are still mortal and sin. This forms an inclusio with how Isaiah began, addressing the corrupt 'heavens and earth' of Jewish society: "Hear, heavens and listen, earth" (Is. 1:2).

Isaiah 66:23 It shall happen, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, says Yahweh-

This forms an inclusio with Is. 1:13,14 "Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to Me; new moons, Sabbaths, and holy gatherings: I can't bear with evil assemblies. My soul hates your New Moons and your appointed feasts. They are a burden to Me". Now they would not be a burden to God and He would delight in being served. The Rabbis understand this verse to mean that for the new moons of an entire year, i.e. every month for a year, the righteous will keep a worship ceremony at which they look upon the remains of the rejected, until they have 'seen enough' (see on :24). "We shall be changed", seeing things from God's perspective; and this will affect how we look upon the carcasses of some we once loved who have been condemned.

"All flesh" would not fit in the literal temple; the immediate reference is to a restored temple in the land of Judah, used by the remnants of "all flesh" in the land promised to Abraham who came to live in Judah as they came into covenant with Israel's God. The Sabbath law has been ended in Christ. This is therefore another example of how these prophecies of the restoration were envisaged as coming true at the time the exiles returned from Babylon. But they broke the Sabbath themselves, as Nehemiah records; and they didn't teach the Gentiles God's ways. The essence but not the letter of all this will therefore be fulfilled in the last days, when all flesh will come before Yahweh.

Isaiah 66:24 They shall go forth, and look on the dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched-

They "go forth" presumably from Zion, suggesting that the location of the "dead bodies" is just outside Jerusalem. Clearly Gehenna is in view, the valley of Hinnom, where these people had practiced child sacrifice the valley of Hinnom at the base of Zion since it was once a place of human sacrifice (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31; 32:35; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6). Their bodies would be on display there. The exiles had practiced the cults of the dead, laying in the graves of the dead. Now their dead bodies would be despised by all.

The form of condemnation for every man will be appropriate to their sins. Their carcasses would be seen and despised by the faithful. They who had taken Babylon's gods with them would be punished as Babylon, who in Is. 14:11 is taunted that they will be devoured by worms in *sheol* / the grave. The lasting fire forms an inclusio with Is. 1:31 "The strong will be like tinder, and his work like a spark. They will both burn together, and no one will quench them". The idea is not that the fire will literally burn for ever; rather, that there will be nobody to save them by quenching the fire. It will not be quenchable by man; which is not the same as saying that it will literally burn for ever. The display of dead bodies recalls how Babylon and Assyria's dead bodies were openly displayed (Is. 14:19; 34:3; 37:36). "Worms" would cover the king of Babylon just as worms will work in decomposing the bodies of the rejected Jews (Is. 14:11). Again we see that the rejected amongst God's people will share Babylon's judgment, that of the surrounding world whom they so loved. There is no hint here of eternal conscious torment. The destruction of the wicked here forms an inclusio with Is. 1:28,29: "But the destruction of transgressors and sinners shall be together, and those who forsake Yahweh shall be consumed. For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which you have desired, and you shall be confounded for the gardens that you have chosen". Earlier in Is. 66:17 there has been the mention of their idolatry in "the gardens". Before their consumption [by fire] and destruction, there will be their sense of shame (as in Dan. 12:2) and being "confounded" as they recall the idolatry of their earlier lives. When this destruction was spoken of in Is. 1, there was a call to repentance, in order to avoid this outcome. Now in Is. 66 there is no such chance for repentance. Here we have the final picture of condemnation in the last day.

The context here is of the destruction of the apostate, hypocritical Jews who had condemned and disfellowshipped their faithful brethren (see on :5). They are the "sinners in Zion" of Is. 33:14, here described as "the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched". This is quoted in Mk. 9:44 concerning Gehenna, the place of punishment for the unworthy saints. If the judgement is to be at Jerusalem, it would fit into place if the unworthy are punished literally in the physical location of Gehenna. This would make more sense of the Lord Jesus Christ's repeated allusions to it when talking of the judgement. The repeated reference to fire being used to punish the unworthy (remember the Angels can be made a flaming fire) implies their punishment will be within a defined period of time- probably very short, seeing God has no pleasure in punishing sin- and if fire is to be used, it would be logical if it was in a confined location. A punishment in literal Gehenna fits in.

The servant was called to sustain the “dispirited” by the prophetic word (Is. 50:4). And yet passages like Is. 50:4-11 and even Is. 53 speak of how the servant met even physical abuse as well as rejection in his ministry to his fellow Jews. Indeed the servant feels that his mission to them has been a failure (Is. 49:1-6), a complaint met by God’s promise that his mission would be in some way reapplied to the Gentiles in their captivity to sin.

The way the servant is beaten and has his hair pulled out (Is. 50:4-11) reminds us of how the prophet Jeremiah was treated the same way by the Jews when his message was rejected (Jer. 20:2; Jer. 37:15). The servant was spat at by his fellow Jews- an expression of utter contempt (Job 30:10). Whilst the servant prophecies find their later fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, it seems to me that in their first context, they speak of how a prophet or prophets at the time of the exile were rejected and even beaten up by their fellow Jews. Indeed, Isaiah ends on a negative note, describing the judgments to come upon the Jews who had rejected the message of deliverance from Babylon (Is. 66:24). Is. 65:8-16; Is. 66:5 etc. speak of a minority of Jews who trembled at the word of prophecy and were Yahweh's servants, who had been disfellowshipped by the leaders of the Jewish community in Babylon. The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon admitted that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them.

And they will be loathsome to all mankind- AV "shall be an abhorring to all flesh"- the Hebrew text of Dan. 12:2 concerning the punishment of the responsible at judgement suggests some allusion to this: "Some to shame and everlasting contempt". "Loathsome" is literally 'enough seeing', as if the righteous will look upon the remains of the condemned until they have seen enough, and move on with eternity. Earlier, Isaiah had described how "They shall lie down in sorrow /shame" (Is. 50:11). Whilst God's saved people rejoice (:5). We are to imagine the condemned lying down for the last time... and their bodies being mocked. So Isaiah ends the longest prophecy in the Bible with a picture of the condemned. The Bible does give greater focus on the condemned than on the saved. This is all in God's wisdom. And knowing the terror of the Lord, we thus persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11).

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: JEREMIAH

JEREMIAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 1

Jeremiah 1:1 The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin- Anathoth was a village near Jerusalem. It was a priestly city (Josh. 21:18) on the great north road through which invaders would have approached Jerusalem (Is. 10:30). "The words of Jeremiah" contrasts with him using the first person in :4, so this introduction may have been added under Divine inspiration by an editor of the prophecy, perhaps Ezra.

Jeremiah 1:2 To whom the word of Yahweh came in the days of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign- Mentioned in Jer. 25:3 as the start of his 23 year ministry.

Jeremiah 1:3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, to the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, to the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month- The implication is that God ceased to speak through Jeremiah once Judah were taken captive. His silence was part of their

punishment; although we note that Ezekiel continued prophesying to the exiles after this point.

Jeremiah 1:4 Now the word of Yahweh came to me saying- Perhaps in a vision, which is how "the word of Yahweh came..." in Gen. 15:1 (s.w.).

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you- This is often misread as meaning that God had a relationship with Jeremiah whilst he was a foetus. But the text says He knew him *before* that. Paul interprets it in Gal. 1:14,15 as meaning known before creation. "Formed" translates the same word Jeremiah will later use of how God as the potter or former has formed Israel in order to do His work (Jer. 18:2-6,11; 19:1,11; 33:2). So the 'forming' is not simply a reference to literal creation, but of being formed in order to fulfil a specific purpose. This involves the formation of our unique personality even before birth; the spirit of man is "formed" within us (Zech. 12:1 s.w.). Our genetic history and formation was likewise in order to be and do specific things intended in God's plan (Eph. 2:10). Man is never better than when living up to these expectations.

Before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations- "Sanctification" is not therefore merely forgiveness, but a calling to action. The idea of forgiveness and moral cleansing is indeed in view, but that is not to be received in a vacuum. We are sanctified so that we might be separated unto active service in response to it, with an appropriate humility. Paul clearly alludes to Jeremiah's experience (Gal. 1:15,16), and the NT applies these ideas to us all. Paul interprets being a prophet to the nations as preaching to them. This is how we who are not inspired as the prophets were can still continue their ministry.

At times, the prophets are paralleled with Israel- Jeremiah was a “prophet to the nations”, and yet this was Israel’s role (Is. 49:2). Both the prophets and Israel are described as “the servant of the Lord”. But God and Israel were in the process of divorce, as they knew. The prophets were both on God’s side, and Israel’s. They were torn men. Just as God Himself was. He appeared “like a man confused” (Jer. 14:9). Jeremiah's ministry was partly "to the [Gentile] nations" in that his prophecies against Babylon and Egypt etc. were intended to elicit their repentance. or we can understand that he was a prophet about the Gentile nations in that Jeremiah repeatedly predicted those nations would attack Israel.

Jeremiah 1:6 Then I said, Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, I don’t know how to speak; for I am a child- It is typical of God to work through those who feel the least qualified. And yet Jeremiah's objection to his calling was wrong, given that God had prepared him genetically from the beginning to be ideally suited for the calling he was now given (:5).

AV is just as legitimate: "I cannot speak". This smacks of a refusal to accept the commission for which he had been prepared from the beginning of creation. The Hebrew for "child" is generally used of pre-adolescents, and it may be that indeed Jeremiah was very young. This indicates that God is active with children and they can legitimately respond to Him.

Jeremiah 1:7 But Yahweh said to me, Don't say, 'I am a child;' for to whoever I shall send you, you shall go, and whatever I shall command you, you shall speak- He was not to keep telling himself that "I am a child…". This exhortation to watch our self-talk and negative self-perception is absolutely needed today. This could be read as meaning that God would force Jeremiah's obedience regardless of his youth; or it could simply be a more detailed reiteration of the command just given, urging his freewill obedience to it.

Jeremiah 1:8 Don't be afraid because of them; for I am with you to deliver you, says Yahweh- AV "Don't be afraid of their faces" suggests this young man being cowed by the faces of those older than him to whom he had to witness. We know exactly this feeling, of inadequacy and awkwardness in making a witness. And we are encouraged hereby to go forward. The phrase is an exact quotation from the encouragements to go and possess the land at the time of the conquest (Dt. 31:6; Josh. 11:6). The unfaithful Israelites are thereby made parallel to the Canaanites; and Jeremiah like Joshua is to lead the people into possession of the kingdom of God in Israel. This was indeed the possible, potential outcome of Jeremiah's message; if Judah had repented and accepted it, then they could have been established as God's Kingdom and would triumph over all seemingly more powerful opposition. But that potential went tragically unrealized at the time. It was with these very same words that Jeremiah was to encourage the Jews to resist and not fear the Babylonians (Jer. 42:11). As he had overcome all the faces of his opponents through obedience to God's word, so all Judah could have followed Jeremiah's personal example. This is indeed how the preacher must be; the word is to become flesh in us. As Jeremiah was not afraid before the faces of opponents, so Judah were to be like him before the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 1:9 Then Yahweh put forth His hand- The same phrase as in Gen. 19:10, where Yahweh through the Angels put forth His hand to preserve Lot from the men of Sodom, who are presented in the prophets as representing the men of Jerusalem and Judah in their persecution of prophets like Jeremiah.

And touched my mouth; and Yahweh said to me, Behold, I have put My words in your mouth- The same phrase is used in the commissioning of Isaiah in Is. 6:7. The touching of the prophet's mouth was there symbolic of God forgiving Isaiah; and here the same idea may be in view, seeing that Jeremiah has just argued back with God in (like Moses)

refusing the commission given to him, when God has explained that he had been born and prepared for this work. Jeremiah's reluctance to preach and struggle with God is going to be a theme of his ministry, coming to full term in Lamentations, where at the end of his life he openly struggles with God over the fulfilment of the very word which Jeremiah has been inspired to preach.

Jeremiah 1:10 Behold, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant- Jeremiah had complained that he was but a child, totally inadequate; and yet through the power of the word he was preaching, he had power over the nations. His prophetic word could destroy nations like Babylon and disobedient Judah, and also result in the building and planting of a new Israel if they were obedient. These words are applied to all who "overcome"; they shall likewise be given "power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26). The 'plucking up' is the word used of how Judah would be plucked up out of their land for their disobedience to the prophetic word (Dt. 29:28; 2 Chron. 7:20). And as the Gentiles plucked up / out Israel from their land, so those nations would be plucked up (Jer. 12:14,15,17). Likewise the building and planting specifically refers to the restoration of Israel after their plucking up (Jer. 24:6; 31:28,40; 42:10). It was God through His word who would do these things (Jer. 18:7); but that possibility worked through the preacher and proclaimer of that word. Therefore here Jeremiah is presented as the one who would do these things. This is the enormous power delegated to all to this day who preach His word; we really can save people, plant them in the Kingdom by sowing the seed of the Kingdom; and those who refuse will be plucked up.

"Break down" is the word specifically used about the throwing down of the temple and great houses of Jerusalem (Jer. 33:4; 39:8). Likewise "overthrow" is used in this sense, specifically about Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 31:28,40). The building and planting are the words used of how God potentially would have restored and rebuilt the kingdom of God in Israel had Judah repented (s.w. Jer. 24:6; 31:28). The plural "nations and kingdoms" in view are therefore epitomized in the fate of Judah; although perhaps intensive plurals are being used here, in the sense of 'the one great nation' and 'one great kingdom' of Judah. Or it could be that the plural refers to Israel and Judah; for at times the ten tribe kingdom are also in view in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 1:11 Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? I said, I see a branch of an almond tree- The almond is the first tree in Palestine to bud, so it means literally the watching tree, as if it were alive and eager to come to life. The idea was that God's prophetic word of judgment against His people, as well as the potentials for restoration, were very soon to come true, and there was an eagerness and energy latent within the word of prophecy to achieve its own ends.

The idea of God 'watching' to fulfil His word in Dan. 9:14 is taken from Jeremiah, who begins his prophecy speaking of the almond tree, the tree of watching over or hastening (Jer. 1:11,12). The idea was that God watches for the moment to make His word come true, whether for good or evil. This of itself shows us the nature of Bible prophecy. The prophetic words are not determinate, meaning that certain things will happen regardless of human freewill. God has stated His intentions, and is waiting for the right time to fulfil it. Hence Daniel alludes to this idea, because He wants God to in one sense hasten His plan to re-establish His Kingdom, and wants Him there and then to seize the opportunity to fulfil it. In other words, God watches eagerly for human behaviour and required preconditions which enable Him to judge or save. Thus He waits until a certain amount of iniquity has built up before judging sinners; and waits in Daniel's case [or, as Daniel then understood it] for a certain amount of prayer and penitence before fulfilling His word of final salvation.

Jeremiah 1:12 Then Yahweh said to me, You have seen well; for I watch over My word to perform it- He would watch over His word to achieve the breaking down and building up just spoken of in :10; as is stated specifically in Jer. 31:28.

The word translated 'hasten' or "watch over" is very similar to the word for 'almond'. Almonds are associated with God's eyes; the bowls of the lampstands were almonds (Ex. 25:33,34). Zech. 4:2 talks about these almond bowls on the candlestick, and Zech. 4:10 interprets them as the "eyes of the LORD which run to and fro through the whole earth". 2 Chron. 16:9 talks about the Angels in the same way; "the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him". Similarly in Rev. 4:5 the lamps in the bowls of almond are equated with the "seven spirits (or Angels) of God". Rev. 5:6 equates the seven eyes with the seven spirits. Thus the almond rod which Jeremiah saw represented God's eyes or Angels who would watch over the word of God which Jeremiah was to speak to perform it. See on Dan. 9:14.

Jeremiah 1:13 The word of Yahweh came to me the second time saying, What do you see? I said, I see a boiling cauldron; and it is tipping away from the north- It was about to be poured out southwards, upon Judah. Ez. 11:3; 24:3 use the boiling cauldron as a symbol of Jerusalem. Perhaps in Ez. 11:3 the false prophets had purposefully wrested Jeremiah's prophecy here to say that the cauldron represented Jerusalem rather than Babylon, and it would give them protection from Babylon. This is typical of how Divine words are wrested out of context in accordance with the desired narrative of the false teacher.

Jeremiah 1:14 Then Yahweh said to me, Out of the north evil will break out on all the inhabitants of the land- The pouring out of the cauldron was the breaking out of evil from Babylon.

Jeremiah 1:15 For, behold, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, says Yahweh; and they shall come, and they shall each set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah- God's judgment was to be uttered as it were from the judgment thrones of the invaders which would be set up at the gates of Jerusalem, the place of power and judgment.

Jeremiah 1:16 I will utter My judgements against them touching all their wickedness, in that they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods- This is evidence that 'the judgment seat' isn't the weighing up of evidence which we may tend to think of it as. Pilate sat on the judgment seat not to weigh up evidence but to pronounce the verdict (Jn. 19:13). Herod sat on the judgment seat in order to make "an oration" to the people, supposedly on God's behalf (Acts 12:21 RVmg.). It wasn't to weigh up any evidence- it was to make a statement. And thus it will be in the final judgment. Also, "judge" is often used in the sense of 'to condemn'- not to just consider evidence (e.g. Mt. 7:2; Rom. 3:7; 2 Thess. 2:17). The trial of our faith is going on now; the judgment will simply formally reveal the verdict which is now being arrived at. The Father judges now "according to every man's work" (1 Pet. 1:17), as He did in OT times: "Thou renderest to every man according to his work" (Ps. 62:12).

And worshipped the works of their own hands- The equivalent of idolatry today is reliance upon our own works. These then become our idols.

Jeremiah 1:17 You therefore put your belt on your waist, arise, and speak to them all that I command you- Jeremiah's temptation, as ours, may have been to only speak forth part of God's message.

Don't be dismayed at them, lest I dismay you before them- James 5:10 puts it bluntly- the prophets are to be taken by us as our examples. Jeremiah was warned: "Be not dismayed of *them*, lest I dismay *you*" (Jer. 1:17 RV). This is alluded to by the Lord when He tells us that if we are ashamed of Him and His words, then He will be ashamed of us (Lk. 9:26). The connection surely indicates that the Old Testament prophets and the spirit of their commissioning is intended to apply to us today in our fulfilling of the great commission. Thus the prophets become our pattern for witness; they are our "brethren the prophets" (Rev.22:9). And so an understanding of them becomes programmatic for

our witness today. Our audience, the world in which we live, is in essence that in which the prophets lived.

Jeremiah remembered this command not to be dismayed and quotes it back to himself in Jer. 17:18. This is how we should act- quoting scripture to ourselves as encouragement. We note that later it is the righteous remnant who are commanded not to be dismayed (Jer. 30:10 s.w.); Jeremiah was to be their example and representative.

Jeremiah 1:18 For, behold, I have made you this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land- This was true potentially, but Jeremiah still had to make the necessary freewill decisions. Jeremiah later speaks of how he came to see Israel for who they were: “The Lord made it known to me and I knew; then thou didst show me their evil deeds” (Jer. 11:8). Ezekiel was shown “what the house of Israel is doing in the dark” (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must’ve been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would’ve been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and “iron pillar” to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn’t be “dismayed at [the] looks” of those who watched them with anger and consternation (Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

Right in the context of God predicting the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is presented as a strong, fortified city, made strong by God against any opposition. The implication was that the faithful should identify with Jeremiah if they wished to avoid the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah uses the same term for "fortified city" in urging the faithful to run into one in the face of the Babylonian advance (Jer. 4:5). But that fortified city was himself and the community of the faithful.

Jeremiah 1:19 They will fight against you; but they will not prevail against you; for I am with you, says Yahweh, to deliver you- Jeremiah needed reminded of this promise in Jer. 15:20 where it is repeated word for word. The aggression of the people against Jeremiah was extreme. As he faced death in the cistern, he must have struggled to believe them. "I am with you" is the language of God encouraging Moses and Joshua, that inheritance of the kingdom land was possible, and :17 is likewise an allusion to this. The hint may be that Jeremiah's ministry could have resulted in the restoration of the Kingdom, and the faithful remnant inheriting it in his time.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 2

Jeremiah 2:1 The word of Yahweh came to me saying- This was aimed specifically at "Jerusalem" (:2), which could refer to the leadership and priesthood.

Jeremiah 2:2 Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem saying, 'Thus says Yahweh, I remember the kindness of your youth, the love at the time of your marriage; how you went after Me in the wilderness- The exodus and wilderness journey is described as God, a young man, being madly in love with the young woman of Israel. It was He who took the initiative in going after them; but He imputes this to them, just as the lover eagerly imagines that the object of love has the same passion for him as he does toward her. And they hardly showed *chesed,* covenant love ["kindness"], toward God. How could a God who loves purity, who cannot look upon iniquity, fall in love so passionately with such a reprobate crew? It cannot be that God turned a blind eye to their sin. And how can Israel be described as going after God in the wilderness, showing Him all their love when in their hearts, from Egypt right through the wilderness journey, "they despised my judgments... (and thus) rebelled against me" (Ez. 20:8,13,16,21)? This was the overpowering love which imputes love and righteousness to the beloved. So this was a reminder of how Israel were in covenant with God on the basis of having had His love imputed to them.

In a land that was not sown- These are the words used of how in the Sabbath and jubilee years, the land was not to be sown, and yet God would provide for His people (Lev. 25:4,11). Perhaps Jeremiah was prophesying in one such year. But the allusion is surely to how the land of Israel was to become barren, a land now sown, in punishment for their sins (Dt. 29:23 s.w.). Even in this case, the promise is that God would lead the faithful remnant of the people through it, as He had led Israel through a similar environment.

Jeremiah 2:3 Israel was holiness to Yahweh- The very term inscribed upon the high priestly mitre (Ex. 28:36). The high priest was not intended to 'do it all' for Israel, as priests in secular religions are intended to. He was to be representative in essence of all God's people. But "holy to Yahweh" can simply mean dedicated to Him., and the context is of their marriage to Yahweh as an exclusive covenant (:2). This verse goes on to say that they were His "firstfruits", His firstborn Son, dedicated to Himself. That they dedicated their firstborn to Moloch was the more awful because of this.

The first fruits of His increase. All who devour him shall be held guilty. Evil shall come on them', says Yahweh- Israel were Yahweh's firstborn (Jer. 31:9), and therefore He slew the firstborn of an Egypt which had destroyed them. And this would continue in the judgment of Babylon. The figure of firstborn raises the fascinating question as to whether God had had 'sons' before in His history. The metaphor implies He had not, at least not in this intimate sense. Israel's failure was the more tragic, therefore; although they were replaced as firstborn by His only begotten Son, His firstborn. And all those in Him likewise become the firstborn, with promise therefore of many children yet to come in future creations.

"Devour" is literally 'to eat', and is used of how Babylon "consumed" Jerusalem with fire (Neh. 2:3,13 etc.). The people and their land were to be "consumed" by the fire which was contained in the words Jeremiah spoke (Jer. 5:14,17). But all who

devoured / consumed them would be "held guilty" (Jer. 2:3; 10:25; 30:16). And yet in depression, Jeremiah lamented that the fire had consumed (Lam. 2:3; 4:11), when it was His owns words which had been that devouring fire. His lament was therefore tantamount to a statement of regret that he had been used as the vehicle for this devouring fire. The devourers of Israel considered themselves "not guilty" because Judah had sinned against their God (Jer. 50:7). But the clear statement in Jer. 2:3 is that "All who devour him shall be held guilty". Punishing a sinner doesn't mean that those who do the punishing are thereby justified; we can be used by God, but that is no guarantee of righteousness or acceptability. This needs to be remembered by those who consider they can punish sinners within the church; they may well be held equally guilty for the lack of love they showed.

Jeremiah 2:4 Hear the word of Yahweh O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel!- God's intention was to restore the ten tribes and revive the apostate kingdom of Judah into His kingdom on earth. So this may well be addressed to the ten tribes, and presumably someone took Jeremiah's message to them.

Jeremiah 2:5 Thus says Yahweh, What unrighteousness have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?- This appears addressed to the "fathers" who were still alive; for they "are" become vain, and the sense is that these fathers had and continued to find fault in Yahweh. Perhaps Jeremiah as a very young person was being asked to appeal here specifically to the younger generation; for youth need youth to appeal to them. "Gone far from me" is a word used of Israel's exile at the hands of their invaders (Is. 6:12; 26:15; Jer. 27:10). But this, like all judgments, was only a reflection of how they had gone far from God in their hearts (s.w. Is. 29:13). To find something unclean in the other party and therefore to go far from them is the language of marriage breakup; which is the context of :2. It was Israel who were ending the marriage, not God; and had gone off with "vanity", other gods. It's not hard to discern the "idols" of our age- they are the various "vanities" which so easily fill human life in this online age.

Jeremiah 2:6 Neither did they say, 'Where is Yahweh who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of the shadow of death, through a land that none passed through, and where no man lived?'- The memory of their historical beginnings and salvation by grace through baptism in the Red Sea was intended to remain with them. And with us too. Their passage so far was by grace alone, for nobody could have survived the journey they had made were it not for God. And this is true of each of us. "The shadow of death" is really 'deep darkness'. The idea of being preserved from "pits" would have recurred to Jeremiah when in the cistern.

Jeremiah 2:7 I brought you into a plentiful land, to eat its fruit and its goodness; but when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination- This continues a major Biblical theme- that God's loving material blessings of His people led them to idolatry (Dt. 32:15). The prosperity Gospel must give due weight to this sad experience of God's people historically. Israel brought the idols of Egypt with them through the wilderness, and lost no time in using them and defiling the land thereby. The popular idea that the generation who entered the land were the most faithful of Israel's generations needs some revision.

Jeremiah 2:8 The priests didn't say, 'Where is Yahweh?' and those who handle the law didn't come to know Me. The rulers also transgressed against Me, the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit- The reason for their turning to other gods was because the priests, who were supposed to teach the knowledge of Yahweh, didn't seek to know Him; and what knowledge they did have was not the 'knowing' of personal relationship. We can know true propositions about God, but not thereby come "to know Me". A teacher must himself be continually learning and enquiring further. But the priests assumed they knew it all; when in fact what they did know was not the same as "knowing Me" in terms of personal relationship. And so they slipped off to idolatry. Although they had been given materially all that they needed on entering the land (Jer. 2:7), the attraction of the idols was "profit". The idols of Canaan were fertility cults, and they were worshipped in the hope of good harvests and material benefits (Jer. 12:13). So Yahweh's blessing of His people materially only elicited in them a craving for yet more materialism, and they turned to the idols- which in reality did not "profit", for all such blessing is only from Yahweh.

Jeremiah 2:9 Therefore I will yet contend with you, says Yahweh, and I will contend with your children's children- This is the language of entering into a law suite; and the results of it were going to last many generations. Or perhaps the idea is that grandparents, their children and grandchildren were all alike guilty and must stand before Divine judgment.

Jeremiah 2:10 For pass over to the islands of Kittim, and see; and send to Kedar, and consider diligently; and see if there has been such a thing- The Gentiles were fiercely loyal to their gods, whereas Israel were for ever seeking some petty advantage or "profit" from adopting new gods. The islands of Kittim were the extreme west of Israel, and "Kedar" to the extreme east. He was a son of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13); a reminder that there was more integrity in the line God had chosen not to work through than in that of Isaac and Jacob.

Jeremiah 2:11 Has a nation changed its gods, which really are no gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit- Israel in the wilderness had changed their glory into the similitude of an ox, the golden calf (Ps. 106:20). And now Judah were committing the same error. They prided themselves on not having the golden calves of the ten tribe kingdom, but they did have the equivalent in their hearts. Gentile nations didn't change their gods; but God's people did, ever seeking a little extra material benefit from some new religion; see on :8. Israel are therefore likened in Hosea to a sexually addicted woman, ever seeking new partners. In this sense Israel were worse than the other nations, who only changed their gods when forced to by the military dominance of neighbours. This is one of many examples of where unbelievers are held up as a challenge to believers; and we can take that challenge for all time.

Jeremiah 2:12 Be astonished, you heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid. Be very desolate, says Yahweh- "Desolate" is "dry", so the heavens / skies addressed may be literal. This theme of water continues in :13. There was to be a drought as a reflection of God's withholding the blessings He had given when they first entered the land.

Jeremiah 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living waters, and cut them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water- There was to be a drought and no water from Yahweh at all (:12). Sin has various component factors, because God is so sensitive to human behaviour. The sin of forsaking Him was separate to that of adopting other gods. Baal was thought to be the rain god, and Israel's addictive desire for extra fertility and material blessing led them to accept Baal. But Baal was no better than a broken cistern; any water that came would be wasted and could not be kept by Israel. And in any case, it was God who gave rain and He was going to therefore punish them by drying up the skies (:12).

Jeremiah 2:14 Is Israel a servant? Is he a native-born slave? Why has he become a prey?- As noted on :3, Israel were God's firstborn son. They were not slaves born in the house, like Ishmael. But they acted as if they were not the native born members of God's family, by seeking other gods. And so they were treated appropriately to their own self-perception and self-identification. I explained on :8,11 that Israel turned to other gods in the hope of petty material benefit. They were therefore to become a "prey", to have their material things taken from them as booty.

Jeremiah 2:15 The young lions have roared at him and yelled, they have desolated his land. His cities are burned up without inhabitant- This is an example of the prophetic perfect, whereby things prophesied in the future are spoken of as having already happened; so certain are they of fulfilment. Just possibly the fate of the ten tribes is in view. The Divine threat to leave Judah "without inhabitant" never quite came true. Not all the urban dwellers were slain. Indeed even after the destruction of Jerusalem, they still came to offer at the site of the altar in Jerusalem (Jer. 41:5). In wrath God remembered mercy. Perhaps He perceived that repentance would not be elicited by the judgments, and so they have been deferred until the last days. Or maybe there was some repentance or intercession which ameliorated the threatened judgments. And yet "young lions" is a double symbol, both of the Babylonians and of the rulers of Judah in Ezekiel; it was for their sakes that the Babylonian lions came.

Jeremiah 2:16 The children also of Memphis and Tahpanhes have broken the crown of your head- Egypt was always attractive for Judah to trust in. But the Egyptians 'shaved the head' (Heb.) of Judah, taking their glory away, at great cost to them (2 Kings 23:35) but provided no help against Babylon.

Jeremiah 2:17 Haven't you procured this to yourself, in that you have forsaken Yahweh your God, when He led you by the way?- If we follow the moment by moment leading of God, having the attitude that we will always say "Yes" to Him, then we will not go astray to idols. And all judgment for such sin is really brought about by the sinners themselves. If we leave the God who is leading us, then we for sure will go astray to other gods and face the appropriate judgment.

Jeremiah 2:18 Now what have you to do in the way to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Shihor? Or what have you to do in the way to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River?- "Shihor" may be another name for the Nile, which represented Egypt as the Euphrates did Assyria. Judah were always trying to get help from their northern or southern neighbour against the threat posed by the other, instead of trusting in

Yahweh above them. The attempted alliance with Egypt is described in Ez. 16:26 as active prostitution with her, when Yahweh would have provided all the freedom and protection Judah wanted. Menahem king of Israel bribed Pul king of Assyria to support him, whilst Hoshea sought the aid of Egypt to enable him to throw off the Assyrians, and Josiah died fighting against the Egyptians on the behalf of Assyria. This is portrayed in Ezekiel as whoredom, the endless cycle of attraction to illicit lovers.

Jeremiah 2:19 Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backsliding shall reprove you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that you have forsaken Yahweh your God, and that My fear is not in you, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies- The Divine hope was that Judah would be corrected by their sins and judgments experienced; "know therefore..." is an appeal for relationship, for understanding and repentance. But this didn't come about, although it potentially could have done. The same Hebrew word for "punish" is also translated "reform / correct" (see the play on this in Lev. 26:18,23,28). The punishments were not therefore simply an expression of God's anger, but rather intended to reform Israel.

Jeremiah 2:20 For of old time I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, 'I will not serve;' for on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed yourself, playing the prostitute- AV "I will not transgress" (NEV "I will not serve"). so many times God had broken the bonds of their captivity and they had promised total loyalty in response; but everywhere they still worshipped other gods. Yoke and bonds are figures of servitude. The idea was that if God had broken their bonds of servitude to the world around them, they should in response serve Him, exchanging one bondage for another, a change of masters. This was supremely seen at the exodus from the bonds of Egypt through the Red Sea baptism. And that is exactly the metaphor used by Paul in Romans 6 for our response to our freedom from this world and sin; in response, we proclaim Jesus as Lord and serve Him. But instead so many like Judah at this time served idols instead.

Judah had "broken the yoke and burst the bonds" of their covenant relationship with God (Jer. 5:5), but He by grace had broken the yoke and bonds of those who enslaved them (Jer. 2:20; 30:8).

Jeremiah 2:21 Yet I had planted you a noble vine, wholly a right seed- How we are spiritually planted is no guarantee that we shall continue to grow in the way we were sown. The noble vine had clearly allowed foreign vine branches to be grafted in. That is the implication. And the lesson, as Paul points out in a similar analogy in Romans, is that being physically of the seed of Abraham was no guarantee at all that the fruit was going to be acceptable. And we may likewise reflect that no matter how well believing parents may plant their children, in the end this can be no guarantee that they will grow into a noble vine just because the right seed was planted. Far more individual volition than that is required. God had well planted Israel, giving them the maximal opportunity for growth and fruitfulness (Is. 5:2; Ps. 80:9; Hos. 10:1); and yet they turned to idols. The requirements for elders that their children be "not unruly" I would therefore see as relevant to their immature children and their manner of raising young families.

How then have you turned into the degenerate branches of a foreign vine to Me?- We see here God's shock and hurt at His people's dashing of His best hopes. Possibly we could say that the language more indicates the Angels' surprise at the weaknesses

of their charges- "The Lord God of Hosts (Angels)... broke thy yoke, and burst thy bands (in Egypt); and thou saidst, I will not transgress (Israel's covenant of obedience to the Angel)... I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed (done by the Angel, Ps. 80:8; note the angelic context of Ps. 80): how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?". But the reality is that God Himself personally can be hurt and broken by us. He limits His omniscience as He limits His omnipotence, in order to enter into real time, actual relationship with us.

Jeremiah 2:22 For though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me, says the Lord Yahweh- The idea is that any attempt to make themselves appear externally better was irrelevant, because their problem was with their mentality and heart. That is what God looks at, and this is what He 'marks'. The sin of Judah was written- both on their hearts and in God's record (Jer. 17:1); their iniquity was "marked before me". Note how their sin was written both before God and on their hearts. The state of our hearts is actually God's record of us; "the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord" through which He searches us (Prov. 20:27).

Jeremiah 2:23 How can you say, 'I am not defiled. I have not gone after the Baals'? See your way in the valley. Know what you have done. You are a swift dromedary traversing her ways- The Jews of course considered that they had not abandoned Yahweh; they were not atheists and had instead worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh, as an expansion of their devotions to Him. "The valley" is that of Hinnom where they had their high places (Jer. 7:31; 32:35). They were like a young camel in heat, desperately running around here and there looking for a partner. This was how God saw their running to various idols and gods. They were asked to look at themselves from outside of themselves: "See your way in the valley" is an invitation to take as it were an aerial photograph or video of themselves there. And this same invitation comes to us in every generation. see on Jer. 3:2.

Jeremiah 2:24 A wild donkey used to the wilderness, that snuffs up the wind in her desire. When she is in heat, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves. In her month, they will find her- We all know the downward spiral into sin… how once we start, we can't stop. But when Israel were like this, they are likened to a female camel in insatiable heat (Jer. 2:23-25; 5:7-9). We'd just rather not read that, or retranslate the words to make it seem somehow different. But we're dealing with serious matters here. Sin is serious to God. Israel were seeking satisfaction from their various idols as if they were sexually addicted and hopelessly out of control. She was searching for them, and not they for her. This heightens the depth of her sin even more so.

Jeremiah 2:25 Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst. But you said, 'It is in vain. No, for I have loved strangers, and I will go after them'- This passage suggests Israel were shameless. They were convinced that their behaviour was not wrong (:23). I suggest that they came to this position by assuming that they were serving Yahweh through serving the idols; and that is the essence of all spiritual temptation in every age. Any appeal to them for self control was dismissed by them.

Jeremiah 2:26 As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets- We must contrast this with the sense of shameless devotion to idols in the previous verses.

See on Jer. 3:22. They had not then been found (out); but they would be, and so sure was their future shaming in condemnation that Jeremiah spoke as if it was already being experienced by them. Judgment in essence is now. If they had realized that, then they would have repented.

Jeremiah 2:27 Who tell wood, 'You are my father;' and a stone, 'You have brought me forth'; for they have turned their back to Me, and not their face- See on Jer. 3:4. This contrasts with the earlier statement that they were God's firstborn (:3). But through their idolatry they denied this. This turning of the back to God was literally seen by Ezekiel, when he was shown men worshipping the sun within the temple, with their backs turned upon the holy place. God's turning away His face from them was therefore only an extension of their own attitude to Him.

But in the time of their trouble they will say, 'Arise, and save us'- This could be read as God sadly lamenting how He knows they will always turn to Him in time of crisis. But it could also be said as it were with joy and hope, knowing that in the final time of Jacob's trouble, God's people will turn to Him and eternally remain with Him. Yet this appears to be God's fantasy and desperate hope and imagination that His people would cry to *Him* and not the idols. But Jer. 11:12 states that His people in the "time of their trouble" (s.w.) would cry *to their idols*. It's as if by the time of Jer. 11 God as it were faces the reality that they would cry to their idols and not to Him.

Jeremiah 2:28 But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble: for according to the number of your cities are your gods, Judah- The large number of gods is further evidence that like the out of control young camel of :23 and donkey in heat of :24, they were obsessed with finding other gods to trust, as if they were addicted to this endless search once they had cast off faith in Yahweh. The connection of thought with the earlier part of the verse seems to be: "When every city has its special deity, surely among so many there might be found one able to help his worshippers". The LXX adds: "And according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem they sacrificed to Baal". This would have been an imitation of Babylon; and so to Babylon they would be sent. Their judgment was a reflection of what they themselves wanted. If we seek above all God's Kingdom, then this will be given us.

Jeremiah 2:29 Why will you contend with Me? You all have transgressed against Me, says Yahweh- God understands Judah as having a legal issue with Him, when He has done nothing wrong to them, and they have done wrong to Him. Again we sense the absolute certainty of the people that they were not sinning. "I am not defiled" was their attitude (:23). Such a shameless attitude was only possible due to becoming psychologically hardened in the idea that they worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh, as an expansion of their devotions to Him. And this is the real danger of believing that our idolatry, in whatever form, is in fact serving God. It can be thinking that gossip is in fact a service and defence of God's truth; or thinking that a luxury mansion is in fact in order to serve God's people. As with Israel at this time, this will lead to an obsession with idolatry which is insatiable.

Jeremiah 2:30 I have struck your children in vain. They received no correction. Your own sword has devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion- The lion was a symbol of Babylon / Assyria, but they had acted like a lion in killing their own prophets. The correction given by the prophets and at the hands of the previous Assyrian and

Babylonian incursions had not been "received". "Correction" is the same word for 'doctrine' or teaching. God's word can come to us, and especially for the illiterate in Jeremiah's time, not only through what we now call "the Bible", but through Divinely controlled experience.

Jeremiah 2:31 Generation, consider the word of Yahweh. Have I been a wilderness to Israel? Or a land of thick darkness?- He had been like this to Egypt, but the Israelites had had light in their areas and homes. But they considered that any correction from God was treating them as if they were not His people, and were wilfully ignorant of their salvation history.

Why do My people say, 'We have broken loose. We will come to You no more?'- They effectively considered they were no longer in covenant relationship with Yahweh, and acted like this. But they would never have agreed that these were their words; God counts our positions and attitudes as words.

Jeremiah 2:32 Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me for days without number- The implication was that they should live permanently in a state of expecting an imminent marriage ceremony. They had married God at Sinai but the hope was that God would establish an eternal Messianic kingdom with them.

Jeremiah 2:33 How well you prepare your way to seek love! Therefore you have taught even the wicked women your ways- Although they didn't dress themselves up for Yahweh (:32), they did in order to attract other lovers. This speaks of how they madly sought relationship with any Gentile nation whom they perceived could benefit them immediately. And just as prostitutes lead men into sin, so they had led even the Gentiles into sin, and encouraged other smaller states to likewise offer allegiance to multiple political partners at the same time. God is therefore portrayed as sensitive to even the sins of the Gentiles. Instead of being a light to the Gentile world, Israel instead had led them into sin.

Jeremiah 2:34 Also the blood of the souls of the innocent poor is found in your skirts, even though you did not catch them in the act of burglary- The idea is that God did not need to break through in order to see their sins; the blood of their own children and also of poor people in society whom they had used as sacrifices was as it were on their clothes. They had publically done these things in the valley of Hinnom. The LXX has: "In thine hands has been found the blood of innocent souls; I have not found them in holes, but on every oak".

Jeremiah 2:35 Yet you said, 'I am innocent. Surely His anger has turned away from me'. Behold, I will judge you, because you say, 'I have not sinned'- "Innocent" is a word often used about being free from a covenant contract. Perhaps the idea was as in :31, that they considered they had broken free from covenant relationship with God and therefore God should not be angry with them. But they, His wife, had broken the marital covenant... and they were not to consider they could walk away from it. It was their attitude that "I have not sinned" which was more hurtful to God than their actual sins. And so it is to this day. Or we could take "innocent" in the sense of 'cleansed', as if they believed that the cleansing of the Mosaic rituals thereby meant that their sin was dealt with and they were free to continue in sin. This was exactly the attitude of some Christians at the time of Rom. 6:1.

Jeremiah 2:36 Why do you go about so much, ever changing your way? You will be shamed by Egypt, just as you were shamed by Assyria- The attempted alliance with Egypt is described in Ez. 16:26 as active prostitution with her, when Yahweh would have provided all the freedom and protection Judah wanted. The final fulfilment of these prophecies as of every prophetic word will be in the final judgment of the last days. This is the scene of Rev. 16:15- the rejected being made naked in shame. This slinking back in shame will fulfil the prophecies of Is. 1:24,29 and Jer. 2:35,36, which speak of the rejected being made ashamed, becoming ashamed, of their idols. They will be made ashamed by the judgment process.

Jeremiah 2:37 From there also you shall go forth, with your hands on your head; for Yahweh has rejected those in whom you trust, and you shall not prosper with them- This prophecy foresaw that contrary to Jeremiah's pleading, some in Judah would flee to Egypt, and yet also be taken captive from there. And yet the people still had freewill as to whether to flee into Egypt. This prophetic potential scenario would therefore not have come about, and this idea of Divine potential is a major theme in the prophets. We ask how did God reject Egypt in whom they trusted? The LXX has "for the Lord has rejected thine hope, and thou shalt not prosper in it". This would suggest that they thought that their trust in Egypt would be acceptable with God, despite His clearly telling them later not to go there. But He rejected that request, as it were, to accept their trust in Egypt as trust in Him. This clearly was their problem, they thought that bad behaviour could be justified as part of their worship of Yahweh. This is why repeatedly they insist that they are innocent of any wrongdoing.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 3

Jeremiah 3:1 They say, 'If a man puts away his wife and she goes from him and become another man's, should he return to her again?'. Wouldn't that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the prostitute with many lovers- Jeremiah often makes a play upon the Hebrew word *shub*- it can mean to turn away (from God), and also to 'turn back' or repent (e.g. Jer. 3:1,7,10,12,14,19,22; 4:1). If Israel turned in repentance, then God would return them to their land (Jer. 15:19); if they turned away from Him, He would turn them out into the Gentile world. Our lives are a twisting and turning, either to or away from God; and God is waiting to confirm us in those twists and turns. Jer. 8:4-6 comment that if one turns from the right road, then they must turn back. We all know how when we miss the way in finding an unfamiliar address, there's a tendency to keep on going along the wrong road- because turning back is so psychologically difficult. And this is the image that God uses here- to appeal to Israel, and ourselves, not to foolishly 'backslide', keep on turning away, from Him- just because that's the course we're set upon.

Yet return again to Me, says Yahweh- Within His own law, it was an abomination for a man to re-marry the woman he had divorced. Yet this notwithstanding, God abases Himself in asking worthless Israel to re-marry Him (Dt. 24:4 cp. Jer. 3:1).

Jeremiah 3:2 Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see!- Again, they are asked to see themselves from outside of themselves. Likewise in Jer. 2:23, "See your way in

the valley" is an invitation to take as it were an aerial photograph or video of themselves there. And this same invitation comes to us in every generation.

Where have you not been lain with? You have sat for them by the ways, as an Arabian in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your prostitution and with your wickedness- Even in Jeremiah's time, the Jews had the sense that they were superior to their 'Arabian' relatives. But here they are presented as an Arabian prostitute. Their worship of idols on the high places is directly equal to their prostitution. They were eager for these relationships, because they were addicted to getting help from others and immediate benefit, rather than going Yahweh's way. Sitting by the roadside could even mean that foreigners passing through Palestine were accosted by the Jews and asked to enter into political relationships with them.

Jeremiah 3:3 Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain- This had been God's way of telling them that their covenant blessings were being withheld; but still they refused to respond.

Yet you have a prostitute's forehead, you refused to be ashamed- The Lord hardened His face like a rock (Is. 50:7; Lk. 9:51); and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30). Israel's shameless attitude is a major theme of God's criticism of them. They were convinced that their behaviour was not wrong (Jer. 2:23,25). I suggest that they came to this position by assuming that they were serving Yahweh through serving the idols; and that is the essence of all spiritual temptation in every age.

Jeremiah 3:4 Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You are the guide of my youth?'- I suggest in :4,5 we have the Divine hope, a kind of interjection from Yahweh fantasizing about their repentance, putting words in their mouths, of the kind we have in Hosea. God yearned for them to realize that they were His children, He and not the idol stocks was their Father (Jer. 2:27). He presents Himself as sentimental about their past together in Egypt and the wilderness, and so wishes for them to let Him guide them again as He had done in the desert. God therefore presents Himself as made weak by the depth of His love, even for a worthless woman.

Jeremiah 3:5 'Will He retain His anger forever? Will He keep it to the end?' Behold, you have spoken and have done evil things, and have had your way- As explained on :4, this is still part of God's fantasy as to the words He so hoped His repentant people would say. He wanted them to realize that they had said and done evil; and we note He gives priority to the words they had spoken. He presents Himself as a man deeply sensitive to words; and we see this reflected in the Lord's later teaching as to how our words shall be the basis of our salvation or condemnation at the last day. He wanted them to understand that He was angry, but that His wrath was but for a moment and would not last (Is. 57:16; Jer. 18:23).

Or we could read :5 as Israel's response to God's desire for their repentance in :4. The prophets spoke of the amazing grace and eternal love of God for Israel, how His wrath endured but for a moment (Is. 57:16; Jer. 18:23); and yet Israel asked: "Will he be angry for ever?". They assumed the present moment is how it shall eternally be; they lacked faith to see the wider and longer plan of God. It was more than frustrating

for the prophets; they shared God's feelings of having poured out so great a love, to see it ignored and disregarded by short termist vision.

Jeremiah 3:6 Moreover, Yahweh said to me in the days of Josiah the king, Have you seen that which backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there has played the prostitute- Jeremiah recalls how God's earnest desire and imagination of ten tribe Israel's repentance had been disappointed in the days of Josiah king of Judah, who made great reforms, perhaps motivated by the judgment upon the ten tribe kingdom of Israel. But the essential love of idolatry was not removed. The stress on "every high mountain" matches the impression already given that Israel had been like a sexually addicted person, they wanted relationship with every possible partner. And so Judah were also being with idols.

Jeremiah 3:7 I said after she had done all these things, 'She will return to Me;' but she didn't return; and her treacherous sister Judah saw it- The ten tribe kingdom appear to have been in a hopeless state spiritually. But still God was "sure" that they would return to Him. There is a word play between the original Hebrew words for "backsliding / treacherous" and "return". Just as the Father thought that His people "surely" would reverence His Son, so He had the same attitude to Israel in Old Testament times: "I thought that after she had done all this, she would return to me, but she did not" (Jer. 3:7 NIV). This surely is God limiting His omniscience in order to enter fully into relationship with His people in real time.

Jeremiah 3:8 I saw, when, for the very reason of committing adultery that I had put away and given a bill of divorce to backsliding Israel, then treacherous Judah her sister didn't fear; but likewise went and played the prostitute- The lack of "fear" in Judah repeats the theme being established; that they were shameless and refused to be convicted of their sins. They were intended to learn from Israel's sin and punishment, but instead they went ahead and sinned yet more. See on :3. God speaks as if *He* was the one who put away Israel. God allowed divorce only for the hardness of man's heart (Mt. 19:7); yet God speaks as if *He*, with all His morality and justice, was responsible for the divorce (Jer. 3:8), when in fact it was Israel who had broken the marriage contract by their unfaithfulness. But in His grace, He as it were took the blame. See on Jer. 8:21.

Jeremiah 3:9 It happened through the lightness of her prostitution, that the land was polluted, and she committed adultery with stones and with stocks- The problem was "Because she took her whoredom lightly..." (ESV). She had a light-hearted and not serious view of life, refusing to look to the implications, corollaries and results of her sins. She just wanted to experience pleasure in the immediate moment with no thought for anything further nor wider. And this is exactly the spirit of our age.

Jeremiah 3:10 Yet for all this her treacherous sister, Judah, has not returned to Me with her whole heart, but only in pretence, says Yahweh- This has reference to the reforms of Josiah, which clearly did not affect the heart of the people. For they returned to their idols immediately he died. "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7) in the way which true repentance requires. They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John's teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought

they'd repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32).

Jeremiah 3:11 Yahweh said to me, Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah- The idea is that Israel appeared more just than Judah, for Judah had sinned worse. Judah had the example of Israel to warn them, and they failed to that and therefore became the more responsible for their sins.

Jeremiah 3:12 Go, and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, 'Return, you backsliding Israel', says Yahweh; 'I will not look in anger on you; for I am merciful', says Yahweh. 'I will not keep anger forever- Again there is a play on the related Hebrew words for "return" and "backsliding". Instead of turning to idolatry, they were to turn again to their God. God assures them of His essential characteristic- that His mercy is greater than His anger with sin. No man has ever gone so far in this life that the eternal anger of God is upon him, for God doesn't keep anger for ever. This contrasts with the human tendency towards unforgiveness, and being still angry over things we were angry about decades ago. This feature of God is a strong encouragement for human repentance (Ps. 103:9; Jer. 3:5).

Jeremiah 3:13 Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against Yahweh your God- Presumably Jeremiah's message was to be taken to the ten tribes. The Divine hope was that Israel and Judah would repent together, and form a revived, united kingdom of God in Israel under a Messianic king. Their unity would be on the basis of common experience of God's grace, their repentance and His forgiveness. It is this which is the ultimate basis of fellowship between believers.

Jeremiah uses the same phrase for "acknowledge iniquity" in saying that "we" have done so (Jer. 14:20). He either considered that he was representative of the people, or he failed to accept that their acknowledging of iniquity was only on a surface level. Although on one hand Jeremiah is in step with God's feeling and thinking, he comes over so often (especially in Lamentations) as implying that God is unjust. He has an over positive view of his people. They did not "acknowledge iniquity" as required, but he considers they had done. Or that they had done so whereas the ten tribes had not.

And have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed My voice', says Yahweh- This 'scattering' to the gods of many different peoples would result in them being appropriately scattered amongst those nations (s.w. Esther 3:8; Jer. 50:17; Joel 3:2). Judgment was really a reflecting back to them of what they in essence had done.

Jeremiah 3:14 Return, backsliding children, says Yahweh; for I am a husband to you. I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion- "Two of a family" suggests that even though the ten tribes had intermarried in captivity, they would still be miraculously 'taken' from wherever they had been scattered and returned to a restored Kingdom of God in Israel. All that was required was that they 'returned' to God, and then He would return them. Although divorced (:1), God still felt as their husband. This is surely also relevant in trying to understand how God now feels towards His people from whom He is divorced.

Jeremiah 3:15 I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding- The system of shepherds, be it the priesthood or

the royal family, was to be replaced by one singular shepherd after the pattern of David (Ez. 34:23), although we learn here that he would have assistants who were also after God's own heart- another way of saying they too would be like David, the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). This was God's intention for the restored Kingdom, but Israel and many of Judah didn't return. And so this will be fulfilled in the last days, when we will be those shepherds.

Jeremiah 3:16 It shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says Yahweh, they shall say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of Yahweh!' neither shall it come to mind; neither shall they remember it; neither shall they miss it; neither shall it be made any more- The intended restoration of the kingdom would feature no ark of the covenant. The temple they were to build in Ez. 40-48 has no mention of a place for the ark, and it concludes with the comment that the city will be called "Yahweh Shammah", the Lord is there. His personal presence would be there. This great potential wasn't fulfilled, so it has been reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, when as Revelation says, God Himself shall be with us. The ark was a contentious issue at the time, with Judah considering they had God on their side because the ark was with them and not the ten tribes. But this mere symbolism would be irrelevant before the very presence of God Himself; as will so much of our contentions with other believers.

Jeremiah 3:17 At that time they shall call Jerusalem 'The throne of Yahweh;' and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of Yahweh, to Jerusalem- As explained on :16, this is the equivalent of Jerusalem being called "Yahweh Shammah" in Ezekiel. The nations, who had abused Israel and Judah, were to be gathered again to Jerusalem; not to judge Jerusalem, but in repentance and acceptance of Israel's God.

Neither shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart- Nobody in our current society would consider what you *think* to be a criminal act; and nobody did in early Israel, either. But time and again, the prophets passionately call down judgment for "evil thoughts" and "evil hearts" (Jer. 3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 14:14; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17).

Jeremiah 3:18 In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north- Although God tacitly accepts Judah would sin, refuse Jeremiah's message and go into captivity, yet He looked ahead to how they would return together with the ten tribes. Their unity would be on the basis of common experience of God's grace, their repentance and His forgiveness. It is this which is the ultimate basis of fellowship between believers.

To the land that I gave for an inheritance to your fathers- The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to "inherit" the land; yet the same word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing Israel to "inherit" the land again after their return from "the north country" (Zech. 2:12; 8:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the "north country", then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized "throne of the Lord" (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn't even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of

Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

Jeremiah 3:19 But I thought how I would set you among My children, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the armies of the nations; and I thought you would call Me My Father, and would not turn away from following Me'- God's being apparently mistaken because of His over enthusiasm for Israel reflects His limiting of His omniscience in order to enter into legitimate real time relationship with His people. Despite realizing this, in :22 God still offers to restore them. His enthusiasm to almost force through His intentions with His beloved stands for all time as an encouragement to His people.

Jeremiah 3:20 Surely as a wife faithlessly departs from her husband, so you have dealt treacherously with Me, house of Israel, says Yahweh- Their lack of faith was the essence of their immorality and seeking other gods. Despite the passion of His love (see on :19), God doesn't turn a blind eye to what they had done. The breaking of faith was breaking covenant; this is the essence of sin. We are to forever remember that we are in the bonds of an eternal covenant, and only wilfully walking away from it can end our part in it.

Jeremiah 3:21 A voice is heard on the bare heights, the weeping and the petitions of the children of Israel; because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten Yahweh their God- The high places were where they worshipped idols. The tragedy was that even in the desperation of their nadir, they still would turn to their idols rather than fully to Yahweh. He simply cannot be one of many options we try in order to get us out of crises. Or it could be that this verse is another example of God as it were interjecting with His own fantasy of how they would repent; there on the high places, before their idols, He envisaged them realizing how vain were the idols, how they had forgotten Yahweh, and then by implication calling upon Him alone. Perhaps Daniel understood this verse like this, when he prays and confesses that "we" had perverted God's way (Dan. 9:5 s.w.). We notice that individual acts of sin aren't in view; rather is the issue with a "way" of being, thinking and living.

Jeremiah 3:22 Return, you backsliding children, I will heal your backsliding- This is a promise to psychologically change them, if they were willing. And this operation upon their very heart or mind is the promise of the new covenant in Jer. 31 and Ez. 20. Although God's people refused that new covenant at that time, it is that which is made with us, and the psychological transformation of His Spirit is just as much available to us today.

Behold, we have come to You; for You are Yahweh our God- As suggested on :21, this seems to be God's almost placing words in their mouths in His imagination. The hopefulness and fantasy of God for Israel often comes out in His statements that Israel definitely will repent "As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so *is* [note the present tense] the house of Israel ashamed" (Jer. 2:26). This was God's fantasy for His people. Hosea is full of this. So here too, this latter sentence is God's fantasy about Israel, imagining them saying those words. How bitter was His disappointment therefore- and how great His delight in those of us who in our weakness do come unto Him and recognize Him meaningfully as our God. Indeed the whole of Jer. 3:22-25 is full of God fantasizing about the sort of words Israel would say upon their repentance, and how they would take responsibility for their sins rather than blame them on their

fathers . This apparent certainty that Israel would repent and thus obviate the threatened judgments must have conflicted within the thinking of the Father- with His certainty that all was already too late for them. Hence passages like Hos. 11:8 speaks of the burning pain within the thought processes of God Almighty.

Jeremiah 3:23 Truly in vain is help from the hills, the tumult on the mountains. Truly the salvation of Israel is in Yahweh our God- God hoped Israel would come to realize that the various gods of the high places ("hills") and the whole ranges of mountains, representing the nations, could not save them. Rather was salvation (*teshua*) only in Yahweh. This would then make the word *Yeshua*, the Hebrew name for "Jesus", the salvation of Yahweh. Finally this hoped for repentance and acceptance of Yah's salvation will come true in the latter day repentance of Israel and acceptance of Jesus as God's Son and the source of their salvation.

Jeremiah 3:24 But the shameful thing has devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters- God hopes and imagines that they will recognize that Baal worship, "the shameful thing", had robbed them of the blessings which He had given them. The phrase "devoured the labours" is that used in Dt. 28:33 of how the invading armies would devour Israel's labours. But as so often, this judgment was only in fact what the people had themselves chosen. For they had allowed Baal to devour their labours.

Jeremiah 3:25 Let us lie down in our shame, and let our confusion cover us; for we have sinned against Yahweh our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day. We have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God- This concludes God's fantasy about how His people would repent, the position they would adopt (lying down in shame) and the words they would say. Instead of prostrating themselves before the shameful thing (Baal), they would lie down in shame before God, in repentance. Fantasy or imagination is part of what it is to be made in God's image; and we must ask ourselves what our deepest hopes really are, and whether our fantasy or imagination for those who hurt us is their repentance and reconciliation... As it was God's for His spiteful people. Shame / confusion covered the faces of God's people when the temple was desecrated (Jer. 51:51 s.w.), but this was because their faces had not been covered with shame at their sins. It's shame for sin now, or shame at judgment day.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 4

Jeremiah 4:1 If you will return, Israel, says Yahweh, if you will return to Me- The Hebrew implies as AV that 'If you will return, then return *to Me'.* We can confuse a desire for change, a fleeting twinge of conscience, with real repentance. “They return, *but not to the most High*” (Hos. 7:16). They had the sense that they must turn away from the way they were in, but this wasn’t necessarily the same as turning back behind the Lord.

And if you will put away your abominations out of My sight; then you shall not be removed- If there was a real turning to God, then God would not remove Judah into captivity. Or it could be that the ten tribes are still the subject, as they largely were in the previous chapter. If they returned to God, then He would miraculously return them to their land; and they would never again be removed. This would imply that some

kind of Kingdom of God situation would have been established then, under a Messianic ruler, with the Gentile nations glorifying Israel's God (:2).

Jeremiah 4:2 And you shall swear, 'As Yahweh lives', in truth, in justice, and in righteousness. The nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him shall they glory- When Israel return to the Lord and swear in truth that "the Lord lives", then all the other nations of the world will be blessed in the coming of the Kingdom. Their repentance is a prerequisite for the second coming. The implication is that this could have happened at Jeremiah's time, see on :1. It didn't, and so the fulfilment is reapplied and rescheduled to the last days.

The implication is that God's people swore that "Yahweh lives" but without moral justice and right behaviour. To believe that God exists is therefore to act like Him, in truth, justice and righteousness. To live otherwise is to effectively deny His existence. His very existence is therefore an imperative to live and be as He is.

Jeremiah 4:3 For thus says Yahweh to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground- This repentance could have brought about some kind of Kingdom situation as described in :1,2. The idea of using fallow ground is that they were to realize their potential- which was that it Judah repented and so did the ten tribes, then those tribes would be regathered into a reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel. We too must "break up our fallow ground" (Heb. 'plough the unploughed'), analayze ourselves from outside ourselves, and use our time and our "all things" to the utmost of their potential (Hos. 10:12). We were created "unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10); we were redeemed that we might be zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14)- not that we might drift through life playing with our hobbies and with the fascinations of our careers.

And don't sow among thorns- The Lord's parable of the sower alludes here. The thorns to Him meant the cares of life and the desire for wealth in the here and now (Mk. 4:19). This was Judah's problem; all their idolatry was choosing the fertility cults in order to get immediate material blessing.

Jeremiah 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to Yahweh, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest My wrath go forth like fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings- To self circumcise is the picture of intimate involvement with oneself. This is what they were asked to do to their own minds and hearts; see on :9. They could have avoided the wrath to come by quenching the fire of that wrath through reformation of their own hearts. We note the paramount importance of the heart; there is no specific call to quit idolatry or any specific manifestation of sin, because the essence was and is in the heart. Here at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, the implication is that the wrath could be quenched still; but the time would come when it could not be. By the time of Jer. 7:20, God was saying that His wrath could no longer be quenched (as 2 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 34:25). And yet even after this point, God still speaks as if it could be quenched by repentance (Jer. 21:12). Even to the point of self-contradiction, God was so eager to have His wrath quenched. And this God is our God. His eagerness for human repentance should be reflected in our attitudes, both to others and to our own sins. Breaking relationship with people by casting them out of fellowship is not reflective of that.

Jeremiah 4:5 Declare in Judah and publish in Jerusalem; say, 'Blow the trumpet in

the land!' Cry aloud and say, 'Assemble yourselves! Let us go into the fortified cities!'- The "cities" may be an intensive plural for the one great city, Zion. For in :7 it seems that God's wrath was at a point where the other cities would be destroyed, but if the people entered Jerusalem in repentance, then although the invaders would surround her, He would miraculously deliver her. This of course is what had happened a few generations before in the time of Hezekiah and the Assyrian invasion. God was willing to use that as a prototype for their salvation now from Babylon. A restored Kingdom of God could have emerged after the destruction of the Assyrians; but Judah didn't really repent, and Hezekiah let the baton drop. But now, out of their sin and the need to judge it, there was to be another opportunity. See on :8; Jer. 5:1; 6:23.

Right in the context of God predicting the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is presented as a strong, fortified city, made strong by God against any opposition (Jer. 1:18). The implication was that the faithful should identify with Jeremiah if they wished to avoid the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah uses the same term for "fortified city" here in urging the faithful to run into one in the face of the Babylonian advance. But that fortified city was himself and the community of the faithful.

Jeremiah 4:6 Set up a standard towards Zion. Flee for safety! Don't wait; for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction- See on :5; Jer. 5:10. There was to be destruction in the land, but there was potentially safety / salvation in Jerusalem for those who were obedient and repentant. This was a test to Judah, because they trusted in their defenced cities (Jer. 5:17). But the prophecy of Jeremiah 4 (and Mic. 5:11) asks them to believe that these cities would fall, and there would be salvation only in Jerusalem. And yet they were disobedient, and did go into those other defenced cities (:29; Jer. 8:14).

Jeremiah 4:7 A lion is gone up from his thicket, and a destroyer of nations; he is on his way, he is gone forth from his place, to make your land desolate, that your cities be laid waste, without inhabitant- Already God had raised up the Babylonians. They had only recently come to prominence by defeating Assyria, and were still somewhat of an unknown quantity at the time Jeremiah's ministry began. The extent of destruction threatened here didn't totally come; the majority of the peasants remained in the land, and they still brought food offerings to the temple even after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 41:5). In wrath God remembered mercy.

The collapsing of time at the judgment would mean that the events used to punish the world could fall upon the rejected from the judgment seat. These unfortunate individuals will be threshed, as will the world be (Mt. 3:12; Rev. 16:16). This is foreshadowed by the way apostate Israel were treated like the surrounding Gentile world ("nations") in the time of their judgments (Jer. 4:7).

Jeremiah 4:8 For this clothe yourself with sackcloth, lament and wail; for the fierce anger of Yahweh hasn't turned back from us- The implication is that such repentance would turn back Yahweh's wrath; Joel uses similar language. Sackcloth and wailing suggested a death had happened; they were to believe they were condemned and the death sentence had been passed, and to lament it; and yet they could repent. I suggested on :5 that they were being encouraged to copy the example of Hezekiah turning away the Assyrians; and his urgent appeal for repentance had led to Yahweh's fierce anger being turned back (s.w. 2 Chron. 29:10; 30:8).

Jeremiah 4:9 It shall happen at that day, says Yahweh, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder- We note the continued stress upon the state of their heart; see on :4. The focus is not upon how they would be slain, tortured, have their eyes put out etc.- but upon the mental, internal panic and collapse they would experience. The physical "desolation" of the land would be matched by the internal, psychological desolation of the priests (s.w. "astonished"). Jeremiah felt the same as the other priests; he was desolated / astonished (s.w.) at the desolation of Jerusalem (Lam. 1:4,13). We can read this as meaning that he as the righteous totally identified with the wicked; or that he was too identified with the wicked priests, and felt like them when instead he should have perceived that this was exactly the astonishment of the priests which he had prophesied.

Jeremiah 4:10 Then I said, Ah, Lord Yahweh! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem in saying, 'You shall have peace;' whereas the sword reaches to the heart- Again, as noted on :9, Jeremiah perceives that the judgments will be upon their hearts. The promise of peace was if the people repented; but Jeremiah considered it so obvious that they wouldn't repent that he therefore accuses God of being unreasonable in even speaking of the possibility of peace. Here we see Jeremiah's struggle with God; his experience of Divine inspiration didn't make him just a mere instrument for relaying God's word. He was personally involved in it. I noted on :5 and :8 the similarities with the siege of Jerusalem at the time of Hezekiah; and the same word was used by Rabshakeh in warning that Hezekiah and Isaiah were deceiving the people by saying there would be peace through Divine salvation (2 Chron. 32:15). This further indicates that Jeremiah was out of step with God in his feelings. God perhaps corrects things by saying that the people were deceiving themselves in thinking that the Babylonians would withdraw, because their false prophets had deceived them to think this (Jer. 29:8; 37:9).

Jeremiah 4:11 At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A hot wind from the bare heights in the wilderness towards the daughter of My people, not to winnow, nor to cleanse- The high places ("bare heights") were the scene of their apostasy with the idols. This wind represented the invasion; but "wind" and "spirit" are the same word in Hebrew, and the idea as in Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim was that the invasion would be moved by God's Spirit. It came down, as it were, from the high places. At this point, God's wrath was such that He intended simply to destroy; but elsewhere He says that the judgments were indeed "to cleanse" His people in a national sense (Ez. 20:38 s.w.). Again we see Him relenting; although perhaps the idea is that those destroyed were not personally cleansed, although the cleansing was to be thus achieved on a national level.

Jeremiah 4:12 A full wind for these things shall come from Me. Now I will also utter judgements against them- This is the language of the judge uttering the final judgment after the case has been considered. LXX "a spirit of full vengeance shall come upon me" may indeed be the idea; but God never carried out "full vengeance", in wrath He remembered mercy.

Jeremiah 4:13 Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles- As noted on :11, this is the equivalent

to Ezekiel's vision of the clouds and chariots of the cherubim, God's Spirit in action, being manifested in the chariots and dust clouds thus formed by the invaders.

Woe to us! For we are ruined- This is Jeremiah's interjection. He sees the personal truth of the message he is relaying. Likewise Jeremiah responds to the prophecy he has to utter against the hated Philistines by begging the Father to limit these judgments, presumably on account of their repentance: "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still" (Jer. 47:6). Here likewise he almost interrupts a prophecy he is giving to Israel about judgment to come by appealing for them *therefore* to repent (Jer. 4:13,14). Our handling of the prophecies of judgment to come should have a like effect upon us: they should inspire us to an inevitable witness. Each of our days cannot be just 'the same old scene' when we see the world in this way.

Jeremiah 4:14 Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?- This is Jeremiah's personal appeal for repentance; he so believed that what he had prophesied would come true. Again the appeal is for reformation of thought patterns; see on :4. "Evil" is literally 'vain', a word often associated with the "vanities" of the idols. But the essence of idolatry, then as now, was vain thinking, emptiness of heart. That to this day is the essence of idolatry, and the prophetic call is not let this vanity lodge within us, but to cast out those thoughts.

Jeremiah 4:15 For a voice declares from Dan, and publishes evil from the hills of Ephraim- These were areas within the ten tribe kingdom which had already been carried captive. The idea is that from there would come advance warning of the Babylonian advance; just as Judah ought to have taken warning from the judgment upon the ten tribes.

Jeremiah 4:16 Tell the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, 'Watchers come from a far country and lift up their voice against the cities of Judah- Why should the Gentile nations also be informed of the Babylonian advance? Presumably in the hope that they too would repent and turn to Yahweh; for this was the Divine intention. "Watchers" could simply mean 'besiegers' (s.w. Is. 1:8; Ez. 6:12); or it could be a reference to the Angels who watch over God's word to perform it (Jer. 1:11-13), and who would bring the invaders on their journey, like Ezekiel's cherubim.

Jeremiah 4:17 As keepers of a field, they are against her all around, because she has been rebellious against Me', says Yahweh- "They (the enemy) are lying in wait on the fields round about". This would support the translation "besiegers" in :16. The rebellion of the people is specifically stated as being in their hearts (Jer. 5:23 s.w.). The state of the heart is such a repeated theme here.

Jeremiah 4:18 Your way and your doings have brought these things to you. This is your wickedness; for it is bitter, for it reaches to your heart- Their "way" refers to their way of thought and internal imagination, the trodden paths of mental reactions and thoughts, which led to their "doings".

Jeremiah speaks of the pain of *his* heart after having spoken of the pain that would reach unto the heart of Judah (Jer. 4:18,19). The pain of their heart became the pain of his heart. And yet Jeremiah had the mind of God in this sense, as David was after God's own heart. This is reflected by the way in which it is very difficult at

times in Jeremiah to decide who is speaking- Jeremiah, or God. Jer. 9:1-3,10,11 is a good passage to work through from this perspective, asking 'Who is speaking? Jeremiah, or God?'. Their minds were clearly so intertwined. Both of them are described, in consecutive verses, as rising up early to plead with Israel (Jer. 25:3,4).

Jeremiah 4:19 My anguish, my anguish! I am pained at my very heart; my heart is disquieted in me; I can't hold my peace; because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war- See on :18. Despite being betrayed and hated by his own people, Jeremiah felt such pain for the judgment to come upon them- he was still struck with pain at the thought of their judgment. If we too have a heart that bleeds, we will come to know the mind of Jeremiah, who as he proclaimed the judgments of his last days, interrupted his sermon with this outburst. His very *soul* heard the message which he preached, and he interrupts his proclamation of it with this emotional outburst; this was no mindless distribution of bills or casual mention of our church. He was pained in his heart to the extent that he seems to have had some form of seizure. This is how much Jeremiah felt for those he preached to and warned, both within and without of the ecclesia. And he speaks of the pain of *his* heart after having spoken of the pain that would reach unto the heart of Judah (Jer. 4:18,19). The pain of their heart became the pain of his heart.

Jeremiah 4:20 Destruction on destruction is cried; for the whole land is laid waste: suddenly are my tents destroyed, and my curtains in a moment- In this whole section, it is hard to decide whether this is Jeremiah or Yahweh speaking in the first person. Jeremiah, as every true preacher, was no mere relayer of God's word. He was personally involved in the message, sharing the heart of God whilst also full of heartbreak for his own people- just like the Lord Jesus.

Jeremiah 4:21 How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?- Again we can question whether Jeremiah was correct in feeling that he didn't want to hear any more judgment to come upon his people. And yet despite this, the personal pronouns in the next verse clearly relate to God rather than Jeremiah. He shared the mind of God, whilst being also so terribly pained for his people- a fine insight into the Lord's mind.

Jeremiah 4:22 For my people are foolish, they don't know me. They are foolish children, and they have no understanding. They are skilful in doing evil, but to do good they have no knowledge- Clearly the "me" is God, and yet the surrounding context suggests Jeremiah is speaking. Again we see how the thinking and spirit of Yahweh was meshed with that of His servant and preacher. This is how our witness should be.

Jeremiah 4:23 I saw the land and, behold, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light- Clearly an allusion to the language of Genesis, supporting the idea that there we have a description of the formation of *eretz* Israel rather than the entire planet. The judgments were intended to bring the *eretz* back to what it was then; but implicit in this judgment is the expectation of new creation. See on :31.

Jeremiah 4:24 I saw the mountains, and behold, they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth- The vision before Jeremiah suggests that the land of Israel was to return to the state it was in when the creation process began.

Jeremiah 4:25 I saw, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the sky had fled- This would suggest that "no man" was to be left on the land. But this didn't happen at this time; only the leadership were taken captive, and soon after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, local Jews still came to worship at the temple site (Jer. 41:5). In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority.

Jeremiah 4:26 I saw, and behold, the fruitful field was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of Yahweh, before His fierce anger- Israel were told to "throw down", "break in pieces" and "utterly destroy" the idols and altars of Canaan. There were times during their history when they obeyed this command by purging themselves from their apostasy in this. The Hebrew words used scarcely occur elsewhere, except very frequently in the context of how God "broke down", "threw down" and "destroyed" Israel at the hands of their Babylonian and Assyrian invaders as a result of their not 'breaking down' (etc.) the idols. "Throw down" in Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 is the same word in 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 4:26; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14; Ez. 16:39; Nah. 1:6. "Cut down" in Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 later occurs in Is. 10:33; Jer. 48;25; Lam. 2:3. So Israel faced the choice: either cut down your idols, or you will be cut down in the day of God's judgment. Those who worshipped idols were like unto them. The stone will either fall on us and destroy us, or we must fall on it and become broken men and women (Mt. 21:44). For the man untouched by the concept of living for God's glory, it's a hard choice.

Jeremiah 4:27 For thus says Yahweh, The whole land shall be a desolation; yet will I not make a full end- Earlier God had threatened to make a full end, the same phrase is found in Is. 10:23 and Zeph. 1:18. But now God promises that He will not make a full end (Jer. 5:10,18; 4:27; 30:11; 46:28). God is not capricious; but His love and pity is such that He is unafraid to not do according to His wrath. In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority. And this God is our God.

Jeremiah 4:28 For this the land will mourn, and the heavens above be black; because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and I have not relented, neither will I go back from it- See on Hos. 13:14. God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6). There has to come a moment when the pull of the flow toward the waterfall of condemnation is now too strong, and the plunge is inevitable. It is that moment which perhaps we need to fear more than anything else in human experience. It happened to Israel- their hearts too were hard, and in the end, after a period, God have them over to their hard hearts (Ps. 81:11,12)- the implication being that even whilst He hardened their hearts, He kept them by grace from the full consequences... but in the end, the final inevitable drag towards the waterfall set in. This is why there were times when even repentance, as a change of mind, could not save Jerusalem from destruction (Jer. 4:28; 15:1-9; 16:12; Ez. 7:1-9). This was the moment *after* the inevitable tug towards the waterfall beings, but before the actual plunge. It's Saul cowering before the witch of Endor, lying face down in the dirt that fateful night... and *this* is the human condition we should most dread.

Jeremiah 4:29 Every city flees for the noise of the horsemen and archers; they go into the thickets and climb up on the rocks: every city is forsaken, not a man dwells therein- This was avoidable; if Judah had obeyed the commandment to flee their fenced cities and go into Jerusalem. See on :6. They refused God's peace and safety in Jerusalem, and so they fled into the rocks and thickets.

Jeremiah 4:30 You, when you are made desolate, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with scarlet, though you deck you with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain do you make yourself beautiful; your lovers despise you, they seek your life- The very nations whose help and blessing Judah had sought, and whose idols she had worshipped, were now coming to demand her life. Just as those idols had demanded the lives of her firstborn children, and she had given them. Now her life itself would be required by them.

Perhaps more than anything, the prophetic descriptions of condemnation were aimed at attacking the indifference which pervaded Israel. And so the power of sexual imagery is used to the full in the description of rejected Israel as a whore all dressed up with no place to go, so utterly unwanted and despised (Jer. 4:30,31). This was and is the tragedy of Divine rejection of those who have so desperately sought the approval of this world, when all too late they find this world is over for good. We so minimize sin. Just a bit of injustice, a little touch of selfishness, a moment of hypocrisy… but all this is obscene treatment of our God. We read the description of the red clothing, gaudy jewellery and heavy make up of the harlot Israel in Ezekiel and Jeremiah… and this is how inappropriate is mere external religion (Jer. 4:30). And we're all guilty of that, in some ways at some times.

Jeremiah 4:31 For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, who gasps for breath, who spreads her hands saying, Woe is me now! For my soul faints before the murderers- The imagery here pictures a woman who is dying in childbirth, but who will still produce a live birth. Just as the imagery of decreation has implicit within it the hope of new life, so here. Although the woman would die, the hope was that she would bring forth a new generation who would respond. The woman in travail is the woman of :30 who desperately dresses as a prostitute in order to placate her former lovers, when she realizes they have come to murder her. And she is in fact heavily pregnant, about to give birth with her murderers standing around her. This was the pathetic, awful picture of Judah's position. This kind of shocking imagery is deployed to try to shake them out of their indifference, as it should us too.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 5

Jeremiah 5:1 Run back and forth through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places of it, if you can find a man, if there are any who does justice, who seeks truth; and I will pardon her- This reflected how God is in search of man. What joy therefore when He finds a man, and the man who is searching finds Him. This is the joy of the lost being found in the parables of Lk. 15. Jeremiah's search for believers was a reflection of God's. God hunts for us like a lion, Job came to realize; and in this "You show yourself wonderful to me" (Job 10:16). And we are searching for God. God is not indifferent to our searching for Him. Those

awestruck moments of wonder, of radical amazement, are where God finds us at the time we are searching for Him. Both sides are seeking each other; and in those moments, they meet. As a Jewish poet put it: "And going out to meet thee / I found thee coming toward me". In those moments, heaven and earth kiss each other. There is a click, a flash, between Almighty God and us- as we stand at a bus stop, turn left into Acacia Avenue, lay there on our bed meditating.

Here is another allusion to the situation during the Assyrian invasion; see on Jer. 4:5,8. Hezekiah obtained forgiveness and acceptance for those who kept the Passover "otherwise than it was written"- thanks to his prayer (2 Chron. 30:18). In Hezekiah's time, all Israel had to repent to avert total destruction- but even though they didn't, the prayer of Hezekiah saved the nation (Jer. 26:13,19). All of Jerusalem would have been forgiven if there was even one that truly executed judgment, after the pattern of Phinehas (or is this a reference to Messiah?).

"Seeks truth" can also be "is not greedy". Jeremiah speaks of running to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem, searching her squares, to see if he could find a single man who did justice and wasn't greedy (Jer. 5:1,5; 6:6,13; 8:10). Why get so ballistic because people are greedy and have no real sense of justice? Isn't that part of the human deal, don't we see it every single day? Yes we do. But the challenge of the prophets is to feel its' awfulness and realize that for this, an awful judgment is coming from God. It is indeed hard to see the world from God's perspective; but this is what the spirit of prophecy was and is all about.

We wonder whether there were really no other righteous in Jerusalem apart from Jeremiah. There was Josiah, but he died in disobedience to God's wishes, fighting against Egypt for Babylon. There was Baruch, but he seems to have had a heart for materialism (Jer. 45:5). Ezekiel was not in Jerusalem but already in captivity.

Jeremiah 5:2 Though they say, 'As Yahweh lives;' surely they swear falsely- Josiah's reformation had clearly not touched their hearts. The implication is that God's people swore that "Yahweh lives" but without moral justice and right behaviour. To believe that God exists is therefore to act like Him, in truth, justice and righteousness. To live otherwise is to effectively deny His existence. His very existence is therefore an imperative to live and be as He is.

Jeremiah 5:3 O Yahweh, don't Your eyes look on truth? You have stricken them, but they were not grieved. You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock. They have refused to return- Jeremiah had similar oscillations of feeling as God also had. This is his response to the command to go and search for even one man who did righteousness (:1). He is complaining that surely God sees the situation anyway, which he had to report- Israel had not grieved to repentance. And they were psychologically hardened against that possibility. But then in :4,5 his pity for them returns and he as it were tries again. We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. The Lord hardened His face like a rock (Is. 50:7; Lk. 9:51); and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30)

Jeremiah 5:4 Then I said, Surely these are poor. They are foolish; for they don't know the way of Yahweh, nor the law of their God- See on :3. Jeremiah apparently relents from his giving up with the people in :3. He realizes that the people simply don't

know God's way and law- because the priests, of whom he was one, had not taught them. "Poor" is better "lean"; skinny and foolish is the language of a misled flock. The priests had not led them as intended. Notice how "the law" is not a set of disconnected, discrete commandments and regulations; it was to inculcate a way of life and thought, "the way of Yahweh", with which here it is paralleled.

But "law" is better "judgment", as AV. Knowing God's present judgment should have a powerful practical effect upon us. If we know the judgment of God against certain types of behaviour, we will keep away from them totally. It is only the rejected who refuse to know "the judgment of their God" (Jer. 5:4 AV). We are living our lives under judgment. Knowing God's judgment-principles, we will wish to separate from all that will finally be condemned and destroyed. Israel chose to be oblivious of what they well knew; there was no (awareness of) God's judgment in their way of life (Is. 59:8) and therefore they lacked that innate sense of judgment to come which they ought to have had, as surely as the stork knows the coming time for her migration (Jer. 8:7).

Jeremiah 5:5 I will go to the great men, and will speak to them; for they know the way of Yahweh, and the law of their God. But these with one accord have broken the yoke, and burst the bonds- As so often, there is an intentional ambiguity as to the speaker. This is Jeremiah's response to the command to go and seek at least one man to stand in the gap; but by :7 we have God speaking. Again we see how Jeremiah's feelings and positions were so meshed with those of God; as should be with us, the Spirit of God had become part of his spirit. Jeremiah speaks as if he had expected that those amongst "the great men" would know Yahweh's law and way; but he is disappointed, he finds not a single one there ("all with one accord..."). Again we see Jeremiah's overly positive and hopeful view of Israel; which was also a reflection of God's view, so in love with them was He still. Breaking the bonds suggests they had broken their covenant relationship. Judah had "broken the yoke and burst the bonds" of their covenant relationship with God, but He by grace had broken the yoke and bonds of those who enslaved them (Jer. 2:20; 30:8).

Jeremiah 5:6 Therefore a lion out of the forest shall kill them, a wolf of the evenings shall destroy them, a leopard shall watch against their cities; everyone who goes out there shall be torn in pieces; because their transgressions are many, and their backsliding is increased- Even in this expression of wrath, there is the implication that the people would still be safe within their cities [an intensive plural for the great singular city, of Jerusalem?] if they remained within it. As explained on Jer. 4:5,8, one of the many potential possibilities was that the cities would be destroyed apart from Jerusalem, and if they repentantly fled into Jerusalem they would be saved.

Jeremiah 5:7 How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken Me, and sworn by what are no gods- The tension within God is apparent. Hosea's the clearest on this. God wants nothing more to do with His adulterous people; and then He pleads with them to come back to Him, breaking His own law, that a put away woman can't return to her first husband. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?... mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together" (Hos. 11:8). And Jeremiah has more of the same: "How can I pardon you… shall I avenge myself on a nation such as this? Shall I not punish them for these things?" (Jer. 5:7-9,28,29). God reveals Himself as oscillating between punishing and redeeming, judging sin and overlooking it. God is open to changing His stated plans (e.g. to destroy Nineveh within forty days, to

destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation). He isn't like the Allah of Islam, who conducts a monologue with his followers; the one true God of Israel earnestly seeks dialogue with His people, and as such He enters into all the contradictory feelings and internal debates which dialogue involves. 'God loves the sinner and hates the sin' has always seemed to me problematic, logically and practically. Love is in the end a personal thing; in the end love and hate are appropriate to persons, not abstractions. And the person can't so easily be separated from their actions. Ultimately, it is persons who will be saved or condemned. The prophets reveal both the wrath and love of God towards His people, in the same way as a parent or partner can feel both wrath and love towards their beloved.

When I had fed them to the full, they committed adultery, and assembled themselves in troops at the prostitutes' houses- Here and in :8 there is continued the tragic theme that the more God blessed His people with material blessings, the more they went away from Him. This continues a major Biblical theme- that God's loving material blessings of His people led them to idolatry (Dt. 32:15). The prosperity Gospel must give due weight to this sad experience of God's people historically. Those blessings gave them a taste for materialism, which led them to madly seek more such blessings from anybody and anything which might immediately yield them. The prostitutes were representative of the various idols they served, although that service often involved sleeping with the cult prostitutes.

Jeremiah 5:8 They were as fed horses roaming at large- We all know the downward spiral into sin… how once we start, we can't stop. But when Israel were like this, they are likened to a female horse camel in insatiable heat (Jer. 2:23-25; 5:7-9). We'd just rather not read that, or retranslate the words to make it seem somehow different. But we're dealing with serious matters here. Sin is serious to God.

Everyone neighed after his neighbour's wife- Being unfaithful to their covenant with God led them to being unfaithful to their marital covenant. Our relationship with God is reflected in our family lives.

Our early morning thoughts are fair indicators of how we really are with God. Interestingly, Israel are criticized for their early morning attitudes- in the mornings (AV) they fantasized after their neighbours' wives (Jer. 5:8; Hos. 7:6), got up and wanted to get drunk again (Is. 5:11), had unjust thoughts about others (Jer. 21:12; Mic. 2:1). That's quite some emphasis- God was *so* unhappy with what His people thought about in the mornings. And Zeph. 3:7 is perhaps the most challenging of all- God condemned His people because they rose each morning and cast off all their opportunities (Heb.), despite Him every morning [potentially] revealing His word to them (Zeph. 3:5). They allowed themselves to be simply too busy to see all that God potentially enabled for them every single day. And what about us? God has prepared huge potential achievement for each of us- but we tend to fritter our days away in busyness and poor planning and lack of a self-disciplined life.

Jeremiah 5:9 Shouldn't I punish them for these things? says Yahweh; and shouldn't My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?- God had been Israel's wife and was in love with her. His deep desire for avenging was therefore absolutely connected with His great love for her. There had to be response from Him. This rhetorical question, enquiring as to whether Yahweh should take vengeance on Israel, is thrice repeated in Jeremiah (Jer. 5:9,29; 9:9). The answer of course is "Yes, God would be justified in doing so". And that answer was perhaps the repentance which God sought in order to avert the coming of His judgment.

Jeremiah 5:10 Go up on her walls, and destroy; but don't make a full end. Take away her branches; for they are not Yahweh's- The destruction of the branches implied that the stock of the vine [a prophetic symbol for Israel] was to remain. This was another way of saying that a "full end" would be made, although Jeremiah was to walk around the walls of Jerusalem and prophecy their fall- the collapse of all human strength. See on :10. We see here the power of the prophetic word- Jeremiah uttering these prophecies was as good as the destruction happening, and he therefore was the vehicle through which it would happen. Realizing this may account for the psychological breakdown of Jeremiah we see in Lamentations. On Jer. 4:5,6 we saw that an earlier prophetic potential had been that Jerusalem would be saved, but the fortified cities of Judah would fall. Now it seems that possibility had been precluded by their impenitence, and so Jerusalem too would fall. This is how God works in our lives too, working out various prophetic potentials.

Jeremiah 5:11 For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against Me, says Yahweh- This was why Jerusalem was going to fall, and the plan for her survival as outlined on Jer. 4:5,6 was now cancelled. "Treachery" means literally to cover; they thought God would not notice, and this was the reason for His anger with them. And we can take a lesson from this. His omniscience requires from us a totally open attitude toward Him and ourselves.

Jeremiah 5:12 They have denied Yahweh and said, It is not He; neither shall evil come on us; neither shall we see sword nor famine- This was a denial of the very essence of Yahweh, "I am that I am"; and they said "It is not He", or "He is not". This was effectively atheism, although they would have hotly denied that charge. The damage of false teaching is that this is where it leads people; for it was the false prophets who taught that there would be no evil coming, and the predictions of sword and famine by Jeremiah and Ezekiel would not happen (:13). To deny God's word is therefore to deny Him, to say "He is not". For "the word was God", He is identified with His word, and our attitude to His word is our attitude to Him.

Jeremiah 5:13 The prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them- This appears to be a statement of the people and false prophets about Jeremiah and the faithful prophets (so :14 implies). "Spirit" and "wind" are the same word in Hebrew. They treated the spirit within Jeremiah as just air, a wind that would pass away. This is why God responds in :14 by saying that His word in Jeremiah would become a fire and not simply wind. Again there is the implication that it was Jeremiah's words which would bring the fire of destruction upon Jerusalem, and this accounts for Jeremiah's psychological breakdown in Lamentations when he views the results of that fire.

Jeremiah 5:14 Therefore thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it shall devour them- See on :13. The prophetic word in Jeremiah's mouth was like fire, and it was the people who were to be "devoured" by it (Ez. 15:5; s.w. Jer. 5:14; 17:27; 21:14). The amazing grace explained in Ez. 15 was in the fact that the 'devoured by fire' vine twig would be refined in Babylon and still used by God to re-establish His Kingdom.

Jeremiah 5:15 Behold, I will bring a nation on you from far, house of Israel, says Yahweh. It is a mighty nation. It is an ancient nation- Babylon was "ancient" in that God had raised it up for this time and purpose. Whatever the geopolitical issues of the day, it was Yahweh who would bring this distant nation against Israel. We wonder why Babylon is not named at this point, whereas it clearly is in Jeremiah's later prophecies. Perhaps it was because these prophecies were still conditional; they were capable of fulfilment in peoples other than the Babylonians, had Judah at that time repented; although the judgment for their sins had to come at some point. But the channel of those judgments was still flexible, depending upon their repentance. See on Jer. 6:3.

A nation whose language you don't know, nor understand what they say- This was to be part of their judgment, and it is applied in 1 Cor. 14:21 to those in the church at Corinth who falsely claimed that speaking in unintelligible babble was the Spirit gift of speaking in foreign languages. This was in fact therefore a sign that the church was judging itself, acting as if they were the sinful Jews of Jeremiah's day whose judgment was to be dominated by those speaking a language they didn't understand.

Jeremiah 5:16 Their quiver is an open tomb, they are all mighty men- The idea was that every arrow in their quiver would bring death; but this was because the tongue of the Jews had been as deadly arrows (Jer. 9:8). They were "mighty men" in that they were the earthly representatives of the Angelic *elohim*, God's "mighty ones". Ezekiel makes the same point- the Angel cherubim chariots were to be the chariots of Babylon.

Jeremiah 5:17 They shall eat up your harvest and your bread, which your sons and your daughters should eat. They shall eat up your flocks and your herds. They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees- "Eat up " is used of how Babylon "consumed" Jerusalem with fire (Neh. 2:3,13 etc.). The people and their land were to be "consumed" by the fire which was contained in the words Jeremiah spoke (Jer. 5:14,17). But all who devoured / consumed them would be "held guilty" (Jer. 2:3; 10:25; 30:16). And yet in depression, Jeremiah lamented that the fire had consumed (Lam. 2:3; 4:11), when it was His owns words which had been that devouring fire. His lament was therefore tantamount to a statement of regret that he had been used as the vehicle for this devouring fire.

They shall beat down your fortified cities in which you trust with the sword- There was to be destruction in the land, but there was potentially safety / salvation in Jerusalem for those who were obedient and repentant (Jer. 4:5-7). This was a test to Judah, because they trusted in their defenced cities (Jer. 5:17). But the prophecy of Jeremiah 4 (and Mic. 5:11) asks them to believe that these cities would fall, and there would be salvation only in Jerusalem. And yet they were disobedient, and did go into those other defenced cities (Jer. 8:14).

Jeremiah 5:18 But even in those days, says Yahweh, I will not make a full end with you- Earlier God had threatened to make a full end, the same phrase is found in Is. 10:23 and Zeph. 1:18. But now God promises that He will not make a full end (Jer. 5:10,18; 4:27; 30:11; 46:28). God is not capricious; but His love and pity is such that He is unafraid to not do according to His wrath. In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority. And this God is our God.

Jeremiah 5:19 It will happen, when you say, 'Why has Yahweh our God done all these things to us?' Then you shall say to them, 'Just like you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours'- Jeremiah was commanded to prophecy this when the judgment happened. Perhaps he did, but Lamentations records him struggling with the "Why, God...?" questions, and concluding that it was all unreasonably severe judgment. He really is portrayed as a man in struggle with God, despite being of His mind and Spirit in so much.

Jeremiah 5:20 Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah saying- This was to go to all Judah and not just Jerusalem, as previous prophetic words.

Jeremiah 5:21 'Hear now this, foolish people, and without understanding; who have eyes, and don't see; who have ears, and don't hear- These words are quoted about the Jews in the Lord's day. But it is not to say that they were incapable of hearing or seeing, for this is part of an appeal to hear and respond (:22). The idea is that they had the eyes to see, but wouldn't. It's like the appeal to break up their fallow ground (Jer. 4:3)- they were to use their potential. They were without understanding because they chose not to open their eyes and ears. Not understanding Divine teaching therefore has a moral basis to it; it's not mere intellectual failure, but is rooted in a deep psychological desire not to repent.

Jeremiah 5:22 Don't you fear Me?' says Yahweh 'Won't you tremble at My presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it can't pass it? and though its waves toss themselves, yet they can't prevail; though they roar, yet they can't pass over it'- They refused to fear God and sense His presence because they were persuaded that they had done nothing wrong (:12). This is the narrative story that is endlessly repeated in the hearts of so many: 'I am a good person, I don't sin, the problem is with us, get off me and stop trying to make me feel my behaviour displeases God'. They had the potential to understand this (:21), but refused to live according to it. The reference to the sea and waves being limited as to their destructive effect is clearly a reference to the seas of the Gentile invaders; God had promised not to make a full end of Israel, and so the waves of the invaders would not be allowed to totally destroy the land / *eretz*. This was part of God's covenant with Israel, His "perpetual decree". It was this experience of grace which ought to have made Judah tremble at the presence of the God of such grace.

Jeremiah 5:23 But this people has a revolting and a rebellious heart; they have revolted and gone- Again the issue is with their heart; they were the stubborn and rebellious son of Dt. 21:18,20 (s.w.) who had to be slain. Their refusal to understand (:21) was not therefore a case of intellectual failure, but was rooted in a desire to revolt from the God who had so loved them and walk away ("gone") from Him. Jeremiah mourned Israel's lack of spiritual sensitivity and failure to live up to their potential- they had eyes, but didn't see, they were God's servant, but a blind one; His messenger, but unable to hear any message (Is. 42:19). So the prophets weren't satisfied just because a minority responded to their message of God's love. They were heartbroken because the majority rejected it. I suspect we tend to think that 1 response in 1000 is good, 1 in 10,000 isn't bad. But what about the other 999, or 9,999, who receive our tracts, hit our websites, hear our witness- and don't respond? Is our witness in the spirit of the prophets? Are we happy that the tiny minority respond, and

don't spare a thought for the tragedy of the majority who don't? Not only their tragedy, but the tragedy for God?

Jeremiah 5:24 Neither do they say in their heart, 'Let us now fear Yahweh our God who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season; who preserves to us the appointed weeks of the harvest'- Yet again the emphasis is upon the heart. They failed to perceive that the rains in Palestine were arranged by God for the optimal times- just after sowing and just before harvesting, and then no rain during the harvesting season. Those "weeks of the harvest" were appointed by God for them. But they refused to "see" that (:21).

Jeremiah 5:25 Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good from you- The rains, so carefully designed to give them an optimal growing season and harvest (see on :24), were turned away from them because these were the blessings of the covenant which they had broken. The potential good that was planned would not come. This failure to realize potential is such a major theme of the prophets, and it can be seen in human life just as much today.

Jeremiah 5:26 For among My people are found wicked men. They watch, as fowlers lie in wait. They set a trap. They catch men- God had told Jeremiah at the start of his ministry that He would watch over His word to perform it; but in the false Israel, there were false prophets who likewise watched over the fulfilment of their evil plans. "Trap" is the same word used about the "mount of corruption" in Jerusalem which Josiah had destroyed (2 Kings 23:13). But his reforms were only tokenistic; the false prophets remained, setting up similar traps of corruption. It is the same word translated 'destruction', which the Babylonians would bring (Jer. 51:25; Ez. 5:16). But as the Babylonians would entrap Jerusalem in the siege, so they had in essence done to themselves already.

Jeremiah 5:27 As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit. Therefore they became great and grew rich- The bird traps featured live birds within them, encouraging other birds to fly in to the trap or cage. This is how advertising works- see how this wonderful thing happened to this person, so why not join them within the cage. The wealth of the false prophets attracted the people to act like them.

Jeremiah 5:28 They have grown fat. They shine; yes, they excel in deeds of wickedness. They don't plead the cause, the cause of the fatherless, that they may prosper; and they don't judge the right of the needy- The "wicked men" of :26 were therefore the spiritual and civil leadership, and their wealth was gained through oppressing the poor. This was mentioned rather than their idolatry, because it is attitudes to the poor which are of such huge significance to God. The very same reasons are given by Ezekiel for the Babylonian judgment at this time (Ez. 22:29).

Jeremiah 5:29 Shall I not punish for these things? says Yahweh. Shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?- See on :9. The judgment was against the "nation", whereas :26-28 appear to condemn the ruling classes. God does not judge the righteous along with the wicked. The corruption of these men had spread throughout society; as noted on :27, they were a self-advertisement for getting wealth by abusing others, and all society were attracted to it. The abuse of the leadership was 'loved' by the people (:31).

Jeremiah 5:30 An astonishing and horrible thing has happened in the land- God was 'astonished' in that again, He limited His omniscience in order to enter fully into relationship with His people. He had higher hopes for His people, and is portrayed as shocked and shattered when those hopes were dashed. The false prophecies uttered in His Name and supported by His priests were particularly shocking to Him (:31).

Jeremiah 5:31 The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own authority; and My people love to have it so- The entire society was guilty because leaders only act as the people want; see on :29. The priests were to teach the people God's law, but the prophets who claimed to give God's word gave false words in His Name. Hence there was a conspiracy between prophets and priests. And yet all Israel were to be priests. Although there was a special priesthood, it was clearly God's intention that all Israel should be like priests; they were to be a "*Kingdom* of priests" (Ex. 19:6). Israel were all "saints", and yet saints and priests are paralleled in passages like Ps. 132:16. Israel in the wilderness had clothes which didn't wear out- just as the Priestly clothes didn't, and were handed down from generation to generation (so Ex. 29:29 implies). Israel were to teach every man his neighbour and brother, saying, Know the Lord (Heb. 8:11). God therefore saw all Israel as represented by the priests (Hos. 4:9; Is. 24:2; Jer. 5:31; 8:10).

What will you do in the end of it?- This is typical of the rhetorical questions in Jeremiah. They were designed to elicit an acceptance by the people that all this would come to an appropriate end in a dramatic destruction. And it was a recognition of this which was vital for repentance. All the time, God is seeking to elicit repentance- from people we would likely have given up with long before.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 6

Jeremiah 6:1 Flee for safety, you children of Benjamin, out of the midst of Jerusalem, blow the trumpet in Tekoa and raise up a signal on Beth Haccherem; for evil looks forth from the north, and a great destruction- On Jer. 4:5,6 we saw that an earlier prophetic potential had been that Jerusalem would be saved, but the fortified cities of Judah would fall. Now it seems that possibility had been precluded by their impenitence, and so Jerusalem too would fall. This is how God works in our lives too, working out various prophetic potentials. Tekoa and Beth Haccherem were to the south of Jerusalem; the idea is that the invaders from the north would take Jerusalem and pursue its inhabitants further south.

The frequent predictions of judgment upon Israel were effectively calls to repentance, whereby the predicted judgment need not actually happen. The more Israel resisted the call, the more they were as it were tightening the bands which the prophetic word had laid around them: "Now therefore be not mockers, lest your bands be made strong; for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth" (Is. 28:22). Thus Jer. 6:2 appears to be a specific prophecy of future destruction in Jerusalem: "The comely and delicate one, the daughter of Zion, will I cut off" (RV). But the preceding verse is in fact a call for the "daughter of Zion" to "Flee for safety out of the midst of Jerusalem" (Jer. 6:1 RV). If they had obeyed that call, then the prophecy of cutting off wouldn't have come true. Note in passing that this is the basis for the Lord's command to flee out of Jerusalem in the "last days" of AD70 and before His return to earth. The prophecies of destruction within Jerusalem had [in AD70] and will yet have an element of

conditionality about them. Hence the appeal of Jer. 6:8,26 to the "daughter of Zion" to "be instructed" and to mourn in repentance; if this had been done, in Jeremiah's time, in AD70 and if it will be done in our last days, so many prophecies of certain judgment will not in fact be fulfilled.

Jeremiah 6:2 The comely and delicate one, the daughter of Zion, will I cut off- See on :1. The translation could refer to good pastureland, which fits with :3. Or LXX: "And thy pride, O daughter of Sion, shall be taken away".

Jeremiah 6:3 Shepherds with their flocks shall come to her; they shall pitch their tents against her all around; they shall feed each one in his place- Again we note that "Babylon" is not mentioned here, and the idea of nomadic shepherds encamping around Jerusalem leads us to think that the nomadic Scyths are in view here. One prophetic potential was that had Judah repented, then the invasion of the Scythian tribes mentioned in Ez. 38 would have happened but would have been destroyed by Divine intervention, and then a repentant Judah would have built the temple system of Ez. 40-48. But this potential didn't come about. The Babylonians weren't characterized as shepherds, and yet they fulfilled the essence of the prophecy by besieging Jerusalem. See on Jer. 5:15.

Jeremiah 6:4 Prepare war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon- Attacks were usually made at dawn and not in the midday heat, but the invaders were to be so enthusiastic, having prepared / sanctified war against Jerusalem. This *jihad* is going to be seen in the last days, when these prophecies will come to their ultimate term.

Woe to us! For the day declines, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out- Here we see how Jeremiah totally identifies with the people he is teaching. In the midst of stating how the invaders would act and speak, he himself cries out "Woe to us!". He sees that the word he is preaching is absolutely true and will really happen. The day of opportunity for repentance is drawing to a close, although it is a long evening, stretching out a long time, because God really so sought their repentance before the night of the invasion came.

Jeremiah 6:5 Arise, and let us go up by night, and let us destroy her palaces- As noted on :4, Jeremiah is predicting the words of the invaders, although he himself interjects an outburst of "Woe unto us!" in :4. The "palaces" refer not only to the temple, but to the houses of the wealthy, built on exploitation of the poor (Jer. 5:28). The historical records in Jeremiah and 2 Chronicles stress that "the great houses" were destroyed.

Jeremiah 6:6 For Yahweh of Armies said, Cut down trees, and cast up a mound against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited; she is wholly oppression in the midst of her- The invaders were under the direct command of Yahweh of Armies; their armies were His armies, reflecting the Angelic armies of heaven. Just as Ezekiel's cherubim were Angelic chariots, manifested in the chariots of Babylon. God commanded the invaders to cut down trees in order to make siege engines. This was specifically the opposite of how He had commanded Israel to make war (Dt. 20:19,20). We could draw the conclusion that what God expects of His people, He doesn't expect of the Gentile world; indeed He may expect the very opposite. This would suggest that it is inappropriate for Christians to demand that the secular world adopts exactly their positions.

Jeremiah 6:7 As a well casts forth its waters, so she casts forth her wickedness: violence and destruction is heard in her; before Me continually is grief and woundedness- The violence and destruction were what the Jews were doing to each other; and so violence and destruction came upon them. That judgment was merely a continuation of how they themselves acted. The continual bubbling forth of their wickedness, as from a perpetual fountain, was matched in God's continual woundedness. That God can be wounded by our behaviour... is a stunning concept. This reveals the extent to which God has sensitized Himself toward man, when we are but ants before Him, the King of the cosmos. The same word is used of the deep wounding of God's people by the invaders (Jer. 14:17; 30:14); but God felt that Himself even before they did.

Jeremiah 6:8 Be instructed, Jerusalem- The appeal for Jerusalem to be "instructed" uses the same word translated "punish" (Lev. 26:18). The idea was that the punishments were to be instruction; they were not the lashing out of an offended Deity. It was God's hope, even 'fantasy' would not be too strong a word, that His people would realize this, and come to say "You punished / instructed me, and I was instructed" (Jer. 31:18 s.w.).

Lest My soul depart from you; lest I make you a desolation, a land not inhabited- See on :1,2. Here and Ez. 23:18 speaks of how God's soul "departed" from His people- but the same word is translated to hang / crucify (Num. 25:4; 2 Sam. 21:6,9,13). It's as if God was crucified in His pain for Israel. And in the death of His Son He went through that pain. And so never, ever, ever... can we nor Israel complain that our pain is greater than God's. Never. The pain of God at Israel's sin leads Him to exclaim (almost in the language of piercing and crucifixion): "Before me continually is grief and wounds" (Jer. 6:7). We can wound God by our sin, so sensitive is He to us. In the end, we read that God's "soul" departed from them, because "the Lord has rejected you" (Jer. 6:8,30). This is the same language used about Saul- God rejected him, and so His spirit departed from him (1 Sam. 15:23; 16:14). The implication was that God's very soul / spirit is "with" us, and therefore He can be so terribly wounded by us in His heart by the rebellions of those in covenant relationship with Him. For His heart / soul / spirit is *so* close to us His beloved people.

Jeremiah 6:9 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel like a vine- The idea is that virtually no grapes would be left. And yet in fact the majority of the population, the working classes, were left in the land by the Babylonians. They had a policy of only taking the upper classes into captivity, and they did this with Judah. So here we see again God speaking in a wrath which He didn't completely fulfil.

Turn again your hand as a grape gatherer into the baskets- The idea seems to be as GNB: "So you must rescue everyone you can while there is still time". Perhaps the fact that not all were destroyed nor taken captive, as seems to be implied would happen, was because of the success of Jeremiah's ministry.

Jeremiah 6:10 To whom shall I speak and testify, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they can't listen. Behold, the word of Yahweh has become a reproach to them. They have no delight in it- This would be Jeremiah somewhat rebellious response to the command in :9: "So you must rescue everyone you can while there is still time" (GNB). Jeremiah's response to this is that made by many

believers today: 'But nobody's interested in repentance'. They had been asked to circumcise their hearts (Jer. 4:4), but Jeremiah considers that none have done so. And therefore, they would not listen, in the sense of responding. Jeremiah's lament that the people had no joy or delight in God's word is the basis for his comment that when *he* found God's words, they were his joy (Jer. 15:16). We might therefore detect there a sense of spiritual superiority over the Jews for whom God's word was not their joy.

Jeremiah 6:11 Therefore I am full of the wrath of Yahweh. I am weary with holding in- Seeing the world through the eyes of both God and man, Jeremiah said that God's wrath was his wrath, "I am full of the wrath of Yahweh", and yet he stood before God "to turn away thy wrath from them" (Jer. 18:20). Hence the huge psychological tension within the prophets. Like God Himself in Jer. 15:6, Jeremiah was "weary" of the stress and tension of continually threatening inevitable judgment and yet offering the utter grace of a way out of it. And so Jeremiah asks God to as it were be done with it, and pour out His anger.

Pour it out on the youths in the street, and on the assembly of young men together; for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him who is full of days- This did happen, in response to Jeremiah's request that it happen; and yet after the Babylonian invasion, he bitterly laments the suffering of young and old in Jerusalem in just the same language (Lam. 2:12,19,21; 5:14). The lesson is that what we pray for in depression and desperation, we may receive. And we should be therefore careful what we pray for.

Jeremiah 6:12 Their houses shall be turned to others, their fields and their wives together; for I will stretch out My hand on the inhabitants of the land, says Yahweh- This is God's response to Jeremiah's request that God pour out His wrath and end the tension of threatening to do so but not doing it (:11). God likewise says in Jer. 15:6 that because He was weary with repenting, with changing His mind, He would "stretch out My hand" in judgment, using the same phrase found here.

Jeremiah 6:13 For from their least even to their greatest, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely- That all of society was guilty is a major theme of the prophets. They were attracted by the idea of immediate wealth, they coveted this, and therefore turned to idols which offered this. Hence covetousness is here paralleled with dealing falsely, which is what they were doing by proclaiming faithfulness to Yahweh whilst serving other gods.

Jeremiah 6:14 They have healed also the hurt of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace- There were false prophets both in Judah as the Babylonians approached, and also amongst those of them already in exile (Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Ez. 13:16). They were assuring the sinful people that in fact they were at peace with God, and that contrary to the prophetic message of desolation at the hand of the Babylonians, they would instead have "peace". This is described in Jeremiah as "lightly" healing the great wound or illness of Judah. That wound is described ambiguously; it was a wound or breach in themselves caused by God's smiting of them in the earlier Babylonian incursions (Jer. 14:19), but also caused by them to God Almighty. "Lightly" carries with it the idea of not serious, light hearted, superficial, trifling. And we must likewise beware of this kind of religion that is pedalled in the name of Christianity; not facing our personal issues, and using a few Bible words from here and there to superficially cover over the most fundamental issues of our

eternal destiny. And this was and is so attractive. But sin and its consequences are far deeper than any superficial, light hearted covering. It requires nothing less than the blood and word of the Lord Jesus.

Jeremiah 6:15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush- We are either ashamed of our sins in repentance; or we will be made ashamed of them in the judgment (Jer. 6:15 RVmg.)- it's shame either way. We either wail for our sins now, or we will wail for them at judgment day (Jer. 9:19,20). Our shame should be before God for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God. Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness. Thus Jeremiah recalls how his repentance involved being ashamed, and yet then being "instructed" (Jer. 31:19). It's through knowing this kind of shame before God that we come to a position where we are unashamed.

Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, says Yahweh- The allusion is to falling down before idols. By doing so they were living out how they were to fall before the nations of those idols. They would be cast down by God, but they had cast themselves down. Sin is its own condemnation.

Jeremiah 6:16 Thus says Yahweh, Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, 'Where is the good way?' and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it'- The "old" paths are literally 'the paths of *olahm*', the ways of eternity, the way that will lead to eternal life. This is the real sense of the phrase; it has been much misused by those whose native conservatism leads them to imagine that the old ways of their denomination must be correct and worthy of defence, just because the phrase "old paths" occurs in the Bible. But this is a mistranslation. Out of all the ways before Israel suggested by the various idols, they were to choose the paths [or perhaps it can be read as an intensive plural, the one great path, referred to by the people as "it"] that leads to eternity. The ways of the idols led at very best only to temporary betterment.

Jeremiah 6:17 I set watchmen over you saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!'. But they said, 'We will not listen!'- The rejection of Jeremiah was in line with the repeated rejection of the earlier prophets / watchmen. It's unlikely that they actually said "We will not listen", but God counts attitudes for what they effectively are, and imputes such statements to men as this is what their attitudes are effectively saying. And it is by such words that we shall be judged, and saved or condemned.

Jeremiah 6:18 Therefore hear, you nations, and know, congregation, what is among them- The appeal to God's people is parallel with an appeal to the Gentile nations. It was the Divine intention that His people would repent along with the surrounding Gentile nations, and all come together in a revived Kingdom of God in Israel under a Messianic king.

Jeremiah 6:19 Hear, earth! Behold, I will bring evil on this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not listened to My words; and as for My law, they have rejected it- As noted on :17, the people never formally rejected God's law and words (:20), but this was effectively their attitude, and so these words and positions

were counted to them. This was what their thoughts implied; and we note the judgment of thoughts as being of primary importance to God.

Jeremiah 6:20 To what purpose comes there to Me frankincense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to Me- They had "rejected" God's law (:19) but still were obedient to parts of it. This is typical of where form becomes more important than content in the lives of religious people. The culture becomes the religion. Israel mixed Yahweh worship with that of the idols, hence the offerings were of materials from "a far country"; Babylon is probably in view.

Like many of the surrounding peoples, the Jews were sure that because they had a temple, because they offered sacrifice to their God and went through required rituals, therefore they were OK. The prophets exposed all this as scandalous pretension, revealing Israel's cherished beliefs and suppositions about these things as meaningless and false. Their surrounding world taught that if you offered sacrifice to your god, all went smoothly. And yet Jeremiah blasts them: "To what purpose does frankincense come [up] to me… your burnt offerings are not acceptable" (Jer. 6:20).

Jeremiah 6:21 Therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will lay stumbling blocks before this people. The fathers and the sons together shall stumble against them. The neighbour and his friend shall perish- God confirms men in the way in which they choose to go. He can deceive those who don't have the love of the truth (2 Thess. 2:10), and so here He would lay stumbling blocks. Ezekiel was prophesying at about the same time to the same people, although from Babylon. He too mentions this feature of God laying stumbling blocks before the wicked, although he says that the prophets gave such people warning (Ez. 3:20). But they had in fact themselves laid the stumbling blocks of their idolatry within their hearts (Ez. 14:3). So here God is only psychologically confirming them in what they had themselves chosen. He works directly on human hearts, through "an evil spirit from the Lord" as with Saul, or positively through the transforming of His Holy Spirit. This theme is continued in :22.

Jeremiah 6:22 Thus says Yahweh, Behold, a people comes from the north country. A great nation shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth- Whoever the invaders refer to, be it Babylon or the Scythians (see on Jer. 5:15; 6:3), they were from the very borders of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, which is "the earth" in view. They were "stirred up" in the same way as the spirit of Cyrus was later stirred up (s.w. Ezra 1:1). As noted on :21, God works directly upon human hearts, placing ideas and desires within the human psyche. Just as God stirred or raised up Babylon to invade, so He would stir up, or psychologically provoke, other nations to come and judge her (Jer. 50:9,41; 51:1,11). This is greatly emphasized. The activity of God directly upon human hearts is a great theme of the Biblical revelation, and is to encourage us that He is eager to transform hearts, and to place desires within us beyond our own unaided psychological ability.

Jeremiah 6:23 They take hold of bow and spear. They are cruel, and have no mercy. Their voice roars like the sea, and they ride on horses, each one set in array, as a man to the battle, against you, daughter of Zion- The present tense is used although the events were still future; they were that certain of coming true, because God's word is sure. This is the language of the Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah's time, and I suggested on Jer. 4:5,8 ; 5:1 that the events in Judah at that time are often alluded to in

Jeremiah. There was still the possibility that at the last moment, salvation by grace would be revealed in Jerusalem. But Is. 17:12,13 had said that the great rushing of the attackers like the waves was going to be turned back. There was still that potential.

Jeremiah 6:24 We have heard its report; our hands become feeble: anguish has taken hold of us, pains as of a woman in labour- The audience of Jeremiah generally rejected his message, insisting that no evil was going to come (Jer. 5:12). So the "we" refers to Jeremiah and the minority who repented. They were in labour, to bring forth the new Zion, the envisaged reborn community of Israel. In Micah, the daughter of Zion was to be in labour pangs (symbolic of their troubles in the 70 years captivity), and then give birth to a new nation as a result of this (Mic. 4:9,10), as well as her Messiah (Mic. 5:2), who would lead Judah in destroying Babylon (Mic. 4:13; 5:5-8). But Judah didn't want to destroy Babylon. Most of them preferred to carry on living there. So, no Messiah. At that time. Another different sequence of prophetic fulfilment had to develop. But this potential was there even before the Babylonian invasion.

Jeremiah 6:25 Don't go forth into the field, nor walk by the way; for the sword of the enemy and terror are on every side- This is a warning from Jeremiah; those who believed no evil would come would have disbelieved him (Jer. 5:12), and perished as a result. It's rather like the command in the Olivet Prophecy to flee to the mountains.

Jeremiah 6:26 Daughter of My people, clothe yourself with sackcloth, and wallow in ashes! Mourn, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation; for the destroyer shall suddenly come upon us- Jeremiah again appeals for repentance, to believe that death would come and so to mourn *as if* they had received their punishment. See on :1,2. The Canaanite tribes spoke of how their gods were married to their *land* and would defend it. But the prophets, especially Hosea, reveal Yahweh as married to His *people*. "Thus says the Lord, O my dear people [*bath 'ami*- as if they are God's partner]… make mourning… for suddenly the destroyer will come upon *us"* (Jer. 6:22,26). God delicately speaks as if He is married to Israel, and that even in their sufferings, He would suffer with them, as a husband suffers with his wife. "The destroyer will come upon *us*" even sounds as if God let Himself in a way be 'destroyed' in Israel's destruction; for each of us dies a little in the death of those we love.

Jeremiah 6:27 I have made you a tester of metals and a fortress among My people; that you may know and try their way- This doesn't mean that Jeremiah decided who was the faithful, the true metal, by testing their way. Rather, the word of God which he preached was a test of the people, and their response to it revealed "their way". Thereby it was God who tried the way of His people (s.w. Jer. 17:10). Those who responded positively would find Jeremiah and his words to be a fortress, and could save themselves thereby.

Not only in our own self-examination should there be unity between our judgment and that of the Father; Jeremiah was told to "know and try" Israel's way, just as God said that He did (Jer. 6:27 cp. 9:7; 17:10). Our 'judging' of others, as well as ourselves, must be according to God's judgments of them. And further; if we know the judgments of God, then we will be more strongly motivated in our preaching and pastoral work, to pull men out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 23).

Jeremiah 6:28 They are all grievous rebels, going about with slanders; they are brass and iron: they all of them deal corruptly- This may be Jeremiah's response to the command to use God's prophetic word to refine the people. He reports that the people are corrupted brass and iron, their encounter with God's prophetic word had not refined them. They were epitomized by slander. This could refer to the false prophecies they believed which slandered God. But it seems more natural to take this as meaning that slander was their characteristic sin. Because gossip is such an epitome of the flesh, it is ranked along with sins like fornication, idolatry and murder in Ez. 22:9. And so there are passages in Jeremiah which describe slander and gossiping as being the reason why God condemned Judah (Jer. 6:28; 9:3-8). The soap operas of the world are full of this kind of gossip and intrigue; they glorify it. And the more we feed ourselves with these things, the more likely we will be to see gossip as just part of life. And yet let's not mistake the words of the prophets; it is seen as murder, because effectively it puts to death a man's relationship with his fellows. God *hates* the man who sows such discord among brethren through gossip in the church (Prov. 6:19). "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Prov. 26:22). That casual remark, that passing on of information under the guise of 'concern'- it was a body blow to the one you gossiped about, a blow so hard that it caused deep internal damage.

Jeremiah 6:29 The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed of the fire: in vain do they go on refining; for the wicked are not plucked away- This is the tragedy of Israel throughout their history, just as it is the tragedy of so many life histories. Terrible sufferings have been experienced, but still repentance and transformation has not been elicited. The fire was so intense that the lead itself was burned up by it, without achieving the desired cleansing. And the bellows, according to the AV, were also burned. Babylon themselves would be destroyed.

Jeremiah 6:30 Men will call them rejected silver, because Yahweh has rejected them- The idea is that "men", the inhabitants of the earth, will come to see Yahweh's judgments from His perspective. "Rejected" is the same word translated "rejected" in Jer. 6:19 where Israel rejected God's word. Their response to that word was therefore their judgment, and the refining fire upon them. It is also translated "despised", and Judah had despised the covenant and word of God (Lev. 26:15,43,44 s.w.). But as those verses in Leviticus bring out, although Israel rejected / despised God, He would not "for all that" reject / despise them eternally. This is the great paradox of God's grace to Israel, which serves as eternal encouragement to His sinful people of all ages. He does not actually operate a *measure for measure* policy, of treating His people as they treat Him; although this is not to say that He will not judge them. That generation were "rejected" (Jer. 7:29), but that is not to say that there was no hope for their future acceptance; the rejection by God was not eternal.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 7

Jeremiah 7:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying- This appears to be parallel to the incidents of Jer. 26, as Jeremiah's prophecies and events in his life aren't at all chronological within the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 7:2 Stand in the gate of Yahweh's house and proclaim there this word and say, 'Hear the word of Yahweh, all you of Judah, who enter in at these gates to worship Yahweh- This was probably not one of the outer gates, but one of the three gates which led from the inner court to the outer. Probably it was the gate where Baruch later recited the prophecies of Jeremiah, called "the new gate of the Lord's house", located in the "upper" i.e. inner court (Jer. 36:10 cp. 26:10). Probably the time was one of the three great feasts, when the people of Judah would have come up to the temple.

Jeremiah 7:3 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place- Jeremiah especially reveals the grace which God was so eager to show to the exiles. Jer. 7:3-7 made it clear that Judah's return to the land was to be conditional upon them not oppressing the poor- only *"then* will I cause you to dwell in this place" (AV). Yet in His grace and zeal for His people, it seems God overlooked that condition- for the returned exiles *did* oppress (Neh. 5:1-5), and yet they returned to the land. And yet they would've dwelt in Zion "for ever and ever" (Jer. 7:7) if they had not been abusive to others and truly loved God.

Jeremiah 7:4 Don't trust in lying words by saying, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple, are these- Time and again Jeremiah accuses the people of purposefully inciting God to anger through their worshipping of Him (Jer. 7:18,19; 11:17,18; 25:6; 44:3-8)- whereas the onlooker would've likely commented that at least they were doing *something* , and Jeremiah should just calm himself down about it all. He uses a grating sarcasm in Jer. 7:21-23: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh… I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings…but this command I gave them: Obey my voice". The people loved their temple: "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord…', they said. And Jeremiah responds: "You trust in deceptive words to no avail" (Jer. 7:4,8). And time and again, the prophets predicted the destruction of the temple by the God of Israel. This was radical stuff in those days; the idea was that the survival of a god depended upon the survival of his temple or shrine. No pagan god would threaten to destroy his own shrine. Israel's God was so different.

Jeremiah 7:5 For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if you thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbour- Perhaps their "ways" refer to the well trodden ways and paths of thought within the mind, reflected in "doings". "Amend" is the word used of how Cain was bidden "do well", to amend his ways, and a sin offering was even provided for him (Gen. 4:7). Hereby Israel are set up as Cain, a parallel which the Lord (Jn. 8:44) and New Testament writers also perceive. Judah had "trimmed" or "amended" their ways to seek relationships with the surrounding nations (Jer. 2:33 s.w.), willing to accept their gods and whatever cult obligations to them which were required. But they would not amend their ways for Yahweh. "Amend" is the word translated 'to do well to' in Jer. 7:23. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change.

Jeremiah 7:6 If you don't oppress the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, and

don't shed innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your own hurt- Because they oppressed Gentiles, therefore they were to be oppressed by them (Dt. 28:29,33; Jer. 50:33 s.w.). Their judgments were appropriate to their sins. Innocent blood was shed in the temple; it was there that the idols were worshipped and child sacrifice made. This is in proximity to the description of that temple as a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11), and these two ideas are found in Ez. 18:10: "If he fathers a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, and who does any one of these things". These were all things going on at the time of Ezekiel. The exiles needed to repent of these things. These actual things had been practiced by the ruling classes who were now in exile with Ezekiel. The same word is used to express how the Jerusalem temple had been turned by the priests into a "den of robbers" or oppressors (Jer. 7:11). Jeremiah as a priest is addressing the leaders of the priests. One reason Judah was destroyed was because Manasseh was a 'shedder of blood' (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4). Perhaps this was being focused upon by some, complaining that God was unfairly punishing them for Manasseh's sins. But the reality was that in essence, his descendants and wider family had done the same as he had done. For they too had been involved in the shedding of the innocent blood of their own children to the idol cults (Ps. 106:38).

Jeremiah 7:7 Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, from of old even for evermore- The whole exile and return need never have happened- the prophecies of this need not have come true in the way they did, for even before the Babylonian invasion, Judah had been offered the prospect of eternally remaining in their land, if they repented. And after it happened, Jeremiah commented: "Your prophets… did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity" (Lam. 2:14 NIV). It could have been 'warded off' by the peoples' repentance. Note how Jeremiah, himself a prophet at the time, so wishes to take the blame upon himself for not pleading more powerfully with the people. Perhaps we will have similar feelings when the time of tribulation breaks forth in the very last days.

Jeremiah 7:8 Behold, you trust in lying words, that can't profit- The attraction to them of the false prophets was that they offered "profit". It was materialism and a chronic coveting of instant wealth which led them to idolatry, which the prophets taught. This was because those idols were fertility cults offering good harvests and prosperity in return for worshipping them. It was idolatry which "can't profit" (s.w. 1 Sam. 12:21; Is. 44:9,10; Jer. 2:8), and this was what the "lying words" were all about.

Jeremiah 7:9 Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, burn incense to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known- This was the behaviour inculcated by the false prophets of :8. They "walked after" gods they did not "know", in the Hebraic sense of having a relationship with. Idols don't have relationships with people; they are worshipped in the minds of the idolaters. Yahweh alone has real, legitimate two way relationship with His people.

Jeremiah 7:10 And come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are saved; so that you may do all these abominations?- The lack of conscience and shamelessness of the people is quite a theme in Jeremiah. They thought that their connection with Yahweh and the temple was some kind of 'once saved always saved' position which meant they could not really sin. This led them to what appears terrible hypocrisy; doing the things of :9 and then coming into the temple to proclaim their innocence. Indeed it seems Judah purposefully committed

their worst sacrilege in the temple on the Sabbath, "in the same day" (Ez. 23:38). The child sacrifices of Ez. 23:39 were committed on the Sabbath. They had justified their perversions by claiming that they were in fact a form of Yahweh worship. That was the only way their consciences could be numbed to do as they did. This is the scenario of Jer. 7:7-10; they offered their children in nearby Gehenna and then came into the temple, reasoning that they were "delivered", saved from Egypt and from threatened judgment, in order to be able to sin without conscience. This was the Old Testament form of continuing in sin because grace abounded (Rom. 6:1).

Jeremiah 7:11 Is this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says Yahweh- A robbers' "den" is a place where they retreat in safety, certain that in their den they are safe from prosecution or the judgment of those they had stolen from. This is what they considered the temple to be. But there was no special, holy place which of itself provided a literal space which shielded from the eyes of Yahweh's judgment. Their holy concept of sacred space, and protection within it, was a false teaching from their prophets.

Jeremiah 7:12 But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first- Commonly enough, the New Testament speaks of baptism as a calling upon the Name of the Lord. This must be understood against its Hebrew background- *qara' beshem Yahweh*, which originally referred to approaching God in sacrifice (Gen. 12:7,8; Ps. 116:4,17). God placed His Name upon places in order to make them suitable places for sacrifice to be offered to Him (Dt. 12:4-7,21; Jer. 7:12). Baptism was thus seen as a sacrificial commitment to Yahweh in solemn covenant.

And see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel- This reminder is in the context of :11, where we saw that Israel considered the temple a sacred space which somehow automatically preserved them from any prosecution for their sins. And so they were reminded that God doesn't operate sacred spaces like that. God's earlier sacred space in Shiloh had been destroyed because of the wickedness of the people, and the Jerusalem temple was not going to be any different. If the people had taken a more Biblical approach, they would have realized that the Scriptures spoke of God's people being taken captive out of their land; the existence of the temple was not going to save them from that.

Jeremiah 7:13 Now, because you have done all these works, says Yahweh, and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you didn't hear; and I called you, but you didn't answer- Several times God speaks of His rising up early in the morning through the ministry of the prophets, every single day since Israel left Egypt (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25). The figure is stressed- God Himself rose up early every day to teach and appeal to His people (Jer. 32:33). Alarm clocks have changed our appreciation of this. Have you ever had to make yourself wake up before dawn, without an alarm clock? You can only do it by having a deep internal, subconscious awareness that you must get up early. You don't sleep well, you keep waking up and wondering if it's time to get up. So to make oneself rise up early was easily understood as a figure expressing great mental effort. And God did this *every day* for centuries...

Jeremiah 7:14 Therefore thus will I do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to

Shiloh- Trust in the physical temple as a place of salvation and automatic shielding from God's judgment is seen today, in that religious people tend to trust in the external structures and symbols of their religion. This is the problem with religion; and human beings are wired with a tendency toward such external religion. The way of Yahweh is the way of the heart, of the Spirit; and external religion militates against this. Their "trust" was in the external form of their religion rather than the essential content- which should have been Yahweh. This "trust" was in the lying words of the prophets who taught this false idea about Jerusalem (:4,8).

Jeremiah 7:15 I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, even the whole seed of Ephraim- As pointed out to them earlier, the fate of the ten tribes was to be theirs. They considered God′s "sight" or presence (s.w.) to be uniquely in the Jerusalem temple. This was not in fact the case, but for the sake of getting through to them, God accepts this for a moment to be true (as the NT language of demons does); and says that in any case, they will be cast out of Jerusalem and His presence in Zion. Ezekiel puts it another way, in saying that God's presence would depart, and the visions of the cherubim departing put that in visual terms. Here, God says that they will be cast out of His presence, even assuming that presence remained in Zion.

Jeremiah 7:16 Therefore don't pray for this people, neither lift up a cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you- Perhaps God was purposefully alluding to how Abraham's intercession saved Lot out of Sodom. But in this case, therefore, the sins of Jerusalem were worse than those of Sodom, and this precluded the power of such intercession. See on :27. For the sake of our prayers, *in some cases* sins of others can be forgiven when otherwise they wouldn't be. For the sake of our conversion of our erring brethren, they can be saved from eternal death and have their sins covered. The Lord's prayer says as much- we ask God to forgive us *our* sins; not 'me my sins'. Only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them (Jer. 7:16 cp. 11:14). Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his "cry" was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same- Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel at this time up to a certain point, but they were *so* hardened in sin at Jeremiah and Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which otherwise, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. If we have any grain of love in us, we will likewise dedicate ourselves to fervent prayer for our brethren, seeing it does have effect and validity within certain boundaries.

The new Testament references to intercession never suggest that the Lord Jesus Christ intercedes in the sense of offering our prayers to God. "Intercession" can be read as another way of describing prayer; this is how the term is invariably used (Jer. 7:16; 27:18; Rom. 11:2; 1 Tim. 2:1). Thus when Jeremiah is told not to intercede for Israel, this meant he was not to pray for them; it does not imply that he was acting as a priest to offer Israel's prayers to God. Nowhere in the Bible is the idea floated that a man can offer another man's prayers to God and thereby make them acceptable. The Greek for "intercession" essentially means to meet a person; prayer / intercession is a meeting with God. There is evidently nothing morally impossible about a man having direct contact with God in prayer without any priest or 'mediator'; the Old Testament abounds with such examples. The fact we are called upon to make intercession for others is surely conclusive proof that "intercession" means prayer, not relaying the

words of another to God (1 Tim. 2:1). This meaning of intercession needs to be borne in mind when we consider its occurrences in Rom. 8. There we are taught that we know not what to pray for as we ought; the Lord Jesus makes intercession for us- i.e. He prays for us- not with words, i.e. not transferring our human words into God's language, not shuttling to and from between us and God as it were, but with His own groanings of the spirit. We don't know how to pray, so Christ prays (intercedes, in the language of Rom. 8) for us.

And yet Jeremiah did pray for the people. We see here the degree to which he recognized that God was and is open to dialogue with man. Perhaps he recalled how God had asked Moses not to intercede with Him not to destroy Israel ("now therefore let Me alone...", Ex. 32:10); and yet Moses had continued interceding and God changed His plan. But now, that was not possible. An end had to come.

Jeremiah 7:17 Don't you see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?- The implication could be that Jeremiah was too slow to perceive exactly how wicked the people were. The sins on the streets of Jerusalem were having idols on every street and naming every street after an idol, just as was done in Babylon.

Jeremiah 7:18 The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of the sky, and to pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger- Again we see that the whole of society, including women and children, were implicated in the idolatry. They would not have considered that they were intentionally doing this to provoke Yahweh to anger, but this is how He read it. For God as it were imputes to our actions their real implications, both positively and negatively.

"The queen of heaven" was a Babylonian fertility god, otherwise called Ishtar, shaped like the moon or the planet Venus. It was the god of female fertility, hence the note that the women and children were a large part of its worship. Each female devotee was expected to sleep with the male cult prostitutes of this cult. And then sacrifice one of their children to it. No wonder this so upset God, seeing that He was the source of Israel's fertility, and their children were born to Him and not to the supposed queen of heaven. The women later protested that they were impenitent of this worship of the queen of heaven, and they did so with the full blessing of their husbands; this was significant, seeing that the cult involved sleeping with other men and offering their children to Ishtar (Jer. 44:19). See on :22.

Jeremiah 7:19 Do they provoke Me to anger? says Yahweh. Don't they provoke themselves, to the confusion of their own faces?- So the theme is repeated- that sin is its own judgment, and they were sinning against their own souls as well as against God. This 'confusion of face' is a term used by both Ezra and Daniel in their prayers, counting themselves amongst those who had suffered this judgment, even though they had not committed the sins of :18 (Ezra 9:7; Dan. 9:7,8). This is a powerful example of how the righteous do not separate themselves from the wicked but consider themselves united in sharing the same judgment; just as the righteous Lord Jesus did for us in tasting death for every man.

Jeremiah 7:20 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, My anger and My wrath shall be poured out on this place, on man, and on animal, and on the trees of the field, and on the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched- At the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, the implication was that the wrath could be

quenched still (Jer. 4:4); but the time would come when it could not be. By the time of Jer. 7:20, God was saying that His wrath could no longer be quenched (as 2 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 34:25). And yet even after this point, God still speaks as if it could be quenched by repentance (Jer. 21:12). Even to the point of self-contradiction, God was so eager to have His wrath quenched. And this God is our God. His eagerness for human repentance should be reflected in our attitudes, both to others and to our own sins. Breaking relationship with people by casting them out of fellowship is not reflective of that.

Jeremiah 7:21 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat meat- As with Saul, God can send "an evil spirit from the Lord" to confirm men in their evil way, and also conversely the Holy Spirit to confirm those who wish to be spiritual in their way. This is why we are to pray "Lead us not into temptation", for God can encourage sinners in their way as He does here. And so Israel went backward and not forward, they were confirmed in their backward path (:24).

Jeremiah 7:22 For I didn't speak to your fathers, nor command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices- God *did* command sacrifices; but He *not so much* commanded them *as* required Israel's spirit of obedience and acceptance of Him. "Not A... not B" is a construction found in Hebrew and other languages which means 'Not so much A, but actually more importantly B'. The sacrifices to the idols in :18 were therefore being performed in the name of Yahweh worship. This explains how shameless Israel were in their idolatry. They had convinced themselves that the false teachings from the false prophets were correct, and therefore they could worship Yahweh through idolatry. And this is an abiding temptation throughout all the generations of God's people.

Jeremiah 7:23 But this thing I commanded them, saying, Listen to My voice, and I will be Your God, and you shall be My people; and walk in all the way that I command you- As explained on :22, the requirement for burnt offerings was not God's essential desire. He wished for obedience and relationship with Him far more than technical obedience; the laws about offerings were to elicit and strengthen that essentially personal relationship between God and individual people. It was quite possible to perform the religious side of Yahweh worship without any personal sense of obedience to His word and relationship with Him. And we all have within us the poles of religion on one side, and spirituality on the other. They were completely on the religious pole, and lacked any real spirituality.

That it may be well with you- "Amend" in :5 is the word here translated 'to do well to'. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change.

Jeremiah 7:24 But they didn't listen nor turn their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart- And went backward, and not forward- The "counsel" or advice / teaching they were following was that of the false prophets (:22). But actually those "counsels" were from their own evil minds. The false teachers were teaching them what they knew the mass of the people subconsciously wanted to hear. It is a feature of human nature that we can even subconsciously perceive what the 'other' or our audience wants us to say and teach-

and to do and say what they want. Hence the weak Christians of the first century heaped to themselves teachers who taught them what they subconsciously wanted to hear, repeating to them what "their own lusts" wanted (2 Tim. 4:3).

And went backward, and not forward- As explained on :21, Israel went backward and not forward, in that they were confirmed in their backward path.

Jeremiah 7:25 Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them- See on Jer. 23:18,22. God reminds Israel that "day after day", ever since they left Egypt, He had *consistently* and *persistently* sent His prophets to them- there was never a day when a prophet wasn't active (Jer. 7:25; 11:7: 25:4; 26:15; 29:19; Am. 3:7; 2:12). And yet obviously we only have the written record of a few of those prophets. It would seem from this that there were prophets apart from Moses who appealed to Israel in the wilderness to repent of their ways.

Jeremiah 7:26 Yet they didn't listen to Me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff: they did worse than their fathers- Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

Jeremiah 7:27 You shall speak all these words to them; but they will not listen to you: you shall also call to them; but they will not answer you- Jeremiah like Ezekiel (Ez. 3:7) was told that Israel wouldn't hear him, but still he pleaded with them to hear (Jer. 9:20; 10:1; 11:6; 16:12; 17:24; 38:15); just as he was told not to pray for them, but he kept praying. This reflected God's hope was that perhaps they would hearken (Jer. 26:3) although He had foretold they wouldn't. Jeremiah was told not to pray for Israel (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11) and yet he did (Jer. 14:20; 42:2,4). And in similar vein, knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would saved (1 Pet. 3:20).

Jeremiah 7:28 You shall tell them, This is the nation that has not listened to the voice of Yahweh their God, nor received instruction- The instruction given and refused was the previous incursions of Judah's enemies and the drought God had brought upon them (Jer. 2:30; Zeph. 3:7).

Truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth- "Truth" is a term often used about covenant relationship. The greatest truth is not some intellectually correct analysis of Bible verses, but of real covenant relationship with God. But they had rejected this, and so God had rejected them (:29). "Truth" in the sense of intellectually correct understanding cannot "perish", nor has it done so over the generations in that some have always understood correctly. God doesn't need His truth in that sense to be defended. But truth in the sense of covenant relationship can perish from those who once held it, and that is the paramount concern.

Jeremiah 7:29 Cut off your hair and throw it away, and take up a lamentation on the bare heights- The AV adds "Cut off your hair, O Jerusalem". They had thrown away their glory, their God, and so they were invited to throw away their natural glory (1 Cor. 11:15). And for a woman to have a shaved head was a sign of her shame. They were being told to do this to themselves, because spiritually that was what they had done. The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman... that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem was to cut her own hair off here in Jer. 7:29). Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4). Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4).

For Yahweh has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath- "Rejected" is the same word translated "rejected" in Jer. 6:19 where Israel rejected God's word. Their response to that word was therefore their judgment, and the refining fire upon them. It is also translated "despised", and Judah had despised the covenant and word of God (Lev. 26:15,43,44 s.w.). But as those verses in Leviticus bring out, although Israel rejected / despised God, He would not "for all that" reject / despise them eternally. This is the great paradox of God's grace to Israel, which serves as eternal encouragement to His sinful people of all ages. He does not actually operate a *measure for measure* policy, of treating His people as they treat Him; although this is not to say that He will not judge them. That generation were "rejected", but that is not to say that there was no hope for their future acceptance; the rejection by God was not eternal.

Jeremiah 7:30 For the children of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight, says Yahweh: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name- The only way their conscience allowed them to do this was because they absolutely convinced themselves that their idolatry was part of their worship of Yahweh. People can believe very strongly in what they want to believe in, and we see here a deep level of faith in their idea that they could serve Yahweh by serving idols. People believe in what they want to believe in. This is where Biblical faith is so different- we are asked to believe in God's word, in His realities and perspectives, which are not what we intuitively would want to believe in of ourselves.

To defile it- The temple was to be defiled by the Babylonians, but as with all judgments, this was but an extension of what they themselves had done.

Jeremiah 7:31 They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I didn't command, nor did it come into My mind- As noted on :30, they did these things because they had persuaded themselves that their idolatry was a form of Yahweh worship. Hence God insists that He had *not* commanded this, it was *not* in His mind that they should do this- whereas it seems the false prophets and the priests were teaching that actually this *was* commanded by God.

Jeremiah 7:32 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that it shall no more be called Topheth, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of Slaughter: for they shall bury in Topheth, until there is no place to bury- Where they had offered their own children, they would also be slain. Again, their judgment was appropriate to their sins. A valley full of bodies is the basis for the dry bones in a valley prophecy of Ez. 37. Out of this awful apostasy and its judgment there could come revival. Such was and is the power of God's Spirit. Remember that Ezekiel was contemporary with Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 7:33 The dead bodies of this people shall be food for the birds of the sky and for the animals of the earth; and none shall frighten them away- Lack of burial was the ultimate shame within their culture, and so their judgments were appropriate to their own self understandings. We recall how when God made His unilateral covenant with Abraham in Gen. 15, the birds of prey were frightened away. This may be implying therefore that the covenant relationship was now broken.

Jeremiah 7:34 Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land shall become a waste- The streets of Jerusalem have previously been mentioned (:17) in the context of their being the scene of idolatry, with each street named after a god, just as in Babylon. The mirth and gladness was therefore in their idol rituals. It was this which led to the land becoming "waste", the phrase used about the result of breaking covenant relationship with Yahweh (Lev. 26:31,33).

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 8

Jeremiah 8:1 At that time, says Yahweh, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves- The valley of dry bones vision in Ez. 37 depicted Israel in captivity as bones waiting to come together and return to the land as a great army. We noted on Jer. 7:32 that this vision was as it were being set up by the picture of Israel's bodies being left in a valley unburied. Jer. 8:1 and other passages in Ezekiel (Ez. 6:5; 24:4) had described both Judah and Israel as dry bones. The feeling of those bones was that "our bones are dried and our hope is lost" (Ez. 37:11). Judah in captivity felt that they had no "hope", that God had cast them off, and that they were unable to have a full relationship with Him outside the land. However, it seems that this was a rather convenient piece of theology for them- they were doing well in Babylon, and despite the opportunity to return to the land, they largely chose to remain in Babylon.

But instead of allowing this revival to happen, instead the people would superstitiously use those dry bones in order to desperately appeal to their false gods to respond (:2). The revival of Ez. 37 was therefore precluded by Judah at the time; that is the point of the connection. But it will ultimately come true in the last days.

Jeremiah 8:2 And they shall spread them before the sun, the moon and all the army of the sky which they have loved, and which they have served, and after which they have walked, and which they have sought, and which they have worshipped: they shall not

be gathered, nor be buried, they shall be for dung on the surface of the earth- See on :1. They were so devoted to their idolatry that even when their leadership were slain, they would use the bones to implore their idols to still save them. They would not be reformed even by the experience of national condemnation. "Walked... sought... worshipped... served" are all terms used of how they ought to have served Yahweh. "They shall not be gathered" stands in tension with the repeated prophecies that judged Judah would then be gathered. They could have been, there could have been a restored Kingdom of God in Judah, but they precluded its fulfilment at that time by refusing to be gathered.

Jeremiah 8:3 Death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue that remain of this evil family, that remain in all the places where I have driven them, says Yahweh of Armies- I suggested on :1 that Ezekiel's prophecy of the revived dry bones could have been fulfilled, but instead of allowing the Spirit of new life to enter them, Judah preferred death to life. They used the dead bones to desperately implore the help of their idols. And this would be done by the exiles, who were driven into exile in "all places". Ezekiel's ministry was specifically to those exiles, and yet he was up against the fact that it was here prophesied that the exiles would preclude the fulfilment of the prophecies of life, and choose death instead.

Jeremiah 8:4 Moreover you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh: Shall men fall, and not rise up again? Shall one turn the wrong way, and not return?- As explained on :1-3, they could have been revived fro those dead bones. Men who take a wrong turning do eventually retrace their steps. But these would not (:5). Jeremiah often makes a play upon the Hebrew word *shub*- it can mean to turn away (from God), and also to 'turn back' or repent (e.g. Jer. 3:1,7,10,12,14,19,22; 4:1). If Israel turned in repentance, then God would return them to their land (Jer. 15:19); if they turned away from Him, He would turn them out into the Gentile world. Our lives are a twisting and turning, either to or away from God; and God is waiting to confirm us in those twists and turns. Jer. 8:4-6 comment that if one turns from the right road, then they must turn back. We all know how when we miss the way in finding an unfamiliar address, there's a tendency to keep on going along the wrong road- because turning back is so psychologically difficult. And this is the image that God uses here- to appeal to Israel, and ourselves, not to foolishly 'backslide', keep on turning away, from Him- just because that's the course we're set upon.

Jeremiah 8:5 Why then is this people of Jerusalem sliding back by a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit, they refuse to return- The Hebrew words for “sliding back” and “return” are identical. The image is of a man on a muddy slope; he slides back either into sin, or into the way of the Lord. We must ‘slide’ one way or the other; every micro decision which makes up the stream of daily life is confirmed by God one way or the other. The refusal to return after taking a wrong turning (:4) is readily imaginable by our generation. If we take a wrong turning, we must come to a point where we humble ourselves and turn back. If we refuse to do this, then we shall be forever lost. We continue going further and further along the wrong path only because we are proud. But they were on a perpetual sliding back from God's intended path. They "refused to return", because they refused to be ashamed (Jer. 3:3 s.w.); and they "refused" God's word through the prophets because it shamed them (Zech. 7:11). It was pride which was at the core of their refusal, and their perpetual lostness.

Jeremiah 8:6 I listened and heard, but they didn't speak aright- The speaker here is God (:5). He was intently listening for the words of repentance He so wished to hear. We see here His eagerness for human repentance. As we go forth into this world to witness, the word we preach is being watched over by God, with His ear eager to hear any sounds of response. This word for intently listening is that used for God's wish that people would intently listen to *His* word (Jer. 6:17,19 etc.). If we listen, then God will listen to us. Again we see related our attitude to God's word, and His attitude to our words in prayer. Bible reading and response thereto is part and parcel of God's response to our words in prayer.

No man repents him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Each one turns to his course, as a horse that rushes headlong in the battle- "What have I done?" is the question God asked Adam and Cain (s.w. Gen. 3:13; 4:10). Adam is everyman, and he specifically represents Israel in their sin. But they refused to listen, and were like a horse set on a course, blinkered to anything apart from rushing headlong forwards along a chosen course. Their question was "Why has Yahweh done this to us?" (Jer. 5:19); when the question should have been rather elicited as to "What have I done?".

Jeremiah 8:7 Yes, the stork in the sky knows her appointed times; and the turtle-dove and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming; but My people don't know Yahweh's law- The parallel is between knowing God's law, and repenting (:6). To know God's word is not therefore an academic issue; engagement with His word as intended will elicit repentance. The birds return from migration naturally, and there is the sense that repentance ought to have been somehow the natural response from Israel. A child will naturally repent of bad behaviour; but Israel didn't do this because they were driven by an underlying narrative, that they were right, God was unjust, and they were too proud to accept they had sinned. This is the awful power of human pride. Israel therefore chose to be oblivious of what they well knew; there was no (awareness of) God's judgment in their way of life (Is. 59:8; Jer. 5:4) and therefore they lacked that innate sense of judgment to come which they ought to have had, as surely as the stork knows the coming time for her migration (Jer. 8:7).

Jeremiah 8:8 How do you say, We are wise, and the law of Yahweh is with us? But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has worked falsely- As explained on :7, engagement with God's law was and is designed to elicit repentance. But it didn't in Israel's case, because their scribes had misrepresented God's law as meaning that their idolatry was in fact legitimate worship of Yahweh. As noted on Jer. 7:8,10 and often, the priests and prophets were teaching the illiterate people what they subconsciously wanted to hear. And so it was not simply that the false prophets mislead the ignorant masses; the masses wanted to believe that they had not sinned and were free to worship idols as part of their Yahweh worship. And so all society were judged. Those who said "The law of Yahweh is with us" were the prophets and priests, of whom Jeremiah was one. Here he is therefore deeply condemning his very own people. "False.... falsely" is the same word used in 2 Chron. 18:22, where God put a false or lying spirit in the mouth of prophets, to confirm His apostate people in the path they chose. And so at Jeremiah's time, "the prophets prophesy falsely" (Jer. 5:31; 6:13 s.w.), falsely saying that the temple would never fall (Jer. 7:14), twisting Yahweh's words to say that.

Jeremiah 8:9 The wise men are disappointed, they are dismayed and taken: behold, they have rejected the word of Yahweh; and what kind of wisdom is in them?- Misrepresenting Yahweh's word (:8) was the same as rejecting it. This needs some meditation. Interpreting God's word can so easily be done with our own unconscious agenda in mind; and this can effectively be a rejecting of His word. "Disappointed [ashamed]... dismayed" is the phrase used of all the other nations overcome by the northern invader (Is. 37:27). As noted often so far in Jeremiah, the deliverance of Jerusalem at the last minute during the Assyrian invasion a few generations previously could have been repeated during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. But it wasn't, because there was not enough repentance. And this is the tragedy of those who twist God's word to what they wish it would say- they end their days in disappointment. Judah were not ashamed [s.w. "disappointed"] at their sins (:12), but they would be ultimately. So the disappointment and dismay spoken of here finally will be true only at judgment day. And then it will be too late to change the outcome.

Jeremiah 8:10 Therefore will I give their wives to others, and their fields to those who shall possess them- Land and wife were the supreme possessions of a man, and God would give these to others.

For each one from the least even to the greatest is given to covetousness; from the prophet even to the priest each one deals falsely- The leadership reflected what the people wanted, and so all of the society was equally guilty. Although there was a special priesthood, it was clearly God's intention that all Israel should be like priests; they were to be a "*Kingdom* of priests" (Ex. 19:6). Israel were all “saints”, and yet saints and priests are paralleled in passages like Ps. 132:16. Israel in the wilderness had clothes which didn’t wear out- just as the Priestly clothes didn’t, and were handed down from generation to generation (so Ex. 29:29 implies). Israel were to teach every man his neighbour and brother, saying, Know the Lord (Heb. 8:11). God therefore saw all Israel as represented by the priests (Hos. 4:9; Is. 24:2; Jer. 5:31; 8:10).

Jeremiah 8:11 They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace- There were false prophets both in Judah as the Babylonians approached, and also amongst those of them already in exile (Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Ez. 13:16). They were assuring the sinful people that in fact they were at peace with God, and that contrary to the prophetic message of desolation at the hand of the Babylonians, they would instead have "peace". This is described in Jeremiah as "slightly" healing the great wound or illness of Judah. That wound is described ambiguously; it was a wound or breach in themselves caused by God's smiting of them in the earlier Babylonian incursions (Jer. 14:19), but also caused by them to God Almighty. "Lightly" carries with it the idea of not serious, light hearted, superficial, trifling. And we must likewise beware of this kind of religion that is pedalled in the name of Christianity; not facing our personal issues, and using a few Bible words from here and there to superficially cover over the most fundamental issues of our eternal destiny. And this was and is so attractive. But sin and its consequences are far deeper than any superficial, light hearted covering. It requires nothing less than the blood and word of the Lord Jesus.

*Jeremiah 8:12 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush- "*Ashamed" is s.w. "disappointed" in :9. They refused to be ashamed, yet they will be ashamed ultimately- in the shame

of the rejected in the last day. We are either ashamed of our sins in repentance; or we will be made ashamed of them in the judgment (Jer. 6:15 RVmg.)- it's shame either way. We either wail for our sins now, or we will wail for them at judgment day (Jer. 9:19,20). Our shame should be before God for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God. Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness. Thus Jeremiah recalls how his repentance involved being ashamed, and yet then being "instructed" (Jer. 31:19). It's through knowing this kind of shame before God that we come to a position where we are unashamed.

Therefore shall they fall among those who fall; in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, says Yahweh- The allusion is to falling down before idols. By doing so they were living out how they were to fall before the nations of those idols. They would be cast down by God, but they had cast themselves down. Sin is its own condemnation.

Jeremiah 8:13 I will utterly consume them, says Yahweh: no grapes shall be on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade- By grace, the people were not utterly consumed. They produced enough fruit even after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem to bring produce to the temple site as an offering (Jer. 41:5). Jer. 2:21 had stated that Judah brought forth bad grapes; but here, the Hebrew suggests there were no grapes brought forth. So bringing forth an appearance of spiritual fruit is going to be revealed as having no fruit.

And the things that I have given them shall pass away from them- The idea is "And I will give them to those who shall pass over them". This is the language of invading armies (Is. 8:7; Dan. 11:10,40).

Jeremiah 8:14 Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the fortified cities, and let us be silent there- This was an act of disobedience. There was to be destruction in the land, but there was potentially safety / salvation in Jerusalem for those who were obedient and repentant (Jer. 4:5-7). This was a test to Judah, because they trusted in their defenced cities (Jer. 5:17). But the prophecy of Jeremiah 4 (and Mic. 5:11) asks them to believe that these cities would fall, and there would be salvation only in Jerusalem. And yet they were disobedient, and did go into those other defenced cities.

For Yahweh our God has put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against Yahweh- The sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross.

Jeremiah 8:15 We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of healing, and behold, dismay!- The false prophets predicted "peace", but it didn't come. And now the people blame this dashed expectation on Yahweh. They liked to cling on to their belief that the false prophets were in fact prophesying from Yahweh, and therefore the failed fulfilments of their words were Yahweh's fault. This was just perversity.

"Good" here refers to the promised Kingdom of God. The future Kingdom is called “good things” in Is. 52:7 (quoted in Rom. 10:15) and Jer. 8:15. ″All things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28) doesn’t mean that somehow everything will work out OK for us in this life- for so often they don’t. We are asked to carry the Lord’s cross, to suffer now and be redeemed in glory later at His return, in the “good things” of the Kingdom.

Jeremiah 8:16 The snorting of his horses is heard from Dan: at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones the whole land trembles; for they have come, and have devoured the land and all that is in it; the city and those who dwell therein- News of the Babylonian advance came from Dan in the north, which was in the territory of the ten tribes. This continues the theme that Judah were intended to have learnt from what happened to the ten tribes. The past tense is put for the future here, so certain was God's word of fulfilment. The people trembled in fear because of the Babylonian advance, and yet endlessly assured themselves that the predictions of "peace" by the false prophets were true. This is a quite imaginable situation, and is yet another internal coherence to the Biblical record.

Jeremiah 8:17 For, behold, I will send serpents, adders, among you, which will not be charmed; and they shall bite you, says Yahweh- "Charmed" is also translated "orator" or "prayer" (Is. 3:3; 26:16). No prayer, using even the most charming words, was now going to be heard; and for this reason Jeremiah had been told not to pray for the people. But he continued to do so, knowing that God is always open to dialogue. See on Jer. 7:16. There may be an intentional allusion to the serpents in the wilderness (s.w. Num. 21:6,8) whose deadly bite could only be healed by looking in desperate repentance at the brazen serpent, which represented their lifted up future Messiah. For in all these words of judgment there are allusions which suggest the possibility of forgiveness and restoration even at the last moment.

Jeremiah 8:18 Oh that I could comfort myself against sorrow! My heart is faint within me- What begins as Jeremiah's cry from the heart merges into God's- for it is Yahweh who becomes the speaker in :19. Jeremiah's conflicted emotions can be read as his having a too positive view of Israel, and his book of lamentations could therefore be read as a statement of protest at God's judgments. But it could also be that Jeremiah was so in tune with God's thinking that these struggles at the amount of suffering brought upon Judah were also God's. The struggles within Jeremiah would therefore reflect God's changes of mind and feeling about judging His people were endlessly "kindled together", just as they were reflected in Hosea's oscillations of feeling concerning Gomer; see on Hos. 11:8. Jeremiah's heart was "faint within me" both before (Jer. 8:18) and after (Lam. 1:22), the destruction of Jerusalem. He was so sure that the prophetic word that he even felt as if it had come true before it did. It was the heart of Judah which was faint (Is. 1:5), and Jeremiah identified totally with their feelings in sorrow with them.

Jeremiah 8:19 Behold, the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people from a land that is very far off: Isn’t Yahweh in Zion? Isn’t her King in her? Why have they provoked Me to anger with their engraved images, and with foreign vanities?- Both God and Jeremiah foresee here the captivity in the "land that is very far off". Or we can read with AV "Because of them that dwell in a far country". Until the cherubim of glory departed from Zion, God's *shekinah* glory was still there. Despite that very clear

statement of His presence in Zion, they still worshipped the vain idols of their enemies. It all seemed so incomprehensible even to God. This impression that God found it incomprehensible reflects the degree to which He limits His omniscience in order to enter into legitimate relationship with His people in real time. Israel after all was the only nation to have the visible symbols of their God's living presence amongst them, as seen in the shekinah glory between the cherubim. And still they preferred the vanities of foreign idols. The same apparently incomprehensible rejection of an evidently living God and Lord goes on today. See on :22.

Jeremiah 8:20 The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved- Jeremiah seems to now be thinking ahead, to after the destruction of Jerusalem. That harvest of judgment (Jer. 51:33; Rev. 14:15) would end, and so would the 'Summer harvest', the harvest of tree fruits which followed the main harvest season, which was from April to June- and yet still he foresaw that Judah would not be saved. He speaks in the present tense of that which was yet future. "Saved" is the word which in Greek would form part of the word 'Jesus', Yah saves. And this has been the abiding tragedy of Israelite history; that all the harvests of judgment did not bring them to accept Yah's salvation, which is now in the person of His Son Jesus. Not being saved is paralleled effectively with there being no fruit harvest. Spiritual fruit was required for the intended salvation to come, and that meant repentance. Perhaps in a literal sense, the people looked for salvation from the Babylonian siege in the summer, but it didn't come. Jerusalem fell in August 587 BC (2 Chron. 36:18,19), which would have been at the end of the 'summer [harvest]'.

Jeremiah 8:21 For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt: I mourn; dismay has taken hold on me- We noted on :18 how as the heart of Judah which was faint (Is. 1:5), so was Jeremiah's. He identified totally with their feelings in sorrow with them. And yet "My people" surely speaks of Yahweh Himself as well. God likens Himself to a young man hopelessly in love with a woman (Israel) who was really no good, a man who took the blame when it was undoubtedly her fault (Is. 54:6,7), grieving that she wouldn't return to Him (Am. 4:8 etc.). "I am broken with their whorish heart... I am crushed" (Ez. 6:9; Jer. 8:21 NIV). God likens Himself to a broken man because of Israel's fickleness. He went through the pain of the man who knows He has been forgotten by the woman he still desperately remembers (Hos. 2:13). "Hurt" in Hebrew carries the idea of a breach, and we recall the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Jer. 39:2; 52:7); indeed the word seems to have the sense of the rape of a virgin when we read that the virgin daughter of Zion had been breached (Jer. 14:17). And both Jeremiah and even God, according to Jer. 8:21, felt themselves breached in this breach of God's people and city. This was how closely identified God was with His wicked people; and how much more does He feel with us in Christ, we who at least seek not to live as Judah did at that time...

Jeremiah 8:22 Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why then isn't the health of the daughter of my people recovered?- Gilead's balm was well known (Gen. 37:25; Ez. 27:17). There was balm and a physician in Gilead which could heal the sick person- but they wouldn't go to it. This continues the sense of incomprehension we explained on :19. The cure was readily available- but Judah refused to make use of it.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 9

Jeremiah 9:1 Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a spring of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!- Jeremiah wishes he had more emotional capacity than he has as a person. His desire to weep may mean that he wept before God, and therefore thought he could change God's mind about Judah's judgment.

But like us, Jeremiah didn't always have such a heart of compassion. Initially he didn't even want to preach to his people. And he even prayed that he would so grieve for them in regard to the message he gave them, that he would cry for them day and night. And this prayer was heard. For by Lamentations, this is just what he was doing. And if what we read of Jeremiah troubles us, we too can pray for a heart that bleeds, and through the experience of life which the Lord allows us, He will develop such a heart in those who want it. You may be so caught up in your business, your family, your ecclesia even, your web of social contact… that in honest moments, you know that your heart doesn't bleed as it should. You see the needs and pain and struggle of men and women, but it doesn't touch your heart very deeply. Jeremiah may well have been like this; but he prayed for a new heart, and so can you. Jeremiah had actually been commanded by God to have such a level of grief for His people: "Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them; Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken" (Jer. 14:17). Jeremiah's grief was God's word of care and concern to the people; and so it can be with us. Jeremiah was to be like this, to reflect God's passion for His people; so he prayed that he would have such a heart of true compassion [note that the chapters in Jeremiah are totally out of sequence chronologically]; and in the end, he found it.

The Biblical record contains a large number of references to the frequent tears of God's people, both in bleeding hearts for other people, and in recognition of their own sin. And as we have seen, these things are related. Consider:

- "My eye pours out tears to God" [i.e. in repentance?] (Job 16:20)
- Isaiah drenches Moab with tears (Is. 16:9)
- Jeremiah is a fountain of tears for his people (Jer. 9:1; Lam. 2:8)
- David's eyes shed streams of tears for his sins (Ps. 119:136; 6:6; 42:3)
- Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37)
- Blessed are those who weep (Lk. 6:21)
- Mary washed the Lord's feet with her tears (Lk. 7:36-50)
- Paul wept for the Ephesians daily (Acts 20:19,31).

We have to ask whether there are any tears, indeed any true emotion, in our walk with our Lord. Those who go through life with dry eyes are surely to be pitied. Surely, in the light of the above testimony, we are merely hiding behind a smokescreen if we excuse ourselves by thinking that we're not the emotional type. Nobody can truly go through life humming to themselves "I am a rock, I am an island… and an island never cries". The very emotional centre of our lives must be touched. The tragedy of our sin, the urgency of the world's salvation, the amazing potential provided and secured in the cross of Christ…surely we cannot be passive to these things. We live in a world where emotion and passion are decreasing. Being politically correct, looking right to others… these things are becoming of paramount importance in all levels of society. The passionless, postmodernist life can't be for us, who have been moved and touched at our very core by the work and call and love of Christ to us. For us there must still be what Walter Brueggemann called "the gift of amazement", that ability to feel and say "Wow!" to God's grace and plan of salvation for us.

Jeremiah wished he had more moisture in his body, so that he could weep both day and night for Judah- and yet he goes on to describe them as proceeding from evil to evil in an ever downward spiral, shooting lies everywhere… Everyone is special, nobody is like anyone else. This is how God sees His children, and we should reflect this perspective. It is this which will make us arrestingly different from the people with whom we daily walk. We will cry out with Jeremiah: “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”, unmoved and lost as they are in their own petty issues (Lam. 1:12).

Jeremiah 9:2 Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men- "Lodging place" is the same word translated "lodge" in Jer. 14:8. There, Jeremiah seems to see it as tragic that God had felt this way about His people. And indeed it was and is. The desire to leave them was because they were adulterous women and dishonest men. "Treacherous" is used about Judah's marital infidelity in Jer. 3:8,20; Hos. 5:7. And so the God of all grace, the most surpassingly loving husband, wanted to become an endlessly travelling man, weary of the road, who wanted to just turn in to a one night motel and rest from His weariness. He elsewhere speaks as if the emotional drain of the relationship wearied Him (Jer. 15:6). This of course is Almighty God adjusting Himself to mortal man, allowing Himself to feel through our limitations.

We can too easily assume that these are the thoughts of Jeremiah. But the references to "my people" in the passage point us toward God as the person expressing these feelings. And then in Jer. 9:3 we have the speaker defined: "... and they know not me, said the Lord". These were *God's* thoughts. He wished He had human tear ducts to weep with... this was how He felt for them. There is a mutuality between God and His people. Several passages in Jeremiah shows how the prophet feels or says something, and Yahweh responds to it (e.g. Jer. 9:1,2 = Jeremiah; v.3 = God; v. 10 = Jeremiah; v. 11 = God's response).

Jeremiah 9:3 They bend their tongue, as their bow, for falsehood; and they are grown strong in the land, but not for truth: for they proceed from evil to evil, and they don’t know Me, says Yahweh- Jeremiah's mourning turns into that of God Himself. The process of inspiration meant that Jeremiah felt as God did. The proceeding from evil to evil refers to how God was confirming them in the downward path they had chosen; see on Jer. 7:21,24. Specifically, their gossiping was associated with 'proceeding from evil to evil' (Jer. 9:3); it is part of a downward spiral of spirituality. Once gossip starts a quarrel, it's like water bursting out of a dam; soon the whole land of Israel will be flooded (Prov. 17:14 NIV). Because gossip is such an epitome of the flesh, it is ranked along with sins like fornication, idolatry and murder in Ez. 22:9. There are passages in Jeremiah which describe slander and gossiping as being the reason why God condemned Judah (Jer. 6:28; 9:3-8). The soap operas of the world are full of this kind of gossip and intrigue; they glorify it. And the more we feed ourselves with these things, the more likely we will be to see gossip as just part of life. And yet let's not mistake the words of the prophets; it is seen as murder, because effectively it puts to death a man's relationship with his fellows. God *hates* the man who sows such discord among brethren through gossip in the church (Prov. 6:19). "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Prov. 26:22). That casual remark, that passing on of information under the guise of

'concern'- it was a body blow to the one you gossiped about, a blow so hard that it caused deep internal damage.

Jeremiah 9:4 Beware everyone of his neighbour, and don't trust in any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will go about with slanders- This speaks to Israel as if they were all *Esau*, being warned about the cunning of his brother Jacob: "Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant". Again, in a clever way, both Jacob and Esau are shown to be in the wrong, and Jacob is therefore treated as Esau. See on :26. Perhaps Jeremiah's over positive view of his own people and the priesthood, which would've included his own family and brothers, needed some correction; he is warned here that they will seek to slander and destroy him, which in fact they later did.

Jeremiah 9:5 They will deceive each one his neighbour and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves to commit iniquity- Jerusalem 'wearied herself' with lies in that the "lies" were her dishonest covenants with the various surrounding nations, as well as with Yahweh (s.w. Ez. 24:12). She even became 'weary' of this way of life; but still she would not be purged. The Hebrew word carries the idea of loathing; they in a sense hated their sin (s.w. Jer. 9:12), climaxing in Jerusalem loathing herself and wanting to pluck off her own breasts (Ez. 23:34). The world is full of people weary with sin, who loathe their own addictions and sin, yet they will not surrender themselves to God's demands and be purged. We note that as Judah were wearied in their life of sin, so God was wearied [s.w.] in His endless relenting regarding punishing them, and weary of the pain of being deceived and rejected by them (Jer. 15:6). The picture is being built up of a relationship coming to an end, with both sides eliciting the same negative emotions in the other. The God of Israel is not far off and stone faced; He is passionately in relationship with His people, with all the feelings that go with being in relationship.

Jeremiah 9:6 Your habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know Me, says Yahweh- The ESV is correct: "Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD". The sense is of a downward spiral of spiritual declension. They were so obsessed with immediate wealth that they deceived and oppressed their brethren to get it. This is true of some Pentecostal pastors today just as much as it was of Israel in those days. And indeed, materialism is an addiction, and it leads to an ever increasing spiral of deceit and oppression, however indirect or operated through third parties, in order to attain it.

Jeremiah 9:7 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how should I deal with the daughter of My people?- This rhetorical question reflects the 'humanity of God'. He really was as it were in despair at what to do in order to keep them as His people. There was so much dross that He could only melt them in the fire of the Babylonian invasion in order to remove that dross. But it happened that they were resistant even to that; Ezekiel uses the same figure about the same people at this time, and he says that the cauldron holding the metal was destroyed by the heat, and no dross was removed.

Not only in our own self-examination should there be unity between our judgment and that of the Father; elsewhere it is Jeremiah who was told to "know and

try" Israel's way, just as God said that He did (Jer. 6:27 cp. 9:7; 17:10). Our 'judging' of others, as well as ourselves, must be according to God's judgments of them. And further; if we know the judgments of God, then we will be more strongly motivated in our preaching and pastoral work, to pull men out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 23).

Jeremiah 9:8 Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit: one speaks peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in his heart he lays wait for him- The idea in Jer. 5:16 was that every arrow in the quiver of the invaders would bring death; but this was because the tongue of the Jews had been as deadly arrows. This reflects the huge importance God places upon honest words and not being hurtful with our tongues.

Our world's devaluing and misunderstanding of sin has likely affected all of us. We see the rich abusing the poor, manipulation of all sorts going on, petty injustices, hypocrisy in the ecclesia, falsehood, cheating in business, white lies, unkindness to ones' brethren… and we shrug and think that it's just normal, part of life as it is. And yet for the prophets, these things were a catastrophe. Saying one thing to someone whilst feeling differently about them in the heart was the reason for God passionately wishing to take vengeance "on a nation such as this" (Jer. 9:8,9)- note that the whole nation are counted as guilty, in that society just shrugged at hypocritical words. What to us are the daily minor sins and injustices of life were to them issues of cosmic proportion.

Jeremiah 9:9 Shall I not visit them for these things, says Yahweh- The "things" are those of :8, the apparently relatively minor sins of deceit and dishonest words. We would rather think that the "things" in view would be idolatry. But dishonest words and hypocritical speaking are of such critical importance to God.

Shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?- God had been Israel's wife and was in love with her. His deep desire for avenging was therefore absolutely connected with His great love for her. There had to be response from Him. This rhetorical question, enquiring as to whether Yahweh should take vengeance on Israel, is thrice repeated in Jeremiah (Jer. 5:9,29; 9:9). The answer of course is "Yes, God would be justified in doing so". And that answer was perhaps the repentance which God sought in order to avert the coming of His judgment.

Jeremiah 9:10 For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the pastures of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none passes through; neither can men hear the voice of the livestock; both the birds of the sky and the animals are fled, they are gone- Jeremiah so believed the words he was relaying to Israel, that he now interjects with his own grief at what was to happen. Jeremiah speaks of the pain of *his* heart after having spoken of the pain that would reach unto the heart of Judah (Jer. 4:18,19). The pain of their heart became the pain of his heart. And yet Jeremiah had the mind of God in this sense, as David was after God's own heart. This is reflected by the way in which it is very difficult at times in Jeremiah to decide who is speaking- Jeremiah, or God. Jer. 9:1-3,10,11 is a good passage to work through from this perspective, asking 'Who is speaking? Jeremiah, or God?'. Their minds were clearly so intertwined. Both of them are described, in consecutive verses, as rising up early to plead with Israel (Jer. 25:3,4).

But the picture presented here is of the complete destruction of all life in the land, through fire. But this didn't happen; soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, the people who remained [who were many] still brought food offerings to the site of the

temple (Jer. 41:5). This word will come finally true, for the 'heavens and earth' of Israel are to be destroyed by fire in the last days just as the world of Noah's time was destroyed by water (2 Pet. 3). But in Jeremiah's time, the full extent of the planned wrath didn't come about. Perhaps there was a modicum of repentance or intercession which stopped it, or perhaps God delayed, reapplied or rescheduled His full intentions because He knew that Judah would not repent as intended.

Jeremiah 9:11 I will make Jerusalem heaps, a dwelling place of jackals; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant- As explained on Jer. 9:10, this didn't completely happen to the extent here prophetically envisaged. As noted on :10, we note again the shift of speaker from Jeremiah to God. What began as Jeremiah's interjection of pain in :10 now merges into the actual prophetic thoughts of God. The jackal comes to eat what the lion has left in the carcase; the idea was that after the lions of Babylon had finished with Jerusalem, there would be others who came to totally destroy her. But this didn't historically happen, because it seems God relented from the full execution of His wrath. The language here of Jerusalem's destruction into heaps haunted by jackals is applied to Babylon (Jer. 51:37). What latter day Babylon does to Jerusalem shall be done to her; and that is the theme of the book of Revelation, where the seals of judgment upon Israel become the vials of judgment upon the beast system.

Jeremiah 9:12 Who is the wise man, that may understand this? Who is he to whom the mouth of Yahweh has spoken, that he may declare it?- Whoever truly understood God's word would declare it. Hearing God's word in faith is associated with declaring it (Jer. 9:12). “Your participation in the [preaching of the] gospel” is paralleled with “your faith” (Phil. 1:5). If we really believe, we will be involved in the preaching of what we believe. The false prophets were the "wise men" of Jer. 8:9. If they were truly wise they would declare the same truths which Jeremiah was stating. It would be true to say that attitudes to evangelism reflect the sincerity of an individual's belief.

Why is the land perished and burned up like a wilderness, so that none passes through?- Already God had sent famine, so the land was perished, and for fear of the Babylonian incursions, Palestine was no longer a highway and the Jews were scared to travel. Perhaps "the land" in view is also specifically that of the ten tribe kingdom which had already been destroyed, and which Judah was intended to take warning from.

Jeremiah 9:13 Yahweh says, Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, neither walked therein- God's law and His voice are paralleled. The word was to be seen as a living word, God actively in ongoing communication with people; rather than a set of regulations which could be partially obeyed on the level of cultural conformity to the faith of their fathers. And that is a challenge which echoes to God's people of all generations.

Jeremiah 9:14 But have walked after the stubbornness of their own heart, and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them- The choice was between walking after God's word (:13), or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks

directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

Jeremiah 9:15 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink- This judgment was taken by the Lord Jesus on the cross, who was there "the servant of Yahweh", which Israel had been intended to be. Wormwood and gall were what would be the result of false teachers encouraging the people to commit idolatry (Dt. 29:18). So they had fed themselves with these things, and their judgment to drink them was therefore God's confirmation of people in what they themselves had chosen. And that is how all His judgments operate.

Jeremiah 9:16 I will scatter them also among the nations, whom neither they nor their fathers have known- Judah were to be scattered to the Babylonian empire, whom they had not "known"; although they eagerly served their gods, to the point of sacrificing their children to them. But they didn't "know" them in the Hebraic sense of having relationship with them. For Yahweh was and is unique in offering passionate personal relationship. This sets the background for the magnificent statement in :24 that God's true people "know" Him.

And I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them- As explained on Jer. 9:10, this didn't completely happen to the extent here prophetically envisaged. The jackals who were to come after the Babylonian lions to finish off the carcass (see on :11) didn't come.

Jeremiah 9:17 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Consider, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for the skilful women, that they may come- The wonder of this is to be 'considered'; for as explained on :18, it is quite something for God Almighty to invite mourning over "us", the failed relationship He was in with Israel, with all the tragedy of that statement. The idea of mourning women was that they were intended to provoke mourning in others, and this was God's desire too. Or it could be that in line with the statement in :1, both God and Jeremiah felt unable to lament as much as they wished, they were at full personal capacity, and 'needed' others to mourn in addition.

Jeremiah 9:18 And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters- “The Lord of hosts” even calls the mourning women to come “and raise a lament over *us*” (Jer. 9:17,18). The “us” is God and Israel. The tragedy is awful, beyond words. All commentary is bathos. His love is wondrous. The intimacy is such that some versions replace the "us" with "you". But this is an example of translation bias when the translator cannot accept the wonder of God's true revelation.

Jeremiah 9:19 For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion, How are we ruined! We are greatly confounded- We are either ashamed of our sins in repentance; or we will be made ashamed of them in the judgment (Jer. 6:15 RVmg.)- it's shame either way. We either wail for our sins now, or we will wail for them at judgment day (Jer. 9:19,20).

Because we have forsaken the land, because they have cast down our dwellings- The idea is "Our dwellings have cast us out". This is picturing the inhabitants of Zion as they realize they are going to be taken into captivity. Hence GNB: "Listen to the sound of crying in Zion: "We are ruined! We are completely disgraced! We must leave our land; our homes have been torn down". The homes that were torn down are those of the wealthy, the historical records emphasize that both the "great houses" and the temple were thrown down. So those "in Zion" who are wailing are the wealthy leadership; for it was they and not the poor of the land who were taken into captivity. The mourning women are called to add their voice to these women who are actually wailing as they face captivity (:18).

Jeremiah 9:20 Yet hear the word of Yahweh, you women, and let your ear receive the word of His mouth; and teach your daughters wailing, and each one her neighbour lamentation- To "hear the word of Yahweh" is a call to repentance. Even when facing captivity, these women could still repent. We note in Jeremiah that the women are given more emphasis than in contemporary accounts. Later in Jeremiah we learn that they were absolutely behind the behaviour of their men. If they lamented for the tragedy of what had happened in spiritual terms, and not just for the human tragedy of it all, then they would soon return. We see God's enthusiasm for their repentance, imagining it, wanting to even teach them repentance.

The women were to teach this song of repentance through lamentation to others. Those who heard God's call to repentance are to *naturally* teach repentance to others (Jer. 9:20 cp. 19). If we have really received forgiveness, and have thereby grasped hold of salvation here and now, the wonder of our own experience will inevitably lead us to tell others, as it did David and Peter.

Jeremiah 9:21 For death has come up into our windows, it is entered into our palaces; to cut off the children from outside, and the young men from the streets- This is part of the dirge of repentance God wanted them to learn (:20). They were to accept that the judgment of death had come upon them like a flood, right up to their windows out of which they were looking. Their great houses, or "palaces", had been entered by death. But they were still alive. It was like the living lamenting their own death. The idea was that they recognized that the judgment of death was correct and appropriate; and yet by grace they would be saved out of it. It was as if from the windows they were watching the children and youths perishing in the streets- even though they had sacrificed their own firstborns to the idols. This was the picture alluded to in Zech. 8:5, where in the reborn Zion, the youth and children would play happily in the streets when all possibility of such condemnation was taken away.

Jeremiah 9:22 Speak, Thus says Yahweh- It is as if the funeral dirge was being taught to them in stanzas.

The dead bodies of men shall fall as dung on the open field, and as the handful after the harvester; and none shall gather them- This is a repeat of Jeremiah's

prophetic words, but the repentant women are asked to repeat them. By so doing they would demonstrate their acceptance of the justice of the condemnation. The harvester dropped handfuls of grain which the impoverished gleaners like Ruth then picked up; but there would be no gleaners. Repentance involves accepting that God's judgments are right, and placing them in our own mouths in agreement.

Jeremiah 9:23 Thus says Yahweh, Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, don't let the rich man glory in his riches- This is still part of the song of mourning and repentance which Yahweh wanted them to sing (see on :20). The false prophets were the "wise men" of Jer. 8:9. And so the repentant dirge was to involve a repudiation of those men in favour of a humble acceptance of God's word and principles (:24). The rich and mighty are identified here with the "wise men". They had become wealthy through religiously and spiritually abusing the people. The wealthy women who were about to go into captivity (for the "poor of the land" didn't go into captivity) were to resign the importance of personal wealthy and glory. This too is part of repentance.

Jeremiah 9:24 But let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me- The repentance song (:20) was to involve the recognition that the only true understanding is repentant relationship with Yahweh. This must be given full weight today, where "understanding" and "knowledge" have become understood to mean pure academic, theological knowledge. But the true understanding is in repentance and from our knees, arising to relationship with God. The glory in 'knowing' Yahweh is set against the background of :16. Judah were to be scattered to the Babylonian empire, whom they had not "known"; although they eagerly served their gods, to the point of sacrificing their children to them. But they didn't "know" them in the Hebraic sense of having relationship with them. For Yahweh was and is unique in offering passionate personal relationship.

That I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says Yahweh- The women were about to go into captivity and had lost their loved ones. But the repentance song involves accepting that Yahweh is just, and full of grace, kindness and righteousness. His "delight" is in them; He just loves doing them. But Israel had turned away from them. Although God does slay the wicked, He has no "delight" in that (Ez. 18:23,32 s.w.). Repentance involves the faith that God's dominant desire is kindness and salvation, although He does justly judge sin. This would have been a hard funeral dirge to sing, lamenting over the dead bodies of those who had just been slain. Repentance and humility before God involves accepting that He is essentially just as well as gracious. And so many find this song hard to sing. It is the spirit of Hab. 3:17,18, where despite the hard reality of the Babylonian destruction, Habakkuk still rejoices and exalts in the God whose ways he obviously struggled to immediately understand. This is in fact the true understanding and knowledge of God.

Jeremiah 9:25 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will punish all those who are circumcised along with the uncircumcised- Jer. 9:25 RV speaks of punishing "them which are circumcised in their uncircumcision". As Paul makes clear, one can be circumcised physically but not spiritually. A person can be circumcised yet effectively uncircumcised at one and the same time. This is the nature of the spiritual schizophrenia which so afflicts us. This verse ends the funeral dirge of repentance which God had wished the women to sing in :20-24; now He points out that physical

circumcision is not going to make any difference. Perhaps the false prophets had taught that circumcision meant that the covenant was with Judah and they could not therefore be destroyed. The fact the ten tribes were destroyed, although circumcised, was wilfully overlooked. As circumcision was seen as something which was the duty of the women to perform, this point is perhaps made at this point because the women have just been specifically addressed. Covenant relationship involved understanding and knowing God in repentance (see on :24)- not in physical circumcision.

Jeremiah 9:26 Egypt, Judah, Edom and the children of Ammon, Moab and all that have the corners of their hair cut off, who dwell in the wilderness; for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart- This makes it clear right back then that circumcision was a matter of the heart more than the flesh; and that therefore there was no essential difference between a spiritually uncircumcised Israel and their apostate cousins. See on :4. The surrounding nations had their various signs of identification, often connected with how their hair or beards were cut. The sign of identity God had chosen was not visible; it was upon the most concealed part of the male body. And this spoke of how the real sign of identity as God's people was in fact nothing external, but in the state of heart, a way of thinking with the flesh cut off from it. This is why we may look the same as others in this world, on some counts. But the difference is in our hearts.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 10

Jeremiah 10:1 Hear the word which Yahweh speaks to you, house of Israel!- This is no mere formal introduction, a standard rubric. It is a desperate appeal for repentance.

Jeremiah 10:2 Thus says Yahweh, Don't learn the way of the nations, and don't be dismayed at the signs of the sky; for the nations are dismayed at them- There was still hope that there could be a miraculous last minute deliverance of Jerusalem, as had happened in the time of Hezekiah. The surrounding nations had all been "dismayed" and destroyed (2 Kings 19:26). Judah were not to be like them; but they were following their astrology, and the results of that "dismayed" them. They were desperately 'learning' the religion of those who were about to destroy them, rather than learning God's way through repentance (Jer. 9:23,24). They should instead have been dismayed at Jeremiah's prophetic words; and to have seen the connection with the frequent exhortations *not* to be dismayed but to possess the Kingdom (Dt. 1:21; Josh. 1:9 etc.). Jeremiah had been commanded not to be dismayed (Jer. 1:9 s.w.); he was to be their example, as is every preacher to be the word made flesh. "Dismay" was a punishment from God upon them (Jer. 17:18) but as with all Divine judgments, this was just an extension of what the people had done to themselves. For they had dismayed themselves.

Many Babylonian cuneiform tablets are in the British Museum in London. They claim that "the appearance of comets, eclipses of the sun and moon, earthquakes, and in fact every kind of change occasioned by the atmosphere, whether good or bad, both to nations and to kings and private individuals [were omens of future events]". The British Museum collection of inscriptions lists "A collection of twenty-five tablets of the signs of heaven and earth, according to their good presage and their bad... Tablets [regarding] the signs of the heaven, along with the star (comet) which has a corona in

front and a tail behind; the appearance of the sky". Judah were desperately trying to learn the astrology of the Babylonians as the Babylonian army approached. But they are being told this was all nonsense.

Jeremiah 10:3 For the customs of the peoples are vanity; for one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman with the axe- Judah were bidden look at things from a bird's eye view, and to perceive how bizarre is idolatry. All idolatry is vanity because it is the work of human hands. The way of spirituality is to accept God's work rather than the work of our own hands. They were 'learning' the astrology of the Babylonians who were about to destroy them (:2); and now they were accepting the "statutes" or "customs" of those people, taking on the yoke of a new law and religious system in the name of Yahweh worship. And thereby ignoring His law.

Jeremiah 10:4 They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it not move- This alludes to very similar language in Is. 40:20; 41:7. See on :5. "Deck" is the word used of how the Jews tried to make themselves attractive to the other nations by as it were 'dressing themselves up' (Jer. 4:30). They did this through worshipping their idols. This confirms the impression that on the eve of destruction, they were turning to the idols of their attackers rather than to Yahweh.

Jeremiah 10:5 They are like a palm tree, of turned work, and don't speak- "Turned work" is a word only used about the beaten work of the tabernacle (Ex. 25:18,31,36 etc.). We will suggest on :9 that they were building a new kind of tabernacle for their idols.

They must be carried, because they can't walk. Don't be afraid of them; for they can't do evil, neither is it in them to do good- This is quoting from Is. 46:7. There are many points of similarity between Jeremiah and Isaiah, because the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian siege in Isaiah's time could still be replicated at Jeremiah's time. But afterwards, Hezekiah dropped the baton, and so later Isaiah goes on to lament how the Babylonians would come and destroy Judah, and how the people would turn to idolatry and persecute the true prophets. This was now coming true in Jeremiah's time. Is. 45:5-7 in the same context puts all this another way in saying that Yahweh is the source of good and evil [in the sense of disaster], light and darkness- rather than the Babylonians gods of good and evil.

Jeremiah 10:6 There is none like You, Yahweh; You are great, and Your name is great in might- The supreme, ultimate greatness of Yahweh meant that all claims of other gods were worth nothing. This continues the allusions to later Isaiah, this time to Is. 46:9. See on :5.

Jeremiah 10:7 Who should not fear You, King of the nations? For it is appropriate for You; because among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their royal estate, there is none like You- It was the prophetic potential that Israel and Judah would repent together, return from captivity, and re-establish the Kingdom of God in Israel under a Messianic ruler, with the surrounding nations also repentant and acceptant of Israel's God. "Who should not..." accept Yahweh out of the nations? We marvel how with Israel so deeply resistant to God's purpose at this point, still the prophets allude to this massive potential. See on :11. This was not fulfilled at the time, but this passage is quoted in Rev. 15:4 as having ultimate fulfilment in the last days.

Jeremiah 10:8 But they are together primitive and foolish: the instruction of idols! It is but a stock- The idea that a piece of wood could teach God's people is mocked; but this is in the context of how :1,2 have condemned Judah for earnestly seeking to "learn" the religious ways of Babylon. They stood in front of a piece of wood in order to be taught by it. "Primitive" translates a word which effectively means 'kindling wood' (s.w. Ex. 35:3). They were wooden, and would be the kindling which brought about the final burning of Jerusalem. See on Jer. 11:16.

Jeremiah 10:9 There is silver beaten into plates which is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the artificer and of the hands of the goldsmith; blue and purple for their clothing; they are all the work of skilful men- Silver, plates, gold, blue, purple and the work of skilled craftsmen is all language reminiscent of the construction of the tabernacle and high priestly robes. The new religious system and laws which they were desperately learning (see on :1,2) was a quasi law of Moses. And yet it was done in the name of Yahweh worship; this explains the similarities, and also how the people also called to Yahweh at this time. See on :5,12,20.

Jeremiah 10:10 But Yahweh is the true God; He is the living God and an everlasting King- A bald statement, urging the Jews on the eve of destruction to quit their idolatry and return wholeheartedly to Yahweh. He was alive, whereas the idols were just dead wood (:8). He would last for ever, whereas the idols of that age, as of every age, stand only for a short time.

At His wrath the earth trembles, and the nations are not able to withstand His indignation- The earth / land of Israel along with the nations was to be judged. Perhaps a literal earthquake was in view, as mentioned in many of the prophets. It was the prophetic intention that the judgment of Babylon and her coalition would follow soon after their judgment of Israel. This didn't happen as intended, because the lack of repentance precluded the scenario happening then. But as the book of Revelation makes clear, this will all come true in the last days.

Jeremiah 10:11 You shall say this to them: The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens- This verse stands out from those around it in that it is written in Chaldee. Perhaps this was intended to be sent and spoken to the Babylonians. To curse a nation's gods was the ultimate insult. And this is what Jeremiah was doing. And he says this when Judah were desperately learning the religion of the Babylonians (:1,2) in the hope that it would save them from Babylon. But the hope also was that Babylon and the surrounding nations would repent and come to Yahweh; see on :7. The Babylonians worshipped the heavenly bodies; but they were worshipping the created rather than the creator.

Jeremiah 10:12 He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding has He stretched out the heavens- This contrast between the idols and Yahweh as the creator of all things is typical of the later part of Isaiah; see on :5. The language of setting up ("established", literally 'to make stand erect') and stretching out suggests that the heavens and earth are a tent or tabernacle. This alludes to how the Jews were desperately constructing a tabernacle to idols; see on :9,20.

Jeremiah 10:13 When He utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, and brings forth the wind out of His treasuries- This could refer to a literal thunderstorm that burst over Jerusalem as Jeremiah was speaking. The waters which arose from the ends of the land represented the nations arising from the boundaries of *eretz* Israel, who were to come in judgment upon Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 10:14 Every man has become primitive and without knowledge; every goldsmith is disappointed by his engraved image; for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them- This is the ultimate end of all idolatry, of all life lived without total devotion to God- disappointment. Life is only in Yahweh; both eternal life, and meaningful life now. The same word for "disappointed" is used of what would happen to the idols of Babylon (Jer. 50:2). Just before the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, the Jews within the city were making those very same idols, and would be disappointed in them just as Babylon was to be. It was the idols who were primitive and without knowledge (:8); and those who make and worship idols become like unto them, also "primitive..." (Ps. 115:8). The desire to worship is built within the human condition. And we become like what we worship. It is therefore critically important to worship the right thing.

Jeremiah 10:15 They are vanity, a work of delusion- It is emphasized in Jer. 10:15, 16 that the God of Jacob is not an idol, nor is He created by an 'errorist'- using the same rare Hebrew word concerning Jacob being a 'deceiver' in Gen. 27:12. Jacob was a 'deceiver', and for much of his life did not accept Yahweh as his God, preferring the idols of the land (Gen. 28:20,21). Yet Jer. 10:15,16 says that idols are made by 'deceivers', and the God Jacob believed in was not an idol like this. God is almost turning everything upside down to frame a weak, faltering Jacob as the very opposite. And He will do likewise with every one of the true Israel.

In the time of their visitation they shall perish- The same words are used of how ultimately Babylon itself would realize this about its own idols (Jer. 51:18). All idols fail at their point of critical testing; the Babylonians should have learnt from the way their idols never saved Jerusalem from destruction. Here we see God's wonderful hope, that even Babylon would repent. We give up on people far too easily compared to Him. The common prophetic idea of "the day / time of visitation" is applied by Peter to the day of the Lord's return and the final judgment (1 Pet. 2:12). All these prophetic possibilities never quite came about in their day; but they will do, in the last day.

Jeremiah 10:16 The portion of Jacob is not like these- See on :15. Jacob inherits God, having Him as his portion; and God inherits Israel / Jacob. We see here the mutuality intended between God and Israel. This is yet another reflection of God's recognition that finally, Jacob fulfilled his promise to make Yahweh his God (Gen. 28:20). The lessons of Jacob's name change were finally learnt.

For He is the former of all things; and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance: Yahweh of Armies is His name- It was the prophetic hope that Judah and the ten tribe kingdom would unite as one in the restored kingdom of God in Israel. "Israel" is therefore described here as a singular tribe.

Jeremiah 10:17 Gather up your wares out of the land, you who live under siege- "Wares" is literally "bundle"; the idea is that the siege would end with the people going into captivity with just a bundle of belongings. This prophecy was given in the very last moments of opportunity, whilst the people were besieged.

Jeremiah 10:18 For thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this time, and will distress them, that they may feel it- But in wrath, God remembered mercy. For not all the inhabitants of the land were taken into captivity. Only the ruling classes were. The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, didn't practice mass deportations. They removed the leadership of subjected peoples, and appointed locals as the leaders under their control. This is what they did to Judah, taking the royal family and priesthood into captivity, and establishing Gedaliah as puppet governor (Jer. 40: 7; 2 Kings 25:2) along with some local Jewish "elders" (Lam. 5:12), with Mizpeh rather than Jerusalem as the capital. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. Presumably the altar had been destroyed, hence no animal sacrifices are mentioned. It has been suggested that the book of Lamentations was written as part of a temple ritual or at least material to be recited at the site of the temple. See on Jer. 12:4; 13:19.

Jeremiah 10:19 Woe is me because of my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is my grief, and I must bear it- This was Jeremiah's pained interjection, but as often, we find his feelings are those of God. And so here in a context where the first person pronouns clearly refer to God and not Jeremiah, we read: “Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is grievous… truly this is a grief, and I must bear it. My tabernacle is spoiled… my children are gone forth… there is none to stretch forth my tent” (Jer. 10:18-20). This is the almost unbelievable extent of God’s pain and hurt for His people. Truly did it hurt God more than His children knew to punish them. "Hurt" is literally 'breaking'. God was broken by His people's behaviour. It is the word often used of the breaking up of Jerusalem and Judah (Jer. 4:6,20 etc.); but this as it were broke the heart of God (see on Jer. 8:21). The deadly, "grievous" wound suffered by Judah was felt by God as His "grief" (Jer. 6:7). We have a window here onto how the Father felt the sufferings of His Son, when "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". To explain that as simply meaning "Jesus = God" is to miss so much that it is a tragic misinterpretation. The judgment sufferings for sin were thereby felt by the God who brought them. The very words for 'bearing grief' are used in Is. 53:4 of how the Lord Jesus bore the griefs of condemned Israel, and indeed all the people

of God. For all have sinned and merit condemnation. Jeremiah at this point knew those essential feelings of the Messianic saviour figure, which were also the feelings of God. "I must bear it" would then be Jeremiah's desire to try to bear their condemnation, as ultimately only the Lord Jesus could do for Israel. He sees himself as the lamb led to slaughter in Jer. 11:19.

Jeremiah 10:20 My tent is destroyed, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth from me, and they are no more: there is none to spread my tent any more, and to set up my curtains- God speaks of the tabernacle rather than the temple because it seems from :9 that they were constructing another tabernacle, but to the gods of Babylon. We noted on :9,12 that God had set up His tabernacle / tent just as He had stretched out the skies at creation. But the Jews were building another tabernacle to other gods. They had taken down Yahweh's tent thereby, and so God was as it were left homeless, able to identify with those left homeless. We deduce from the argument here how Almighty God is in a sense "in need of man", as Avraham Heschel put it. He had nobody to spread out His tent- He, the God who spread out the skies of the cosmos by His great power.

Jeremiah 10:21 For the shepherds are become primitive, and have not inquired of Yahweh: therefore they have not prospered, and all their flocks are scattered- Those who ought to have set up the tabernacle in :20 were the priests and Levites, and they had turned away from Yahweh. This was especially hard for Jeremiah to utter, seeing he was from a priestly family. The shepherds, the priests, became "primitive", the same word used of the idols themselves in :8,14. They became like that which they worshipped (Ps. 115:8). Any shepherd / teacher should themselves be ever 'inquiring' of Yahweh. But they instead were learning all they could about idol worship (:1,2). They did not 'prosper', Heb. 'understand'; and so new pastors were needed, who would teach understanding (Jer. 3:15 s.w.).

Jeremiah 10:22 The voice of proclamation, behold, it comes, and a great commotion out of the north country- The word for the "rushing" noise of the cherubim wheels in Ezekiel is used elsewhere about the noise of the chariots of Israel's enemies and the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 10:22; 47:3; Nah. 3:2). The Angelic armies of Heaven were therefore revealed on earth in the chariots of Babylon; it was both Babylon and the Angelic cherubim behind them who took Judah captive, and who could also return them to their land. Hence the stress in Ezekiel's vision that the wheels of the cherubim were on the earth / land. Clearly enough, the things that go on in our lives, even those things which appear as brutal and tragic as the Babylonian chariots were to Judah, are not random machinations of men; they are, in some unfathomable way, under the direct control of a God of love, who only means to do us good at our latter end.

To make the cities of Judah a desolation, a dwelling place of jackals- As explained on Jer. 9:10, this didn't completely happen to the extent here prophetically envisaged. The jackal comes to eat what the lion has left in the carcase; the idea was that after the lions of Babylon had finished with Jerusalem, there would be others who came to totally destroy her. But this didn't historically happen, because it seems God relented from the full execution of His wrath. The language here of Jerusalem's destruction into heaps haunted by jackals is applied to Babylon (Jer. 51:37). What latter day Babylon does to Jerusalem shall be done to her; and that is the theme of the book of Revelation, where the seals of judgment upon Israel become the vials of judgment upon the beast system.

Jeremiah 10:23 Yahweh, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man who walks to direct his steps- The passage from :23-25 could be a prayer of Jeremiah, who recognizes his own sinfulness on a personal level. In this case we see how he prayed despite being asked by God not to pray (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:7). But it could also be the wish or even fantasy of God for the repentance of the people; these are the words He imagines an individual repentant Israelite saying. The idea is perhaps that man cannot direct his path whilst he is walking; he must firstly direct his steps, and then walk accordingly. The way of Adam (Heb.) would allude to how Adam could not direct his own way back to the tree of life; the Angel cherubim would keep that way and direct man upon it (Gen. 3:24). Jeremiah sees the exile of Judah to the east as the driving out of Adam eastward from Eden, the same *eretz* Israel. And he knew now that it would not be of man, of Israel as it was not of Adam, to get back; it required the Angel cherubim to bring them back. And that was just the message of Ezekiel at this same time and context. It is Yahweh alone who can direct the steps of man (same words in Prov. 16:9).

Jeremiah 10:24 Yahweh, correct me, but in measure: not in Your anger, lest you bring me to nothing- If this is a personal prayer of Jeremiah on behalf of the people, then perhaps God did hear; because He did indeed correct them "in measure" (s.w. Jer. 30:11 "I will correct you in measure, and not leave you altogether unpunished"), but the full extent of His prophesied anger [such as the destruction of all animal and human life in the land by fire] was not carried out. Judah were not literally 'brought to nothing'. This was in response to Jeremiah's prayer here- to correct / punish [s.w.] Judah, but not bring them to nothing. The same phrase "bring to nothing" is found in Jer. 30:19, where God promises that He will not bring Judah to nothing. This was in direct response to Jeremiah's prayer here. Jeremiah here is praying as representative of all Israel, just as he personally says "Amen" to the offer of the new covenant in Jer. 11:5.

Jeremiah 10:25 Pour out Your wrath on the nations that don't know You, and on the families that don't call on Your name: for they have devoured Jacob, yes, they have devoured him and consumed him, and have laid waste his habitation- This could mean that although those nations were used by God to execute judgment, they were willing and eager to abuse Israel, and so were to be punished. Or perhaps they went beyond their commission, and it was for this that they were punished (Is. 10:6,7; 47:6; Zech. 1:15). Yet we could read Jeremiah here as out of step with God's hope that even Babylon would repent; and failing to realize the extent to which Judah deserved their punishments.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 11

Jeremiah 11:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying- Jeremiah is not a chronological book. This could refer to the time when the book of the covenant was discovered by Josiah; or it could be a reminder at a later point that the people ought to have been obedient to that covenant which had been discovered and proclaimed.

Jeremiah 11:2 Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah, and to

the inhabitants of Jerusalem- See on :1. The allusion is indeed to the book of the covenant discovered by Josiah. But we should also consider that according to Jer. 31, Ez. 20 etc., God offered a new covenant to the people at this time, seeing they had broken the old covenant in the form of the Mosaic law.

Jeremiah 11:3 And say to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: Cursed is the man who doesn't hear the words of this covenant- The allusion is to how the old covenant was pronounced, and this same curse was made binding. Like us, Israel were reminded that His covenant with His people was not a mere historical incident. His word is living, and the covenant applied to them just as much as it did to those who first heard it; with the attendant blessings and cursings. We can likewise reflect how the promises to Abraham are similarly personally relevant to us, being the basis of the new covenant.

Jeremiah 11:4 Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the iron furnace saying, Obey My voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so you shall be My people, and I will be your God- They had been saved from the furnace of Egypt, but they were now within the furnace of Jerusalem (Ez. 22:18,20). Just as they had been saved from the Egyptian furnace, so now they also could be from that of Divine judgment. But the deliverance was to be conditional upon obedience. The commandments to be obeyed were not mere tests of obedience or loyalty; "*so* you shall be My people" means that they were designed in order to facilitate in practice the relationship between God and His people. The deliverance from the furnace of Egypt was in order that they become God's people (Dt. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51). But if they didn't want to become God's people, then deliverance would be pointless. The furnace was to be a refining process (Is. 48:10), but if they didn't want this, then they would be destroyed in that furnace.

Jeremiah 11:5 That I may establish the oath which I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day- We need to remember in our preaching that success is potentially possible; God is working through us to give those we intersect with the chance of a real salvation. Their rejection shouldn't be so discouraging the more we perceive that we on God's side in all this, He is working through us to try to appeal to them. And appreciating this will give a far greater intensity and urgency of appeal to our preaching. In Jer. 11:4,5 God speaks of how obedience is required in order for Him to fulfil the promises to us which He so wishes to fulfil: "Be my people... and this will allow me to carry out the oath that I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as I have in fact done" ["as at this day"]. We see here how God allows Himself to be limited by us- we can 'allow Him' to carry out His purposes, or not. And yet in this example we see His grace, in the words "As I have in fact done". For Israel weren't obedient to the covenant- and yet He still gave them the promised land. His grace shines through, breaking even His own conditions.

Then answered I and said, Amen, Yahweh- This is reminiscent of Israel saying "Amen" to the covenant. Jeremiah acts on their behalf, just as his prayer at the end of Jer. 10 is in the first person, but is representative of all Israel.

Jeremiah 11:6 Yahweh said to me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem saying, Hear the words of this covenant, and do them- In Jer. 5:1, Jeremiah was asked to run to and fro in those streets, representing God in

search of man. The medium of God's searching for man is the word of offer of covenant relationship with Him. Obedience to this commandment would have taken Jeremiah some time. "The cities of Judah" had not yet fallen to the Babylonians, so this prophecy must be relatively early in his ministry. Hearing and doing is the classic language of obedience to the covenant (e.g. Dt. 4:1). James alludes to it in saying that those under the new covenant likewise are to both hear and do. We note that Jeremiah doesn't repeat the covenant here; perhaps because he is referring to the book of the covenant found by Josiah (:1,2).

Jeremiah 11:7 For I earnestly protested to your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even to this day, rising early and protesting saying, Obey My voice- Again we have the sense of God's living word, speaking to every generation. What He said to their fathers was spoken to every subsequent generation "even to this day". This is the art of faithful Bible reading- perceiving God's historical voice as coming to us personally. "Protested" is the same word translated "testify" in the records of the giving of the covenant; and that testifying was "by heaven and earth" (Dt. 30:19), whom Israel were now worshipping as Babylon worshipped them, rather than seeing in them evidence of Yahweh's creation.

Jeremiah 11:8 Yet they didn't obey, nor turn their ear, but walked each one in the stubbornness of their evil heart- Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

Therefore I brought on them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they didn't do them- Again we see God's grace. Because not all the curses for covenant breaking were brought upon Israel. In wrath He remembered mercy, even when they were impenitent.

Jeremiah 11:9 Yahweh said to me, A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem- The conspiracy against Jeremiah by his own local people and family (:19) was itself a reflection of how these men had as it were made a conspiracy against God. As Jeremiah's positive view of his own people seems to have prevented him from perceiving it, so God reveals Himself as shocked that as it were 'in secret', His people had conspired against Him. We see here the unity between God and His servant. The idea of a conspiracy suggests a wilful, conscious decision to rebel against God. It is the consciousness of their disobedience which is so stunning. They were led into this by their false prophets telling them that they could serve Yahweh in ways which were disobedient to His covenant. Hence the contemporary Ez. 22:25 says that the "conspiracy" (s.w.) was amongst the false prophets.

Jeremiah 11:10 They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear My words; and they are gone after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with

their fathers- Judah were continually being reminded by Jeremiah that they were not better than the ten tribe kingdom of Israel, and would meet a similar destruction and exile as they had. The breaking of covenant was a conscious act, indicated by it being a "conspiracy" (:9). If they had "turned back" to God, then the exiles would have been "turned back" to Zion. But instead they had "turned back" to the sins of their fathers. This point is significant in that Ez. 18 reflects how they considered they were being unfairly punished for the sins of their fathers. But here they are reminded that they were committing the very same sins as their fathers.

Jeremiah 11:11 Therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will bring evil on them, which they shall not be able to escape; and they shall cry to Me, but I will not listen to them- And yet the many prophetic messages at this time showed that they *were* "able to escape". But they chose not to. We noted on :9 and :5 how Jeremiah personally was representative of Judah. They were told here that prayer was going to be pointless for them; hence Jeremiah personally was commanded not to pray in their name (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:7). This is perhaps the nadir of all existence; for God's people to be unable to pray to Him. This is the picture of condemnation; this will be the reason for gnashing of teeth.

Jeremiah 11:12 Then shall the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem go and cry to the gods to which they offer incense: but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble- The time of Jacob's trouble was to come at the Babylonian entry into Jerusalem. In that moment, Jacob should surely have cried to his God; but tragically, they cried to the gods of their invaders. As observed earlier, idols always fail at the point of critical testing; the Babylonians should have learnt from the way their idols never saved Jerusalem from destruction. Here we see God's wonderful hope, that even Babylon would repent. We give up on people far too easily compared to Him. In Jer. 2:27 God had fantasized that His people in the "time of their trouble" (s.w.) would cry *to Him*. But now He as it were faces the reality that they would cry to their idols and not to Him. And yet whilst crying to the idols, they would also cry to Him (:14). We have the picture of them crying out to every god they had ever worshipped, as well as Yahweh. But that is not the singular faith in Him which He can respond to. He is not one of many options and loves of our lives. He is to be the passion of our faithful, loyal hearts.

Jeremiah 11:13 For according to the number of your cities are your gods, Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have you set up altars to the shameful thing, even altars to burn incense to Baal- Each street of Jerusalem was named after an idol, just as was the case in Babylon (Jer. 11:13)- and thus Jerusalem shared Babylon's judgment. If we don't come out from Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4). Zion lost her children and also her husband whilst still a young woman (Is. 49:21; 54:6), just as Babylon would (Is. 47:9).

Jeremiah 11:14 Therefore don't pray for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry to Me because of their trouble- See on :12. For the sake of our prayers, in some cases sins of others can be forgiven when otherwise they wouldn't be. For the sake of our conversion of our erring brethren, they can be saved from eternal death and have their sins covered. The Lord's prayer says as much- we ask God to forgive us *our* sins; not 'me my sins'. Likewise only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease

prayer for them (Jer. 7:16 cp. 11:14). Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his "cry" was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same- Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel up to a certain point, but they were *so* hardened in sin at Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which otherwise, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. If we have any grain of love in us, we will likewise dedicate ourselves to fervent prayer for our brethren, seeing it does have effect and validity within certain boundaries.

Christ did not pray for the world (Jn. 17:9), which in the context seems to refer to the unrepentant Jewish world (cp. Jer. 11:14; 1 Jn. 5:8) as well as the surrounding (Roman) world.

Ez. 22:30 says that if a person had been found at this time who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap', God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" in Ez. 22:30 is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. But there was not such a person, because they were "all" dross (Ez. 22:18,19). Jeremiah was in the land at the time and was surely righteous, but he had been told not to intercede for the people (Jer. 11:14; 14:11). It seems that if another like him had been found, in addition to Ezekiel in exile, then the judgments could have been averted. There were simply so many possible scenarios! And this is what we must expect if even time periods can be shortened or extended in response to human behaviour. And yet Jeremiah himself seems to have been too 'pro' Israel. He was shocked at the depth of their weakness and even naive to it; and in Lamentations he seems to consider God had acted too harshly against His people. So perhaps in any case Jeremiah was not the appropriate interceder.

Jeremiah 11:15 What has My beloved to do in My house- Despite casting them out of His house, God still calls them His "beloved". This is really love amazing, and grace without compare.

Since she has worked lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from you? When you do evil, then you rejoice- LXX: "Will prayers and holy offerings take away thy wickedness from thee, or shalt thou escape by these things?". GNB: "Do they think they can prevent disaster by making promises and by offering animal sacrifices? Will they then rejoice?". It's clear from :12,14 that they cried out to their idols when in their final desperation, and yet Jer. 2:27 says that at that point they cried to Yahweh as well. Likewise it seems they were madly offering sacrifices to every god they knew, including Yahweh. And that was exactly why God didn't respond to them.

Jeremiah 11:16 Yahweh called your name, A green olive tree, beautiful with goodly fruit- The Lord's words as He carried the cross "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; His quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel…? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit

of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

With the noise of a great tumult he has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken- I explained on Jer. 10:8 that the wooden idols were likened to the kindling wood, as it were stacked around Jerusalem. God kindled the fire, although it sounded like ["with the noise of..."] the invaders had done so. He worked through them. Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4). God "broke" the tree of Israel (s.w. Jer. 25:29), but so did the invaders. The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman...that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4).

Jeremiah 11:17 For Yahweh of Armies, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you- They were planted by God when they left Egypt and entered covenant with God (Ex. 15:17; Num. 24:6), and also when they entered Canaan and God cleared the land of the Canaanite tribes (Ps. 44:2; 80:8). Having done everything possible through their planting that they might produce fruit (Is. 5:2), it was appropriate for God to also destroy them when they failed to respond. Likewise we have been "planted" in a manner and position optimal for our spiritual fruitfulness; we cannot therefore blame our lack of spiritual fruit on bad environment.

Because of the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have worked for themselves in provoking Me to anger by offering incense to Baal- Judah were continually being reminded by Jeremiah that they were not better than the ten tribe kingdom of Israel, and would meet a similar destruction and exile as they had. They had both produced the judgment for themselves; sin is essentially a sin against ourselves as well as God.

Jeremiah 11:18 Yahweh gave me knowledge of it, and I knew it: then You showed me their evil deeds- Jeremiah speaks here of how he came to see Israel for who they were; he realized their conspiracy against God, and also their conspiracy against himself. He was therefore underlined as really being God's representative on earth, emotionally passing through similar experiences. Ezekiel was shown “what the house of Israel is doing in the dark” (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must’ve been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would’ve been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and “iron pillar” to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn’t be “dismayed at [the] looks” of those who watched them with anger and consternation (Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

Jeremiah 11:19 But I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter- On Jer. 10:19 we noted that Jeremiah alludes to the great Messianic prophecy of Is. 53, feeling himself the bearer of Israel's griefs. He continues that allusion here, this time to Is. 53:7 "a lamb to the slaughter". Jeremiah had naively believed they had good intentions, hence GNB "like a trusting lamb". His overly positive view of his people reflected that of God. For the conspiracy against Jeremiah was reflective of that which they had as it were made against Yahweh (:9).

And I didn't know that they had devised devices against me saying, Let us destroy the tree with its fruit- LXX "Come and let us put wood into his bread", suggesting an attempt to poison him. But the destruction of a tree is the figure just used in :16 for the cutting down and burning of the tree of Israel. The idea may be that the tree of Israel was destroyed because of their plot to kill Jeremiah and thus nullify, as they thought, his words. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological. It may be that Jeremiah had earlier specifically been warned that his family were trying to kill him (Jer. 12:6) but he ignored it. This would again be reflected in how Yahweh knew on one hand that His people were conspiring against Him (:9), and yet acted as if He didn't know that, such was His love and hope for them.

And let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered- This alludes to Is. 53:8, where the suffering servant is to be cut off out of the land of the living. See on :21. Jeremiah was attempting to be the sin bearer for Israel in the terms of Is. 53. Perhaps this is why many of the prophecies of judgment were ameliorated in their outworking. But their sin was such that his willingness was not enough to save them from condemnation. Or perhaps Jeremiah's struggling spirit against God's ways, which at times does appear in the record (e.g. Jer. 12:1), meant that he was not righteous enough; hence the final fulfilment of Is. 53 in the Lord Jesus and not Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 11:20 But, Yahweh of Armies, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind- The 'testing' of Judah was to be through melting them in the furnace of Jerusalem, caused by the fire of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9). We learn here that the essential purpose of that was to try / test / purify / reveal their heart and mind; for that was and is of utterly paramount importance to God.

I shall see Your vengeance on them- But when he did see this, he bitterly laments over it, in Lamentations. We must be careful what we ask for, lest we receive it. There is more information about Jeremiah's feelings about his persecutors at Jer. 20:10-12. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically, and it seems Jer. 11:20 refers to the same time as Jer. 20:10-12.

For to You have I opened up my cause- The fact God sees and knows all means that we might as well open our lives up before Him in prayer and meditation. Jeremiah "revealed my cause" before the Lord because he knew that God "tests the heart and the mind". This may be why men like Jeremiah were somewhat 'rough' with God; whatever they felt about God, they told Him. They so knew that God knew their thoughts... there was and is no point in saying fine words to God in prayer, whilst feeling harder about Him in ones heart.

Jeremiah 11:21 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life saying, You shall not prophesy in the name of Yahweh, that you not die by our hand- The Lord may have alluded here in saying that a prophet always lacks

honour amongst his own people (Mt. 13:57). For as noted on :19, Jeremiah was clearly a type of the rejected Lord Jesus. If we enquire why they had such specific hatred for him, it was clearly because subconsciously they knew themselves to be indeed worthy of death as Jeremiah had been saying. And so they projected their sin onto the innocent, and wished to then punish him with the punishment they knew they themselves deserved. This is why those who secretly commit adultery are often eager to judge and punish others in the church who commit adultery. It's not simply hypocrisy; it's all the same story of psychological transference- of their own sin and desert of punishment onto another.

Jeremiah 11:22 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine- This specifically speaks of the people of Anathoth (:21). The children died not because they were punished for the parents' sins, but because sin has collateral damage. That is part of what sin is; the results of it affect others who did not commit that sin.

Jeremiah 11:23 And there shall be no remnant to them: for I will bring evil on the men of Anathoth, even the year of their visitation- But by grace there was a remnant left to Judah. God here speaks in the fire of His wrath, but in wrath remembers mercy; although it could be that Anathoth being on the great north road, directly in the line of the Babylonian advance, was indeed totally liquidated and left with no remnant.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 12

Jeremiah 12:1 You are righteous, Yahweh, when I contend with You; yet I would reason the cause with You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all they at ease who deal very treacherously?- This is a parade example of how we should approach issues relating to the justice of God; beginning with the simple recognition that Yahweh is righteous, even if we don't understand. This prophecy appears to have been at the time of Josiah, when Judah were still relatively at ease and prospering, despite Josiah's reforms not having been deeply responded to.

Jeremiah 12:2 You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they bring forth fruit- This planting is that of Jer. 11:17. They were planted by God when they left Egypt and entered covenant with God (Ex. 15:17; Num. 24:6), and also when they entered Canaan and God cleared the land of the Canaanite tribes (Ps. 44:2; 80:8). Having done everything possible through their planting that they might produce fruit (Is. 5:2), it was appropriate for God to also destroy them when they failed to respond. Likewise we have been "planted" in a manner and position optimal for our spiritual fruitfulness; we cannot therefore blame our lack of spiritual fruit on bad environment.

You are near in their mouth, and far from their heart- This can be translated as them saying "You are near" with their mouths, when in fact they were far from God in their heart. This statement "You are near" was based on the much loved Dt. 4:7, which states that no God has Israel so "near" them (s.w.). Indeed Yahweh was near them- but they had to come near to Him in their hearts. He was "near" in that His word was to be near in their hearts and not far off from their hearts (Dt. 30:11,14 s.w.), but they were refusing His word through Jeremiah. The nearness of God is therefore potential, for man in response must also draw near unto Him (Ez. 42:13;

43:19 s.w.). But the grace of God was such that He would save them even from "far off" (Jer. 30:10 s.w.). See on Jer. 23:23. Even from that situation, God's grace could work on their hearts. They were taken "far [off]" to captivity because they had Him far from their hearts.

Jeremiah 12:3 But You, Yahweh, know me; You see me, and try my heart towards You: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter- This is just how Jeremiah describes himself, a lamb for the slaughter, in Jer. 11:19. There he was alluding to the prophecy of the suffering servant in Is. 53. But the significance is that *they* were the condemned lamb for the slaughter, and the state of Jeremiah's heart was different; he was not for the slaughter. But he willingly identified with Israel's sin and condemnation whilst being personally sinless in this matter- a fine type of the Lord's representative sufferings and sin bearing for us on the cross.

Jeremiah 12:4 How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of the whole country wither? for the wickedness of those who dwell therein, the animals are consumed, and the birds- And yet the wicked people of :1 apparently prospered. So we may be reading the present tense spoken of as the future. And yet actually all animals weren't consumed from off the land. In wrath God remembered mercy, by His amazing grace. See on Jer. 10:18.

Because they said, He shall not see our latter end- They said this in their hearts; they psychologically assumed that God did not "see" their behaviour nor foresee a final judgment for them.

Jeremiah 12:5 If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? and though in a land of peace you are secure, yet how will you do in the swelling of the Jordan?- The land was not in peace at the time of many of Jeremiah's prophecies, and so this must be an earlier prophecy. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological. The prediction that his own family would seek to kill him (:6) was therefore made early in his ministry, but he apparently disbelieved this word (Jer. 11:19). The idea was that the Jordan was going to swell up, rather than be under their control as it was when they first entered Canaan. The previous incursions of the Babylonians were as foot soldiers compared to the cavalry which were to pour into the land. This is God's response to Jeremiah's apparent complaint in :4 that the judgments were too severe. He is at this point personally out of step with God's judgment program; and so God reminds him that his very own family were intending to kill him (:6). Jeremiah had an overly positive view of Israel, but he was also even in that reflecting God's love and imputation of righteousness to His wayward people.

Jeremiah 12:6 For even your brothers, and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; even they have cried aloud after you: don't believe them, though they speak beautiful words to you- See on :5; Jer. 11:19. Jeremiah was sharing God's experiences with His people, who had dealt treacherously with Him too (s.w. Is. 48:8; Jer. 3:8,11; 5:11; 9:2), as Jeremiah himself recognized (:1). To Jeremiah's face they were nicely spoken, but behind his back they cried for his blood. Likewise with their God, they had Him on their lips but their hearts were far from Him (:2).

Jeremiah 12:7 I have forsaken My house, I have cast off My heritage; I have given the

dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies- This and the following verses are God's response as to how He would respond to the treachery of His own people. But this :7 may be Jeremiah's response, which (as often in Jeremiah) merges into the feelings of God too and then God becomes the dominant thinker and speaker rather than Jeremiah. In this case, Jeremiah would be responding that he had dissociated himself from his family, and had resigned his dearly beloved, perhaps his wife, to destruction because she too refused to respond to his message. Yahweh 'cast off' Judah (Jer. 12:7; 23:33) but only because they had cast Him off (Jer. 15:6 s.w.). And yet God did not cast off His people (Jer. 33:26); Jeremiah personally was persuaded that God would not cast off His people for ever (Lam. 3:31). He will show them mercy as if He had not cast them off (Zech. 10:6); this reversal of their casting off was to be through the repentance of the exiled community (Lev. 26:44). But even this didn't happen, and yet God still did not cast them away (Rom. 11:2). His love and grace was such that He holds on to them. This desperate holding on to His people is seen in the experience of every person who joins God's people through baptism into Christ. They may indeed be cast off ultimately, but that is because they cast Him off, and wrestled against His insistent desire to keep hold of them eternally.

Jeremiah 12:8 My heritage has become to Me as a lion in the forest: she has uttered her voice against Me- It was appropriate therefore that her invaders would be as lions, uttering their voice against her; for this was how they had treated God. Judgment is but an extension of how we ourselves have acted.

Therefore I have hated her- A love as strong as God's is going to also elicit the emotion of hatred and anger when that love is rejected and abused. He "hated" (s.w.) Judah's insincere worship and relationship with Him (Is. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4). But it is hard to separate the sin from the sinner. That distinction may be helpful for us in order to avoid judging others too personally, but God it seems doesn't make that decision. He gave Israel into the hands of those who hated her (s.w. Ez. 16:27,37) and in that sense He hated her. The feelings of hatred which Hosea had for Gomer due to her abuse of His love were those of God for Israel: "There I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). God is not simply "love" in the abstract. He is love for real, with all the emotion and psychological complex which goes along with love; and this will include hatred if that love is abused.

Jeremiah 12:9 Is My heritage- To lose an inheritance was a major tragedy in the thought of those times. God was losing His inheritance in that He was allowing it to be consumed, 'polluting it' (Is. 47:6). No man would ever spoil his own inheritance like this; but God did, such was His belief in the need to punish His people for their sins. And yet the metaphor of lost / spoilt inheritance reflects how painful this was for God, felt as a personal loss. The whole idea elicits sympathy for God in this tragic loss. See on :10.

To Me as a speckled bird of prey? Are the birds of prey against her all around? Go, assemble all the animals of the field, bring them to devour- The rhetorical question was because this situation need not be, if Judah repented. As it was, God's people were like a different coloured bird which attracted the aggression of the other birds. It then is brought to the ground and the animals come to devour it. There was something perceived as different about Judah, the root of all anti-Jewish sentiment down the centuries. And this attracted others to attack that which was different. But the difference was not in their spirituality; it was perhaps in their manic desire to be like other nations. Israel was "speckled" or dyed with multiple different colours, like

pagan idol worshipping clothes (s.w. Jud. 5:30). The anger of the nations with Judah was that she had made covenants of unique loyalty with each of them, on the agreement that Judah would worship their gods. And now they discovered she had made such agreements with them all, and the Jerusalem temple was full of the idols of the various nations. This was the basis for their combined anger with her. See on :12.

Jeremiah 12:10 Many shepherds have destroyed My vineyard, they have trodden My portion under foot, they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness- At this time, Judah was still prosperous (see on :1). The past tenses indicate that what God threatened He was now going to fulfil, and it was as good as done. The vineyard of Israel had been carefully planted and prepared by God (Is. 5). For God to allow His own vineyard to be destroyed was therefore a huge personal loss to Him. See on :9,11.

Jeremiah 12:11 They have made it a desolation; it mourns to Me, being desolate; the whole land is made desolate, because no man lays it to heart- The desolation of the land is not specifically predicated upon idolatry, but upon not laying things to heart; a light hearted, not serious attitude to the things of God. This was of paramount pain and significance to God, and it remains so to this day. That the land should be desolate was a personal tragedy to God (s.w. Ex. 23:29); as noted on :9,10, God's judgment of His people was at huge personal loss to Himself.

Jeremiah 12:12 Destroyers have come on all the bare heights in the wilderness; for the sword of Yahweh devours from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh has peace- And yet at the time of the prophecy, perhaps still in Josiah's time, the land was in peace (:5). The present tense is used for the future, so certain was it of fulfilment. The "destroyers" are the invaders, and yet it was the shepherds of Israel who are the destroyers in :10. Jeremiah was from the priestly family, and perhaps their hatred for him (:6) was because of his criticism of them. The high places, where Judah thought they could secretly worship idols, were going to be destroyed; it was Judah's promiscuous relationship with multiple nations and idols which provoked the anger of the invaders. See on :9.

Jeremiah 12:13 They have sown wheat, and have reaped thorns- The Lord may have had His eye on this in constructing the parable of Mt. 13:27. The wheat sown didn't produce wheat because an enemy sowed thorns amongst the wheat which eclipsed the wheat. So the idea is that although they sowed wheat, they had also sown thorns, and these had eclipsed what apparent spirituality they had. Only a wholehearted devotion to God can succeed in spiritual life.

They have put themselves to pain, and profit nothing: and you shall be ashamed of your fruits, because of the fierce anger of Yahweh- Although they had been given materially all that they needed on entering the land (Jer. 2:7), the attraction of the idols was "profit". The idols of Canaan were fertility cults, and they were worshipped in the hope of good harvests and material benefits or "profit". They worshipped them with the "pain" of offering their firstborn to them. But the same word is used of the grief or pain which the representative Saviour would experience for them (Is. 53:10), bearing every aspect of their condemnation. So Yahweh's blessing of His people materially only elicited in them a craving for yet more materialism, and they turned to the idols- which in reality did not "profit", for all such blessing is only from Yahweh. In the day of condemnation, they would look at the few "fruits" they thought they had gained due to idol worship, and be ashamed that they sought them at the expense of

eternity. And so it shall be for all materialists in that day.

Jeremiah 12:14 Thus says Yahweh against all My evil neighbours- Even in the midst of condemning His people, God closely identifies with them, speaking here of the surrounding nations as "*My* neighbours". This is typical of the prophetic revelations of condemnation.

Who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit- Whoever touches Israel touches the apple of God's eye, such is His extreme sensitivity towards His people even when they are under condemnation (Zech. 2:8).

Behold, I will pluck them up from off their land, and will pluck up the house of Judah from among them- Potentially, there was huge Divine power available to those who repented in exile and wanted to return. The decree of Cyrus is evidence enough. But the majority preferred the soft life of Babylon. We too are commanded to come out from Babylon, and if we even nod a "yes" toward that, we will be hugely confirmed in it.

Jeremiah 12:15 It shall happen, after that I have plucked them up, I will return and have compassion on them; and I will bring them again, every man to his inheritance, and every man to his land- This implies that those taken captive would themselves return. The exact duration of the exile was always an open question. Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years (Ez. 4:6). Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. See on Ez. 6:8.

But the people in view (and this depends upon translation) could refer to the Gentile invaders. It was God's intention that they should return to their own lands experiencing God's compassion. But the Jews mixed with the people of the land, they didn't teach them the Name, and so the prophecy didn't come true- they weren't built up in the midst of Israel as intended (:16). Prophecies like Is. 19:18,24 were thereby disabled from fulfilment at that time- "In that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt that… swear to the Lord… in that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria". Is. 2:2-4, Zech. 8:21-23 etc. speak of how Gentile nations would desire to learn the ways of God and come up to a temple in Zion for this purpose. Could it not be that these passages are to be read in the context of Jer. 12:14-17- that

all this was only possible if at the time of the restoration the nations had learnt God's ways from the Jews? In this case these passages are not to be taken as 'proof' that there has to be a future temple built in Zion.

Jeremiah 12:16 It shall happen, if they will diligently learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, As Yahweh lives; even as they taught My people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built up in the midst of My people- See on :15. The *if…then* construction in :15-17 is clearly conditional: the Gentiles could have come and dwelt in the land in a Kingdom-like situation, if Judah had taught them, and if they had responded. "The ways of My people" were by implication the ways of Yahweh. If Judah been obedient, then they would have been a witness to the nations where they were carried captive, and they too would have repented, become Jews, and been "built up in the midst of My people", incorporated into God's revived, refined Israel. The future building up of a replanted Israel in their land would have meant their building up too (s.w. Jer. 24:6; 31:28; 33:7). But so much potential was wasted because of the lack of human repentance.

Jeremiah 12:17 But if they will not hear, then will I pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying it, says Yahweh- This sounds like the total end of Israel as a nation. But that didn't happen, even though they did not hear. They were not plucked up and destroyed. God did not cast away His people (Rom. 11:2). The God whose love is so strong that He even doesn't carry out the judgments He threatens... is a God of love and grace to the ultimate term. If the impoverished remnant who remained in the land had been obedient, then they would not have been plucked up (Jer. 42:10). They were not obedient, and yet still God preserved His people.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 13

Jeremiah 13:1 Thus said Yahweh to me, Go, and buy yourself a linen belt, and put it on your waist, and don't put it in water- The belt represented Israel (:11); being unwashed perhaps speaks of their lack of spiritual cleansing and uncleanness. He had to "buy" it as Yahweh had redeemed or bought Israel out of Egypt. Linen, not woollen, garments were appointed for priestly wear; the idea is that all Israel were to be a nation of priests, a light to the Gentiles. Or maybe the command not to wash it is just so that it would cleave to Jeremiah over time, representing the intimacy and close connection intended between God and Israel.

Jeremiah 13:2 So I bought a belt according to the word of Yahweh, and put it on my waist- There is an Arabic saying that a man's people cling to him as a man's belt. That seems to be the idea in view in this acted parable.

Jeremiah 13:3 The word of Yahweh came to me the second time saying- This was some time after Jeremiah had been wearing the belt every day; see on :2.

Jeremiah 13:4 Take the belt that you have bought, which is on your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock- The removal of the belt meant that God was severing His special relationship with His people, whom He considered intimately part of Him; see on :2. The hiding in the rock represented how Judah would be in captivity. It's not clear whether Jeremiah literally made this journey. If he did, it would have been a major undertaking, and all would have known about it. However, if an actual visit to the Euphrates is meant, the part referred to "cannot be anywhere near Babylon, where there are no 'rocks,' or rather 'crags'—but in the upper part of its course, above Carchemish, or even above Samosata, where it still flows between rocky sides". Hiding in a cleft of the rock recalls Moses; he did so in order to see the glory of Yahweh. There is a similar idea in Is. 2:10. The implication was that through this experience, the bringing down of all human pride, then the glory of Yahweh would be revealed at the restoration, as it was to Moses. And that is very much the language of Ezekiel's cherubim visions which were given around this time.

Jeremiah 13:5 So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as Yahweh commanded me- The Lord Jesus spoke a parable about a man who buried his talent (the Truth he had received at baptism) in the earth, and then when he was condemned at the judgment, this man thinks he's being treated unfairly. This story was quarried from Jer. 13:5-10, where God tells Jeremiah to take a belt and bury it. It becomes spoilt and useless. This buried belt, according to God's own interpretation, represents those of His people "which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart". It was this which destroyed them, making them spiritually rot and decay until they were of no use. The Lord Jesus seems to foresee in His parable those who would accept His Truth, but bury it in the ground, effectively forgetting the love of His word, and yet assuming that simply because they possess the Truth they ought therefore to be in the Kingdom.

Jeremiah 13:6 It happened after many days that Yahweh said to me, Arise, go to the Euphrates and take the belt from there, which I commanded you to hide there- The taking of the belt spoke of God's taking of His people out of captivity once their pride had been destroyed (:9). If indeed Jeremiah made the literal journey to the Euphrates, then it would have appeared a huge effort in order to teach a simple lesson about God's hatred of pride. But that was the point. All this was to prove that God hates pride and will go to any extreme length in order to remove it from His people. See on :9.

Jeremiah 13:7 Then I went to the Euphrates and dug, and took the belt from the place where I had hidden it; and behold, the belt was ruined, it was unfit for use- Ezekiel taught the same lesson in likening Judah to a vine branch which had been burnt at the hands of

the Babylonians, and was therefore unfit for use (Ez. 15:2-4). We assume that Jeremiah was to wear the useless belt on the long journey back to Judah. Losing our pride (:9) means recognizing we cannot do any work for the Lord, in the sense that all human achievement is nothing; and yet He still wears us, He uses us, He identifies with us. The Hebrew for "dig" also means to search out; God would search out His scattered, humbled people and return them to His land (s.w. Dt. 1:22; Josh. 2:2). "Ruined" is the word for 'destroyed' in :14 and often. They would be destroyed in the sense that their pride would be destroyed (:9). This was the positive outcome of 'rotting away' in exile (Lev. 26:39 NET).

Jeremiah 13:8 Then the word of Yahweh came to me saying- The whole point of Judah's exile in Babylon was to make them "ruined, unfit for use" like the cloth which Jeremiah buried by Euphrates (Jer. 13:7). And yet the second half of Isaiah is full of expressions of God's desire to use Israel after their experience in Babylon as His witness to the nations. Israel's preparation for their mission was through being made "unfit for use". And so God prepares His missionaries and ambassadors today likewise.

Jeremiah 13:9 Thus says Yahweh, In this way I will ruin the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem- See on :6. It was pride in the heart which was the essential problem; all the idolatry and immorality flowed from that. And this is the abiding lesson for us. As noted on :7, God would ruin or destroy His people in the sense of destroying their pride. This was the intention of the captivity; and only then could God bring them back to Judah attached to Him, just as Jeremiah returned with the useless belt. It is not specifically stated that he returned with the belt because it was an open question as to whether the exiles would shed their pride. The reality is that they didn't, yet by pure grace God still tried to bring them back; such was and is His desire to as it were fore through His saving purpose with people.

Jeremiah 13:10 This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their heart, and are gone after other gods to serve them and to worship them- The choice was between walking after God's word, or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is

a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

Shall even be as this belt, which is profitable for nothing- Jeremiah's parable of the girdle demonstrated that the Jews would not "prosper" (Jer. 13:7,10) even when taken into captivity at the Euphrates (i.e. Babylon), using the same word as in the parable of the vine in Ez. 17:9. Babylon, according to Ez. 17:8, was potentially fruitful soil for their spiritual revival. But they would not "prosper", Jeremiah says, because of their deep seated love of idolatry and lack of true repentance.

Jeremiah 13:11 For as the belt clings to the waist of a man, so have I caused to cling to Me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, says Yahweh; that they may be to Me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear- There is an Arabic saying that a man's people cling to him as a man's belt. That seems to be the idea in view in this acted parable. God caused His people to cling to Him, perhaps referring to marriage (s.w. Gen. 2:24); and yet their pride meant that they refused it. This speaks of the psychological work of God to cause His people to cling to Him, which is likewise ongoing today. We note that Israel and Judah are mentioned together; the idea was that the restoration would unite both nations through the common experience of being humbled and repenting. The two nations would return to the land and this become God's singular people. This was God's intention from the start, but it was their pride (:9) which caused them not to "hear".

Jeremiah 13:12 Therefore you shall speak to them this word: Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine: and they shall tell you, Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine?- This continues the theme of the earlier parable of the belt, which had to be marred before it would be useless enough for God to use. This spoke of how Judah would lose their pride in Babylon (:9), or that was the intention. "Bottle" here of course means not a glass bottle but a bag or wine skin; but the Hebrew word essentially means that which is deflated, alluding to how wine skins deflated. It is used of the "fading" of human pride in Judah (Is. 28:1,4; 40:7,8; 64:6). This is the continuation of theme with the fading pride of :9. Those humbled skins could have been filled with the wine of the new covenant; but they were to be filled with the wine of judgment (:13). To be given wine from Yahweh is a double symbol; either of condemnation, as happened later to Babylon as well (Is. 51:23; Jer. 25:15); or of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16). They of course chose to understand it as the symbol of blessing, saying that of course they knew the skins were to be filled with wine. But the wine was in

fact to be a symbol of judgment (:13). This double symbol explains how the communion service can bring us up sharp before the two options in our destiny- to drink to our condemnation, or to our eternal blessing. This is why self examination is naturally elicited by it.

Jeremiah 13:13 Then you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings who sit on David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness- The royal family and leadership are bracketed along with "all the inhabitants of the land". Leadership does what the masses want; leaders exercise the natural human tendency to quickly perceive what the other wishes to hear and to say and do it. This is what had happened in Judah. The "people love to have it so", and therefore the priests and prophets said what the people wanted to hear (Jer. 5:31). This is why all society was to be punished. The wine of the covenant was to become the drunkenness of condemnation for them.

Jeremiah 13:14 I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, says Yahweh: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have compassion, that I should not destroy them- See on :24. They would be a source of mutual destruction. we bite and devour each other, we may be consumed by each other (Gal. 5:15)- this is the same idea of brethren killing brethren. Israel were condemned to destruction by brother being dashed against brother (Jer. 13:14). Indeed, biting and devouring each other is a quotation from Is. 9:19,20 LXX (although not apparent in the AV), where Israel in their judgment for unfaithfulness would bite and devour each others' bodies in the siege. Paul is saying that if we bite and devour each other with our words (and we are all guilty of this at times), we are acting as the condemned. If we do this, we may well be consumed of each other- and this *may* have a terribly literal fulfilment, in that as the world destroys every man his neighbour in the confusion of the last day, so the rejected may do the same, living out the bigotry and passive anger they felt towards each other in their ecclesial life. This all needs some meditation. For there are very few of us not caught up in some division, personality clash, biting or devouring.

Jeremiah 13:15 Hear, and give ear; don't be proud; for Yahweh has spoken- Jeremiah had just made a journey to Euphrates and back as part of an acted parable appealing for humility (:9). And so he now begs them not to be proud; but rather to be humble before God's word. God has spoken, and that itself is the imperative to not be proud. We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our

subsequent actions. We are to hear *and* give ear to God's word. We can hear on a surface level, but not give the ear of our heart to God's voice.

Jeremiah 13:16 Give glory to Yahweh your God, before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and, while you look for light, He turns it into the shadow of death, and makes it gross darkness- The land was to return to its state before creation, covered with gross darkness. But even in this language of judgment there is hope of new creation, through the movement of the Spirit. Giving glory to God to avoid this meant being humble (:9,15). This is the great paradox- that our humility and repentance exalts God.

Jeremiah 13:17 But if you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret for your pride; and my eye shall weep bitterly, and run down with tears, because Yahweh's flock is taken captive- This continues Jeremiah's desperate plea for humility (:16). He uses the present tense "is taken captive" although it was yet future, because so certain was the condemnation for pride. And yet they were to go into captivity even then as "Yahweh's flock", they were still His. The fact others reject our message ought likewise to pain us at the very core and heart of our beings. Perhaps here we have a private soliloquy of Jeremiah. He would hide away and weep for them, and nobody would ever know. His grief was to be deeply personal ("my soul shall weep") and unperceived by others ("in secret places"). And I challenge us, each one: have we ever done this, or even come near it, in our frustration with those who reject our message? Jeremiah wept. He didn't "...not care a rush". For all the issues which the prophets could have condemned people for, pride was high on their list. "I abhor the pride of Jacob", Amos cried out in dismay (Am. 6:8). Jeremiah here weeps in secret, his eyes running with tears, "for your pride". Isaiah gets passionate about the way that Assyria thought that "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom" (Is. 10:13). Because Ephraim trusted in his wealth, the most awful words of judgment are pronounced upon him (Hos. 12:8; 10:13,14). We shrug when we see pride and trust in wealth. Rich or poor, we all tend to trust in money. Thinking that that's life... under the sun. But the prophets went ballistic about this. We've developed established patterns of indifference to this kind of thing. But the prophet's consciences were keenly sensitive to these patterns, and they openly challenged them. They weren't just empty moralizers, bleating on about the state of the nation; their words are an assault of the mind and conscience.

Jeremiah 13:18 Say to the king and to the queen mother- This could refer to Jehoiakim and the queen-mother Zebidah (2 Kings 23:36). But more likely it refers to the three months' reign of his successor, Jehoiachin, whose mother, Nehushta, is referred to in 2

Kings 24:8,12,15. The mother is mentioned because Jehoiachin was so young (cp. Jer. 22:26).

Humble yourselves, sit down; for your headdresses have come down, even the crown of your glory- Come down is the idea of humbling. The pride of man will be humbled by Yahweh; if we refuse to humble ourselves, then God's condemnation of us in the day of judgment will humble us. Therefore it is logical to humble ourselves now. LXX gives: "come down from your head is your beautiful crown". We noted on :1 that all Israel were intended to be a nation of priests and even God's High Priest for the surrounding nations. But they were to now lose that possibility. Perhaps Jeremiah is even asking them to resign from the throne in recognition of their corruption, so that the line of David might be restored in the restored Kingdom which was then potentially possible.

Jeremiah 13:19 The cities of the South are shut up, and there is none to open them: Judah is carried away captive, all of it; it is wholly carried away captive- LXX "Complete removal". But this didn't happen to this extent; see on Jer. 10:18. Perhaps at this point the Babylonian advance had already surrounded the southern cities, and the captivity of the people was as good as done, hence the use of the present tense about something yet future. There was none to open the besieged, shut up cities; because the power of Egypt upon whom they hoped had been broken; see on :19. This is why "the cities of the south" are mentioned, for being nearer to Egypt, they had particularly hoped upon Egyptian help.

Jeremiah 13:20 Lift up your eyes, and see those who come from the north: where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock?- The flock which disappeared may refer to how the army of Egypt, upon whom Judah (LXX mentions "Jerusalem" specifically here) had trusted for defence against Babylon "from the north", was destroyed at the battle of Carchemish (BC 605). This may have just happened when Jeremiah said this. This was why there was now nobody to open the cities which were closed up because of the siege; the Egyptians were not going to lift the siege (:19).

Jeremiah 13:21 What will you say, when He shall punish you?- "Punish" translates two words, 'to be overseer over'. The allusion is to their bondage in Egypt, to which they were to effectively return in Babylonian captivity.

You have provoked them to be captains and rulers over you- The "them" are the northern invaders seen in :20. "Captains and rulers" sounds like Israel's slavery in Egypt. They

were to as it were return to Egypt (Hos. 8:13; 9:3). This is why the language of the restoration prophecies, especially in later Isaiah, allude to the exodus from Egypt. Judah had done what their fathers had done- returned in their hearts to Egypt. They therefore as it were appointed the invaders as their captains and rulers over them.

Shall not sorrows take hold of you, as of a woman in travail?- Although this a metaphor for judgment, it includes the hope that new birth was to come out of all these sufferings. Always God had in view His hope for the rebirth of His people.

Jeremiah 13:22 If you say in your heart, Why are these things come on me?- Ezekiel addresses this same complaint in Ez. 18, that the judgments are unjust. God's response is simply to remind them of how terribly they are to be judged- and that ought to elicit within their own consciences an awareness of what they had done to deserve this. The level of shameless self-justification is extreme; so extreme that we reflect it could only have arisen from allowing themselves to be utterly convinced that they were serving Yahweh through serving the idols, and that the words of the false prophets were those of God. But this utter conviction was not simply a case of intellectual failure or being mislead by their teachers. It had a strong moral basis to it; in that they were believing what they wanted t believe, in order to justify their lusts.

For the greatness of your iniquity are your skirts lifted up, and your private parts suffer violence- Her lovers, those she had depended upon, would become her enemies and destroyers (Ez. 23:22). The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (Ez. 23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (Ez. 16:7,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (Ez. 16:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (Ez. 23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are modern readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the

more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism.

Jeremiah 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, who are accustomed to do evil- This is in response to their question in :22, as to why they were being punished. No specific sin is listed, but rather the complaint is that they had become psychologically dominated by their ways and habitual ("accustomed") paths of thought. Once habit solidifies, it becomes effectively part of our nature and almost impossible to change, at least in human strength. The Hebrew translated "accustomed" carries the idea of repeated habit. The Hebrew idea of 'teaching' is connected to the words for 'habit' or 'custom'; because teaching was by repetition. The Lord Jesus "morning by morning" heard God's word "as the learned" (Is. 50:4); but the Hebrew words for "accustomed" in Jer. 13:23 and "learned" in Is. 50:4 are the same. God teaches by repetition- which may be out of vogue in the experience / problem based learning philosophy of current education, but it's God's way.

Jeremiah 13:24 Therefore will I scatter them, as the stubble that passes away, by the wind of the wilderness- The "stubble" doesn't refer to what is left in the ground after harvest. Here it refers to the broken straw which had to be separated from the wheat after the corn had been trampled out by the oxen. Sometimes it was burnt as useless; at other times left to be blown away by the wind coming from the desert. The idea is that whatever was left after the trampling of the Babylonians, even that would be blown away by the wind out of the land and into captivity. But by grace this didn't happen, because the poor of the land, the majority, were left there. See on Jer. 10:18.

Dan. 2:44 describes how the kingdoms of this world will be broken and scattered as the chaff before the wind. Yet this is exactly the language of Jer. 13:24 concerning Israel's latter destruction. They will be "dashed" (Jer. 13:14) as the nations of the world will be (Ps. 2:9). The same verse says they will be destroyed by brother being dashed against brother- again, the picture of the world's final destruction (Zech. 14:13). Rev. 2:27 speaks of the unfaithful in the ecclesia likewise being dashed to pieces. The Lord's coming will be a stone that grinds them to powder (Mt. 21:44).

Jeremiah 13:25 This is your lot, the portion measured to you from Me, says Yahweh; because you have forgotten Me, and trusted in falsehood- The portion of the wine of judgment was justly measured and it lead to the drunkenness of condemnation. But as

noted on :24, even that just measure was ameliorated by the grace of a God whose justice incorporates grace. But the judgment measured, "this... your lot", could refer to the mind-set of :24. God confirmed them in their path of rebellious thinking. Rom. 1:28 states this clearly- God gives a "reprobate mind" to those who wish to think in that way. He confirms us by His Spirit, working directly on our hearts, in the way we choose to go and be.

Jeremiah 13:26 Therefore will I also lift your skirts up above your face- The shocking sexual language and imagery of the prophets was in order to help Israel see that this was how far they had outraged God; see on :22. It was and is a rhetoric that cannot be forgotten, shrugged off, re-interpreted. The rhetoric pushes relentlessly for a response in our consciences (See Phyllis Trible, *God And The Rhetoric Of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) pp. 31-71). Just as for a woman to have her skirt ripped above her head and her nakedness displayed was ultimately humiliating for her, so Israel had humiliated God by their sin (Jer. 13:25-27); their actions were just as shocking and obscene.

And your shame shall appear- Time and again, Israel were told that through the judgments of punishment they would receive, they would come to know God in truth (e.g. Ez. 25:7. Their own shame was made to appear before their own face by the judgment process (Jer. 13:26 RV). But it is possible for us to come to that knowledge now through a correct response to the word. If only in our self examination now we would "judge (i.e. condemn) ourselves, we would not be judged (condemned)" at the judgment seat (1 Cor. 11:34). The mental effort and organization of time which this requires must surely be worthwhile in the light of this promise.

Jeremiah 13:27 I have seen your abominations, even your adulteries, and your neighing, the lewdness of your prostitution, on the hills in the field. Woe to you, Jerusalem!- The sexual violence to be done to her was appropriate to the nature of her sins, which are presented as sexual- in that every act of trust in the surrounding nations, every covenant with them, was adultery against God. The terms of those covenants was that they had to worship the gods of those nations, which they did "on the hills and in the field"; and this therefore was where they had committed their persecution. Their endless "neighing" for the attentions and favours of the Gentiles was to be reflected in the neighing of the horses of their invaders (only s.w. Jer. 8:16).

You will not be made clean; how long shall it yet be?- LXX "for thou hast not been purified so as to follow me; how long yet shall it be?". This suggests the longing of God for their repentance.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 14

Jeremiah 14:1 The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought- See on Jer. 17:8. Drought was the specific punishment for serving other gods, and would lead to the destruction of the people (Dt. 11:16,17).

Jeremiah 14:2 Judah mourns, and its gates languish, they sit in black on the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up- This could mean that God heard their situation as if it were a prayer, even if unarticulated. The intensity of the drought and famine was to try to get the people to repent, as it was in Elijah's time; so that the even worse blackening of the gates of Jerusalem with fire need not happen at the hands of the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 14:3 Their nobles send their little ones to the waters: they come to the cisterns, and find no water; they return with their vessels empty; they are disappointed and confounded, and cover their heads- This again recalls the recorded search for water during the drought of Elijah's time. It was to elicit repentance. The covering of heads in shame and confusion is all language of the exile; they were intended to experience those things through the famine and repent, so that the shame of the exile need not have happened. This is typical of how God works, to this day. To focus solely upon His final execution of judgment and to cry foul is to fail to appreciate all the effort made to *not* have to judge like that.

Jeremiah 14:4 Because of the ground which is cracked, because no rain has been in the land, the ploughmen are disappointed, they cover their heads- See on :3. "Cracked" is the word usually translated "dismayed"; and there are multiple exhortations not to be dismayed (Jer. 23:4; 30:10). Judah were dismayed with the dismay of the Gentiles (Jer. 10:2 s.w.). And the state of the land reflected their internal mental condition.

Jeremiah 14:5 Yes, the hind also in the field calves and forsakes her young, because there is no grass- Perhaps we are intended to recall that it is the voice of the Lord which makes the hinds to calve (Ps. 29:9); but the lack of grass was a result of a drought which Israel had brought upon themselves. God's word had set up a potential which they refused to allow to come to realization.

Jeremiah 14:6 The wild donkeys stand on the bare heights, they pant for air like jackals; their eyes fail, because there is no greenery to eat- The impression is of them scanning the countryside from the high places for food. Those high places were where idols had been worshipped as part of fertility cults; and clearly they had failed to deliver on their promises, as all idols do.

Jeremiah 14:7 Though our iniquities testify against us, work for Your name's sake, Yahweh; for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against You- God had said He would destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation. But He relented of that, and in Ez. 20:22 we see the picture of His internal struggle, working for His Name's sake, for the sake of the principles incorporated within His Name. So it is an intrinsic part of His Name and essential personality that He changes His judgments from pity. When the Psalmist of Ps. 109:21 asks for God's grace, He asks God to "do" or "work"

for the sake of His Name, and not bring about a threatened judgment. Jeremiah likewise understood this and asks God to still be gracious to Israel despite their lack of repentance- through working for His Name's sake (Jer. 14:7). To save by grace was therefore working or doing according to His Name's sake, rather than according to human merit (Ez. 36:22). Thus by working for His Name's sake, the repentant exiles would come to 'know Yahweh' (Ez. 20:44), they would come to see who He essentially is. And He is revealed as the very opposite of a stone faced, unchanging, insensitive God, which was then the standard conception of a deity.

Jeremiah 14:8 You hope of Israel, its Saviour in the time of trouble, why should You be as a foreigner in the land, and as a wayfaring man who turns aside to stay for a night?- This could be saying that God seems as disinterested in the land as a traveller passing through a foreign country who only spends a night there in transit. But the idea may be that God was to Israel as a wayfaring man who wanted to lodge with them, but they only let Him stay one night. It must be so awful to have such a wonderful spirit of lavishing grace and love, consciously giving out life and patient forgiveness to so many; and yet not be appreciated for it, to have puny humans shaking their fist at God because they die a brief moment of time sooner than they think they should, to have tiny people arrogantly questioning His love. Seeing that God is Almighty, and God could have made [and could re-make] His creation to 'understand' and respond in a robot-like way... and seeing God has real and deep emotional feelings... it all makes God almost a tragic figure.

A slightly different slant of interpretation opens when we perceive that the word for "stay" is that used in the phrase "lodging place" in Jer. 9:2, where God says that He wished to leave His people and find a "lodging place in the wilderness for wayfaring men" and spend the night there, away from His adulterous people. Jeremiah here recalls those statements of God in Jer. 9:2, and sees it as tragic that God had felt this way about His people. And indeed it was and is. The desire to leave them was because they were adulterous women and dishonest men (Jer. 9:2). And so the God of all grace, the most surpassingly loving husband, wanted to become an endlessly travelling man, weary of the road, who wanted to just turn in to a one night motel and rest from His weariness. He elsewhere speaks as if the emotional drain of the relationship wearied Him (Jer. 15:6). This of course is Almighty God adjusting Himself to mortal man, allowing Himself to feel through our limitations.

Jeremiah 14:9 Why should You be like a scared man, as a mighty man who can't save? Yet You, Yahweh, are in the midst of us, and we are called by Your name; don't leave us- The idea of God limiting His omnipotence and also His omniscience explains why God is described as if He suddenly becomes aware of something, makes haste to intervene, or is hurt by sudden apostasy. These ideas are hard to understand if in fact God has total knowledge, i.e. awareness, from the beginning. They either express God to us in human terms; or God limits His omniscience, as He limits His omnipotence, and therefore disallows Himself from foreseeing all our possible futures. The fact is, God 'the Saviour of Israel' can become "as a mighty man that cannot save" by our refusal to accept His salvation (Jer. 14:8,9). God left Himself as a mighty man that cannot save, as a wayfaring man wandering through His own deserted land- so much does He respect our freewill decisions concerning Him, no matter how much they hurt Him.

Jeremiah 14:10 Thus says Yahweh to this people, Even so have they loved to wander; they have not refrained their feet: therefore Yahweh does not accept them; now He will remember their iniquity, and visit their sins- God's response seems to suggest that Jeremiah's desperate plea for God to remain with them (:9) is out of step with how things really are. The reality is that they had wandered away from Him. They had no applied any self control in going away from Him. See on :12.

Jeremiah 14:11 Yahweh said to me, Don't pray for this people for their good- Ez. 22:30 says that if a person had been found at this time who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap', God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" in Ez. 22:30 is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. But there was not such a person, because they were "all" dross (Ez. 22:18,19). Jeremiah was in the land at the time and was surely righteous, but he had been told not to intercede for the people (Jer. 11:14; 14:11). It seems that if another like him had been found, in addition to Ezekiel in exile, then the judgments could have been averted. There were simply so many possible scenarios! And this is what we must expect if even time periods can be shortened or extended in response to human behaviour. And yet Jeremiah himself seems to have been too 'pro' Israel. He was shocked at the depth of their weakness and even naive to it; and in Lamentations he seems to consider God had acted too harshly against His people. So perhaps in any case Jeremiah was not the appropriate interceder.

Jeremiah 14:12 When they fast, I will not hear their cry- The command had been for Jeremiah not to pray for the people (:11). But the reason is given that God would not hear *their* prayer. So we see reflected here the way in which *in some circumstances* God is prepared to hear the prayer of a third party as the prayer of the person being prayed for. See on Mk. 2:5. But Judah had moved so far from God that this was now not possible.

And when they offer burnt offering and meal offering, I will not accept them- Although in real spiritual terms, Judah had gone far away from God to their idols (see on :10), they still made offerings to Yahweh. But these were unacceptable because they were worshipping other gods and offering to them too at the same time.

But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine and by the plague- Judah were in fact not consumed by these things; in wrath God remembered mercy, by grace. See on Jer. 10:18.

Jeremiah 14:13 Then I said, Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, the prophets tell them, You shall not see the sword, neither shall you have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place- Again we sense the overly positive view of Israel held by Jeremiah. It ought to have been intuitively obvious to him that these were not Yahweh's words. And yet Jeremiah apparently enquires of God what is going on. It likewise ought to have been obvious to Judah, with the severe drought upon them, that they already had famine. They were asking a lot of faith from people to believe that their prophecies of "peace in this place" would come true. And yet that promise was also given by the true prophets, word for word the same in Hag. 2:9, requiring faith in it as well. But it was the perversity of human nature to put their faith in a false prophecy.

Jeremiah 14:14 Then Yahweh said to me, The prophets prophesy lies in My name; I didn't send them, neither have I commanded them, neither spoke I to them: they prophesy to you a lying vision and divination, a thing of nothing and the deceit of their own heart- "A thing of nothing" is the language of idols. This is how the Hebrew word is usually translated. Their false prophecies were therefore connected with idolatry. They claimed that the idols of Babylon and the nations were inspiring them with messages of peace. That Babylon should come and destroy them, the very opposite of peace, was an appropriate judgment. Yet they made these prophecies in Yahweh's Name. We see here how they claimed that their idolatry was all sanctioned by Yahweh and was a form of worshipping Him.

Jeremiah 14:15 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name and I didn't send them, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land: By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed- Whilst the deaths of the false prophets is not recorded, we can assume that this judgment was not ameliorated as that upon the entire society was (see on :12). The anger of Judah's "lovers" was because she had promised total loyalty to them and their gods; but then they discovered Judah had made such agreements with many nations, and the Jerusalem temple was full of idols of various nations. We can understand therefore that the priests and prophets would have been particularly targeted by the invaders, and indeed would have been slain by the sword.

Jeremiah 14:16 The people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them- them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness on them- Sin is its own judgment; the judgment / punishment is likened here to their own sin. The judgment of the teachers / prophets is paralleled with that of their hearers. It wasn't simply that the masses were genuinely misled. The teachers taught what they perceived their audience wanted to hear, and this explains why teacher and listener alike were condemned. And yet when the people were cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, the true prophet, laments as if this judgment is somehow unreasonable (e.g. Lam. 2:21). I feel that whilst the human tragedy was enough to make anybody cry "Too much!", Jeremiah is here out of step with the God who had inspired him to make just this prophecy in places like Jer. 14:16.

I have noted several times that the prophesied judgments in Jeremiah differ from each other; he has also predicted that there would be such mass destruction that there would be nobody to bury the dead, for all would be slain (Jer. 14:16). But Jer. 19:11 speaks of burying bodies in Topheth. These different scenarios didn't all come true. There were various prophetic options, according to the exact measure of Israel's repentance and Jeremiah's intercession; or perhaps, simply according to the pity which Yahweh would finally show this sinful people.

Jeremiah 14:17 You shall say this word to them, Let my eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease- This could be read as an invitation to repent in tears, in the desperate hope God may yet change His intended judgment; hence LXX "Let your eyes shed tears day and night, and let them not cease: for the daughter of my people has been sorely bruised, and her plague is very grievous". But there is an ambiguity in the text, whereby apparently God is the one who is mourning night and day. Perhaps this is purposeful; they were to mourn as He did, seeing the coming

judgments from His perspective, rather than from the human perspective of considering them as just a tragic misfortune. Jeremiah himself entered into this, for he wept night and day for Zion. This passage is alluded to in Lam. 2:18, where Jeremiah appears to ask the remaining Jews in Jerusalem to pray night and day; and yet there too, the grammar is ambiguous. For he may be saying there that they had already done this. The truth was they had not, Jeremiah had done so, but contrary to what he hoped, God was not prepared to accept his tears of repentance and mourning as theirs (see on Jer. 14:11).

For the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous wound- This is the language of the rape of a virgin. And yet as Jeremiah and Ezekiel have made very clear, Judah had long since given up her virginity to the nations. So this loss of virginity had been of her own eager choice. The "breach" recalls the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Jer. 39:2; 52:7); indeed the word seems to have the sense of the rape of a virgin here when we read that the virgin daughter of Zion had been breached (Jer. 14:17). And both Jeremiah and even God, according to Jer. 8:21, felt themselves breached in this breach of God's people and city. This was how closely identified God was with His wicked people; and how much more does He feel with us in Christ, we who at least seek not to live as Judah did at that time...

Like us, Jeremiah didn't consistently have a heart of compassion. Initially he didn't even want to preach to his people. And he even prayed that he would so grieve for them in regard to the message he gave them, that he would cry for them day and night: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jer. 9:1). And this prayer was heard. For by Lamentations, this is just what he was doing. And if what we read of Jeremiah troubles us, we too can pray for a heart that bleeds, and through the experience of life which the Lord allows us, He will develop such a heart in those who want it. You may be so caught up in your business, your family, your ecclesia even, your web of social contact… that in honest moments, you know that your heart doesn't bleed as it should. You see the needs and pain and struggle of men and women, but it doesn't touch your heart very deeply. Jeremiah may well have been like this; but he prayed for a new heart, and so can you. Jeremiah had actually been commanded by God to have such a level of grief for His people: "Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them; Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken" (Jer. 14:17). Jeremiah's grief was God's word of care and concern to the people; and so it can be with us. Jeremiah was to be like this, to reflect God's passion for His people; so he prayed that he would have such a heart of true compassion [note that the chapters in Jeremiah are totally out of sequence chronologically]; and in the end, he found it.

In Jer. 6:7, God laments that the continual bubbling forth of their wickedness, as from a perpetual fountain, was matched in His continual woundedness. That God can be wounded by our behaviour... is a stunning concept. This reveals the extent to which God has sensitized Himself toward man, when we are but ants before Him, the King of the cosmos. Yet the same word is used here of the deep wounding of God's people by the invaders (Jer. 14:17; 30:14); but God felt that Himself even before they did.

Jeremiah 14:18 If I go forth into the field, then, behold, the slain with the sword! If I enter into the city, then, behold, those who are sick with famine! For both the prophet and the priest go about in the land, and have no knowledge- This is Jeremiah looking ahead in faith to the fulfillment of God's words. "Go about..." is the language of

trading. Jeremiah blames his own people- the priests and prophets- for the situation. And it was their love of material benefit and gain which led them to their false teachings, and which in turn led the people to accept it so eagerly. They had "no knowledge" in the Hebraic sense of relationship with God. Again we see that the acceptance of false doctrine / understanding is often based on subconscious immoral desires or is predicated upon moral rather than purely intellectual issues.

Jeremiah 14:19 Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul loathed Zion? Why have You struck us, and there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of healing, and behold, dismay!- Again we sense Jeremiah somewhat out of step with God, accusing Him of not giving peace and healing- despite the reasons for that having been specifically stated by God. However he may be quoting the words of the people, which :22 then comments upon. The lack of quotation marks and expected rubric for quotations often makes interpretation of Jeremiah difficult. They "looked for peace" because the false prophets told them that; or perhaps they referred to Isaiah's prophecies of peace in the restored Kingdom of God. The terms of God's covenant had been clear, using the same phrase for 'the soul loathing'; if Israel's soul loathed God's judgments, then His soul would loathe them (Lev. 26:11,15,30,43). They had loathed or literally 'cast away' God their husband (s.w. Ez. 16:45), and so the distance between God and themselves was of their making and initiative.

The level of shameless self-justification is extreme; so extreme that we reflect it could only have arisen from allowing themselves to be utterly convinced that they were serving Yahweh through serving the idols, and that the words of the false prophets were those of God. But this utter conviction was not simply a case of intellectual failure or being mislead by their teachers. It had a strong moral basis to it; in that they were believing what they wanted t believe, in order to justify their lusts.

Jeremiah 14:20 We acknowledge, Yahweh, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned against You- As noted on :21, the lack of quotation marks and expected rubric for quotations often makes interpretation of Jeremiah difficult. This seems to be God's fantasy about their response of repentance; or these could be Jeremiah's words, hoping that his feelings would be counted as those of the people. But as discussed on :12, he had been specifically told that God was not going to accept this. In which case he was absolutely out of step with God in this matter; for God had said that he should not pray nor reason in this way (see on :11).

Jeremiah earlier has repeated God's request that they "acknowledge iniquity" (Jer. 3:13). But they did not. But here he says that "we" have done so. He either considered that he was representative of the people, or he failed to accept that their acknowledging of iniquity was only on a surface level. Although on one hand Jeremiah is in step with God's feeling and thinking, he comes over so often (especially in Lamentations) as implying that God is unjust. He had an over positive view of his people. They did not "acknowledge iniquity" as required, but he considers they had done.

Jeremiah 14:21 Do not abhor us, for Your name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of Your glory- Here we find something wonderful: "Do not abhor *us*… do not disgrace the throne of Your glory". *We*, weak humans, are paralleled with the throne of God's glory. Although Jerusalem is in mind, Jeremiah seems to understand that God's throne is essentially His repentant people.

Remember, don't break Your covenant with us- Jeremiah appears again out of step with God. For he has repeatedly lamented how Israel have broken the covenant. Israel's breaking of the covenant meant that God had therefore broken the covenant (Lev. 26:15,44 s.w.). Idolatry was therefore to "break My covenant" (Dt. 31:20; Ez. 44:7). God's covenant was broken by them. So the issue of God breaking His covenant was not relevant; He had broken His covenant insofar as they had broken it. What was required was their repentance and desperate seeking of a new covenant with God to replace the one they had broken.

Jeremiah 14:22 Are there any among the vanities of the nations that can cause rain? or can the sky give showers? Aren't You He, Yahweh our God? Therefore we will wait for You; for You have made all these things- As explained on :20, Jeremiah is apparently assuming that his feelings will be accepted as the peoples'. He indeed waited for Yahweh, but the people did not. As Jeremiah elsewhere has to point out and prophecy, the people continued in their mad devotion to the idols right up to the fall of the city. And those idols were supposed to have been the creators of the various planets. Here Jeremiah appears to deny those idolatrous beliefs by saying that Yahweh alone is their creator and therefore in total control of the rainfall. But in reality the people were still worshipping the various rain gods and planets, in the hope they would give rain. And so Jeremiah was wrong to speak for the people in this way; and he has been specifically told not to do so, as explained on :11,12.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 15

Jeremiah 15:1 Then Yahweh said to me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be towards this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth- As discussed on Jer. 14:11,12, things had gone so far with Israel that Jeremiah's words were not to be counted as Israel's, and so in that sense He was not to pray for them. However as noted on Jer. 14:20-22, he attempts to do so. And here we have God's response. He was not going to accept third party intercession and repentance as theirs. Hence the force here of "*then* Yahweh said...". 'Standing before the Lord' refers to prayer- Ps. 106:23; Ezra 9:15; Jer. 15:1; 18:20. To live a life standing before the Lord is to live a life of prayer. Hence David and Paul say that prayer can be continual- in that life becomes a lived out prayer, with the practice of living in the presence of God. And straight away we ask ourselves, in lives just as busy as those of David and Paul, whether our self-talk, our minute by minute inner consciousness, is "before the Lord"... or merely the sheer and utter vapidity of the modern mind.

God's "soul" (LXX) could not face the people, they were to be cast out of His presence; and therefore no intercessor could stand in His presence representing them. There has to come a moment when the pull of the flow toward the waterfall of condemnation is now too strong, and the plunge is inevitable. It is that moment which perhaps we need to fear more than anything else in human experience. It happened to Israel- their hearts too were hard, and in the end, after a period, God have them over to their hard hearts (Ps. 81:11,12)- the implication being that even whilst He hardened their hearts, He kept them by grace from the full consequences... but in the end, the final inevitable drag towards the waterfall set in. This is why there were times when even repentance, as a change of mind, could not save Jerusalem from destruction (Jer.

4:28; 15:1-9; 16:12; Ez. 7:1-9). This was the moment *after* the inevitable tug towards the waterfall beings, but before the actual plunge. It's Saul cowering before the witch of Endor, lying face down in the dirt that fateful night... and *this* is the human condition we should most dread.

Jeremiah 15:2 It shall happen, when they tell you, Where shall we go forth? Then you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh: Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for captivity, to captivity- The idea may be that they would desire to "go forth", but none would come out of the siege alive apart from a fourth part who would go into captivity. The rest would only come out of the siege of Jerusalem, as it were, to death. But that isn't how it worked out. The various statements of judgment express the various possible scenarios which could have emerged. For they didn't all come true; see on Jer. 10:18.

Jeremiah 15:3 I will appoint over them four kinds, says Yahweh: the sword to kill, the dogs to tear, the birds of the sky and the animals of the land, to devour and to destroy- LXX "Four kinds of death". But there is no evidence that wild animals killed anyone in Judah. It may have happened, but the idea seems to be that a quarter of the population would be killed by the invaders, and the rest by birds and wild animals. If the animals of the land refer to the local nations killing the Jews, then we would have thought that was included in the category "the sword to kill". So we seem here to have a prediction that three quarters of the population would die at the hand of wild animals- perhaps aggressively searching for food due to the awful drought of Jer. 14, and the abandoning of the countryside. But this didn't happen. As noted on Jer. 10:18, God in wrath remembered mercy, or perhaps allowed a different path of events and potentials to take place. Indeed the very next verse speaks of them being wanderers amongst the nations; which means they were not all to be slain as here threatened. We are meant to understand that there were various potential scenarios which could work out- depending upon the extent of their repentance.

Jeremiah 15:4 I will cause them to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the land because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem- This removing of Judah from their land uses the same word as in Dt. 28:25; in response to their breaking of the covenant, they would be "removed (s.w.) into all the kingdoms of the *eretz*, throughout the land promised to Abraham. But this curse could have been turned into a blessing; for the restoration prophets envisaged the nations of the *eretz* repenting and converting to Yahweh. This could have been achieved by the exiles witnessing to the various peoples and languages within the Babylonian / Persian empire. But this didn't happen as was potentially possible. The exiles didn't repent, and so their repentance and experience of the grace of forgiveness was not the powerful pattern of conversion to their neighbours which it could have been. The kingdoms of the *eretz* would then be the wild animals of the land of :3. Ezekiel at this time had been careful to explain that the children don't die for the sins of their fathers. They would be punished because they continued in the sins of Manasseh.

Jeremiah 15:5 For who will have pity on you, Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask of your welfare?- LXX "Who will spare you?". This is a rhetorical series of questions, each of which is answered in one word: Yahweh. He

was the One who would "have pity" upon the exiles although nobody else would (s.w. Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17). LXX "who will turn back to ask for thy welfare?" suggests therefore that Yahweh did "turn back" or relent. See on :3. The "welfare", Heb. *shalom*, the peace of Jerusalem... is indeed Yahweh's special interest. "Ask" is literally 'to pray', and the same two words are found in Ps. 122:6: "Pray [ask] for the peace [welfare] of Jerusalem".

Jeremiah 15:6 You have rejected Me, says Yahweh, you have gone backward- As explained on Jer. 7:21,24, they were confirmed in their backward path by God Himself. "Rejected" is 'cast off'. Yahweh 'cast off' Judah (Jer. 12:7; 23:33) but only because they had cast Him off (Jer. 15:6 s.w.). And yet God did not cast off His people (Jer. 33:26); Jeremiah personally was persuaded that God would not cast off His people for ever (Lam. 3:31). He will show them mercy as if He had not cast them off (Zech. 10:6); this reversal of their casting off was to be through the repentance of the exiled community (Lev. 26:44). But even this didn't happen, and yet God still did not cast them away (Rom. 11:2). His love and grace was such that He holds on to them. This desperate holding on to His people is seen in the experience of every person who joins God's people through baptism into Christ. They may indeed be cast off ultimately, but that is because they cast Him off, and wrestled against His insistent desire to keep hold of them eternally.

Therefore have I stretched out My hand against you and destroyed you- The hand of God is an Angelic term, and here we see it responsible for the frequent repenting (changing of mind) of God concerning Israel. Frequent repentance is fundamentally not a characteristic of God Himself- "God is not a man, that He should repent" (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29).

I am weary- This weariness of God is reflected in how in Jer. 9:2, God says that He wished to leave His people and find a "lodging place in the wilderness for wayfaring men" and spend the night there, away from His adulterous people. In Jer. 14:8, Jeremiah here recalls those statements of God, and sees it as tragic that God had felt this way about His people. And indeed it was and is. The desire to leave them was because they were adulterous women and dishonest men (Jer. 9:2). And so the God of all grace, the most surpassingly loving husband, wanted to become an endlessly travelling man, weary of the road, who wanted to just turn in to a one night motel and rest from His weariness. The emotional drain of the relationship wearied Him. This of course is Almighty God adjusting Himself to mortal man, allowing Himself to feel through our limitations.

With relenting- God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6). This is likewise the theme of Hosea's emotionally draining relationship with Gomer, which reflected that of Yahweh with Israel (Hos. 11:8).

Jeremiah 15:7 I have winnowed them with a fan in the gates of the land; I have bereaved them of children, I have destroyed My people; they didn't return from their ways- And yet they had bereaved themselves of their children by offering them to the idols. The 'destruction' of the people was not literal death; for after it, they still didn't "return from their ways". There is a play upon the word for "return". Israel's return to

God would be matched by their return to the land. The exiles didn't repent, and yet by grace God still returned them, so eager was and is He to as it were force through His purpose of grace. The destruction is parallel with the winnowing; the intention was that the judgment would lead to the true corn falling to the ground and the chaff being blown away. But this didn't happen, and so it was reapplied and rescheduled to the last days.

Jeremiah 15:8 Their widows are increased to Me above the sand of the seas; I have brought on them against the mother of the young men a destroyer at noonday- Attacks were typically made at dawn and not in the heat and visibility of noon. But the destroyers would be that confident and zealous as to attack and destroy the women at noon. These words are very similar to those of Ps. 137:8,9, where the daughter of Babylon is to be "destroyed" (s.w. "destroyer") and also loose her children. What was done to Zion was to be done to Babylon; which is the theme of Revelation, that the judgments upon Israel are then to be brought upon those who deliver them. All throughout, it is Yahweh who is the "destroyer" through the hand of the surrounding peoples (s.w. Jer. 25:36). This was in radical tension with the idea that a local god is always supportive of his people and always saves them. The God of Israel reveals a sensitivity to sin as fundamental to His character; and therefore He will judge and even destroy His own people rather than save them from their invaders.

I have caused anguish and terrors to fall on her suddenly- The sudden nature of Jerusalem's fall is emphasized (Jer. 4:20; 6:26; 15:8; 18:22); she was to fall as Babylon would "suddenly" fall (Jer. 51:8). Jerusalem fell predictably after a siege, there were no great surprises that she fell. See on Jer. 16:9. It was not a sudden fall that came out of left field, unexpectedly. And yet that is the implication of the prophecies. Babylon was reveling in prosperity when the Medes unexpectedly took the city; but the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon was totally expected and inevitable. Yet the fall is spoken of as "sudden". It could be that a potential "sudden" invasion and destruction of Jerusalem was projected by God, but the intercession of the few faithful, or the repentance of a tiny remnant, changed this possible outcome of their sin. So many different possibilities of judgment are given, ranging from a quarter destruction to total destruction of people and even all animal life. This reflects the open nature of God's working with His people, setting up various potentials in order to be fully responsive to human freewill decisions.

Jeremiah 15:9 She who has borne seven languishes; she has given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day; she has been disappointed and confounded: and their residue will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, says Yahweh- Instead of being respected and glorified for having had seven children, the woman was ashamed because those children were dead. There is a strong sense of disappointment here, her sun going down before its time. This may refer to how the false prophets were shown to be so shamefully wrong.

Jeremiah 15:10 Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole land!- Having spoken of the shame of a mother who loses her seven children, Jeremiah now thinks of his own mother, and feels her shame for having given birth to such a "man of strife" as himself. This logical progression of thought concerning the shame of mothers has the ring of psychological credibility to it. This is indeed how Jeremiah would have felt, and again, the Biblical record has every credibility and internal evidence that it is true. "To the whole land" / *eretz*

suggests that his messages were taken to the Gentile nations in the land promised to Abraham. God's intention was that they too along with Judah and Israel should repent, and participate in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel which He wished to establish.

I have not lent, neither have men lent to me; yet everyone of them curses me- The people cursed Jeremiah as people curse one in whose debt they are. By preaching the Truth to people, they become in our debt. Paul used this figure to persuade Philemon, who as his convert was as it were in his eternal debt. Our preaching of the Gospel is not therefore without impact upon the consciences of our hearers. Their apparent disinterest is an act. Every bullet, as it were, hits its target; but people consciously choose not to respond.

Jeremiah 15:11 Yahweh said, Most certainly I will strengthen you for good; most certainly I will cause the enemy to make supplication to you in the time of evil and in the time of affliction- The promise of strengthening is a repeat of that made at the start of Jeremiah's ministry. The strengthening was psychological strengthening against their hate and rejection of him. The Hebrew word for 'intercede' means also 'to meet'; every prayer is a meeting with God (Job 21:15; Is. 47:3; 64:5; Jer. 7:16; 15:11). Those who had so hated Jeremiah would come to him begging for his help in mediating with God.

The Hebrew here is difficult. The LXX offers: "Be it so, Lord, in their prosperity; surely I stood before thee in the time of their calamities, and in the time of their affliction, for their good against the enemy". GNB: "LORD, may all their curses come true if I have not served you well, if I have not pleaded with you on behalf of my enemies when they were in trouble and distress". The LXX would suggest that Jeremiah succeeded in interceding before God, and achieved "good" for them, in that his intercession ameliorated the judgments pronounced at the hand of their enemies. This would explain why there are so many different scenarios of judgment given through Jeremiah; but some were ameliorated by his intercession.

Jeremiah 15:12 Can one break iron, even iron from the north, and brass?- GNB "No one can break iron, especially the iron from the north that is mixed with bronze". In those days, "iron" was not made as today and was relatively weak. But the Babylonians mixed iron and brass, and this was the hardest metal of its time. We see here how God's word speaks in terms of contemporary understandings and situations, just as the language of demon possession is used in the New Testament.

Jeremiah 15:13 Your substance and your treasures will I give for a spoil without price, and that for all your sins, even in all your borders- GNB "The LORD said to me, "I will send enemies to carry away the wealth and treasures of my people, in order to punish them for the sins they have committed throughout the land". But their sins may have been particularly in their borders, for it was from these that they went to the nations surrounding them, seeking relationship and covenants which are portrayed in the prophets as similar to prostitution. The mention of "treasures" could refer to the temple treasures. But it could be that until the drought, Judah had become prosperous under the reforms of Josiah. Yet their wealth is presented as parallel with their sins, which were to be punished by the loss of wealth.

Jeremiah 15:14 I will make them to pass with your enemies into a land which you don't know; for a fire is kindled in My anger, which shall burn on you- GNB "it will

burn forever". But it didn't. God felt like that, at that time, but the pole of His mercy is stronger, in the end, than that of His rightful anger and judgment.

Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4). The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman...that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29).

Jeremiah 15:15 Yahweh, you know; remember me, and visit me, and avenge me of my persecutors; don't take me away in Your long suffering: know that for Your sake I have suffered reproach- God had promised Jeremiah protection and strength at the start of his ministry, but he clearly doubted this. He felt that he was likely to be killed, and he asks God to save him from this. That salvation was to be according to God's patient long suffering; which may suggest that Jeremiah felt he was worthy of death as a sinner, and it was only of grace and Divine patience that he be spared death.

It seems that Jeremiah was one of several later characters who found inspiration in Samson, and alluded to him in their prayers to God, seeing the similarities between his spirit and theirs: "O Yahweh [Samson only used the Yahweh Name at the end of his life], thou knowest: remember me [as Samson asked to be remembered for good, Jud. 16:28], and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors ["that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines", Jud. 16:28]... know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke [the Philistines doubtless mocked Yahweh as well as Samson]. Thy words were found, and I did eat them [cp. Samson loving the word and eating the honey which he "found" in the lion]: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart... I sat not in the assembly of the mockers... I sat alone because of thy hand [Samson's separation from an apostate Israel]... why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable?" [the finality of his blindness] (Jer. 15:15-17). If these connections are valid, Samson's love of the word was a very big part of his life.

Jeremiah 15:16 Your words were found, and I ate them- Josiah's zealous reforms started with reading "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2), probably the list of curses which were to come for disobedience (2 Kings 22:19 = Lev. 26:31,32). And this book was in some way a joy and rejoicing to Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16). In this sense Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11), and David in the Psalms takes comfort and joy in judgment to come.

Despite this unity of spirit between God and the prophets, the prophets weren't always forced to say the words. Jeremiah didn't want to say them at times, the weariness of it all got on top of him; and yet he felt unable to walk away, just as God felt with Israel. But there were times when he outright rebelled. Jer. 20:7 is made a mess of in most translations, because the obvious translation is simply too shocking. Jeremiah complains: "O Lord, thou hast seduced me [s.w. Ex. 22:16 of a man seducing a woman], and I am seduced; thou hast raped me [s.w. Dt. 22:15] and I am overcome" (Abraham Heschel's translation). Here is Jeremiah saying that he was attracted by God, he was seduced by Him, but then the whole thing became too much-

he felt his soul had been raped. And yet in Jer. 15:16 he says that he had found God's word and eaten it, and as a result, "I am called by thy name, O Lord"- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his "joy [and] delight"- two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an inbreathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was "full of the wrath / passion of God" (Jer. 6:11). A prophet could only be incensed if God was incensed (Num. 23:8)- such was the bond between them. No wonder these men felt alone amongst men. They had a relationship with God which others couldn't enter into, which totally affected their lives and beings. The preacher / testifier of Jesus knows something of this spirit of prophecy. But in Jer. 20:7, Jeremiah felt he had been raped and not married. He resented the complete takeover of his heart.

And Your words were to me the joy and the delight of my heart: for I am called by Your name, Yahweh, God of Armies- Jeremiah's lament that the people had no joy or delight in God's word (Jer. 6:10) is the basis for this comment that when *he* found God's words, they were his joy. We might therefore detect there a sense of spiritual superiority over the Jews for whom God's word was not their joy. Jer. 6:10 had spoken of how God's word was a "reproach" to Israel, and here in :15 he laments how he had become a reproach because of his identity with God's word.

LXX is slightly different: "Consume them; and thy word shall be to me for the joy and gladness of my heart: for thy name has been called upon me, O Lord Almighty". The idea would therefore be that if God consumes Jeremiah's enemies, which included his own family, *then* he would find joy and gladness in God's word. But without that, he implies that he saw little personal delight in it. This would have been great weakness; and would fit the impression that in :16-18 Jeremiah sins in what he says, and is challenged to repent of his attitude in :19.

Jeremiah 15:17 I didn't sit in the assembly of those who make merry, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of Your hand; for You have filled me with indignation- This was all true in a sense, and alludes to Psalm 1. But Jeremiah is rebuked for his attitude of resenting that he "sat alone" and had kept away from the "assembly" of the rejoicers (Jer. 15:17,19); and so we are to assume that he said these things in resentment that he had had to stand alone amongst men. He resented how he "sat alone" (Lam. 3:28); yet this is the very term used of how Jerusalem was to "sit alone [solitary]" (Lam. 1:1). He was her representative, and yet he seems to have resented that. He was after all being representative of those who had hated him and tried to kill him. As Jeremiah wrongly lamented his own 'sitting alone', so he ought to have perceived that he should not have lamented Jerusalem's likewise.

As we lay awake at night looking up at the lamp fitting, or stare out from the balcony at the city lights, there must have been within each reader a deep sense of this clawing, intrusive loneliness. That search for ourselves, that inner despair, that fear of standing so totally and essentially alone in this world… And I have reason to believe that these kinds of struggles are more common amongst Christians than amongst many others. For we have been separated from this world unto the things of the future Kingdom; there is a deep and natural sense of our 'separation', yet frankly we often don't know how to handle it. But we can end up like Jeremiah here, almost resenting that separation: "I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me..." . Our essential loneliness, and recognizing it, is what leads us to faith in and relationship with our true Father. The

Lord Jesus will not leave us alone as orphans- He will come to us (Jn. 14:18). He does this through “The Comforter”, the Spirit of Christ.

Jeremiah 15:18 Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You indeed be to me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail?- LXX "Why do they that grieve me prevail against me? my wound is severe; whence shall I be healed?". Jeremiah saw no way out from his psychological pain which had arisen from him accepting the perspective of God about Israel. He also saw that his separation from his family (:17) was going to be permanent; as they were so against God, so they would be against him, He was no cure for his broken heart. And this of course represented the feelings of God about Israel. But Jeremiah appears to feel that God has promised him a better experience than this. He felt God was deceitful, a mirage of water in a thirsty land which in reality wasn't there. It was this which was so upsetting to God. For He does not deceive His people. As representative of both God and Judah, the fault was not with God but with Judah; their impenitence was the cause for Jeremiah's perpetually broken heart. This was how God felt. But Jeremiah was tired of feeling that hurt and isolated; he wanted to be a normal person rather than the manifestation of Yahweh. This giving up, being tired of acting for God, of intimate identity with Him, warranted the strict and condemnatory response of God in :19.

The "waters that fail" may be an allusion to Is. 58:11, where God had promised the faithful that even in drought (which was ongoing at this time, Jer. 14:1), He would be as waters that *don't* fail to His faithful people. "Fail" is s.w. "deceitful". Yet Jeremiah apparently feels that God hasn't come through on this promise; perhaps he resented having to suffer the results of the drought along with the rest of Israel.

Jeremiah 15:19 Therefore thus says Yahweh, If you return, then I will restore you, and you shall stand before Me- Jeremiah often makes a play upon the Hebrew word *shub*- it can mean to turn away (from God), and also to 'turn back' or repent (e.g. Jer. 3:1,7,10,12,14,19,22; 4:1). Jeremiah had sinned in his words of :16-18. If he returned / repented, then he would be restored. And yet even through this failure, God uses Jeremiah to be representative of Israel. If Israel turned in repentance, then God would return them to their land and restore the kingdom of God in Israel; if they turned away from Him, He would turn them out into the Gentile world. Our lives are a twisting and turning, either to or away from God; and God is waiting to confirm us in those twists and turns. Jer. 8:4-6 comment that if one turns from the right road, then they must turn back. We all know how when we miss the way in finding an unfamiliar address, there's a tendency to keep on going along the wrong road- because turning back is so psychologically difficult. And this is the image that God uses here- to appeal to Israel, and ourselves, not to foolishly 'backslide', keep on turning away, from Him- just because that's the course we're set upon.

If you utter what is precious, and not what is base, you shall be as My mouth: they shall return to you, but you shall not return to them- His words of :16-18 are therefore called "base". The word is used for riot, drunkenness and gluttony; this was how God viewed his lack of self control with his words. Although the record of them is in the inspired Bible, those words were not right. We see here the difference between inspiration [of the historical record] and revelation [of Divine truths through His word, which in these particular words of Jeremiah we don't have. But several versions follow the LXX "If thou wilt bring forth the precious from the worthless, thou shalt be as my mouth: and they shall return to thee; but thou shalt not return to

them". "The precious" would refer to "the precious sons of Zion" (s.w.), which Jeremiah later laments were slain, and therefore he had not saved (Lam. 4:2). He had not separated the good metal from the dross in his ministry.

In Jer. 15:15, Jeremiah asks for vengeance on his persecutors, and in Jer. 15:18 accuses God of deceiving him. God's response is to ask him to repent of this, so that he can resume his prophetic work: "If you [Jeremiah] return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me [prophetic language]. If you utter what is precious, and not what is base, you shall be as my mouth" (Jer. 15:19). Perhaps Jeremiah had this incident in mind when he commented: "The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word" (Lam. 1:18). This indicates that at least in Jeremiah's case, he was not irresistibly carried along by the Spirit in some kind of ecstasy, having no option but to speak God's word. His speaking of God's word required that he shared the essentially loving and gracious spirit / disposition of his God.

Jeremiah 15:20 I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall; and they shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you to save you and to deliver you, says Yahweh- This continues the reassurance to Jeremiah given in :15, in response to his collapse of faith that God would preserve him from the Jewish opposition. God had promised Jeremiah protection and strength at the start of his ministry, but he clearly doubted this. He felt that he was likely to be killed, and he asks God to save him from this. But again we see how Jeremiah is representative of Judah, at least potentially. For had they repented as Jeremiah did (:19), then they would also have found that they were fought against (by the Babylonians) but not prevailed against. And God's promise of deliverance would have been true for them as well as Jeremiah. But there is clearly a double meaning in these words; for they could have come true in that Jeremiah personally was their bronze wall, and then those who fought against "you" (Judah) would not prevail, for the sake of Jeremiah's intercession, acting as a wall between them and their enemies.

Jeremiah 15:21 I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you out of the hand of the terrible- As noted on :20, the passage could refer to Jeremiah being delivered out of the hand of the "wicked... terrible" Jews (s.w. Jer. 14:16; 33:5); or to their deliverance from the "wicked... terrible" Babylonians as a result of his intercession for them (the words are used of them in Ez. 28:7; 31:12 etc.). Even in his weakness and failure, Jeremiah was still representative of his people.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 16

Jeremiah 16:1 The word of Yahweh came also to me saying- This appears to continue from the previous chapter, where Jeremiah has been rebuked and is told that he must repent and continue his mediation. This perhaps is why he is asked here to make himself representative of condemned Judah in a very personally demanding way.

Jeremiah 16:2 You shall not take a wife, neither shall you have sons or daughters in this place- This is not to say Jeremiah had never had a wife; she may have died in one of the earlier Babylonian invasions. The reason given is that she and their children were likely to be killed. Whether that was of itself a reason not to marry isn't quite the

point; Jeremiah was to live out an acted parable in order to demonstrate the reality of judgment to come. He was demonstrating his connection with God's people, both Judah and the ten tribes. For the allusion is to Hos. 9:9: "Ephraim is bringing forth his children to the murderer". To not have children was a form of death for people of that age. 1 Cor. 7:26 appears to allude here, where Paul advises that in the tribulation of the last days of AD70, it would be better not to have wife and children.

Jeremiah 16:3 For thus says Yahweh concerning the sons and concerning the daughters who are born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bore them, and concerning their fathers who became their father in this land- This would imply that Jeremiah should not have a family, because if he did then he too would die, as only the single, unmarried would escape. But that doesn't quite ring true to the situation. Jeremiah is being asked to act out a kind of parable in which he is representative of the people; see on :1.

Jeremiah 16:4 They shall die grievous deaths: they shall not be lamented, neither shall they be buried; they shall be as dung on the surface of the ground; and they shall be consumed by the sword and by famine; and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the sky, and for the animals of the earth- Jeremiah was told not to have a family, lest this happen to him. That would imply that all families would be destroyed. But this scale of devastation simply didn't happen. Within Jeremiah's prophecies, there are many different variations on the amount of judgment. The reality was that in wrath, God remembered mercy. See on Jer. 10:18.

Jeremiah 16:5 For thus says Yahweh, Don't enter into the house of mourning, neither go to lament, neither bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace from this people, says Yahweh, even loving kindness and tender mercies- Jeremiah was commanded not to make lamentation for the punishment of his people. But he did, and God inspired the record of them in Lamentations, and because they are inspired words, He spoke through those words to all subsequent generations. The reason for this was that God's covenant, referred to as "kindness and mercy", was broken; they were not at peace with Him. And so they should not be pitied in their death. And yet although the covenant was broken by Israel, and God broke His side of it in response to that... He in fact still treated them as His covenant people. This is not to say that God is not serious about His statements. He is; but His love, grace and pity is displayed as the more extraordinary, in that it leads Him to break the words and threats spoken in justifiable and understandable wrath. For the same Hebrew phrase "loving kindness and tender mercies" is used again by Jeremiah in Lam. 3:22, where he reflects that these have not been withdrawn from God's people, even though Zion is now in ruins.

Jeremiah 16:6 Both great and small shall die in this land; they shall not be buried, neither shall men lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them- When we read that those who were to die in the land due to the Babylonian invasion would not be buried "neither shall men lament for them", this sounds like a prediction. But actually it's a command- for Jeremiah was told "Neither go to lament nor bemoan them" (Jer. 16:5). But he did lament them- and God didn't ignore that, but rather inspired the record of the book of Jeremiah's Lamentations! Likewise God told Jeremiah not to pray for the people, but when Jeremiah insisted on doing so, God did in fact hear him. So we must be careful to discern what is prediction and what is command or intention. And even then we have to recognize that God's purpose is to

some extent open-ended- if men and women wish to walk with Him but don't strictly follow His preferred intentions, He may still walk and work with them in the extension of His purpose.

Jeremiah 16:7 neither shall men break bread for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother- The reason for this lack of mourning and burial may simply be because the idea was that all the people would perish. There would be none left to bury or lament; all were to die. But in reality that didn't happen (see on Jer. 10:18), and there are various degrees of destruction spoken about in the various prophecies.

'Breaking bread' or 'eating bread' is simply an idiom for sharing in a meal (Is. 58:7; Jer. 16:7; Lam. 4:4; Ez. 17:7; 24:17; Hos. 9:4; Dt. 26:14; Job 42:11). 'Bread' is used for any food, just as 'salt' is used in the same way in Arabic. The way the Lord broke His bread with sinners, with anyone, is therefore evidence enough that the 'breaking of bread' is inclusive and not exclusive. LXX "and there shall be no bread broken in mourning for them for consolation over the dead: they shall not give one to drink a cup for consolation over his father or his mother". This refers to how at the funeral, food and gifts were given to a child who lost parents. But there would be none to do so. The "breaking of bread" meeting is therefore set up as a kind of funeral celebration, but also a "cup of consolation".

Jeremiah 16:8 You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and to drink- Because the day was to come when they would all be dead, because of their sins, Jeremiah was not to feast with them before judgment came. The marriages and family events which they were celebrating were to come to a tragic end in the mass destruction of family life by the invaders which has just been predicted. Jeremiah, like us, was to live life now in light of how things were going to ultimately be.

Jeremiah 16:9 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride- This specifically states that it would happen in their days and before their eyes. The image is of a wedding being interrupted by the invaders. This suggests a sudden, unexpected invasion, rather than what happened- a lengthy siege, famine, desperate poverty, all leading towards an inevitable end when Zedekiah fled the city and the Babylonians entered Jerusalem. The sudden nature of Jerusalem's fall is emphasized (Jer. 4:20; 6:26; 15:8; 18:22); she was to fall as Babylon would "suddenly" fall (Jer. 51:8). Jerusalem fell predictably after a siege, there were no great surprises that she fell. It was not a sudden fall that came out of left field, unexpectedly. And yet that is the implication of the prophecies. Babylon was reveling in prosperity when the Medes unexpectedly took the city; but the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon was totally expected and inevitable. Yet the fall is spoken of as "sudden". It could be that a potential "sudden" invasion and destruction of Jerusalem was projected by God, but the intercession of the few faithful, or the repentance of a tiny remnant, changed this possible outcome of their sin. So many different possibilities of judgment are given, ranging from a quarter destruction to total destruction of people and even all animal life. This reflects the open nature of God's working with His people, setting up various potentials in order to be fully responsive to human freewill decisions.

Jeremiah 16:10 It shall happen, when you shall show this people all these words and they shall tell you, Why has Yahweh pronounced all this great evil against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against Yahweh our God?- The "great evil" had been done by them (Jer. 44:7 s.w.), and s the "great evil" of judgment was only an extension of their own sins. And that ought to have been obvious. Repeatedly we encounter this shameless refusal to accept they had done anything wrong, and apparently genuine shock and surprise that God should speak of judging them so severely. This indicates the degree to which they were psychologically hardened in their belief that they could serve the idols as part of serving Yahweh. This is why the reason for their judgments was not simply 'Because you worship idols', but because of their state of heart (:11,12).

Jeremiah 16:11 Then you shall tell them, Because your fathers have forsaken Me, says Yahweh, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken Me, and have not kept My law- This is not to say that they were going to be punished because of the sins of their fathers. I noted on :10 how shameless they were in their idolatry, and how they were genuinely unaware of wrongdoing. But this was because they had become so hardened in sin, as people are today, that they consider that their wrongdoing is in fact righteousness. The reason why that generation was punished was because of this hardened, evil state of heart (:12); not simply because they worshipped idols. Their fathers had done that and had not received the judgment for it which they were going to.

Jeremiah 16:12 And you have done evil more than your fathers; for behold, you walk each one after the stubbornness of his evil heart, so that you don't listen to Me- Se on :10,11. The choice was between walking after God's word (:11), or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

Jeremiah 16:13 Therefore will I cast you forth out of this land into the land that you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, where I will not show you favour; and there you shall serve other gods day and night- LXX "and ye shall serve their other gods, who shall have no mercy upon you". Yahweh alone has grace / mercy; this is what distinguishes Him from all forms of idolatry.

The passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5].

God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jer. 16 goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (Jer. 16:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8). God then outlines a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (Jer. 16:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would "cause them to know mine hand… and they shall now that my name is The Lord" (Jer. 16:21). This double recompensing of Judah's sin happened in the exile in Babylon (Is. 40:2), and therefore the joyful news was proclaimed to Zion in Is. 40 that now the Messianic Kingdom could begin. But there wasn't much interest nor response to the call to return to Judah in order to share in it. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended. Now none of this makes God out to be somehow not serious or unreliable. Rather is it all an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us. Thus God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him: "Thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him.

Jeremiah 16:14 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that it shall no more be said, As Yahweh lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt- The form of swearing in covenant relationship was to be changed. The same verses occur in Jer. 23:7,8 in the context of Judah being offered a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. That new covenant was to be made when the exiles left Babylon and the various nations within her empire where they had been scattered. But this didn't work out; because Judah refused it.

Jeremiah 16:15 But, As Yahweh lives, who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the countries where He had driven them. I will bring them again into their land that I gave to their fathers- See on :14. The new covenant was to be made once they left Babylon and the subject nations, just as the old covenant was made once they had left Egypt. There was intended to be some even more dramatic and powerful source of exodus in leaving Babylon than there had been in leaving Egypt. But in reality. nothing like the parting of the Red Sea or the plagues upon Egypt happened. The decree of Cyrus was clearly overruled by God, but other prophecies make it clear that the exodus of the exile was to be associated with the fall of Babylon. Indeed they were to flee Babylon so that they didn't share in her fall. And it was this dramatic action which was to convert the remnants of the Babylonian empire to Israel's God. But this didn't happen; instead this prophetic theme has been reapplied and rescheduled to the events of the last days.

Jeremiah 16:16 Behold, I will send for many fishermen, says Yahweh, and they shall fish them up; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and out of the clefts of the rocks- This suggests a total regathering of all who were in captivity. This didn't happen because

the exiles preferred the soft life in Persia. The effort made wasn't responded to. Indeed Jeremiah later laments that the people were "hunted" after Jerusalem fell (s.w. Lam. 3:52; 4:18). He ought to have realized that the exiles were to be hunted back to the restored kingdom- if they responded. But in his depression, he focused only upon the negative, the glass half empty rather than half full.

And perhaps the prophecy therefore was rescheduled and reapplied to the fishing of individuals to comprise a new Israel. It was whilst Simon and Andrew were in the very act of casting their net into the sea, snap shotted in a freeze-frame of still life, silhouetted against the sea and hills of Galilee, that the Lord calls them to go preaching (Mk. 1:17). The Lord surely intended them to [at least later] figure out His allusion to Jer. 16:14-16, which prophesied that fishermen would be sent out to catch Israel and bring them home to the Father. And He called them to do that, right in the very midst of everyday life. His preachers were like harvesters working in the very last hour to bring in the harvest- in fact, the harvest was spoiling because it's not being fully gathered. No delay for anything was possible in the light of the knife-edge urgency of sharing Christ with others.

Jeremiah 16:17 For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, neither is their iniquity concealed from My eyes- Their sin and breaking of the covenant meant that God would hide His face from them (Dt. 31:17; 32:20; Mic. 3:4). But the paradox is that God did *not* hide His face from their sins, His eyes were upon their ways. He didn't turn off His sensitivity to behaviour which so sorely hurt Him at His heart; because He desperately wishes to retain relationship for as long as possible, no matter how painful. The iniquity of Israel was not concealed from God's eyes because He Himself chose not to conceal His face from it.

Jeremiah 16:18 First I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double, because they have polluted My land with the carcasses of their detestable things, and have filled My inheritance with their abominations- The land was literally filled with idols; the sacrifices to them are described as carcasses, which God saw as polluting the land. And so God desired to punish them "double", and so did Jeremiah, because he had the mind and feelings of God (Jer. 16:18; 17:18). But Ezra 9:13 states that God punished them less than their iniquities deserved- and not double punishment. So again we have God, through Jeremiah, speaking in the fire of His anger; but this didn't actually work out like this. The pole of His pity and grace is finally far stronger than that of His anger and judgment.

Jeremiah 16:19 Yahweh, my strength, my stronghold and my refuge in the day of affliction, to You shall the nations come from the ends of the land and shall say, Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, vanity and things in which there is no profit- This is Jeremiah's interjection. He is confident that he shall be preserved in the siege which was ahead. God would be his refuge; although his confident faith at this point was sorely tested when he was thrown into the dungeon to die. Jeremiah caught God's vision, of the repentant nations crossing the borders of Palestine confessing that the idols were lies and vanity. This was the Divine intention- that when Israel and Judah returned from captivity, they would come back to the land along with the repentant peoples of the nations to whom they had been scattered. But instead, they learnt the ways of the nations and worshipped their gods, as Ezekiel often laments.

Jeremiah 16:20 Shall a man make to himself gods, which yet are no gods?- This is

apparently part of the fantasy of Jeremiah and Yahweh concerning the repentance of the surrounding nations and their turning to Yahweh having thrown away their idols. The hope was that they would confess that what a man makes with his own hands cannot therefore be God. For God by *His* hands has created man. It is the worship of works, of what we have devised by our own device... which is our modern idolatry. Hence GNB "Can people make their own gods? No, if they did, those would not really be gods".

Jeremiah 16:21 Therefore behold, I will cause them to know, this once will I cause them to know My hand and My might; and they shall know that My name is Yahweh- LXX "I will at this time manifest my hand to them, and will make known to them my power; and they shall know that my name is the Lord". "This once" could suggest that God would do this once and for all, as if the intention was to begin the restored Kingdom there and then. The refusal of the exiles to repent precluded so much potential happening. And likewise the Gentiles continued in their idolatry. If they had repented as envisioned in :19,20, "therefore... I will cause them to know... My name". Their repentance would have been followed by a special revelation of Yahweh to them. Having quit what was wrong, His Spirit would have revealed to them what was right. The Name of God is not so much Yahweh or Jehovah, but effectively refers to God's "hand and might", His actions and characteristics in history.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 17

Jeremiah 17:1 The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of your altars- The sin of Judah was written- both on their hearts and in God's record (Jer. 17:1); their iniquity was "marked before me" (Jer. 2:22). Note how their sin was written both before God and on their hearts. The state of our hearts is actually God's record of us; "the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord" through which He searches us (Prov. 20:27).

Jeremiah 17:2 While their children remember their altars and their Asherim by the green trees on the high hills- The idea is as GNB "Your people worship at the altars and the symbols that have been set up for the goddess Asherah by every green tree and on the hilltops". The number of worship places for the idols was amazingly high; whereas Yahweh worship had only one altar, in the Jerusalem temple. This marked absence of religious paraphernalia in Yahweh worship was to inculcate faith. There was visual symbolism in the tabernacle ritual and temple; but this was to be meditated upon in everyday life, rather than actually physically encountered. God wanted the hearts and minds of His people, far more than acts of external obedience.

Jeremiah 17:3 My mountain in the field, I will give your substance and all your treasures for a spoil, and your high places, because of sin, throughout all your borders- Their idols may have been particularly in their borders, for it was from these that they went to the nations surrounding them, seeking relationship and covenants which are portrayed in the prophets as similar to prostitution. The mention of "treasures" could refer to the temple treasures, "my mountain". But it could be that until the drought, Judah had become prosperous under the reforms of Josiah. Yet their

wealth is presented as parallel with their sins, which were to be punished by the loss of wealth.

Jeremiah 17:4 You, even of yourself, shall discontinue from your inheritance that I gave you; and I will cause you to serve your enemies in the land which you don't know: for you have kindled a fire in My anger which shall burn forever- It could be argued that death and remaining dead is in a sense suffering a punishment which has eternal consequences; it is the anger of God forever. But that seems rather forced. I would compare the statement that God's anger here burns for ever with the statements to the effect that God does not keep His anger for ever (Ps. 103:9; Jer. 3:12; Mic. 7:18). Surely this is how God felt at this time; that He would never get over what they had done, and His anger would continue for ever. This is the emotional God with whom we have to do. Likewise the threat to be discontinued from the inheritance was revised; in that Judah will finally eternally inherit the land. "Discontinue" is however the word used for the land having "rest" in the Sabbath year (Ez. 23:11), and the exile was so that the land might "rest" for all the Sabbath years she had not been rested for (Lev. 26:34,43).

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says Yahweh: Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from Yahweh- It could be that the "man" in view is Egypt, upon whom Judah was trusting for deliverance from Babylon- rather than Yahweh. The same words are used in Jer. 5:23 of how the people's heart had departed from Yahweh. Always in the Old Testament it is the state of the heart which is so significant to God; and this continues in the New Testament with the huge focus upon the spirit. The chapter goes on to suddenly condemn the man who seeks to get wealth wrongfully (:11); this would be the man who made flesh- his own flesh- his strength, and filled his mind with ways of doing so.

Jeremiah 17:6 For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited- The people who trust the flesh or the world for "good" rather than Yahweh will "not see when good comes". The true good that comes only from Yahweh will not be perceived if we are focused all the time upon the "good" we think we can get from trusting in the flesh. We will not perceive the beauty of a sunrise because we are so caught up in hoping that news of a lottery win is about to come through. Such people stay in the land of condemnation ["a salt land"] by their own choice. And so many of the exiles remain in Babylon, failing to perceive the "good" which was being brought about by the "good hand of God" at the restoration (s.w. Ezra 7:9; 8:18 etc.). The very phrase "good comes" is used of the good things God would do at the restoration from Babylon (Jer. 32:42).

Jeremiah 17:7 Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh, and whose trust Yahweh is- So often Yahweh is portrayed as the only "confidence" or trust of His people. Judah's confidence in nations like Egypt was therefore a betrayal of their relationship with Yahweh. This rejection of trust / hope in foreign alliances is behind this comment that the man who hoped / had confidence in Yahweh alone would be blessed. The immediate context referred to having Egypt and other nations as their hope / confidence (Ez. 29:16 s.w.).

Jeremiah 17:8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, who spreads out its

roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat comes, but its leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit- "Drought" is s.w. only in Jer. 14:1. The drought was brought as judgment upon Judah to bring about their repentance; but those who truly trusted in Yahweh (:7) would be unaffected by it in real terms. The "heat" of judgment would not ultimately affect the righteous.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?- This has commonly been read as a generic statement about the heart of every man by nature. However, we must remember that whatever we posit about human nature, we posit about the Lord Jesus; who despite having our nature, achieved a state of being holy, perfect and undefiled, and in whose spirit or heart was no guile. But the context is of Jeremiah continually emphasizing Judah's state of heart as being critically important. See on :5. It was Judah's heart which was so corrupt; :10 suggests that God could search their hearts and potentially find good things there, but in this case He found only corruption. "Exceedingly corrupt" is the wound used about the "incurable wound" of Judah (Jer. 15:18), which by grace would be healed. It describes a state of mind gotten into, and not how things are by nature within every human being [including the Lord Jesus]. The LXX gives: "The heart is deep beyond all things, and it is the man, and who can know him?". This would explain the parallel in :10 between the man, the mind, the heart and the doings. A man is his mind.

Jeremiah 17:10 I, Yahweh, search the mind, I try the heart, even to give every man according to his works, according to the fruit of his doings- The 'testing' of Judah was to be through melting them in the furnace of Jerusalem, caused by the fire of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9). We learn here that the essential purpose of that was to try / test / purify / reveal their heart and mind; for that was and is of utterly paramount importance to God.

In likely allusion to the descriptions of God searching and trying our hearts in the Psalms, Jeremiah says that we should "search and try our hearts" (Lam. 3:40)- we should seek to know ourselves as God does. David's invitations to God to search and try him (Ps. 17:3; 26:2; 139;23) imply he has done so himself (cp. Ps. 77:6). God now searches and tries the hearts, and will [at judgment day] give every man as his work shall be (Jer. 17:10 cp. Rev. 22:12). The spirit of man is [i.e. is intended to be] the candle which God also uses for His examination of men (Prov. 20:27); there is thus a link intended between our self-examination and the way God looks at us. His judgment must be ours. As sin is condemned by Him, so we should examine ourselves to the point of self-condemnation.

Jeremiah 17:11 As the partridge that sits on eggs which she has not laid, so is he who gets riches, and not by right; in the midst of his days they shall leave him, and at his end he shall be a fool- This warning against materialism and dishonesty in order to gain more wealth continue the warning begun in :5 about not trusting in flesh, even our own flesh. All the idolatry and poor behaviour in Judah was in fact rooted in this desire for quick blessing and wealth. The materialist "at his end [rejection at the judgment] shall be a fool" (Jer. 17:11). The utter *folly* of the rejected is a major theme (Prov. 14:8,18; Ps. 5:5; 49:13; Mt. 7:26; 25:8). Their folly will be manifest to all- not least themselves (2 Tim. 3:9). Parables like that of the rich *fool*, the *foolish* virgins... they will all be crystal clear to them. *Then* the Kingdom of Heaven will be likened to wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 25:1), after the judgment experience.

Jeremiah 17:12 A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary- GNB "Our Temple is like a glorious throne, standing on a high mountain from the beginning". This interjection from Jeremiah is out of step with Yahweh's position about the temple. He has made clear in Jer. 7 that it will be destroyed and His sanctuary and glory is in Heaven, not in the temple. Hence Jeremiah's bitter disappointment in Lamentations when the temple is destroyed. But at least we can say that Jeremiah's though about God's glory and throne was in order to lift himself far above the terrible lowness of his immediate theme- men who trust in their own strength to get a little bit more glory and wealth than the man next to them.

Jeremiah 17:13 Yahweh, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be disappointed. Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken Yahweh, the spring of living waters- The next verse and the first half of this verse are clearly Jeremiah talking. But the second half of :13 is Yahweh's response; and it is repeating what Jeremiah has just said in different words and with more detail. We marvel at the dialogue and intimacy possible between God and man. The people Jeremiah had in mind may be his persecutors, for he uses the same word "disappointed" ["ashamed"] about them in :18. Being "written in the earth" may contrast with being written in heaven (Heb. 12:23). But the idea may be that because they forsook the living waters by rejecting Jeremiah's prophetic word, they would remain written in the dust. The Lord would then be alluding to this when He wrote in the dust when rescuing the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 9). Perhaps He wrote the names of the accusers in the dust, or their names and their own sins. Jeremiah still speaks of Yahweh as "the hope of Israel", as it there were still (in his opinion) true Israel who hoped in their God.

Jeremiah 17:14 Heal me, O Yahweh, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for You are my praise- Jeremiah was perhaps physically ill; but he expresses his affliction in terms of Israel's being smitten with judgment and then their salvation. Repeatedly, the wound of Judah is described as incurable (Jer. 15:18; 30:12,15; Mic. 1:9). Only by God's amazing and paradoxical grace could this be cured. And he had the faith and vision to believe it was possible. He saw himself as representative of the people, even though God had told him that he could not "stand before Me" for Israel in the way other intercessors had. For Israel were just too evil and rebellious against Him. "You are my praise" could mean that Jeremiah solely praised Yahweh, unlike the other Jews who praised various gods along with Yahweh.

Jeremiah 17:15 Behold, they tell me, Where is the word of Yahweh? let it come now- As noted on :13, the "they" here refers to Jeremiah's persecutors who had departed from Yahweh and would be ashamed. Despite the deteriorating situation with regards to Babylon's strengthening, Egypt's weakening and the terrible drought, they mocked Jeremiah's words of judgment. Even though there was every evidence that they were about to come true.

Jeremiah 17:16 As for me, I have not hurried from being a shepherd after you- LXX "But I have not been weary of following thee"; the continual background noise had not made him give up. And that is a thought to inspire us for all time. Or the idea may be that he had continued to try to shepherd and pastor those who so mocked him and God's word which was in his mouth.

Neither have I desired the woeful day; you know: that which came out of my lips was before Your face- GNB: "LORD, I never urged you to bring disaster on them; I did not wish a time of trouble for them". But the reality was that Jeremiah had done so; indeed he calls for such disaster upon them in :18 "Bring disgrace on those who persecute me, but spare me, LORD. Fill them with terror, but do not terrify me. Bring disaster on them and break them to pieces". He seems to have never quite put this matter straight in his own mind, for in Lamentations, Jeremiah likewise laments the Lord's actions in judging- when it was Jeremiah who had stated that these things should happen.

Jeremiah 17:17 Don't be a terror to me: You are my refuge in the day of evil- Is. 28:15,17 had used this word "refuge" to describe the refuge of lies in which the believers in false prophets and idols trusted. Jeremiah could sense the large scale of destruction to come, but often expresses his faith that somehow he will be saved.

Jeremiah 17:18 Let them be disappointed who persecute me, but let not me be disappointed; let them be dismayed, but don't let me be dismayed- Jeremiah remembered the command not to be dismayed in Jer. 1:17 and quotes it back to himself in Jer. 17:18. This is how we should act- quoting scripture to ourselves as encouragement. "Dismay" was a punishment from God upon them but as with all Divine judgments, this was just an extension of what the people had done to themselves. For they had dismayed themselves (Jer. 10:2).

Bring on them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction- God desired to punish them "double", and so did Jeremiah, because he had the mind and feelings of God (Jer. 16:18; 17:18). But Ezra 9:13 states that God punished them less than their iniquities deserved- and not double punishment. So again we have God, through Jeremiah, speaking in the fire of His anger; but this didn't actually work out like this. The pole of His pity and grace is finally far stronger than that of His anger and judgment.

Jeremiah 17:19 Thus said Yahweh to me: Go, and stand in the gate of the children of the people through which the kings of Judah come in and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem- He was to firstly announce in "the People's gate", what is now the Jaffa Gate, and then subsequently at every gate of Jerusalem. Any attempt to directly engage the leadership of a nation at war by implicitly criticizing them... is doomed to many problematic reactions. And so it was for Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 17:20 And tell them, Hear the word of Yahweh, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates- The leadership ["kings" plural] and common people are paralleled. A leadership do what the masses want, or what they perceive they want. And the masses pressurize the leadership, however subconsciously. This is why the entire society was addressed and was culpable to judgment.

Jeremiah 17:21 Thus says Yahweh, Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem- The emphasis upon the Sabbath is appropriate because the land is depicted as having missed out on 70 Sabbaths of rest during the period of 490 years from the time of Saul to the captivity. Therefore the land had to rest for 70 years. The Sabbath was the sign of covenant between God and Israel. To not keep it meant to despise the covenant.

Jeremiah 17:22 Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do any work: but make the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers- Carrying burdens out of their private homes is paralleled with carrying them out of the gates or doors of Jerusalem (:21). Their private behaviour in their own homes was to be repeated on the scale of the whole city.

Jeremiah 17:23 But they didn't listen neither turn their ear- Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

But made their neck stiff that they might not hear and might not receive instruction- The instruction given and refused was the previous incursions of Judah's enemies and the drought God had brought upon them (Jer. 2:30; Zeph. 3:7).

Jeremiah 17:24 It shall happen, if you diligently listen to Me, says Yahweh, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but to make the Sabbath day holy, to do no work therein- I noted on :22 the difference between carrying burdens out of the city, and out of their own homes. It seems that if on the level of the city it was obeyed, even if some individuals refused, then God would have restored the Kingdom.

Jeremiah 17:25 Then shall there enter in by the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever- If they had kept the Sabbath etc. as required, *then* the temple would have been a joyous center of worship. The language is clearly to be connected with other descriptions of the Messianic Kingdom. And this indicates that Ez. 40-48 is likewise a conditional prophecy. If they didn't carry anything out of the gates, then into the gates would come the Messianic rulers. Not carrying things out meant not trusting in their own works. If they accepted God's work rather than their own, and were obedient to the Sabbath as the sign of the covenant... then it seems that a form of the Messianic, restored Kingdom could have then begun permanently. To be obedient to the Sabbath regulations was not a big issue; and so much, even "forever", could have been achieved. They were that close, but their refusal to respond to such simple requirements indicated so much about them.

Jeremiah 17:26 They shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places around Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the lowland, and from the hill country, and from the South, bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, meal offerings and frankincense, and bringing sacrifices of thanksgiving to the house of Yahweh- This is the scene of Ez. 40-48. If Judah had been obedient, then they would have built and sacrificed in the temple there described. But they didn't.

Jeremiah 17:27 But if you will not listen to Me to make the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day- See on Neh. 13:19. The offer of an eternally established city was predicated upon simply obeying this painless law about the Sabbath (:25). Their refusal to do it would therefore speak volumes- it would be tantamount to saying that they didn't want the things of God's Kingdom. Hence the severe judgment.

Then will I kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched- The prophetic word in Jeremiah's mouth was like fire, and it was the people who were to be "devoured" by it (Ez. 15:5; s.w. Jer. 5:14; 17:27; 21:14). The amazing grace explained in Ez. 15 was in the fact that the 'devoured by fire' vine twig would be refined in Babylon and still used by God to reestablish His Kingdom.

The Bible is written from a Jewish perspective; the Gentile reader is 'expected' to understand that Gehenna and the concept of "eternal fire" are Jewish idioms for total destruction (Jer. 17:27; Jude 7). Although see on :4. Again, the point has to be made that much misunderstanding has arisen in 'Christian' circles on the issue of hell through failing to appreciate that God is writing in Jewish terms. The New Testament is literally packed with phrases and other language which depend on an appreciation of Old Testament theology to make sense of (e.g. Christ calling himself "the bread of life"). Nowhere, however, are we explicitly told that we must understand the New Testament's language by reference to the Old. We need to keep all these points in mind when considering the language of demons.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 18

Jeremiah 18:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying- It has been truly commented about this chapter: "Whenever a piece of pottery turned out imperfect the potter would take the clay and make it into something else. God says that this is the principle behind His actions. If He says He is going to build up a nation but the nation disobeys Him the prophecy will not be fulfilled. Equally, if He says He is going to destroy a nation and the nation repents, He will not carry out His intention". Hence if Israel turned from their way, "I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them" (Jer. 26:3). Earlier Israel had known God's breach of promise, the altering of His purpose, in that those who were to enter Canaan actually didn't (Num. 14:34).

Jeremiah 18:2 Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words- The revelation of God's truth often requires an initial act of obedience, in this case, going to the potter's house. "Potter" is the same word first used in Gen. 2:7 about God forming Adam from the dust. Clearly God is the potter or former, both of individuals and nations. The word is repeatedly used in later Isaiah of how God formed Israel, and would form them again as a new creation upon their return from exile in Babylon (Is. 44:24; 45:9; 64:8 etc.). Jeremiah had been reminded at the start of his ministry that he personally had been formed by God (Jer. 1:5). It is also used of how God "frames" or literally 'potters' evil or good in the life of His collective people (:11). The 'going down' could suggest there was a potter who worked in the valley near the temple; Zech. 11:13 suggests there was a potter who worked there or even within the temple. And the potter's field was effectively

purchased with the blood of Christ, for Judas spent that blood money on buying *the* potter's field, this one which Jeremiah visited. See on Jer. 19:2.

Jeremiah 18:3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he was making a work on the wheels- To 'make a work' is literally 'to work a work' and is the language of creation (Gen. 2:2,3). On :2 I noted the word for "potter" is that used in the Genesis creation (Gen. 2:7 etc.). So there was the hint here at a new creation. The only other time we find the Hebrew word translated "wheels" is in Ez. 1:16 of the birthing stools upon which women gave birth- another hint at new creation.

'Working the work' is a phrase very often used about the restoration of Jerusalem (Neh. 4:16,17,21; 6:3,9,16; 11:12; 13:10; Hag. 1:14 etc.). The Kingdom could have been restored and a new creation come about from the exiles. But this too was not to happen. The clay misbehaved in the hands of the Divine potter. In the immediate context here, the term has just been used of how Judah 'worked work' on the Sabbath (Jer. 17:22,24), instead of allowing God to work. Not working their own work, keeping the Sabbath, was a sign of covenant relationship with God. God wanted to use people who could not 'work work' (Ez. 15:3,5). To trust in their own works and not allow His working was therefore effectively a breaking of covenant relationship.

Jeremiah 18:4 When the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made of it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it- "Marred" has a moral dimension to it, translated "corrupt" in Gen. 6:11-13, where the corrupt *eretz* had to be destroyed. The Jews were "corrupted" (Jer. 6:28 s.w. "marred"). It is the word used about how the linen girdle of Jeremiah was "marred" in figurative captivity in Babylon (Jer. 13:7,9), and yet that marred girdle was still going to be used. And we have that same message here; Judah was to be destroyed / marred because they had marred themselves, but then a new nation was to be created. What "seemed good to the potter" is again a creation allusion; for God saw what He had made and it seemed very good to Him.

Jeremiah 18:5 Then the word of Yahweh came to me saying- This interpretation may have come immediately as Jeremiah watched the potter, or somewhat later after he had had time to work it out for himself; in which case this subsequent revelation was only confirming him in his own conclusions.

Jeremiah 18:6 House of Israel, can't I do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, house of Israel- God has prepared us exactly to respond to His hand. We were born at a certain point in time, formed / pottered by Him with our prehistory, gene pool history etc., so that we can respond. Any lack of response to His hand is therefore highly culpable. God could work a new vessel from the clay of Judah, as He wanted to do in the time of Moses. By grace He didn't totally destroy them, didn't grab a new piece of clay, but rather tried to rework the existing clay. Even though in Jer. 15:6 God had said that His hand would now destroy Israel. But in fact He attempted to rework them.

Jeremiah 18:7 At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation or kingdom- God had earlier "in an instant" (s.w.) stated that He would immediately destroy Israel (Ex. 33:5; Num. 16:21,45), but this didn't happen because of Moses' intercession. Ezra perceived the connection, using this word to speak of how "for a little moment" (s.w.) the exiles had a chance to change the verdict. God speaks, but there is a gap between

the statement and the fulfillment. We all live within that gap, as Judah were- and there is therefore an intensity to the need for repentance to change the otherwise certain outcome.

To pluck up and to break down and to destroy it- The 'plucking up' is the word used of how Judah would be plucked up out of their land for their disobedience to the prophetic word (Dt. 29:28; 2 Chron. 7:20). And as the Gentiles plucked up / out Israel from their land, so those nations would be plucked up (Jer. 12:14,15,17). Likewise the building and planting specifically refers to the restoration of Israel after their plucking up (Jer. 24:6; 31:28,40; 42:10). It was God through His word who would do these things; but that possibility worked through the preacher and proclaimer of that word. Therefore in Jer. 1:10, Jeremiah is presented as the one who would do these things. This is the enormous power delegated to all to this day who preach His word; we really can save people, plant them in the Kingdom by sowing the seed of the Kingdom; and those who refuse will be plucked up.

Jeremiah 18:8 If that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them- Jeremiah's message as the Babylonian armies approached Jerusalem had stressed that if the Jews repented, then God would repent of the evil He was planning to bring upon them (Jer. 18:8,10; 26:3,13). The Jews did not repent, and so Jerusalem was taken and Zedekiah deported. Even at this thirteenth hour, God said to the Jewish forces that remained at large outside Jerusalem and who were about to flee to Egypt: "If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down. . . for I repent Me of the evil that I have done unto you"" (Jer. 42:10). What a God we have! Although Israel had not repented, the Angel repented to the extent of changing His pre-requisite for repenting of bringing more evil on them. And so God changed this from returning wholeheartedly to the Law, to merely remaining in the land of Israel rather than fleeing to Egypt. What of us? Jer. 31:18,19 tops all for such encouragement: "Turn thou Me (said Ephraim), and I shall be turned. . . I (God in the Angel) was turned, I repented"- and therefore God repented too! God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6).

Due to Moses' prayer, "the Lord repented of the evil which he had said he would do unto his people" (Ex. 32:14 RV). Yet these are the very words of Jer. 18:8- if a *nation* repents, then God will repent. But in this case, God accepted the singular prayer of Moses.

Jeremiah 18:9 At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation or kingdom, to build and to plant it- This was the case with the people of Judah. God had promised to build and plant them in a restored, Messianic kingdom in Israel (Jer. 31:28; 42:10; Ez. 36:36). But this was all conditional upon them continuing to obey His voice, otherwise He would change His plans (Jer. 18:9,10). Jeremiah had been given the power to speak the words of both destruction and building and planting (Jer. 1:10).

Jeremiah 18:10 If they do that which is evil in My sight, that they not obey My voice, then I will repent of the good, with which I said I would benefit them- This is exactly what happened in Jer. 42:10. The remnant left in the land could have been built and planted, into a new restored Kingdom of God in Israel. But they fled into Egypt.

Jeremiah 18:11 Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return you now each one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your doings- "Frame" is the word translated "potter" in :2. The call to repentance was intensely individual, to "each one". "Devise a device" is the very phrase used of how Judah's response to this was to "devise a device", to make a plot, to kill Jeremiah and stop his words, as they thought, from coming true (:18). This was perversity in the extreme. They thought they could match God's plot with their own. No wonder they could not be further worked with.

Jeremiah 18:12 But they say, It is in vain; for we will walk after our own devices, and we will do everyone after the stubbornness of his evil heart- They preferred their thoughts or devices to God's (:11). Whether or not they said these words, this was how God read their hearts, as saying these words. The choice was between walking after God's word, or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

Jeremiah 18:13 Therefore thus says Yahweh: Ask now among the nations, who has heard such things; the virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing- No god of the nations made such huge effort with their people. It was all supposedly a simplistic matter of yes / no obedience, and receiving blessings or cursings. Yahweh was far more complex in His workings, and always seeking to save and bless His people despite their disobedience. But they refused even that. "The virgin of Israel" leads us to expect that the "very horrible thing" she did was an act of immorality, sexual unfaithfulness to their God. And that is indeed how the term is always used elsewhere (Jer. 5:30,31; 18:13; 23:14; Hos. 6:10). By forming alliances with other nations and serving their gods, they had been unfaithful to the God who wanted to marry them; for that is the implication of a virgin being unfaithful.

Jeremiah 18:14 Shall the snow of Lebanon fail from the rock of the field? Shall the cold waters that flow down from afar be dried up?- It ought to have been natural for Israel to respond to such amazing grace and love; but their refusal of it was as unnatural as gushing melt water on a slope suddenly drying up. Likewise any refusal of God's love is a conscious fighting against Him, clay resisting His forming hand.

Jeremiah 18:15 For My people have forgotten Me, they have burned incense to false gods- The allusion is to Dt. 32:18, where Israel "forgot God who formed you", and we

have shown on :2 that a "potter" is literally a 'former'. But Israel claimed to worship Yahweh; yet they forgot or were oblivious to the real implications of Him. We too can go through a semblance of worship whilst having effectively forgotten our God.

And they have been made to stumble in their ways, in the ancient paths, to walk in byways, in a way not built up- At the restoration, these rocky paths were to be made smooth. Is. 57:14 teaches that a level way must be made amongst the Jewish people, i.e. the stumbling blocks and 'valleys' must be removed from their path. "*Cast ye up*, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people" is therefore a command to God's people to undo the generations of false shepherding which Israel have experienced: "They have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not *cast up*" (Jer. 18:15 s.w. "cast…up" in Is. 57:14). Once we have prepared the way in this sense, then the highway is in place over which the Lord Jesus will return. This is how vital our work is for the Jewish people.

Jeremiah 18:16 To make their land an astonishment and a perpetual hissing; everyone who passes thereby shall be astonished and shake his head- But the land was not perpetually mocked. As explained on Jer. 10:18, many remained in the land and it was not left totally desolate. In wrath God remembered mercy, and there is also the factor of intercession and repentance of a minority to be taken into account.

Jeremiah 18:17 I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back and not the face in the day of their calamity- This is what was done to the Egyptians at the Red Sea, driven back by an east wind. God showed them His back, so that they were in darkness and could not reach the Israelites. But out of that destruction there was to arise a new people, redeemed from Babylon after the pattern of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. That was the Divine hope and program, although it never really came true at that time as it could have done.

At the time when Moses doubts whether he really has found grace, the God who speaks to Moses face to face then turns and shows Moses only His back parts (Ex. 33:11,20,22). This is alluded to in Jer. 18:17 and there interpreted as being a sign of God's anger- to turn away His face and show His back parts. God was so angry with Moses' disbelief in His grace. And that was the problem with Judah at this time.

Jeremiah 18:18 Then they said, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words- "Devise a device" is the very phrase used in :11 of God's device to destroy Israel. But Judah's response to this was to "devise a device", to make a plot, to kill Jeremiah and stop his words, as they thought, from coming true. They satisfied themselves that Jeremiah was a false prophet, and the false prophets were the true prophets. They considered Jeremiah a renegade priest; the priests' duty was to teach God's word, and the rest of the priests taught the words of the false prophets in the name of Yahweh. Ez. 7:26 alludes to these words, saying that the law would perish from these priests.

Jeremiah 18:19 Give heed to me, Yahweh, and listen to the voice of those who contend with me- Jeremiah was aware of what they were saying, perhaps because God revealed it to him in :18. He asks for his words to be heard, and also the words of his enemies. This is an example of where our situation is heard by God as a prayer. The

words of our enemies are heard as if they are words addressed to God, requiring Him to respond to them. We therefore shouldn't be so steamed up about them.

Jeremiah 18:20 Shall evil be recompensed for good? For they have dug a pit for my soul. Remember how I stood before You to speak good for them, to turn away Your wrath from them- Seeing the world through the eyes of both God and man- Jeremiah said that God's wrath was his wrath, "I am full of the wrath of God" (Jer. 6:11), and yet he stood before God "to turn away thy wrath from them" (Jer. 18:20). Hence the huge psychological tension within the prophets. 'Standing before the Lord' refers to prayer- Ps. 106:23; Ezra 9:15; Jer. 15:1; 18:20. To live a life standing before the Lord is to live a life of prayer. Hence David and Paul say that prayer can be continual- in that life becomes a lived out prayer, with the practice of living in the presence of God. And straight away we ask ourselves, in lives just as busy as those of David and Paul, whether our self-talk, our minute by minute inner consciousness, is "before the Lord"... or merely the sheer and utter vapidity of the modern mind. Jeremiah's intercession for those who hated him was heard by God, and He turned away His wrath from them. And yet they sought to kill Jeremiah. This was typical of the work and experience of the Lord Jesus.

Jeremiah 18:21 Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and give them over to the power of the sword; and let their wives become childless and widows; and let their men be slain of death, and their young men struck of the sword in battle- When Jeremiah's wishes here came true, he spends the book of Lamentations lamenting it, referring to these very words. We must be so careful what we pray for, especially if it is imprecation against others, lest it come true. He therefore lamented his own prayer at length.

Jeremiah 18:22 Let a cry be heard from their houses, when You shall bring a troop suddenly on them; for they have dug a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet- The sudden nature of Jerusalem's fall is emphasized (Jer. 4:20; 6:26; 15:8; 18:22); she was to fall as Babylon would "suddenly" fall (Jer. 51:8). Jerusalem fell predictably after a siege, there were no great surprises that she fell. It was not a sudden fall that came out of left field, unexpectedly. And yet that is the implication of the prophecies. Babylon was reveling in prosperity when the Medes unexpectedly took the city; but the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon was totally expected and inevitable. Yet the fall is spoken of as "sudden". It could be that a potential "sudden" invasion and destruction of Jerusalem was projected by God, but the intercession of the few faithful, or the repentance of a tiny remnant, changed this possible outcome of their sin. So many different possibilities of judgment are given, ranging from a quarter destruction to total destruction of people and even all animal life. This reflects the open nature of God's working with His people, setting up various potentials in order to be fully responsive to human freewill decisions.

Jeremiah 18:23 Yet, Yahweh, You know all their counsel against me to kill me- They falsely claimed prophetic revelation to kill Jeremiah as he was a false prophet (:18; see on Jer. 19:7.

Don't forgive their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from Your sight; but let them be overthrown before You; may You deal with them in the time of Your anger- When Jeremiah's wishes here came true, he spends the book of Lamentations lamenting it, referring to these very words. We must be so careful what we pray for,

especially if it is imprecation against others, lest it come true. He therefore lamented his own prayer at length. Jeremiah here is the very opposite of Moses, who pleaded that the people who despised him would have their sin blotted out. And yet Jeremiah also comes over as at times far too positive about Israel, complaining that God's judgments were too harsh. He may have been bi-polar, or simply going through the mood swings that were perhaps inevitable to anyone who was representative of both God and Israel. And his internal conflict between these two poles, of judgment and grace, also reflected those within God, as brought out in Hosea, where His "repentings" are unbearable for Him (Hos. 11:8). See on Jer. 20:13.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 19

Jeremiah 19:1 Thus said Yahweh, Go and buy a potter's earthen bottle, and take some of the elders of the people and of the elders of the priests- This meant a return visit to the potter of Jer. 18:2. The priests he took with him may well have been his own relatives, and those of Jer. 18:21-23 who were intent upon killing Jeremiah because his message about the potter hit home too hard. And now he was asked to repeat such teaching, to this same group.

Jeremiah 19:2 and go forth to the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the gate Harsith, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell you- I suggested on Jer. 18:2 that it was in a muddy part of this valley that the potter was working and had his field. LXX has "read" for "proclaim", suggesting these words of prophecy were given to Jeremiah and he or Baruch wrote them down before he read them out. The "gate Harsith" is GNB "The potsherd gate". The gate which led to the valley of Hinnom was known by this name because potters worked there, and the fragments of their broken vessels, remnants of pottery projects that hadn't worked out, were strewn around the place. "Harsith" is literally "potsherd". All this spoke of the broken projects of so many of God's people; and their worship of idols in that valley of the potter was the cause for all the failures. No wonder this same valley where rubbish such as potsherds were thrown and burnt, known in the New Testament as Gehenna, became the Lord's symbol of choice for total destruction of those who fail to be formed by God into His chosen vessels.

Jeremiah 19:3 and say, Hear the word of Yahweh, kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring evil on this place, which whoever hears, his ears shall tingle- God is repeatedly presented as the ultimate source of "evil". There is no radical evil in the cosmos outside of His control. There is no cosmic Satan figure; all "evil" is under His control, and performed by His Angelic "armies" manifested through human armies used by them, as the Babylonians were at this time.

Jeremiah 19:4 Because they have forsaken Me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it to other gods that they didn't know, they and their fathers and the kings of Judah; and have filled this place with the blood of innocents- "Know" in its Hebraic sense refers to relationship. They worshipped gods with whom they had no relationship, even if (as explained on Jer. 14:1-5) they 'knew' and learnt how to worship them, they did not "know" them in terms of relationship. No idol of

whatever form can provide the genuine, dynamic relationship which is possible between Yahweh and His people.

Jeremiah 19:5 and have built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons in the fire for burnt offerings to Baal; which I didn't command, nor spoke it, neither came it into My mind- God describes the word which He inspires as coming into His mind- as if it occurs to Him, and then He inspires men with it. Although God is outside time, this mustn't lead us to conclude that He is somehow static and unfeeling; He reveals Himself as accommodating Himself to men to the extent that He has feelings of joy at the moment of our repentance (consider the Father rushing out to the returning son) and sorrow and anguish at the times of our apostasy (consider the Almighty "rising early and sending" the prophets). Although He is outside time, yet He limits His omniscience (as He evidently limits His omnipotence). It could even be that although He *could* see every possible future and foresee our behaviour well before our birth, He somehow ignores this possibility. This is why He is described as being disappointed at Israel's level of response to His love, shocked at their sins, surprised at their perversions (e.g. Jer. 19:5; 32:35).

Jeremiah 19:6 therefore, behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that this place shall no more be called Topheth, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of Slaughter- LXX: "This place shall no more be called, The fall and burial-place of the son of Ennom, but, The burial-place of slaughter". The valley of Hinnom was known from before the Israelites entered Canaan (Josh. 15:8), so Ennom must have been a Canaanite who died there, perhaps 'fell' in battle there, and was buried there. Instead of commemorating the fall of the Canaanites, it would now remember the fall of the Israelites there.

Jeremiah 19:7 I will nullify the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life: and their dead bodies will I give to be food for the birds of the sky, and for the animals of the earth- In the very place of idol worship, there was false teaching. This was because the priests and false prophets were in league (Jer. 18:18) and their specific counsel was to murder Jeremiah (Jer. 18:23). They falsely claimed prophetic revelation to kill Jeremiah as he was a false prophet (Jer. 18:18). It was the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's home town, his own relatives who were also priests, who sought his life (Jer. 11:21). Their punishment was to be that the Babylonians would seek their lives, and slay them. What they intended to do to Jeremiah would be done to them. But in a low moment, Jeremiah lost his faith in this (see on Jer. 20:10).

Jeremiah 19:8 I will make this city an astonishment, and a hissing; everyone who passes thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all its plagues- The hissing and mocking was because Jerusalem had been praised in David's psalms (e.g. Ps. 48:2; 50:2) as the joy of the whole earth and perfect in beauty (Lam. 2:15). Those Psalms of David were well known; for David after the Bathsheba incident had vowed to preach the good news of Yahweh's grace to the entire world. He had done so through his Psalms. His music ministry had been successful; the nations knew the songs about Zion being the joy of the whole earth and the perfection of beauty. And so they mocked it as it lay in ruins.

Jeremiah 19:9 I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their

daughters; and they shall eat each one the flesh of his friend, in the siege and in the distress, with which their enemies, and those who seek their life, shall distress them- This was more relevant to AD70 than to the Babylonian siege. This was because these prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the Romans, as they will likewise come to their ultimate term in the last days.

Jeremiah 19:10 Then you shall break the bottle in the sight of the men who go with you- The religious and civil leadership (:1).

Jeremiah 19:11 and shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel- The world will be broken to shivers, "as the vessels of a potter" (Rev. 2:26). But this is in fact quoting Jeremiah's words concerning the breaking of the individual believer who is rejected at the last day (Jer. 18:4-6; 19:11). The point of the Lord's quotation is surely that those He rejects will share the world's condemnation.

That can't be made whole again- The broken earthen bottle which was smashed couldn't be made whole again- apparently. But the miracle of grace was that like the useless burnt vine branch of Ez. 15 and the marred linen girdle buried by the Euphrates, the smashed bottle, like Ezekiel's dry bones vision, could be made whole again. The stripes upon the suffering servant could 'heal' Israel (s.w. "made whole", Is. 53:5). Jeremiah had preached as much, that being made whole again was possible (Jer. 3:22; 30:17; 33:6 s.w.). The rhetorical question of Lam. 2:13 "Zion... who can heal you / make you whole again?" (s.w.) had its answer in Yahweh.

And they shall bury in Topheth, until there is no place to bury- I have noted several times that the prophesied judgments in Jeremiah differ from each other; he has also predicted that there would be such mass destruction that there would be nobody to bury the dead, for all would be slain (Jer. 14:16). But Jer. 19:11 speaks of burying bodies in Topheth. These different scenarios didn't all come true. There were various prophetic options, according to the exact measure of Israel's repentance and Jeremiah's intercession; or perhaps, simply according to the pity which Yahweh would finally show this sinful people.

Jeremiah 19:12 Thus will I do to this place, says Yahweh, and to its inhabitants, even making this city as Topheth- All the once holy city would become as the burial place in Topheth. The Jews had always been careful to bury bodies outside of the city, lest it be defiled; but the whole city would become a place of dead bodies.

Jeremiah 19:13 and the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah, which are defiled, shall be as the place of Topheth, even all the houses on whose roofs they have burned incense to all the army of the sky, and have poured out drink offerings to other gods- As noted on :12, the Jews had always been careful to bury bodies outside of the city, lest it be defiled; but the houses within the city would become full of dead bodies. Those houses had been built on the back of fraud. They would be destroyed along with the temple, and the historical records of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem emphasize that the "great houses" were also destroyed. We note too the extent of their idolatry; not just in Topheth, but on the roofs of their private homes. They were like a sexually obsessed woman; they worshipped every possible idol or god, hoping for some material benefit from it.

Jeremiah 19:14 Then came Jeremiah from Topheth, where Yahweh had sent him to

prophesy; and he stood in the court of Yahweh's house and said to all the people- LXX "And Jeremias came from the place of the Fall". The sin of Judah is presented as that of Adam, and the way Zedekiah flees to the east and Judah are sent out of the land to the east continues the similarities.

Jeremiah 19:15 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring on this city and on all its towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it; because they have made their neck stiff, that they may not hear My words- The significance of bringing the evil pronounced is in the fact that God speaks, but there is a gap between the statement and the fulfillment. We all live within that gap, as Judah were- and there is therefore an intensity to the need for repentance to change the otherwise certain outcome. But they had stiffened their neck. To really hear God's words requires humility, a bowing of the neck, and a willingness to change the well trodden paths of habitual reactions, a softness and flexibility which doesn't come naturally.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 20

Jeremiah 20:1 Now Pashhur the son of Immer the priest, who was chief officer in the house of Yahweh, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things- "Pashhur" means 'liberated'. This may well have been his title; he was preaching liberty to act as they naturally wanted. God's response was to proclaim a liberty to the sword and to destruction for such people (Jer. 34:17). He was the equivalent of the New Testament false prophets who taught that we can continue in sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1). See on Jer. 21:1.

Jeremiah 20:2 Then Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper gate of Benjamin, which was in the house of Yahweh- In this Jeremiah was a type of the Lord Jesus, indeed more than this- Jeremiah might have been a potential Messiah figure of some sort, but Judah rejected him. The way the servant is beaten and has his hair pulled out (Is. 50:4-11) reminds us of how the prophet Jeremiah was treated the same way by the Jews when his message was rejected (Jer. 20:2; Jer. 37:15). "Stocks" is LXX "dungeon".

Jeremiah 20:3 It happened on the next day, that Pashhur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then Jeremiah said to him, Yahweh has not called your name Pashhur, but Magormissabib- LXX "Not Pashhur, but Exile". GNB "Terror everywhere" connects with :4, "I will make you a terror...". And the same phrase is used in :10; the terror everywhere would be due to Pashhur. He appears to have been the chief false prophet and is singled out for particular mention and condemnation.

Jeremiah 20:4 For thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself, and to all your friends- As noted on :3, this was to be the meaning of his new name, hence he was a terror to himself.

And they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall see it; and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall kill them with the sword- As explained on Jer. 10:18, not "all Judah" went to Babylon, in fact only a minority of them. Again we see God's pole of pity and grace overpowering the pole of judgment within His personality. But the

tension and struggle between those poles were very real for Him, as they were within His representative Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 20:5 Moreover I will give all the riches of this city, and all its gains, and all the precious things of it, yes, all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies; and they shall make them a prey, and take them, and carry them to Babylon- This alludes to Isaiah's words to Hezekiah, that all his wealth and royal descendants would be taken to Babylon as punishment for his pride and refusing to act as the intended Messianic ruler of the restored kingdom was meant to. And yet here the fault for that is blamed upon Pashhur and those who believed him. We reflect how all God's actions and judgments are a careful calculation, taking multiple factors into account, and are far from being a swipe in anger at those who displease Him.

Jeremiah 20:6 You, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house shall go into captivity; and you shall come to Babylon, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you, and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely- We wonder why Pashhur wasn't killed but died having seen the suffering and death of those to whom he had falsely prophesied. This was likely extra punishment for the man; to have died by the sword in Jerusalem would have been a lesser judgment. And this is how the condemnation of the wicked will work out at the last day; the grades of punishment will be in terms of seeing the result of their actions, rather than in degrees of heat or torture as classically imagined.

Jeremiah 20:7 Yahweh, you have seduced me, and I was seduced; You are stronger than me, and I am overcome: I am become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocks me- See on Ez. 14:9. Despite the unity of spirit between God and the prophets, the prophets weren't always forced to say the words. Jeremiah didn't want to say them at times, the weariness of it all got on top of him; and yet he felt unable to walk away, just as God felt with Israel. But there were times when he outright rebelled. Jer. 20:7 is made a mess of in most translations, because the obvious translation is simply too shocking. Jeremiah complains: "O Lord, thou hast seduced me [s.w. Ex. 22:16 of a man seducing a woman], and I am seduced; thou hast raped me [s.w. Dt. 22:15] and I am overcome" (Rabbi Abraham Heschel's translation). Here is Jeremiah saying that he was attracted by God, he was seduced by Him, but then the whole thing became too much- he felt his soul had been raped. And yet in Jer. 15:16 he says that he had found God's word and eaten it, and as a result, "I am called by thy name, O Lord"- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his "joy [and] delight"- two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an inbreathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was "full of the wrath / passion of God" (Jer. 6:11). A prophet could only be incensed if God was incensed (Num. 23:8)- such was the bond between them. No wonder these men felt alone amongst men. They had a relationship with God which others couldn't enter into, which totally affected their lives and beings. The preacher / testifier of Jesus knows something of this spirit of prophecy. But in Jer. 20:7, Jeremiah felt he had been raped and not married. He resented the complete takeover of his heart. See on :10.

If we stick with the translation "deceived", then we conclude that Jeremiah feared God had deceived *him* (Jer. 20:7 AV)- showing he knew such a thing was possible. Dt. 13:1-3 warns Israel not to believe prophets whose prophecies came true although

they taught false doctrines, because they may have been raised up to test their obedience.

Jeremiah 20:8 For whenever I speak, I cry out Your word- LXX "For I will laugh with my bitter speech" sounds as if Jeremiah is sarcastically saying that he will laugh along with his mockers. His attitude seems so bitter and resentful of his being mocked that it is not altogether correct.

I cry, Violence and destruction! But the word of Yahweh is made a reproach to me and a derision all the day- "Reproach... and a derision" is quoting verbatim from Ps. 44:13; 79:4, which speak of how God's people became just this because of their sins. Jeremiah identifies with Israel, and yet feels that this is how he is treated by Israel. And he clearly minded it; he was very sensitive to being mocked. Yet through this experience he was enabled to identify with how Israel were to be made to their neighbours. Nothing is ever wasted in the Divine ecology.

Jeremiah 20:9 If I say, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name; then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I can't- This could as well be translated as meaning that Jeremiah did decide not to make mention of Him nor speak any more. We get the impression that at this point he had had enough, he was a reluctant if not rebellious prophet. And yet because the writing of God's Word is a result of God's will rather than human desire, he was "carried along by the Holy Spirit" so that he had no choice in the matter. Peter describes this idea of the Bible writers being 'carried along' with the same Greek word used in Acts 27:17,27 about a ship being 'driven' by the wind, out of control. Mic. 2:7 comments that truly inspired prophets can't be stopped from speaking forth God's word, because God's Spirit controlling them can't be constrained. Those men were truly 'carried along'. And yet in Jeremiah's case, he was also willing, and his spirit was that of God on so many points. Perhaps therefore it was not that he was irresistibly forced to prophesy; the fire he felt within may not simply have been that of Divine inspiration forcing him, but the passion he felt for his people, which made him return to being a willing mouthpiece.

Jeremiah 20:10 For I have heard the defaming of many, terror on every side- "Terror everywhere (GNB) / on every side" is one meaning of "Magormissabib "in :3. The terror to come upon Judah was partly because of their defamation of Jeremiah, who had spoken God's word to them.

Denounce, and we will denounce him, say all my familiar friends, those who watch for my fall- LXX "Conspire ye, and let us conspire together against him". But Jeremiah has just been assured that all such plots would come to nothing (Jer. 18:18,23; 19:7). In this low moment he appears to have lost his faith in that promise, although it returns in :11. His "familiar friends" were literally those of his family, the men of Anathoth, his fellow priests (Jer. 11:21).

Perhaps he will be persuaded, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him- Clearly Jeremiah was being set up in some kind of trap, being persuaded to say or so things which would ensnare him. The language here of traps and faithless "familiar friends" is that of the Messianic Psalms. His heart was clearly in those Psalms, and this makes him even more a type of Christ. "Persuaded" is the same word as "seduced" in :7. He felt on one hand seduced by God, and then

bitterly disappointed; and yet seduced by the false prophets too, although he resisted that. Possibly some kind of sexual seduction was offered to him.

Jeremiah 20:11 But Yahweh is with me as an awesome mighty one- "Awesome mighty one" is literally 'an oppressor'. Jeremiah felt at times that God had seduced him and taken him over (:7) and he apparently resented that. His language seems inappropriate, but he speaks so often in depression and states his feelings without much apparent effort at self-controlling them.

Therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail; they shall be utterly disappointed, because they have not dealt wisely- This was exactly as promised in Jer. 18:18,23; 19:7. But in :10 Jeremiah temporarily lost his faith in this and despaired. He is so human and so imaginable.

Even with an everlasting dishonour which shall never be forgotten- Eternal shame is a common condemnation of the wicked. Seeing they will be long dead and gone, it is us, the accepted, who by God's grace will recall the terrible shame of the rejected throughout our eternity. Their shame will be so terrible; and hence their anger will likewise be.

Jeremiah 20:12 But, Yahweh of Armies, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind- The 'testing' of Judah was to be through melting them in the furnace of Jerusalem, caused by the fire of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9). We learn here that the essential purpose of that was to try / test / purify / reveal their heart and mind; for that was and is of utterly paramount importance to God.

Let me see Your vengeance on them- But when he did see this, he bitterly laments over it, in Lamentations. We must be careful what we ask for, lest we receive it. There is more information about Jeremiah's feelings about his persecutors at Jer. 20:10-12. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically, and it seems Jer. 11:20 refers to the same time as Jer. 20:10-12.

For to You have I revealed my cause- The fact God sees and knows all means that we might as well open our lives up before Him in prayer and meditation. Jeremiah "revealed my cause" before the Lord because he knew that God "tests the heart and the mind". This may be why men like Jeremiah were somewhat 'rough' with God; whatever they felt about God, they told Him. They so knew that God knew their thoughts... there was and is no point in saying fine words to God in prayer, whilst feeling harder about Him in ones heart. "Revealed my cause" is legal language, used also in Jer. 11:20. He feels that his prayer is an approach to the throne of God, and he seeks justice and judgment from Him- vengeance on his false accusers. Prayer is indeed a foretaste of the judgment; we come boldly before the throne of grace just as we shall likewise come boldly before that throne at the last day.

Jeremiah 20:13 Sing to Yahweh, praise Yahweh; for He has delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers- This is typical of the almost bi-polar nature of Jeremiah; ecstatic praise after desperation and almost collapse of faith earlier in this chapter, and then in the next verse, having suicidal thoughts. Maybe he was not bi-polar but simply going through the mood swings that were perhaps inevitable to anyone who was representative of both God and Israel. And his internal conflict between these two poles, of judgment and grace, also reflected those within God, as

brought out in Hosea, where His "repentings" are unbearable for Him (Hos. 11:8). See on Jer. 18:23.

Jeremiah 20:14 Cursed is the day in which I was born: don't let the day in which my mother bore me be blessed- Jer. 20:14-18 is quoting from the depression of Job in Job 3:3-12. Whilst Jeremiah was in a sense wrong to have these suicidal thoughts, and was denigrating his own ministry which was from God, even in those low moments he turned to Biblical precedent. He recalled there was another man who had been betrayed by his friends and misrepresented by them.

Jeremiah 20:15 Cursed is the man who brought news to my father saying, A boy is born to you; making him very glad- The quotation from Job 3:3-12 is not exact. We wonder whether Jeremiah had only verbally recalled from memory those words, hence the discrepancies; or whether he was quoting from an earlier version which under inspiration was edited during the exile into its current form.

Jeremiah 20:16 Let that man be as the cities which Yahweh overthrew, and didn't relent: and let him hear a cry in the morning, and shouting at noontime- This is alluding to Sodom and Gomorrah. It seems an awful imprecation to bring down upon the head of an innocent messenger of decades previously. Jeremiah here surely is in depression, quoting Job's depressed words without pausing to put meaning into those words. We have noted often how he does this about his enemies, and then in Lamentations laments how his imprecations actually came true.

Jeremiah 20:17 because God didn't kill me from the womb; and so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb always great- This idea that the naturally aborted child remained within the mother is of course medically inaccurate, but the Bible doesn't carry inspired footnotes which point out the scientific inaccuracies of the recorded statements. We need to remember this when we encounter the language of demons being used to describe mental illness and their cure in the New Testament.

Jeremiah 20:18 Why came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?- GNB "to end my life in disgrace?". God had promised to preserve Jeremiah's life, so this is definitely Jeremiah in weakness. But this 'end of life' may refer to his plans to commit suicide. He was a man called to do God's work, as we all are. His despising of his life is therefore deeply wrong. But it is recorded as comfort for us as we reflect upon words written or spoken in depression. Just as Job's words quoted here were not held against Job, and at the end he is commended for having spoken rightly about God. It seems that God does cut some slack to the feelings of depressed people. And we should likewise.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 21

Jeremiah 21:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, when king Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchijah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest saying- We noted on Jer. 20:3-6 that Jerusalem's judgments were blamed upon Pashhur son of Immer. This is probably the same as this Passhur ben Malchijah. It seems too unusual that two men of the same name occur in two chapters which follow on from each other. This man had a huge role to play in the false

prophecies. That Zedekiah should send this false prophet to Jeremiah to ask for God's true word, and to ask him to pray for the people... would indicate that at best Zedekiah was out of touch, and yet more realistically it seems Zedekiah went along with a plan by Pashhur to get Jeremiah to say things for which they would further condemn and punish him. "Malchijah" is literally "Yah's king". It could be that this person was both in the kingly line and also the priestly line (Jer. 20:1). He could have been the Messianic king-priest of the restored Kingdom; but he chose not to be. This would explain the extraordinary condemnation of him in Jer. 20.

Jeremiah 21:2 Please inquire of Yahweh for us; for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon makes war against us: perhaps Yahweh will deal with us according to all His wondrous works, that He may go up from us- This is the typical human tendency, to ask someone else to pray for us, to engage with God on our behalf. God wanted to deal directly with Israel, speaking personally to them; but they wanted Moses to go and talk with Him and then tell them. We see the same mentality in 1 Kings 13:6; Acts 8:28. It is classic religion, and is on the opposite pole of personal relationship with God which the Bible seeks to inculcate. We note that they are now recognizing that Egypt is not going to help them; Ezekiel pictures them as a prostitute now desperately going to all and any man for help against Babylon, and that included going to Yahweh. Perhaps this incident is after the battle of Carchemish when Egyptian military power was destroyed by Babylon. "All His wondrous works" is quoting Ex. 3:20 of Yahweh's deliverance of the people from the Egyptians. They were aware of Yahweh's historical salvation, and were asking for it to be repeated. But they were to be treated like Egypt, and smitten along with their animals with a great plague (:6).

Jeremiah 21:3 Then Jeremiah said to them, You shall tell Zedekiah- We might imagine that his response could have been that God had told him not to pray for them. But God does respond, although not with the message they expected and hoped for.

Jeremiah 21:4 Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who besiege you without the walls- This continues the great prophetic theme that all human strength and military technology is brought down beneath God's judgment. See on :13.

And I will gather them into the midst of this city- The implication is that God is within the city, the shekinah glory was still present in the temple according to Ezekiel's visions. And yet instead of this meaning that they would therefore have the protection of their God, He would in fact gather the besiegers into the city, "into the midst" of it, that is to Zion, the temple itself.

Jeremiah 21:5 I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, wrath and great indignation- This contradicts the common understanding that a national god, or the god of a city, would always fight *for* and not against that people or city; for to do otherwise would seem so illogical, to as it were destroy himself. But the God of Israel was so different; He would Himself fight against His own people, city and nation. And this implied that He would do so to His own personal hurt and loss. His wrath was therefore not painless for Him. It was the duty of the priests to discharge their office so that there would not be the "indignation" of Yahweh against His people (Num. 1:53; 18:5 s.w.). This statement is

therefore tantamount to saying that the priesthood had not done their work. Jeremiah was himself a priest; no wonder his own relatives, who were also priests, were so incensed against him. "Anger... wrath... and indignation" is a quote from the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 29:28).

Jeremiah 21:6 I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man and animal: they shall die of a great plague- It seems that one prophetic scenario was that God would create "a great [specific] plague" which would destroy both people and animals within Jerusalem. As noted on :2, the people thought God would deliver them as He had Israel from Egypt; but they were to be treated like the Egyptians, to whom they had returned in their hearts and whom they had looked to for deliverance from Babylon. And yet it seems that this particular scenario didn't happen; there is no mention of such a great plague. In wrath God remembered mercy, or chose to work through one of the other possible paths of judgment which Jeremiah has elsewhere outlined. All the time we see God's flexibility and openness to working with men.

Jeremiah 21:7 Afterward, says Yahweh, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people, even such as are left in this city from the plague, from the sword and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life: and he shall strike them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy- I noted on :6 that this "great plague" which was to destroy most of the people and animals in the city didn't apparently happen. And likewise the remnant were not all killed by the sword nor were all the people taken to Babylon (see on Jer. 10:18). Zedekiah wasn't slain by Nebuchadnezzar, but rather died in captivity (Jer. 52:11). Perhaps he repented; or God chose to work out another path of judgment with Zedekiah which would achieve more glory for Him and His objectives than simply having him slain by the sword. The statement that Nebuchadnezzar would not show him "pity nor have mercy" and not spare him was therefore not fulfilled; because he was reflecting the God who had also said He would not spare or pity, but yet He did.

Jeremiah 21:8 To this people you shall say, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death- Although they had broken the covenant (see on :5), they are now invited to see themselves as facing again the choice of accepting or rejecting it. For these are the words which God presented to Israel as they entered the land (Dt. 31:27). Even at this point there was the possibility that they could enter a reestablished land and Kingdom of God.

As Yahweh was with Moses- not just in power, but in wondrous patience and gentleness- so He will be with us too. Not only did God encourage Joshua to see himself as in Moses' shoes; He inspired Jeremiah likewise (Jer. 21:8 = Dt. 30:15,19), and Ezekiel (Ez. 2:3 = Dt. 31:27; Neh. 9:17; Num. 17:10); and He wishes us to also see Moses' God as our God. But if Moses' God is to be ours in truth in the daily round of life, we must rise up to the dedication of Moses; as he was a faithful steward, thoroughly dedicated to God's ecclesia (Heb. 3:5), so we are invited follow his example (1 Cor. 4:2; Mt. 24:45).

Jeremiah 21:9 He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; but he who goes out, and passes over to the Chaldeans who

besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be to him for a prey- The prediction of death by plague in Jer. 21:6 was therefore conditional. Those prophetic words need not have come true if Israel had been obedient to this call to surrender. "Passes over" is literally "to fall down". They were to accept their condemnation, and thereby save their lives. Their lives would be to them "for a prey", literally, as booty taken from a conquered city. This was and is the great paradox- that surrender, acceptance of defeat, was the great spiritual victory. In the future, at the Lord's return, we will be saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9). Whilst this has already been achieved in a sense, it will be materially articulated in that day- in that we will feel and know ourselves to be worthy of God's wrath, but then be saved from it. We are all to some extent in the position of Zedekiah and the men of Judah, who was told that if they accepted God's condemnation of them as just, and served the King of Babylon, then they would ultimately be saved; but if they refused to accept that condemnation, then they would be eternally destroyed (Jer. 21:9; 27:12). And the Babylonian invasion was a type of the final judgment.

Jeremiah 21:10 For I have set My face against this city for evil and not for good, says Yahweh: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire- A pagan god looked after his own people against their enemies. But Yahweh of Israel sent and empowered Israel's enemies against them, and gave them victory against His own people; He encamped against His very own people (Is. 29:2-4). The archenemy of Israel, Assyria, was revealed as a rod in the God of Israel's hand (Is. 10:5 etc.), and the King of Babylon was Yahweh's servant who would come against Yahweh's own people (Jer. 25:9; 27:6 etc.). The will of Israel's God was that the capital city, seen by the people as the symbol and nerve center of a god's power and control, was to be destroyed by Israel's enemies (Jer. 34:1-5; 21:3-7). In the surrounding culture of Israel, capital cities were portrayed as women, the wives of the gods. They are always presented as pure and wonderful. But the prophets represent cities like Jerusalem and Samaria as fallen women, whores. It was all *so* counter-cultural. Yahweh's prophet even appealed for Israel to surrender when under siege (Jer. 21:8-10). Try to enter into how radical and counter-cultural all this was. The prophets were trying to share the feelings and positions of a God *so* vastly different to the imaginations and understandings of His very own people. The nervous stress of this, the psychological pressure, can't be underestimated. And we are asked to share the spirit / mind / disposition of those prophets. Not only was God on the side of Israel's enemies; yet through all that, He somehow *was* with Israel; quite simply, "God is with us", even though it is He who encamps against them too (Is. 8:9,10; 18:4). The God of Auschwitz is somehow still the God of Israel. The very torment, even torture, of understanding that was etched clearly in the prophets, and it will be in us too.

Jeremiah 21:11 Touching the house of the king of Judah, hear the word of Yahweh- The family of Zedekiah were guilty of injustice and abusing people (:12), and he clearly was involved in this himself. He was not simply weak minded and manipulated by his courtiers; he was himself guilty.

Jeremiah 21:12 House of David, thus says Yahweh, Execute justice in the morning, and deliver him who is robbed out of the hand of the oppressor- They went into captivity because the princes and priests oppressed the people (Jer. 22:3,17); in the new temple, this was not to be so (Ez. 45:8). And yet, in Nehemiah's time the princes

of the people did again oppress them, e.g. through making them mortgage their lands to them. This is the tragedy of Israel's refusal to learn… The intention was that they would "bear the punishment of their iniquity… *that* the house of Israel go no more astray" (Ez. 14:11). The call to execute justice "in the morning" may not simply refer to how courts were typically held in the morning; it could be an urgent call to immediately reform, from tomorrow morning. They were acting as "the oppressor" to God's people, and so they too were to be oppressed by the Babylonians (Jer. 50:33 s.w.). How they treated their brethren was directly related to how they would be treated in their judgment, and this principle applies for all time.

Lest My wrath go forth like fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings- At the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, the implication was that the wrath could be quenched still (Jer. 4:4); but the time would come when it could not be. By the time of Jer. 7:20, God was saying that His wrath could no longer be quenched (as 2 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 34:25). And yet even after this point, God still speaks as if it could be quenched by repentance (Jer. 21:12). Even to the point of self-contradiction, God was so eager to have His wrath quenched. And this God is our God. His eagerness for human repentance should be reflected in our attitudes, both to others and to our own sins. Breaking relationship with people by casting them out of fellowship is not reflective of that.

Jeremiah 21:13 Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley and of the rock of the plain, says Yahweh; you that say, who shall come down against us? Or who shall enter into our habitations?- LXX "that dwellest in the valley of Sor". It could be that :13,14 speak of the judgment of Moab in similar terms to Jer. 48:8,21 and they have become added here out of place. Yet :14 can be clearly understood as referring to Jerusalem. But GNB likely has the sense right: "You, Jerusalem, are sitting high above the valleys, like a rock rising above the plain. But I will fight against you. You say that no one can attack you or break through your defense". This continues the theme that all human might and apparent advantage is as nothing before God's judgment; see on :4. These were likely the words of the false prophets, who taught [as some evangelicals do today] that Jerusalem is inviolate and will always be protected by Yahweh. But that is to argue on the level of mere religion and not spirituality. God's historical actions against Jerusalem clearly show that she is not inviolate.

Jeremiah 21:14 I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, says Yahweh; and I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it shall devour all that is around her- Jerusalem being like a forest destroyed by a forest fire is the language of Is. 9:18. The "forest" of Jerusalem may refer to the temple, famed for its cedar paneling from the forests of Lebanon (see on Zech. 11:1). The prophetic word in Jeremiah's mouth was like fire, and it was the people who were to be "devoured" by it (Ez. 15:5; s.w. Jer. 5:14; 17:27; 21:14). The amazing grace explained in Ez. 15 was in the fact that the 'devoured by fire' vine twig would be refined in Babylon and still used by God to reestablish His Kingdom.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 22

Jeremiah 22:1 Thus said Yahweh: Go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak there this word saying- This 'going down' could reflect the coming down of Yahweh in judgment. It was 'down' from the Temple on the eastern hill of Jerusalem

to the king's house, which was on lower ground.

Jeremiah 22:2 Hear the word of Yahweh, king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you, and your servants, and your people who enter in by these gates- That the king still sat on David's throne was a reminder of the potential still possible; see on :4. The appeal is carefully made not just to the king and his courtiers, but also to all the people; or at least to all the people who entered the gates of the king's house. The guilt for what was to happen is continually expressed as being far more than merely with the leadership.

Jeremiah 22:3 Thus says Yahweh: Execute justice and righteousness, and deliver him who is robbed out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence, to the foreigner, the fatherless, nor the widow; neither shed innocent blood in this place- Because they oppressed Gentiles, therefore they were to be oppressed by them (Dt. 28:29,33; Jer. 50:33 s.w.). Their judgments were appropriate to their sins. Innocent blood was shed in the temple; it was there that the idols were worshipped and child sacrifice made. They had made the temple as a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11), and these two ideas are found in Ez. 18:10: "If he fathers a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, and who does any one of these things". These were all things going on at the time of Ezekiel. The exiles needed to repent of these things. These actual things had been practiced by the ruling classes who were now in exile with Ezekiel. The same word is used to express how the Jerusalem temple had been turned by the priests into a "den of robbers" or oppressors (Jer. 7:11; 22:3). Jeremiah as a priest is addressing the leaders of the priests. One reason Judah was destroyed was because Manasseh was a 'shedder of blood' (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4). Perhaps this was being focused upon by some, complaining that God was unfairly punishing them for Manasseh's sins. But the reality was that in essence, his descendants and wider family had done the same as he had done. For they too had been involved in the shedding of the innocent blood of their own children to the idol cults (Ps. 106:38).

Jeremiah 22:4 For if you do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people- But the gates were to be burnt with fire, because Israel "would not". To as it were incite their repentance, God makes the offer that if they there and then repented of the abuses of :3, then He would establish a Messianic kingdom. The king who then sat on David's throne (:2) would become a Messianic style king, fulfilling the Messianic kingdom prophecy of Is. 66:20. Perceiving how near and real the Kingdom can be for us ought to elicit repentance. They were really close here at this point; and yet they refused, so hardened were they in the paths of continual sin.

Jeremiah 22:5 But if you will not hear these words, I swear by Myself, says Yahweh, that this house shall become a desolation- The most solemn and binding form of oath possible (Heb. 6:13-18). They could have the Messianic kingdom there and then (:4); or the destruction of the king's palace ["this house" of :1,2] and all they once held dear. The destruction of the "house", both the royal palace and family, meant an end to any hopes of the line of David continuing. At least for then. They had come to a T-intersection where they had to decide; whereas we would likely have just punished them for their sins and considered that their just desert.

Jeremiah 22:6 For thus says Yahweh concerning the house of the king of Judah: You are Gilead to Me, the head of Lebanon. Yet surely I will make you a wilderness, cities which are not inhabited- God still found them so attractive, even though they had sinned awfully, building their "house" by abusing labourers (:13) and had to be destroyed. This was love itself. There is a parallel between "the house of the king" and the "cities"; the repentance of a minority, the royal family, could have led to the restoration of all Judah, and their continuance in sin meant the mass destruction of it. The entire society were guilty, and were not punished just because of the sins of the royal family; the masses did not suffer because of the sins of the minority. But God was prepared to work the other way around; the repentance of a minority could lead to blessing for a majority of sinners. This willingness of God in this regard came to its acme in the salvation of sinners for the sake of the obedience of just one man, His Son. And yet even though they did not repent, the "cities", perhaps an intensive plural for the one great city, Jerusalem, did not become literally a wilderness. The temple and great houses were burnt, but some people still lived there, such as the local inhabitants encountered by Ezra when he returned to rebuild.

Jeremiah 22:7 I will prepare destroyers against you, each one with his weapons; they shall cut down your choice cedars and cast them into the fire- These were the cedars of Lebanon which God had found so attractive (:6). "Prepare" is literally 'sanctify'. Within the worldview of the attackers, they had sanctified their war against Judah in the names of their gods (s.w. Jer. 6:4 s.w.). But God worked through that, Himself sanctifying or preparing these men. The false prophets were wrong to claim that Jerusalem and the temple were sanctified by God and were therefore inviolate; God would sanctify the destroyers and their weapons so that it would all be destroyed.

Jeremiah 22:8 Many nations shall pass by this city and shall say every man to his neighbour, Why has Yahweh done thus to this great city?- This quotes Dt. 29:24, a curse for breaking the covenant (:9), and alludes to the specific judgment upon the temple (1 Kings 9:8). There is no particular example of this oft repeated curse coming true, apart from in Lam. 2:15, which appears to be spoken by Jeremiah in deep grief, and does not include the words predicted here and in :9. The actual destruction of Jerusalem and Judah was not as extensive as threatened; either God took pity, or there was a modicum of intercession or repentance which ameliorated the extent of the judgment. And that would explain why neither in the Bible nor other history is there any record of this happening.

Jeremiah 22:9 Then they shall answer, Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them- See on :8. The idea was that the destroyed city and temple would be a silent witness to the power of Yahweh, and how this God who kept covenant was now as it were 'free' as His earlier people had betrayed Him and left Him without a people. The deserted city and ruined temple would therefore have been an invitation to observers to seek this Yahweh, and enquire whether they could enter a new covenant with Him, seeing His previous covenant with His people had been broken and He was now, as it were, unattached.

Jeremiah 22:10 Don't weep for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep bitterly for him who goes away into exile; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country- Perhaps Jeremiah spoke these words in relation to a prominent funeral or memorial

service for the dead, presumably that of Josiah who was killed trying to support the Egyptians against Babylon.

Jeremiah 22:11 For thus says Yahweh touching Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, and who went forth out of this place: He shall not return there any more- Shallum is the same as Jehoahaz. Perhaps he is called Shallum because that word means 'The one marked out for judgment'. See on :12. I explain on Ez. 4:6 that potentially, the captivity of Judah need only have lasted for 40 days or years, but this period was extended, just as it could have been reduced. But Jehoahaz was not going to experience this, he had precluded any reduction in his captivity period because of his impenitence at that time.

Jeremiah 22:12 But in the place where they have led him captive, there shall he die, and he shall see this land no more- The false prophets were claiming that his exile was going to be very short lived and he would return to establish a Messianic kingdom, thus twisting the prophecies of the restoration which Jeremiah may have already given, along with those of Isaiah which were already extant.

Jeremiah 22:13 Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his rooms by injustice; who uses his neighbour's service without wages, and doesn't give him his hire- Jehoiakim had already demanded from his people a heavy tribute to the king of Egypt (2 Kings 23:35), whom he trusted in instead of in God; and now like Solomon he exacted forced labour from his own people so that he might have a luxurious palace built for himself. The prophets weren't just empty moralizers, bleating on about the state of the nation; their words are an assault of the mind and conscience. Amos speaks of judgment to come in dramatic terms 'just' because creditors sold their debtors into slavery just to recover the cost of a pair of shoes (Am. 2:6,7). Jer. 22:13-19 is a long and passionate condemnation of Jehoiakim for building an extension to his house, using his neighbours as workmen and not giving them the agreed wages. We see this sort of thing all the time. And shrug and think it good fortune it didn't happen to us. But that's not the spirit of prophecy.

Jeremiah 22:14 who says, I will build me a wide house and spacious rooms, and cuts him out windows; and makes a ceiling with cedar, painted with vermilion- This obsession with building his own house recalls that of Solomon. The only other mention of "vermilion" is in Ez. 23:14 where this is what was used to portray images of the idols upon the walls of the Jerusalem temple. The temple was famed for its cedars (:7), and so it was as if he was turning his house into an imitation temple. A "wide" house is literally a house built by measure, and this is the phrase used about the construction of the temple (1 Kings 7:9; 2 Chron. 3:3). "Rooms" is the term used for the "chambers" (s.w.) of the temple. "Cut out" or 'rendered' windows are what were intended for the temple of the restored kingdom (s.w. Ez. 40:25,29,33; 41:16 etc.). This is the classic path of apostasy- to justify the worship of our own home and luxury in the name of worshipping God.

Jeremiah 22:15 Shall you reign, because you strive to excel in cedar?- The temple was famed for its cedar work (:7), and so it seems that by making his own house similar to the temple, the king was thinking that this would make his house and dynasty likewise inviolate. But this was mere religious tokenism.

Didn't your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him- He made the classic mistake of all materialists, thinking that he proved himself the rightful king by the degree of his ostentation and luxury. The implication could be that Josiah experienced all things "well with him" whilst he did justice; but when he started playing politics and supporting Egypt against Babylon, he no longer experienced this but rather died in shame. His trust in Egypt and human strength was therefore associated with no longer seeking justice for people. The two strands of thought and behaviour go together. For it is trust in God and not flesh which elicits justice in our behaviour towards others.

Jeremiah 22:16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Wasn't this to know Me? says Yahweh- See on :15. To know Yahweh means to have a relationship with Him and to respond in practice. This is the Hebraic sense of 'knowing' a person. The Jews of those times had done what many believers do today- assume that an intellectual knowledge of God and external ritualism is the same as knowing God. But it is our attitudes to the poor and needy which are the knowledge of God which the Bible has in view.

Jeremiah 22:17 But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it- The reason why the poor and needy were abused by the king was that he and his fellow rulers were covetous. Oppression, abuse and violence all flowed from an attitude of heart. Innocent blood was shed, referring not only to the babies sacrificed to fertility gods in the hope of better harvests and therefore more wealth, but death sentences were inflicted in return for bribes. The already wealthy king wanted yet more wealth. The acquisition of wealth is an addiction.

And so they went into captivity because the princes and priests oppressed the people (Jer. 21:12; 22:3,17); in the new temple, this was not to be so (Ez. 45:8). And yet, in Nehemiah's time the princes of the people did again oppress them, e.g. through making them mortgage their lands to them. This is the tragedy of Israel's refusal to learn… The intention was that they would "bear the punishment of their iniquity… *that* the house of Israel go no more astray" (Ez. 14:11).

Jeremiah 22:18 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: they shall not lament for him saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! They shall not lament for him saying Ah lord! or, Ah his glory!- This is structured as poetry, as if a mock funeral lament. Jeremiah uttered this prophecy during Jehoiakim's lifetime (Jer. 1:3). To so stridently criticize a king at the gates of his own palace was a brave thing to do. No wonder it brought Jeremiah such opposition; indeed it was but by God's protection that he was not murdered.

Jeremiah 22:19 He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem- Jehoiakim was not to be buried but his body thrown out to the elements, like an ass (Jer. 22:18,19; 36:29-31); but the idiom of "he slept with his fathers" (2 Kings 24:6) may imply that he had a more normal burial. This was a conditional prophecy.

Jeremiah 22:20 Go up to Lebanon, and cry; and lift up your voice in Bashan, and cry from Abarim; for all your lovers are destroyed- Abarim was the mountain range in the south and Lebanon that in the north. Throughout the entire land, including the former

territory of the ten tribes, Jeremiah was to travel with the message: that all Israel's lovers, the nations surrounding her to whom she had prostituted herself in return for promises of support against Babylon, were to be destroyed.

Jeremiah 22:21 I spoke to you in your prosperity; but you said, I will not hear. This has been your way from your youth, that you didn't obey My voice- Before the drought of Jer. 14 came (and the book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically), Judah were prosperous; as prosperous (s.w.) as Sodom before she was destroyed (Ez. 16:49). Prosperity is directly related to refusing to hear God's word (Dt. 32:15); so we should be surprised if we as believers are relatively prosperous, and should consider this condition an exception rather than the rule in the lives of believers.

Jeremiah 22:22 The wind shall feed all your shepherds, and your lovers shall go into captivity- The false prophets claimed to be full of the wind / Spirit of God, but they would be filled with the wind which would carry them away. And one by one, the "lovers", the nations whom Judah hoped upon for salvation from Babylon, would be overcome by her and taken into captivity. This ought to have been warning as to what would happen to her, but they refused to hear the voice of God speaking to them through observed experience of their neighbours. His voice speaks to us like that today.

Surely then you will be ashamed and confounded for all your wickedness- Just as the Father thought that His people "surely" would reverence His Son, so He was 'certain' that if His people went to Babylon in captivity, "surely then you will be ashamed… for all your wickedness". But the reality was that they grew to like the soft life of Babylon and refused to obey the command to return to God's land. Such was and is the hopefulness of God. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended. Now none of this makes God out to be somehow not serious or unreliable. Rather is it all an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us. Thus God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him: "Thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him.

Jeremiah 22:23 Inhabitant of Lebanon, who makes your nest in the cedars, how greatly to be pitied you will be when pangs come on you, the pain as of a woman in travail!- As in Zech. 11:1, the cedars of Lebanon in the temple resulted in the temple being called "Lebanon". The Jews thought that the temple was inviolate and that they could take refuge there; and the king's palace was a replica of the temple in this (see on :6,7,14). He likewise reasoned that his palace was inviolate. But God is no respecter of such literalism. The image is of a woman who dies in childbirth. But even within that figure, there is the Divine hope of new birth, of something coming out of it with whom He could work in restoring a renewed Israel. But even that hope was to be dashed, as the exiles of the next generation didn't respond, as Ezekiel's prophecy chronicles.

Jeremiah 22:24 As I live, says Yahweh, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet on My right hand, yet would I pluck you from there- Coniah is

also called Jeconiah, and then when he ascended to the throne, Jehoiachin. The kings of Judah were intended to be kings on behalf of God, His representatives on earth; and therefore they as it were carried His signet ring. But this is expressed in the conditional sense, because Coniah did not thus reign on God's behalf. God's intention was that at the restoration, the throne of David should be restored and Zerubbabel would have this signet ring and reign on God's behalf (Hag. 2:23). But that potential also didn't come about and was precluded by human weakness. The prophecy is therefore deferred and rescheduled to fulfillment in the Lord Jesus.

Jeremiah 22:25 and I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of them of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans- Their fear of Babylon was such that they were madly running to every nation who might help them against Babylon, eagerly accepting their gods as part of a contract in which they would receive their military help.

Jeremiah 22:26 I will cast you out, and your mother who bore you, into another country where you were not born; and there you will die- This was true, but he was shown great grace there in that he was released from prison (Jer. 52:31), perhaps because he repented. See on :12,30. His mother is also mentioned as going into captivity as his lack of spirituality was likely partly her fault.

Jeremiah 22:27 But to the land to which their soul longs to return, to it they shall not return- The same words are used of the desire of the common people to return (Jer. 44:14). "Return" is the word also used for repenting. This is the picture of all the rejected, the foolish virgins banging on heaven's door all too late, wanting to repent / return, but all too tragically late. Now is the day for repentance / returning.

Jeremiah 22:28 Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel? Is he a vessel in which none delights? Why are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they don't know?- This could be quoting the imagined reaction of the Jews that their great king Coniah was being treated as a useless potsherd, a piece of broken pottery. But that was indeed how Israel and their king had been presented earlier- as a shattered earthen jar, broken by the Divine potter (Jer. 19:1). It could be that this is an interjection from Jeremiah, once again overly positive in his view of Israel; and even in that, he was somehow representing the view of God for His beloved people. Or these could be rhetorical questions, as if to enquire why Coniah was being treated like this. See on :29.

Jeremiah 22:29 O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Yahweh- What follows is a judgment of condemnation upon one man. But the people of the entire land were to "hear" this word and be led to repentance by considering the condemnation of another individual. And that is a challenge for us today as well.

Jeremiah 22:30 Thus says Yahweh, Write you this man childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling in Judah-

Hag. 2:23 and Zech. 6:12,13 make the prophecy that Zerubbabel would be king: "he shall bear royal honor, and shall sit upon his throne and rule. There shall be a priest by his throne". We have here a clear example of a potential prophecy; like

Cyrus, Zerubbabel was specifically named as having a future which didn't materialize for him. Because he and others chose for that not to happen. This helps us understand how the detailed command / prophecy of Ez. 40-48 was all likewise potential, as in fact are all of the restoration prophecies. The Davidic line from Jeconiah had been cursed by Jeremiah, saying that no offspring of "Coniah" would sit on the throne (Jer. 22:30). However, Zerubbabel was of the main Davidic line through Solomon and Jeconiah. This is stressed in the Lord's genealogy in Mt. 1:12,13: "Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud". Again we see how God's prophetic plan and even His curses are open to renegotiation. Zerubbabel the cursed not to be king could have become king. But he failed to live up to the potential, and so God's word of curse still came true.

I suggested on :26 that his release from prison in Babylon suggests he repented. And so this judgment didn't come true, in that he had children (1 Chron. 3:17) and Shealtiel is reckoned as his son and directly in the line of Messiah (Mt. 1:12), although it seems Jeconiah was not his natural father (Lk. 3:27-31). So we see again that judgment can be changed by repentance- in this life.

At the restoration from Babylon, David would never want a man to sit upon his throne (Jer. 33:17); and no conditions to this are specified. And yet even within Jeremiah it is apparent that because of the failure of Judah's leaders, there would indeed come a time when there would be "none to sit upon the throne of David" (Jer. 22:30; 36:30). Yet *if* the Jews had done righteousness in Zedekiah's time, then instead of the Babylonians entering the gates of Jerusalem there would have been "kings sitting for David upon his throne" (Jer. 22:4 RVmg.). But this condition is not mentioned in the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 nor in the apparent blanket statement of Jer. 33:17.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 23

Jeremiah 23:1 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! says Yahweh- Jeremiah was himself a priest, and this prophecy is particularly against them, his own people and family. No wonder it was they who wished to destroy him. Time and again the Lord Jesus reapplies the language of the restoration from Babylon to what He is doing to all men and women who heed His call to come out from the world and follow Him. The ideas of bringing His sheep, "other sheep of mine", who will hear His voice and form one flock under one shepherd (Jn. 10:16)- all these are rooted in the restoration prophecies (Ez. 34; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Jer. 31:1-10).

Jeremiah 23:2 Therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people- They did feed the people; the issue is therefore that they fed them wrongly, with false prophecies. It was the duty of the priests to teach the people, as represented by the figure of feeding.

You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit on you the evil of your doings, says Yahweh- They had not "visited them" with true Divine comfort, they had not manifested / revealed God to them, and so God would manifest / reveal Himself in judgment upon them.

Jeremiah 23:3 I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries- The exile of Judah into the nations comprising the Babylonian empire was considered as certain

to happen, even though there was the possibility of repentance. This would be orchestrated by the Angels- the Angel of Israel is likened to a shepherd in Ps. 80:1; Is. 63:9-11 etc.

Where I have driven them- Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having 'driven out' Israel from their land (Jer. 23:2,3,8); the pastors' sin resulted in all the people sinning and deserving judgment, and God worked with this system, confirming His people in the evil way they had taken. There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin. A personally 'righteous' believer may well be excluded from the Kingdom for the effect he has had on others.

And will bring them again to their folds- The "them" is defined in :6 as both Judah and the ten tribes. It was potentially possible, and was the Divine intention, that both groups would return from captivity at the same time and come to "their folds", perhaps an intensive plural for the one great fold, in Jerusalem. The same word is translated "holy habitation" with reference to Zion (Ex. 15:3; 2 Sam. 15:25; Is. 27:10; 33:20; Jer. 31:23).

And they shall be fruitful and multiply- They would then experience the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, and would be part of a new creation, fulfilling the command to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. They would enter a new covenant based upon the promises to Abraham, seeing they had broken the old covenant which was based upon the Mosaic law.

Jeremiah 23:4 I will set up shepherds over them who shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be lacking, says Yahweh- "I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them"- rulers who would genuinely care for Israel like the master shepherd, the Angel, did (see on :3). Jeremiah was frequently moved to lament the false shepherds of Israel, which is understandable if the Angel shepherd of Israel inspired Jeremiah. He would have been deeply hurt at his flock being left to ruin by those to whom He had delegated His shepherding role (cp. how in Is. 63:9-11 both the Angel and Moses appear to be the shepherd that led Israel). But this potential didn't happen, and so the prophecy was reapplied to the great shepherd, the Lord Jesus.

The great restoration prophecies of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31 speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The Hebrew word *shub* means both 'to return' in the sense of returning to the land, and 'turning' in the sense of repentance. But these restoration prophecies are packed with allusion to the great shepherd Psalm 23. Here, David says that the good shepherd 'causes me to repent' (Ps. 23:3 Heb.). This is matched in Ez. 36 by the idea of God *giving* Israel a new heart. And the Lord's amazing parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also these restoration passages, in speaking of how He goes out and finds the lost sheep and brings it back home. The sheep is found, and accepts being found- there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the 'return' of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God- He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace.

Jeremiah 23:5 Behold, the days come says Yahweh, that I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land- In contrast to the king at the time of Jeremiah who did

not act like this but the opposite (Jer. 22:16,17). I suggested on Jer. 22:24 that the king in view was potentially Zerubbabel, "the branch of God from Babylon". Zech. 6:12 interprets this as a reference to Zerubbabel: "the man whose name is the branch... shall build the temple of the Lord". Zerubbabel being a king-priest was in the kingly line, and thus can correctly be called a king in the line of David (Mt. 1:12; Lk. 3:7; 'Sheshbazzar' of Ezra 1:8 is the Babylonian equivalent of 'Zerubbabel'; Ezra 3:8 describes his brothers as "priests and Levites"). Great prince Nehemiah humbly entered Jerusalem incognito on an ass (Neh. 2:11-15)- it is a wild speculation that Zerubbabel did the same, and thus provided a primary basis for Zech. 9:9 "Thy king cometh unto thee (also unrecognized, in the case of Jesus entering spiritually ruined Jerusalem)... lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass".

The majestic prophecy of Jer. 23:5-7 had prophesied that when Israel returned from Babylon, “the branch” would rise and save them “and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth”, i.e. establish the Messianic Kingdom (cp. Ps. 72:2; Is. 9:7). But Zerubbabel, the “branch-from-Babylon”, lead the people back from Babylon, half heartedly built a temple- which faithful men wept at, when they saw how feeble it was compared to that which should have been (Ezra 3:12). And then he beat it back to Babylon. Nelson’s Bible Dictionary comments: “For some mysterious reason, Zerubbabel is not mentioned in connection with the Temple dedication. Neither is he mentioned after this time”. The reason seems to be that he returned to Babylon. R.K. Harrison in the Zondervan Encyclopedia mentions that “a 6th century AD Jewish chronicle preserved the tradition that Zerubbabel returned to Babylonia after 515 BC and succeeded his father Shealtiel as the prince of the exiled remnant there”. He chose to be a prince in Babylon’s Kingdom, the kingdoms of men, rather than in the Kingdom of God. And so many have followed his decision in the centuries since, thus frustrating what could have been for them and many others within their influence. Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.3) records that “Zorobabel, who had been made governor of the Jews that had been in captivity, came to Darius from Jerusalem, for there had been an old friendship between him and the king”. He was friendly with the King of Babylon, and chose to follow where *this* lead rather than friendship with the Almighty. Compare this with how the ‘friendliness’ of a boss or worldly friend has lead so many into promotions or situations where they simply cannot do the work which God intended for them. See on Jer. 30:21.

Jeremiah 23:6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name by which he shall be called: Yahweh our righteousness- Jer. 33:16; 23:6 etc. outline God's intention that after the restoration, the rebuilt Zion would be named "The Lord our righteous one" because Jerusalem would be the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 31:23; 50:7). This is similar language to the restoration prophecies of Isaiah- the surrounding Gentile world would see / perceive / believe in "the righteous one" who would reign in the rebuilt Zion (Is. 62:2). The idea of imputed righteousness developed by Paul in Rom. 1-8 is here foreseen. Israel had sinned grievously, and were largely impenitent. The only way they could be right with God was through the imputed righteousness of a "branch" of David (:5) who was completely righteous.

Jeremiah 23:7 Therefore behold, the days come says Yahweh, that they shall no more say, As Yahweh lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt- The form of swearing in covenant relationship was to be changed. The same verses occur in Jer. 16:14,15 in the context of Judah being offered a new covenant, seeing

they had broken the old covenant. That new covenant was to be made when the exiles left Babylon and the various nations within her empire where they had been scattered. But this didn't work out; because Judah refused it.

Jeremiah 23:8 but, As Yahweh lives, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries where I had driven them. They shall dwell in their own land- The new covenant was to be made once they left Babylon and the subject nations, just as the old covenant was made once they had left Egypt. There was intended to be some even more dramatic and powerful source of exodus in leaving Babylon than there had been in leaving Egypt. But in reality. nothing like the parting of the Red Sea or the plagues upon Egypt happened. The decree of Cyrus was clearly overruled by God, but other prophecies make it clear that the exodus of the exile was to be associated with the fall of Babylon. Indeed they were to flee Babylon so that they didn't share in her fall. And it was this dramatic action which was to convert the remnants of the Babylonian empire to Israel's God. But this didn't happen; instead this prophetic theme has been reapplied and rescheduled to the events of the last days.

Jeremiah 23:9 Concerning the prophets. My heart within me is broken, all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of Yahweh, and because of His holy words- Faced with the wonderful potential future of :1-8, Jeremiah felt utterly overcome by the reality of the fact that the false prophets were teaching quite otherwise and were being eagerly believed, with resultant immoral behaviour (:10). We see here his sensitivity to the tragedy of the future and spiritual possibilities which God's people were missing. The "holy words" in view are the promise of imputed holiness or righteousness. We too should be deeply affected by the spurning of God's grace by His people.

Jeremiah 23:10 For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourns; the pastures of the wilderness are dried up- See on :9. The widespread adultery and swearing to other gods was a result of the false prophets of :9, who were eagerly believed rather than the amazing grace of Yahweh offered in :1-8. And already the drought of Jer. 14 had come. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological.

Their way is evil, and their might is not right- Human power is fiercely criticized by the prophets. “One of the most striking and one of the most pervasive features of the prophetic polemic is the denunciation and distrust of power in all its forms and guises”. “Not by might, says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6; Mic. 7:16).

Jeremiah 23:11 for both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in My house have I found their wickedness, says Yahweh- Yahweh still referred to the temple as "My house", and according to Ezekiel the shekinah glory was there until the very end. Prophet and priest were related in that it was the duty of the priests to teach God's word, but they were instead teaching the word of the false prophets.

Jeremiah 23:12 Therefore their way shall be to them as slippery places in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein; for I will bring evil on them, even the year of their visitation, says Yahweh- This describes the downward spiral, an evil spirit from the Lord, which is the counterpart to the work of the holy Spirit from Him. God deceived prophets to speak things in His Name which were actually false (1 Kings 22:20-22; Ez. 14:9). He chose Israel's delusions by making their idols answer

them (Is. 66:3,4). God laid a stumbling block before the righteous man who turned to sin (Ez. 3:20), driving him along "slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them" (Jer. 23:12). Jeremiah feared God had deceived him (Jer. 20:7)- showing he knew such a thing was possible.

Jeremiah 23:13 I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied by Baal, and caused My people Israel to err- Samaria was already in captivity because of their false prophets. But they are paralleled with the false prophets of Judah (:14). Judah was persuaded that they were spiritually superior to the ten tribes because the temple was with them, and there were therefore inviolate. But this was not the case, and we noted on :6 that it was God's intention that Israel and Judah were to be united by the experience of repentance and acceptance of His grace.

Jeremiah 23:14 In the prophets of Jerusalem also I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that none does return from his wickedness: they are all of them become to Me as Sodom, and its inhabitants as Gomorrah- See on :13. The widespread adultery amongst the people of :10 was therefore directly related to their being taught to do this by the Jerusalem prophets, who likewise were adulterers. This adultery was not so much a case of having affairs with neighbours as of sleeping with local women at the idol shrines. Repentance / returning from wickedness was so critical at this stage, and yet the spiritual leadership were encouraging impenitence.

Jeremiah 23:15 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies concerning the prophets: Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall- Maybe the Lord realized as He had the cup of gall on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain. This judgment was taken by Him on the cross, who was there "the servant of Yahweh", which Israel had been intended to be. Wormwood and gall were what would be the result of false teachers encouraging the people to commit idolatry (Dt. 29:18). So they had fed themselves with these things, and their judgment to drink them was therefore God's confirmation of people in what they themselves had chosen. And that is how all His judgments operate. God's judgment is likened to drinking wormwood. But homeopathy has discovered that wormwood is a cure for some forms of breast cancer and malaria- on the homeopathic principle that the actual trace elements of the illness can be the elements of the cure. God knew this of course when He describes His condemnation of men as a drinking of wormwood. There is something healing and therapeutic about judgment, even if it doesn't save the individual judged.

For from the prophets of Jerusalem is ungodliness gone forth into all the land- As noted on :10,14, the immoral teaching and example of the false prophets had spread into all the land because the priests chose to teach their false word to the people rather than God's true word which Jeremiah was preaching.

Jeremiah 23:16 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Don't listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you: they teach you vanity; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of Yahweh- This of course sounded like Jeremiah asking people to believe him and not the other prophets. Indeed that was the requirement made by "Yahweh of Armies", the God whose Angelic armies were

controlling the armies of the Babylonians. The word of God is contrasted to words which come from our own heart. Man's natural imagination is not to be the source of truth, but rather it is God's word which is to be our authority. This is a warning required today, when human imagination and vision has been elevated to Divine proportions.

Jeremiah 23:17 They say continually to those who despise Me, Yahweh has said, You shall have peace- Those who despised Jeremiah were his own priestly relatives (Jer. 11:21,23). Those priests taught the word of the false prophets, who obviously hated Jeremiah. "Despise" is usually translated "provoke". Jeremiah was really hurt and provoked by the opposition of his family; and in that again he manifested Yahweh, who was likewise provoked by Israel (s.w. Dt. 31:20; 32:19).

And to each one who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart they say, No evil shall come on you- The choice was between walking after God's word, or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

Jeremiah 23:18 For who has stood in the council of Yahweh, that he should perceive and hear His word? Who has noted My word, and heard it?- It was Jeremiah and not the false prophets who had done this. The first half of the verse is Jeremiah's thoughts; the second half is Yahweh speaking in response, confirming Jeremiah's thoughts. The true prophets stood in the presence of God, and partook in His “council” (see on :22), i.e. His inner circle of trusted friends (Jer. 15:19; 23:18), of which we see a glimpse in the vision of the court of Heaven in 1 Kings 22:20-22. God’s doctrines are described as a secret, a mystery; the Hebrew word used in this connection means ‘A confidential plan revealed to intimate friends’; and yet they are revealed to the true believers (Am. 3:7,8; Jer. 23:18,22 AV mg.; Ps. 25:14; Eph. 3:3-6). Therefore the congregation of true believers is called “the secret assembly of the saints” (Ps. 89:7 Heb.). There are many Bibles around, but God’s doctrines are to some extent a secret, and not understood by many of those who possess and read the Bible. It therefore follows that the Bible must be written in such a way as to conceal Truth from the majority of readers, because they don’t wish to enter God’s secret.

Jeremiah 23:19 Behold, the storm of Yahweh, His wrath, has gone forth. Yes, a whirling storm. It shall burst on the head of the wicked- This is the same idea as the cherubim storm being used by Ezekiel to represent how the armies of Babylon had already "gone forth" and were about to burst over the wicked in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 23:20 The anger of Yahweh shall not return, until He has executed, and

until He has performed the intents of His heart: in the latter days you shall understand it perfectly- There is a gap between God's statements and their execution, and in that gap there can be human repentance which means that the initial intentions or statements of God do not come about. But there had been no take up of that opportunity, and so the intents of God's heart concerning judgment were to come true. In repentance, "in the latter days", this would be completely, clearly understood.

Jeremiah 23:21 I sent not these prophets, yet they ran: I didn't speak to them, yet they prophesied- 'Running' is an idiom for receiving God's word (see on Hab. 2:2). If we receive God's word we are to run with it, to distribute it to others; that is axiomatic to truly receiving it. The false prophets 'ran' with their word, but it was their word and not Yahweh's.

Jeremiah 23:22 But if they had stood in My council, then had they caused My people to hear My words, and had turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings- See on :18. To truly receive God's word means to turn from evil. The word creates a response in those whom it impacts. But if people are caused to hear a false word, then they will not repent. Here in Jer. 23:18,22 we find prophets standing in the "council of the Lord" (RV) to receive His word; and yet this sounds very much like Angels standing in the court of Heaven to receive God's word of command. Likewise note the parallel between an Angel sitting under an oak and a prophetess sitting under an oak (Jud. 4:5 RVmg.; 6:11). "The God of the spirits [Angels] of the prophets sent his Angel" to the prophet John (Rev. 22:6 RV); implying that as God had sent His Angel-Spirits to inspire the prophets, so now He did to John. Ps. 147:15,18 speak of the sending out of God's word to melt snow and send rain; this must surely refer to the Angels being sent out from the court of Heaven to do these things. The way the "watcher and holy one" came down from Heaven is paralleled with the word of Divine command likewise coming down from Heaven (Dan. 4:23,31). The universe is not just ticking away on clockwork; the Angels are actively being sent out from Heaven to perform what may appear the most mundane and repetitious of things. Thus God sends out His Angels; He sends out His word; and He also sent out His prophets (Haggai- Hag. 1:12; Ezekiel- Ez. 3:5,6). God rose up and sent out His prophets (2 Kings 17:13; Jer. 7:25 and many others). He is described as doing this because those prophets likewise identified with the word and became part of their own message. See on Is. 9:7; Ez. 10:5.

Jeremiah 23:23 Am I a God at hand, says Yahweh, and not a God afar off?- This is a rhetorical question. The words for "near" (NEV "at hand") and "far" are as in Jer. 12:2 "You are near in their mouth, and far from their heart". This can be translated as them saying "You are near" with their mouths, when in fact they were far from God in their heart. This statement "You are near" was based on the much loved Dt. 4:7, which states that no God has Israel so "near" them (s.w.). Indeed Yahweh was near them- but they had to come near to Him in their hearts. He was "near" in that His word was to be near in their hearts and not far off from their hearts (Dt. 30:11,14 s.w.), but they were refusing His word through Jeremiah. The nearness of God is therefore potential, for man in response must also draw near unto Him (Ez. 42:13; 43:19 s.w.). But the grace of God was such that He would save them even from "far off" (Jer. 30:10 s.w.). Even from that situation, God's grace could work on their hearts. They were taken "far [off]" to captivity because they had Him far from their hearts.

Jeremiah 23:24 Can any hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? says Yahweh. Don't I fill heaven and earth? says Yahweh- This appears to be a quotation from or allusion to the words of the false prophets; or perhaps these words were never said, but they were the implied subconscious position of the people. We would all claim to believe that God sees and knows all things, and yet our behaviour and thinking at times implies we think there are "secret places" hidden from His view. Edom had the same mentality (Jer. 49:10). God had specifically warned them that their ways were not "hid" from His eyes (Jer. 16:17 s.w.). And yet Israel thought they could hide from Him (Jer. 23:24 s.w.).

Jeremiah 23:25 I have heard what the prophets have said, who prophesy lies in My name saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed- "I have heard..." is the equivalent of God saying that they could not hide their ways from Him (:24). He heard every word they said, as He does to this day. And judgment is according to our words.

Jeremiah 23:26 How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, even the prophets of the deceit of their own heart?- Again, the heart is the essential issue. We would likely have simply focused upon the fact that these people were liars, falsely claiming things convenient for them, in the name of God. But God's comment is that the lies were in their hearts, they were self deceived deep within their own self-talk, and were sharing that deceit with others.

Jeremiah 23:27 Who think to cause My people to forget My name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal- They fiercely guarded the pronunciation of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name. And so with the temple; they so loved it, it was the apple of their eye; but in real principle, they desecrated all that it stood for. The Gentile destruction and desecration of it was only a material reflection of what they in principle had done; and the invasions were doubtless intended to teach Israel this. To forget Yahweh's Name is understood as worshipping other gods (Ps. 44:20 s.w.). The message of the false prophets was given in the name of Yahweh, and it was effectively saying that Yahweh was asking Judah to serve other gods in His Name. But by this they were forgetting His Name, for His Name as revealed to Moses expresses His character and the unique claim He thereby has upon His people. See on :39.

Jeremiah 23:28 The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the straw to the wheat? says Yahweh- This could simply be saying that the true prophet was to faithfully speak the word received. But there could also be the implication that in such an environment as described in :27, the true prophets (and there were others apart from Jeremiah, at least Ezekiel we know was contemporary with him) were tempted to not tell or speak forth the word they had received. And so they are encouraged that the true prophecies were as wheat to the straw of the false prophecies- the difference was evident. Another possibility is that the false prophet who had a dream should tell it just as it was, a dream he had had; whereas the true prophet should speak God's word faithfully. See on :30.

Jeremiah 23:29 Isn't My word like fire? says Yahweh; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?- The false prophets were speaking of "peace" coming as a result of

worshipping idols, sanctioned by Yahweh (see on :27). The true word of God was by its nature more powerful in that it spoke of judgment to come; the hammer of Babylon (Jer. 51:20) was to crush Judah and burn Jerusalem and the temple with fire. The very demand of God indicated that it was His word. Peter understood this when He asks the Lord to invite him to walk on the water towards Him- He knew that such demands are typical of the true word of God.

Jeremiah 23:30 Therefore behold, I am against the prophets, says Yahweh, who steal My words each one from his neighbour- It could be that the false prophets were stealing some of Yahweh's true words from the true prophets who were their "neighbours", considered as prophets too; see on :33,36. And so there was a mixture of true and false words from Yahweh in their message; hence the idea of the true and false prophecies being divided like straw and wheat (:28). This has always been the attraction of false teaching- in that it is a mixture of the true and the false. Just as in our own failures and temporal apostasies we mix truth and error, flesh and spirit within our own reasoning and self-justification. For example, we may gossip whilst justifying ourselves as doing so because we have love for the recipient of our gossip.

Jeremiah 23:31 Behold, I am against the prophets, says Yahweh, who use their tongues and say, He says- The idea is that they used *their* tongues, or words, and yet said "He [God] says this...". They were exhibiting the same mentality which today claims that our own native thoughts and ideas are in fact God's; the pastor who claims he has had a word from the Lord asking him to get a new expensive car or watch...

Jeremiah 23:32 Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says Yahweh, and do tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies- As noted on :26, the heart was the essential issue. Their dreams arose from their own self deception deep within their own psychology, and yet they claimed these thoughts as those of God. We would likely have simply focused upon the fact that these people were liars, falsely claiming things convenient for them, in the name of God. But God's comment is that the lies were in their hearts, they were self deceived deep within their own self-talk, and were sharing that deceit with others.

And by their vain boasting- Of victory against the Babylonians.

Yet I didn't send them, nor commanded them; neither do they profit this people at all, says Yahweh- The attraction to them of the false prophets was that they offered "profit". It was materialism and a chronic coveting of instant wealth which led them to idolatry, which the prophets taught. This was because those idols were fertility cults offering good harvests and prosperity in return for worshipping them. It was idolatry which "can't profit" (s.w. 1 Sam. 12:21; Is. 44:9,10; Jer. 2:8), and this was what the "lying words" were all about.

Jeremiah 23:33 When this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask you saying, What is the burden of Yahweh?- The conscience of the false prophets and the priests who taught their false words was not clear. Otherwise they would not have come to Jeremiah asking him what Yahweh's word really was. Perhaps they did so in order to steal some of his words of true prophecy and mix them with their own false prophecies (see on :30,36).

Then you shall tell them, What burden! I will cast you off, says Yahweh- Yahweh 'cast off' Judah (Jer. 12:7; 23:33) but only because they had cast Him off (Jer. 15:6 s.w.). And yet God did not cast off His people (Jer. 33:26); Jeremiah personally was

persuaded that God would not cast off His people for ever (Lam. 3:31). He will show them mercy as if He had not cast them off (Zech. 10:6); this reversal of their casting off was to be through the repentance of the exiled community (Lev. 26:44). But even this didn't happen, and yet God still did not cast them away (Rom. 11:2). His love and grace was such that He holds on to them. This desperate holding on to His people is seen in the experience of every person who joins God's people through baptism into Christ. They may indeed be cast off ultimately, but that is because they cast Him off, and wrestled against His insistent desire to keep hold of them eternally.

Jeremiah 23:34 As for the prophet, the priest and the people who shall say, The burden of Yahweh, I will even punish that man and his house- Prophet, priest and people were all to be sharing God's word; all society was to be involved. The false prophets gave their words to the priests, whose duty it was to teach their words; and then the people spread those words further. This was how Israel should have been, with the ordinary people spreading the knowledge of God's word; and indeed this is the ideal situation of the Kingdom age (Jer. 31:34).

Jeremiah 23:35 You shall say each one to his neighbour and each one to his brother, What has Yahweh answered? and, What has Yahweh spoken?- The judgment upon them was that God's word would not be given to them in future. Instead of telling each other what they claimed was God's word, they would instead be asking each other if they had heard a word from God- and the answer would be in the negative, because the sun would go down over the prophets and His revelation would stop (Am. 8:12; Mic. 3:6). And yet this was a judgment which was deferred; because Ezekiel continued speaking God's word to the exiles, and the restoration prophets did so for another few generations. Yet here we have the impression that God was so angry with the false prophets and the eager belief of them, that He threatens to withdraw all true revelation. And yet He didn't at that time, although this word did come true in later generations.

Jeremiah 23:36 You shall mention the burden of Yahweh no more: for every man's own word shall be his burden; for you have perverted the words of the living God, of Yahweh of Armies our God- See on :35. Their perverting of God's word was through mixing His true words (which they stole from Jeremiah, see on :30,33) with their false words. By our words we will be justified or condemned. The false prophets were judged according to their words: "Every man's word shall be his burden" at the day of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 23:36). Gal. 6:5 alludes here in saying that at the judgment, every man shall bear his own burden- i.e., that of his own words.

Jeremiah 23:37 You shall say to the prophet, What has Yahweh answered you? and, What has Yahweh spoken?- This was a commandment; instead of claiming to have God's word in the form of the false prophecies, they were to instead be seeking it from the true prophets. See on :35.

Jeremiah 23:38 But if you say, The burden of Yahweh; therefore thus says Yahweh: Because you say this word, The burden of Yahweh, and I have sent to you saying, You shall not say, The burden of Yahweh- Instead of seeking to learn God's word as commanded in :37, they claimed that the burden or prophecies of Yahweh were with them. They had just been soberly warned not to do this; if they continued, there would be extreme punishment.

Jeremiah 23:39 therefore, behold, I will utterly forget you, and I will cast you off, and the city that I gave to you and to your fathers, away from My presence- Here and in :40, God speaks in the fire of His wrath. For to twist His words to the very opposite of their intention was terrible, and incited His anger, as it does today. By doing so, they had forgotten His Name (:27). And so God in response would forget them. But He says in Is. 49:18 that His love was such that He could not forget them even if they forgot Him. And has God cast away His people, as here threatened? Rom. 11:2 says that He has not.

Jeremiah 23:40 and I will bring an everlasting reproach on you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten- I explained on :39 that the twisting of Yahweh's words deeply provoked His anger, and He speaks here in that wrath. Hence He speaks of Judah being perpetually shamed; although He would "forget you" as His people (:39), He would never forget what they had done to Him. But we know that in that wrath He remembered mercy, and actually did not carry this out. For in the restoration of His people which He envisaged, their shame would be removed (Ez. 36:15). They would "bear their shame" for a limited period only (Is. 61:7; Ez. 39:26). This is the God of such passionate love that He can change His stated purposes about His people, because the pole of His saving pity is greater than that of His judgment.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 24

Jeremiah 24:1 Yahweh showed me and behold, two baskets of figs set before Yahweh's temple- The allusion is to how the firstfruits were brought as offerings to the temple, to be first inspected by the priests. "First-ripe" in :2 is the same word translated "firstfruits". And Jeremiah as a priest was asked to make that inspection. The fig trees had been destroyed by the drought of Jer. 14 and by the earlier incursions of the Babylonians (Jer. 5:17; 8:13; Am. 4:9). That there were any figs to offer was therefore of itself a reflection of God's grace.

"Two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the Lord"; one representing the apostate Jews who remained in the land, and the other those who went to Babylon and who were intended to there revive spiritually. It seems that an Angel dwelt literally in the temple. This vision of two groups of Jews standing before an Angel is probably the basis of the vision of Zech. 3, where Joshua and the Jews eager to rebuild Jerusalem stand before the Angel, with the Satan standing there too. 'Satan' is often associated with apostate Jews in the New Testament.

After that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and the princes of Judah- This prophecy is therefore to be dated when Zedekiah ascended to the throne. But it clearly states that Zedekiah was to spiritually fail (:8). And yet Jeremiah often appeals to him to repent. If he had done so, then this prophecy wouldn't have come true. Throughout, this is a prophecy of potentials, the final outcome of which human repentance could have changed.

With the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon- As noted on Jer. 10:18, it was Babylonian policy to take into exile only the leadership and their families. I suggest that the craftsmen and smiths were also taken because they were the ones who had constructed the idols and shrines. Their specific judgment was also to deprive those who remained of their services, in a bid to elicit

repentance from Zedekiah, who would otherwise stand condemned (:8). See on Jer. 25:6.

Jeremiah 24:2 One basket had very good figs, like the figs that are first-ripe; and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad- There were three fig harvests / year. The ripe figs were freshly harvested, whereas the bad figs were either the immature fruit which was due for future harvest, or figs from the previous harvest. The eating of the offerings by the priests was to symbolize God's eating with Israel, His fellowship with them and acceptance of them. God would not accept / eat the bad figs, but He would accept the good ones.

Jeremiah 24:3 Then Yahweh said to me, What do you see, Jeremiah? I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the bad, very bad, that can't be eaten, they are so bad- The difference between the two types of figs was marked. And yet it is hard to perceive the fulfillment of this difference; Ezekiel's prophecies to those who had gone into captivity show that the early exiles of :5 were no better than Zedekiah's group who remained in the land; indeed in Ez. 18 those "good figs" complain that those left in the land were being punished unjustly. This prophecy therefore is about a potential fulfillment didn't come about.

Jeremiah 24:4 The word of Yahweh came to me saying- The interpretation appears to have been given later. Perhaps literally the two baskets of figs were placed before the temple as an acted parable.

Jeremiah 24:5 Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so will I regard the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans, for good- The first group of exiles didn't become so exceedingly good (:3) of themselves; it was because God decided to "regard" them like this; He would impute righteousness to them so that He saw them like this. The "good figs" were to be those who went to Babylon and through that experience there became "good figs". Micah speaks of the same process. Zion was to be plowed and Jerusalem become heaps, which happened in the Babylonian invasion. But then afterwards- 70 years afterwards- the temple was to be rebuilt, "the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains" (Mic. 3:12; 4:1). "In that day…will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather that has been driven out…and I will make her that was cast off a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth even for ever…the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem". A Messianic Kingdom could then have come. This whole situation would be brought to pass because the daughter of Zion was to "go forth out of the city" of Jerusalem "and come even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered [RV rescued]: there shall the Lord redeem thee" (Mic. 4:10). How was the travailing daughter of Zion to be delivered / rescued in *Babylon* after having been taken captive there from Jerusalem by the Babylonians? Surely in that there, God intended a spiritual revival of the people, there they would hear Ezekiel's appeal to repent, which if responded to would enable them to build the temple which he had described (Ez. 43:10,11) and thus usher in a Messianic Kingdom.

But there are several reasons to believe that this intended Divine program didn't work out- due to the lack of human response. For one thing, the majority of the Jews chose to remain in Babylon. They didn't return when they had the chance. And there is extra-Biblical evidence that they soon arose from their weeping by the rivers of

Babylon, and wholeheartedly adopted the surrounding Babylonian beliefs and values. Further, in Esther's time, a decree was made to "destroy… and cause to perish" the Jews throughout the provinces of Persia / Babylon (Esther 3:13; 7:4). This phrase uses the two Hebrew words which we find together three times in the list of curses to be brought upon a disobedient Israel (Dt. 28:20,51,63). There evidently is a connection. And yet by her wonderful self-sacrificial mediation, Esther brought about the deferment and even annulment of those justifiable curses. God's prophetic word was again changed- due to a mediator, who of course pointed both backwards to Moses, and forwards to the Lord Jesus.

The prophecy of Jer. 29 is addressing the same two groups as in Jer. 24; the captives were intended to repent and become the good figs, whereas Zedekiah and his courtiers who remained in Jerusalem would become the bad figs (Jer. 29:17). But that prophecy was only potentially true. Because now in Jer. 29:21-32 Jeremiah warns the exiles, those who were supposed to become good figs, that they were tolerating false prophets and following them.

Jeremiah 24:6 For I will set My eyes on them for good- To set the eyes upon for good, "take care of" or "look well unto", could mean that God's eyes, the Angels, would bless the "good figs" in captivity and lead them to repentance and salvation. For that is the ultimate "good" which God plans for His people. But twice we read that Jeremiah could have gone into captivity and been looked upon for good (Jer. 39:12; 40:4 s.w. "I will set My eyes on them for good" in Jer. 24:6). Yet Jeremiah declined; he chose to suffer affliction with the condemned, with the bad figs of the Jer. 24 prophecy, so that he might still help them to repentance. This looked forward to the Lord's death as a sinner on the cross. And it is to be our spirit too, ever seeking the repentance of those who otherwise will be condemned rather than enjoying time solely with those who apparently will be saved.

And I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up- Jer. 18:9 makes it clear that this was conditional; if God promises building and planting, then the potential activity of God in this regard would cease if the people were disobedient. Which they were. Had the first exiles truly been good figs, then they would have been built, planted and never plucked up again in the restored kingdom under the new covenant God was offering them (s.w. Jer. 31:28). And the same promise is made to those called here the bad figs, the Jews who remained in the land- they too could have been planted, built and not plucked up again if they resisted the temptation to flee to Egypt (s.w. Jer. 42:10). So this entire prophecy of the figs was not prescriptive, it was God's vision of what was possible, but it was precluded by a lack of repentance amongst the exiles, as Ezekiel laments so often. And likewise, the bad figs need not have been as they were; they could have had the blessings of the good figs.

Ezra 9:8 says that "And now *for a little space* grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage". Ezra saw that "little space" as a time when they received *grace*; he understood the prophecy of the figs in Jer. 24, that it was only through the captivity and the fact God had graciously not destroyed them but rather preserved them there, that there was the opportunity for a remnant to re-establish the Kingdom. What may appear to some as forsaking is in fact God's grace to us, when spiritually discerned- whether it be deep within our own lives, or in the state of affairs upon this planet. Yet

it should be noted that the prophecy of Jer. 24:6,7 about the good figs seems not to have come true at the restoration- although it could potentially have done so.

Jeremiah 24:7 I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am Yahweh: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God; for they shall return to Me with their whole heart- The gift of a new heart was that associated with acceptance of the new covenant by the repentant exiles (Jer. 31:33; 32:39; Ez. 11:19; 36:26). But they refused that new covenant, and so it was reapplied and offered to a new Israel formed through the Lord's death. The intention was that they would return to God, and therefore return to the land and enter this new covenant, which would involve God working directly upon their hearts, giving or 'putting in' their hearts His word and love for Him. This is still on offer today, through the gift of the holy Spirit given to all who truly accept the same new covenant in the blood of the Lord Jesus. But that was all potentially possible for the first group of exiles who went into Babylon; but they would not.

Jeremiah 24:8 As the bad figs, which can't be eaten, they are so bad, surely thus says Yahweh, So will I give up Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt- This was a subversion of their understanding, that those who had gone into captivity were sinners and they who remained were thereby declared righteous. It was God's intention that the opposite be the case. And yet Zedekiah was repeatedly appealed to for repentance, so that this scenario would not happen. Again we have to conclude that there is a large conditional element in prophecies. The people of Jerusalem and those who had gone to Egypt likewise were not all destroyed. Jeremiah went down into Egypt with them and so far as we know, he was preserved. The reference may be to Jews who had gone to Egypt earlier with Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:34).

Jeremiah 24:9 I will even give them up to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth for evil; to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them- This removing / tossing to and from of Judah from their land uses the same word as in Dt. 28:25; in response to their breaking of the covenant, they would be "removed (s.w.) into all the kingdoms of the *eretz*, throughout the land promised to Abraham. But this curse could have been turned into a blessing; for the restoration prophets envisaged the nations of the *eretz* repenting and converting to Yahweh. This could have been achieved by the exiles witnessing to the various peoples and languages within the Babylonian / Persian empire. But this didn't happen as was potentially possible. The exiles didn't repent, and so their repentance and experience of the grace of forgiveness was not the powerful pattern of conversion to their neighbours which it could have been.

Jeremiah 24:10 I will send the sword, the famine, and the plague, among them, until they be consumed from off the land that I gave to them and to their fathers- "Consumed" clearly means 'destroyed' (Jer. 27:8; 36:23; 44:12,18 etc.). But yet again we see that in wrath God remembered mercy. Zedekiah was not destroyed but went into exile in Babylon and died there apparently of natural causes. God's plans are open ended, to always allow scope for human repentance; and somehow intertwined with that is His eagerness to respond to mediation from faithful third parties, as well as the simple fact of His extreme pity for human situations, arising out of His grace and love toward His people.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 25

Jeremiah 25:1 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, King of Judah (the same was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon)- This was the time of the battle of Carchemish when the Egyptian army was destroyed, and it ought to have been obvious that Egypt was not going to save Judah from Babylon. Dan. 1:1 speaks of the third year, but the difference depends upon how one expresses some time in between the third and fourth years. This was the year when Daniel and the exiles were taken into captivity.

Jeremiah 25:2 which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying- He was going to announce that their exile and the Babylonian victory was now certainly going to happen. We wonder whether he travelled around Judah with this message in order to get it out to "all the people of Judah". See on :5.

Jeremiah 25:3 From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years, the word of Yahweh has come to me, and I have spoken to you, rising up early and speaking; but you have not listened- We often ask in Jeremiah: 'Who is speaking? Jeremiah, or God?'. Their minds were clearly so intertwined. Both of them are described, in consecutive verses, as rising up early to plead with Israel (Jer. 25:3,4). It was God who rose up early and spoke, but His effort was manifest in that of Jeremiah. This is how close we can come to God if we sincerely work with Him and for His cause, seeing things from His perspective. There is no hint that a single person responded to Jeremiah's ministry; a great encouragement to us to persevere regardless of response to our ministry.

Jeremiah 25:4 Yahweh has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them (but you have not listened- Perhaps there were other prophets apart from Jeremiah who were also preaching at this time; probably Habakkuk. See on :3.

Nor inclined your ear to hear)- Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

Jeremiah 25:5 saying, Return now each one from his evil way and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that Yahweh has given to you and to your fathers, from of old and even for evermore- If they returned to God in repentance, then they would return from exile to the land. But this is spoke of even before they went into exile, as it were already the case. The promise of eternal inheritance in the land was only going to be true for those who wanted to be in the land. The appeal was

to individuals- "each one". They were to realize that they as individuals had a part in the fate of the nation; they couldn't consider that God was simply dealing with the leadership and they were unable to change outcomes. Hence the double emphasis in :1,2 upon the appeal being to all the people.

Jeremiah 25:6 and don't go after other gods to serve them or worship them, and don't provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands; and I will do you no harm- Again we see that idolatry is in essence a trust in our own works rather than in God. This is why idolatry is in essence an abiding temptation for all ages. It also explains why as noted on Jer. 24:1, the "smiths" who made the idols were taken into captivity so that they could not create any more such works of their hands. The "harm" or "evil" was to be done by God, who is the author of good and evil in this sense (Is. 45:5-7)- a concept impossible to understand by those who believe in a cosmic Satan figure.

Jeremiah 25:7 Yet you have not listened to Me, says Yahweh; so that you provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own hurt- All sin is to our own hurt or evil. The hurt / harm evil brought by Yahweh (:6) was but an extension of their own choices. Jeremiah is presented as making no converts; he "sat alone" (Jer. 15:17). Not only was their perspective on human sinfulness so very different to that of their audience. They preached a message which was counter-cultural and attacked the very bases of the assumptions which lay at the core of individual and social life in Israel. They appeared to back Israel's enemies. Their message was therefore rejected. Jeremiah lamented: "For twenty three years… the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened" (Jer. 25:3-7). The prophets saw the love of God, but saw too how Israel spurned it and refused to understand it. It must've been a tragic and awful experience.

Jeremiah 25:8 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies: Because you have not heard My words- There is a crucial difference between hearing and obeying. They heard the words, as we can, but without really hearing.

Jeremiah 25:9 Behold, I will send and take- Who was sent forth to take the northerners to invade Judah? Presumably an Angel. The same phrase is used of God sending forth an Angel to take a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:7,40). But in reality, it was Jeremiah who was sent to take a cup of wine to those nations (s.w. Jer. 25:15,17). Jeremiah was therefore following in the steps of the Angel, just as we do when we go on missions which are clearly God's will.

All the families of the north, says Yahweh- "Babylon" was not a pure nation but a coalition of various tribes.

And I will send to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant- Judah liked to imagine that *they* were the "servant of Yahweh" spoken of in Isaiah's recent prophecies. But this didn't make them God's people and therefore inviolate from judgment. Nebuchadnezzar was also Yahweh's servant but would be judged for his actions.

And will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations around; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations- The surrounding nations were those whom Judah had hoped would save them from Babylon, with whom they had committed whoredom by making contracts with them and accepting their gods. Judah was not made a perpetual desolation; many continued to live there, and the strata of

agricultural evidence suggests that cultivation continued there throughout the exile. "Desolate" implies a dry land; we think of Hosea wanting to make Gomer a dry land and slay her children with thirst, whilst also having such feelings of passionate love for her. And that all reflected God's feelings for Israel. Anger and compassion / love can be held at the same time, and God too has this dimension. Whenever God spoke against His people, He was aware also of those feelings of passionate love. And this would be an example: "Isn't Ephraim My darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says Yahweh" (Jer. 31:20). God still considered them His "darling child". The unrequited yearning of God for human repentance is a tragedy, and He must be so thrilled when we at least desire to respond. God's whole experience with His people has been of unrequited love. And Jeremiah experienced this same yearning of the heart for his people (s.w. Jer. 4:19). That yearning should be ours as we beg men and women to respond; our evangelism should be done out of a heart that bleeds for people.

Jeremiah 25:10 Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp- Every humble home had at least a candle burning at night; the idea was that as with the destruction of Sodom, judgment would come suddenly, whilst they were marrying and giving in marriage. That 'suddenness' is a theme of other prophecies; but in reality, Jerusalem fell predictably and inevitably after a period of siege. This was another element of the judgments which wasn't carried out quite as stated, because in wrath God remembered mercy.

Jeremiah 25:11 This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years- As explained on :12, this time period didn't literally come true. It was a potential, one of many possible scenarios. The nations around Judah didn't serve Babylon for 70 years. If the exiles had repented as intended, and had brought the other nations to accept Yahweh, then this may have been the scenario. But that didn't happen, and so as explained on :12, the period was recalculated and reinterpreted. And as noted on Jer. 10:18, the land was not completely desolate for the 70 year period. A 70 year period of desolation for Tyre in Is. 23:17 likewise didn't have a literal fulfillment because various unstated preconditions weren't met.

Daniel was to be told that the 70 years were being recalculated by God as 70 weeks. One possibility is that there is an intentional ambiguity in how Jer. 25:11,12 speaks of "seventy years". The Hebrew word for "Seventy" is composed of consonants which with different vowel points could read "weeks". After 'weeks of years', the restoration would come. The difference is between *shav'uim* [weeks] or *shiv'im* [seventy]. And Daniel is being told that Israel's impenitence and the failure of the Messiah figures meant that God was now reading this as weeks of years, not 'seventy years'.

Jeremiah 25:12 It shall happen that when seventy years are accomplished, then I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, says Yahweh, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it desolate forever- From BC606, the fourth year of Jehoiakim (:1), to the fall of Babylon in BC539, is 67 years, not 70. So there was some flexibility in the time period. Yet the same 70 year period is mentioned in Jer. 29:10 in a prophecy apparently given 11 years later than that of Jer. 25:12. The

punishment of Babylon was to be at the same time as Judah returned from exile; "I will punish Babylon (s.w.); and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he has swallowed", i.e. Judah (Jer. 51:44). And yet Judah were told to flee Babylon *before* she was destroyed. So there were all manner of different scenarios; for Babylon was not destroyed when the persians took it, and certainly not as the prophecies of Babylon's fall suggested. It wasn't made desolate, the walls still stood, and there was no outpouring of Divine judgment upon the city in terms of fire and sulphur.

The 70 years of Babylon's mastery and Judah's captivity were not strictly fulfilled to the letter. See on Jer. 27:7. From the fall of Nineveh (612) to the fall of Babylon (539) was 73 years; or from Nebuchadnezzar's accession (605) to Babylon's fall (539) was 66 years (Dates taken from John Bright, *Jeremiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) p. 209). Was there a degree to which the period was prolonged or decreased, due to unstated variables- perhaps prayer, Judah's repentance, Babylon's repentance...? All arguments that the 70 years were fulfilled exactly rather fall down before the fact that Daniel realized the 70 years were over and yet there was no restoration (Dan. 9:2). Daniel understood that after 70 years Jerusalem must be restored; but he earnestly prayed for their forgiveness *so that* this would happen (Dan. 9:2 cp. 19). Perhaps he opened his window and prayed towards Jerusalem exactly because he wanted to fulfil 2 Chron. 6:37,38: “If they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn, and pray unto thee… toward their land… and toward the city which thou hast chosen”. He knew that repentance was a precondition for the promised restoration to occur.

Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. The 70 year period was conditional on Israel; the question to them was therefore "How long... until you repent?" Jeremiah 31:22 is clear: "How long will you go here and there, you backsliding daughter?". The exile is described as a being tossed to and fro, continual movement within the empires who had taken them captive. Daniel understood that after 70 years Jerusalem must be restored; but he earnestly prayed for their forgiveness *so that* this would happen (Dan. 9:2 cp. 19). So "how long" they were in exile was an open question; they could have been restored sooner had they wished it, and finally the 70 years of exile until full restoration of the Kingdom were reinterpreted in Daniel 9 to be 70 weeks of days, i.e. a far longer period. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. And yet there again, Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years (Ez. 4:6). Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... Perhaps some restoration could have happened to the ten tribes after 390 years (Ez. 4:5), although there's no sign it ever did. And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward,

by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. In fact, if a person had been found who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap' (Ez. 22:30), God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. There were simply so many possible scenarios!

The prophecy was re-interpreted; for Daniel was told that there was to be a "seventy weeks of years" (Dan. 9:24 RSV) period involved in order to gain ultimate forgiveness for Israel as Daniel had just been praying for. The 70 years had become "seventy weeks of years". The command to rebuild Jerusalem was given in the first year of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1); but Daniel must have watched in vain for any sign that Zion's glad morning had really come. And so it is recorded that in the third year of Cyrus Daniel was given a vision that confirmed to him that "the thing was true, but the time appointed was long [Heb. 'extended'; the word is also translated "greater", "more"]: and he understood the thing" (Dan. 10:1). What was "the thing" that was true, which Daniel sought to understand? Surely it was the vision of the 70 years that he had sought to "understand" in Dan. 9:2. The Hebrew "dabar", translated "thing", is usually translated "word". He was comforted that the word of prophecy would come true; it was "noted in the scripture of truth" (Dan. 10:21). It was just that it had been extended in its fulfilment; "for yet the vision is for many days" (Dan. 10:14). And this was how he came to "understand the thing / word". The essential and ultimate fulfilment of the 70 years prophecy would only be after a long time, involving 70 "weeks of years".

Jeremiah 25:13 I will bring on that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations- These are clearly the words written in the prophecies against Babylon and the other nations at the end of Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically; Jer. 25:13 sounds as if "this book" of Jeremiah had been finished at this point.

Jeremiah 25:14 For many nations and great kings shall make bond servants of them, even of them; and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the work of their hands- Babylon would no longer be Yahweh's servant, but would become the servants of other nations; see on :9. "Even of them" can be translated "of them also". The idea is that what was done to Israel by Babylon would be done to Babylon. But that isn't really what happened when the Medes took Babylon and the Persian empire then came to dominate Babylon. "Babylonians" weren't put into forced labour throughout the Persian empire; "make bond servants of them" is the language of what Egypt did to the Hebrews (Ex. 1:14). God's intended judgments of Babylon, as those He stated about Judah at this time, were ameliorated. Or we could say they were rescheduled and reapplied to the last days.

Jeremiah 25:15 For thus says Yahweh the God of Israel to me: Take this cup of the wine of wrath at My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it- As noted on :9, God had "sent" His Angel to "take" the Babylonians, and Jeremiah was following in the Angel's steps. See on :17.

There can only be two exits from the Lord's throne, to the right or to the left, and likewise we are faced with such a choice in our response to the bread and wine. The cup of wine is a double symbol- either of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), or of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). Why this use

of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads. We note that to refuse to drink the cup meant condemnation (:28); we cannot just pass on it, or else that is a refusal of the Lord's blessing and by default we drink condemnation to ourselves.

Jeremiah 25:16 They shall drink, and reel back and forth, and be mad- "Reel back and forth" is literally to be troubled (s.w. Job 34:20). What is in view is the dread fear of those who know they are about to receiving Divine condemnation. "Mad" is the Hebrew *halal* which is usually used about praise (s.w. Jer. 20:13) which the nations shall finally give (Jer. 31:7 s.w.), although it can carry the sense of 'raving'. If madness was solely in view, another word would have been used. Perhaps the word choice was again to hint that they could come to repentance and praise of Yahweh as a result of the judgments- if they responded rightly.

Because of the sword that I will send among them- Jeremiah was "sent" with the prophetic word to these nations (:15); but the sword was likewise "sent". Here again we see the power of God's word; it is itself its fulfillment. This bracketing together of word and fulfillment explains why we can so positively consider that we "have" eternal life now whereas it is promised as a future experience.

Jeremiah 25:17 Then took I the cup at Yahweh's hand, and made all the nations to drink, to whom Yahweh had sent me- As noted on :9, God had "sent" His Angel to "take" the Babylonians, and Jeremiah was following in the Angel's steps. If Jeremiah literally did this, it would have been a major and dangerous mission, taking much time. It could be understood as all happening only in vision.

Jeremiah 25:18 Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and its kings, and its princes, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, a hissing, and a curse, as it is this day- Judah was to suffer the judgments of the surrounding nations; just as those of the new Israel shall be "condemned with the world" which they had likewise identified with in their days of opportunity. The hissing and mocking was because Jerusalem had been praised in David's psalms (e.g. Ps. 48:2; 50:2) as the joy of the whole earth and perfect in beauty (Lam. 2:15). Those Psalms of David were well known; for David after the Bathsheba incident had vowed to preach the good news of Yahweh's grace to the entire world. He had done so through his Psalms. His music ministry had been successful; the nations knew the songs about Zion being the joy of the whole earth and the perfection of beauty. And so they mocked it as it lay in ruins.

Jeremiah 25:19 Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people- They are mentioned first amongst the Gentile nations because it was upon them that Judah had placed so much hope, rather than in Yahweh, for deliverance from Babylon.

Jeremiah 25:20 and all the mixed people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Gaza, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod- These towns were very near to Judah, and it seems Judah had tried to forge a coalition from these peoples against Babylon. They had made covenants with them all, on condition that Judah worshipped their idols. We can imagine this kind of thing going on in the latter day fulfillment of these words; Israel facing off against a

superior enemy, seeking help from even the Palestinians / Philistines, rather than throwing themselves in repentance upon Yahweh.

Jeremiah 25:21 Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon- These nations were active in assisting the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7). But Judah had sought to make a covenant with them whereby they would fight against Babylon in their defence. The lovers turned against Judah the prostitute and helped burn her with fire. This is all the stuff of politics... whereas faith in Yahweh was to be supreme.

Jeremiah 25:22 and all the kings of Tyre, and all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the isle which is beyond the sea- Or, by the sea coast. Perhaps the minor kings confederate with Tyre and the Phoenicians are in view.

Jeremiah 25:23 Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all who have the corners of their beard cut off- In Jer. 9:26, Judah are listed as a nation who trimmed their beards like this, rather than being circumcised in heart. The surrounding nations had their various signs of identification, often connected with how their hair or beards were cut. The sign of identity God had chosen was not visible; it was upon the most concealed part of the male body. And this spoke of how the real sign of identity as God's people was in fact nothing external, but in the state of heart, a way of thinking with the flesh cut off from it. This is why we may look the same as others in this world, on some counts. But the difference is in our hearts.

Jeremiah 25:24 and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mixed people who dwell in the wilderness- These peoples were confederate with Babylon (Jer. 51:37), but they are listed here as peoples with whom Judah had tried to make an alliance against Babylon. They turned against Judah and backed Babylon in the end, and then were destroyed by Babylon and by the destruction of Babylon at the hands of the Medes. All this kind of political intrigue will have its fulfillment in the last days too, and would be absolutely typical of Middle Eastern politics.

Jeremiah 25:25 and all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes- These peoples had not yet developed into "Persia"; they were then just small tribes to the west of Babylon who were known to be against Babylon. And so Judah had sought their assistance against Babylon. The range of nations is lengthy, and reflects the desperate and extensive measures used by Judah to get human help against Babylon.

Jeremiah 25:26 and all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another- These nations all had their part in the Babylonian invasion, which is why they were to be punished in the end after Israel's restoration from captivity (Jer. 25:12). Ezekiel was prophesying about the time of the restoration- after 38,39 he goes on to give commands about how to rebuild the temple on their return from captivity. This is the context in which Ezekiel alludes back to Jer. 25.

And all the kingdoms of the world, which are on the surface of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them- "Sheshach" is a code name for Babylon. The Jewish kabbalists had a system called athbash, whereby the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is read as the last one, the second letter as the second to last letter, etc. "Sheshach" is the spelling of "Babylon" according to this; and yet the word *sheshach* means "humiliation", which was to happen to Babylon (Is. 47:1). We wonder why

Jeremiah at times uses this term whereas at other times he is clear that he refers to "Babylon". If he was scared of repercussions, then we wonder why at times he does refer to "Babylon". I suggest therefore that he is simply making the point that proud Babylon was to be humiliated. For the essence of all human sin is pride, and judgment is therefore about humiliating pride. And we are to humble ourselves now.

Jeremiah 25:27 You shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel: Drink, and be drunk, vomit, fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you- The drunkard is initially attracted to the cup of wine, and so these nations eagerly accepted a part in the coalition to destroy Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 25:28 It shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at your hand to drink, then you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies: You shall surely drink- Even if they perceived that temporary union with Babylon would be to their hurt (see on :27), they would still be punished for their sins.

Jeremiah 25:29 For, behold, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by My name; and should you be utterly unpunished?- This could imply that the sin of the surrounding nations was like that of Judah; but Jer. 2:10 has stated that Judah's sin was greater than theirs. So perhaps there is here too the hint that their sin was slightly less, but they would not be unpunished.

You shall not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth, says Yahweh of Armies- Ezekiel 38:21 says that a sword will be called for against Gog and thus he will meet his end. This is quoting from Jer. 25:29, where the context is of a group of surrounding nations invading the land and a sword being called upon them. There are several other links with the nations of Ezekiel 38 when we look closer at Jer. 25:19-26. Edom, Moab, Ammon, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish feature in Ez. 38 too, and this confirms by suggestion there that we are to read the text as suggesting that Sheba, Dedan and the merchants are part of the invading force in Ezekiel 38, not against it.

Jeremiah 25:30 Therefore you must prophesy against them all these words and tell them, Yahweh will roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation; He will mightily roar against His fold; He will give a shout, as those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth- This would have been difficult for them to understand; the god of a city was supposed to defend his city. But Yahweh who lived in Zion, His holy habitation, would roar against His own people; and His wrath with Jerusalem would then go out against all the peoples of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, whose idols Judah had worshipped and brought into Zion.

Jeremiah 25:31 A noise shall come even to the end of the land; for Yahweh has a controversy with the nations- "Controversy" is a legal case (s.w. Ex. 23:2). It was a complicated case, with counter appeals which resulted in everyone being condemned- and yet Judah then being finally justified, by grace. Yahweh had this legal case with Judah, and then with the peoples who supported Babylon against her (Jer. 25:31) and then He has this case against Babylon (Jer. 51:36) during which He is advocate for Judah, whose cause He legally pleads in the court case (Jer. 50:34) of which He is judge as well as advocate for the defence. Being both advocate and judge, we see the certainty of Judah's final justification- if they chose to accept His amazing grace in justifying them.

He will enter into judgment with all flesh: as for the wicked, He will give them to the sword, says Yahweh- 'Entering into judgment' is s.w. "plead". Condemnation is in a sense God's appeal to us. Ezekiel often uses the word in speaking of how God will judge / condemn Israel. But he uses the same word when he speaks of how He will "plead" with Israel in their captivity in Babylon, i.e. in their condemnation experience (Ez. 17:20); how He will plead with them as He pleaded with them whilst they were undergoing judgment in Egypt (Ez. 20:35,36- s.w. "judge" Ez. 20:4); and how He will "judge" or "plead" with Israel's latter day invaders through the punishments He will bring upon them (Ez. 38:22). When God gives those wicked people to the sword, He will be pleading / judging with "all flesh" (Jer. 25:31); "For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead [s.w. judge] with all flesh" (Is. 66:16). They will be gathered to the valley of Jehoshaphat, so that the Lord can "plead [s.w. judge] with there for my people" (Joel 3:2).

Jeremiah 25:32 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great storm shall be raised up from the uttermost parts of the earth- As explained on :31, all the nations were to be implicated in this great assize, and all were to be punished. The great storm from the borders of the land refers to the Babylonians, but the language of approaching storm is expressed by Ezekiel in terms of the cherubim of glory, Yahweh of hosts of heavenly armies, who was manipulating the Babylonian armies. In the latter day fulfillment, the final invader of Israel will be a group of nations orchestrated by a power likewise just beyond the borders of the *eretz*, somewhere like Iran.

Jeremiah 25:33 The slain of Yahweh shall be at that day from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground- This was the judgment to come upon Judah (Jer. 8:2) but the idea is that the Gentile nations were to suffer the same judgment as Judah. There was to be no differentiation between Judah and the world around her when it came to judgment; because she had so fully entered into unity with them. Being left unburied was the ultimate shame for Middle Eastern folks of that time; perhaps the implication is that there would be such mass destruction that there would be none left to do the burying. And yet this scale of destruction didn't happen after Jerusalem fell and Babylon turned upon its own coalition. The prophecy will come to its final term in the last days.

Jeremiah 25:34 Wail, you shepherds, and cry; and wallow in dust, you principal of the flock- The focus now returns to Israel, the "fold" of Yahweh whom He Himself would destroy (:30,37). The wallowing in the dust may have been a call to repentance; for this was the behaviour which Jeremiah here urges, rather than what was to happen in any case. Even though their destruction and dispersion was now certain, it seems they could still have repented, and thereby ameliorated the nature of that judgment. This self humiliation was to be practiced by the "principal" or "great ones" of the flock. They were themselves to repent of their pride.

For the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are fully come, and you shall fall like a goodly vessel- "Dispersions" is the word used of the people at Babel (Babylon) being scattered abroad (Gen. 11:4,8). Whilst the prophecy here seems to apply specifically to the shepherds of Israel (:34), it could be that the leaders of all the nations are in view. They were to fall as did Babel, and would be scattered from her. Consistently, the idea of scattering is used as part of condemnation; and true unity,

therefore, is a sign of blessing. Division is therefore bringing about the self-condemnation of any believing community. In the specific context of Judah, the "dispersion" was not just into exile, but is used of the scattering of Zedekiah's family and army (2 Kings 25:5). But the pastors / shepherds of Judah had already scattered the people (s.w. Jer. 23:1,2; Ez. 34:21). Their scattering in judgment was only what in essence they had done themselves.

Jeremiah 25:35 The shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape- This in the primary application speaks of the capture of Zedekiah and the "principal of the flock" (a phrase perhaps specifically referring to him) as they sought in vain to flee (2 Kings 25:5). But it will come to final term in the last days. A desire to escape but having no place to run is a feature of the rejected at the last day (Heb. 2:3, quoting Is. 20:6 concerning the inability of men to escape from the approach of the invincible Assyrian army). Rev. 20:11 likewise speaks of the rejected 'heavens and earth' fleeing from the Lamb's throne and finding no place to go. Before the whirlwind of God's judgment, the false shepherds of Israel "shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape" (Jer. 25:35). The rejected will see that the Lord is coming against them with an army much stronger than theirs, and they have missed the chance to make peace (Lk. 14:31). They will be like the Egyptians suffering God's judgments in the Red Sea, wanting to flee but having no realistic place to run to. Uzziah hasting to go out from the presence of the Lord after he was judged for his sin was a foretaste of this (2 Chron. 26:20).

Jeremiah 25:36 A voice of the cry of the shepherds, and the wailing of the principal of the flock! For Yahweh lays waste their pasture- All throughout, it is Yahweh who is the "destroyer" [s.w. "lay waste"] through the hand of the surrounding peoples (s.w. Jer. 15:8). This was in radical tension with the idea that a local god is always supportive of his people and always saves them. The God of Israel reveals a sensitivity to sin as fundamental to His character; and therefore He will judge and even destroy His own people rather than save them from their invaders.

Jeremiah 25:37 The peaceable folds are brought to silence because of the fierce anger of Yahweh- An intensive plural for the one great fold, of Zion (:30). "Jerusalem" mean literally "city of peace". The Biblical idea of peace is of peace between God and man, achieved through faith in His provided reconciliation. This had been spurned by Judah, and so His anger was such that "Jerusalem" could no longer be the city of peace; the intended fold of His sheep was to be "brought to silence" or "cut off" (s.w.). Yet it was Jeremiah who sat in silence in the ruins of Zion (Lam. 3:28 s.w.), totally identified with his sinful and judged people, in response to how there was to be no funeral wailing for the dead but rather, silence (Ez. 24:17).

Jeremiah 25:38 He has left His den, as the lion; for their land has become an astonishment because of the fierceness of the oppression, and because of His fierce anger- The "He" in view is both Yahweh and the lion of Babylon. The invaders had now left their den in Babylon. Jeremiah could see it all, and sought to share his vision with Judah, in the desperate hope that they might repent even on their deathbeds, as it were. Because the Jews had oppressed their brethren, they were to be oppressed (Jer. 22:3; Ez. 18:7; 22:7 s.w.). Our attitudes to our brethren likewise will be directly reflected back to us at the day of judgment.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 26

Jeremiah 26:1 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word from Yahweh saying- Jer. 26:2-6 is a summary of the material in Jer. 7:1-15. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically.

Jeremiah 26:2 Thus says Yahweh: Stand in the court of Yahweh's house and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in Yahweh's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them- This was probably not one of the outer gates, but one of the three gates which led from the inner court to the outer. Probably it was the gate where Baruch later recited the prophecies of Jeremiah, called "the new gate of the Lord's house", located in the "upper" i.e. inner court (Jer. 36:10 cp. 26:10). Probably the time was one of the three great feasts, when the people of Judah would have come up to the temple.

Don't diminish a word- Not only our salvation but that of others can be limited by our exercise of freewill. If others' salvation is not dependent upon our preaching, then there is no meaning to the very concept of preaching. This is true to the extent that a watchman can occasion the death of those he could warn, if he doesn't do it. And their blood [for they will die] *will be required* at his hand (Ez. 33:8,13). The wicked will only turn from their ways if the watchmen warns them- and Ez. 33 shows clearly enough that the watchman can be lazy to fulfill his commission, with the result that some will die eternally who need not have done so. It's not that another watchman is raised up to do the job- it is his responsibility, which he can discharge or not. God's word has been delegated to us; to not speak it forth is therefore in a sense to diminish His word. Hence Jeremiah is told to "keep not back a word" of all God's words (Jer. 26:2 AV; RV: "Diminish not a word"). Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be…" Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

Jeremiah 26:3 Perhaps they will listen, and turn every man from his evil way; so that I may repent Me of the evil which I purpose to do to them because of the evil of their doings- See on Jer. 18:8. God is willing to totally forgive the repentant sinner. He could just forgive men; it is within His power to do this. But He doesn't. He allows His power to do this to be limited by the extent of our repentance. "If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil which I purpose to do unto them" (Jer. 26:3). Likewise "Repent ye therefore… and be converted, *that* your sins may be blotted out... Repent therefore... and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart *may* be forgiven thee" (Acts 3:19; 8:22). The ability of God to forgive is controlled by our repentance ("that... may"). This is used by Peter as the source of appeal for men to repent.

Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). Interestingly, the very words which Jeremiah was tempted not to speak forth, so stern was their message of judgment to come, were what had the power to lead Israel to repentance (Jer. 26:2,3).

Jeremiah 26:4 You shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh: If you will not listen to Me, to

walk in My law which I have set before you- Properly 'listening' means 'walking' in practice. There is an acute difference between literally hearing and spiritually listening. The more familiar we are with the text of scripture, the stronger the temptation not to actually "listen". The law set before them may not refer to the Mosaic law, which was the basis of the old covenant which they had broken. Perhaps it refers to the new covenant, the new deal, which God through Jeremiah was setting before that generation.

Jeremiah 26:5 To listen to the words of My servants the prophets whom I send to you, even rising up early and sending them, to which you have not listened- The emphasis is upon the prophets who were Yahweh's servants; because the false prophets were a major problem. The people preferred to listen to their words, rather than those of Yahweh's true prophets.

Jeremiah 26:6 then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth- The ark had earlier been kept at Shiloh, and there the tabernacle was pitched (Jud. 18:31; 1 Sam. 1:3). God apparently destroyed the tabernacle there (Ps. 78:60) because of the kind of apostasy there practiced by Eli and his sons. Judah assumed that Jerusalem was inviolate, and was chosen by God over the worship system of the ten tribes in Samaria. But mere physical location and tradition do not make us inviolate to Divine judgment.

Jeremiah 26:7 The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of Yahweh- The connection between priests and prophets was that the priests were to teach the word of Yahweh, and the false prophets gave them a false message to teach.

Jeremiah 26:8 It happened that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that Yahweh had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him saying- We note that "all the people" were connected with the false prophets and their preachers, the priests. The "people love to have it so", and therefore the priests and prophets said what the people wanted to hear (Jer. 5:31). This is why all society was to be punished.

You shall surely die- The words of condemnation spoken by God to Adam. They were not only playing God, saying what *they* thought and felt in the name of God; but we see how they considered any criticism of them to be the ultimate sin, like Adam's disobedience in Eden.

Jeremiah 26:9 Why have you prophesied in the name of Yahweh saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant? All the people were gathered to Jeremiah in the house of Yahweh- The implication was that they considered he was just speaking his words, whereas the true word of Yahweh was what they were speaking. We see here the power released by a guilty conscience- a mass desire to shoot the messenger, to avoid by all means the confrontation with God which sinful living must provoke. The desire to shoot the messenger and discredit the message is the same in essence behind those who wish to rubbish the Bible as the words of men and not of God. This has a subconscious moral basis to it.

Jeremiah 26:10 When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of Yahweh; and they sat in the entry of the new gate of

Yahweh's house- The idea is that they sat in judgment. They heard the case brought by the false prophets, priests and people. They heard the case in the temple rather than in the king's palace because it was distinctly religious, and they were seeking a death penalty prescribed by the Mosaic law.

Jeremiah 26:11 Then spoke the priests and the prophets to the princes and to all the people saying, This man is worthy of death; for he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears- The princes were sitting in judgment, and the people were the audience. They were arguing that anyone who prophesied against Jerusalem was worthy of death. But it was God who had prophesied more than any against Jerusalem, through various prophets and not just Jeremiah. They were effectively wishing the death of God. See on :16 for the fickleness of "all the people".

Jeremiah 26:12 Then spoke Jeremiah to all the princes and to all the people saying, Yahweh sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard- This is picking up on their idea that anyone who spoke "against this city" must die because they were speaking, therefore, against Yahweh. But Jeremiah's point is that Yahweh had repeatedly spoken against His own city, and even His own house. They were reasoning as if Yahweh was but a tribal deity, who would always defend his own temple and city. They viewed the true God through the lens of how gods and religion was generally viewed; and that again is a challenge to our age.

Jeremiah 26:13 Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of Yahweh your God; and Yahweh will repent Him of the evil that He has pronounced against you- Perhaps their "ways" refer to the well trodden ways and paths of thought within the mind, reflected in "doings". "Amend" is the word used of how Cain was bidden "do well", to amend his ways, and a sin offering was even provided for him (Gen. 4:7). Hereby Israel are set up as Cain, a parallel which the Lord (Jn. 8:44) and New Testament writers also perceive. Judah had "trimmed" or "ammended" their ways to seek relationships with the surrounding nations (Jer. 2:33 s.w.), willing to accept their gods and whatever cult obligations to them which were required. But they would not amend their ways for Yahweh. "Amend" is the word translated 'to do well to' in Jer. 7:23. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change.

God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6).

Jeremiah 26:14 But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes- Having pleaded with Judah to repent, Jeremiah goes on to say: "But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes" (Jer. 26:13,14 RV). It's as if he doesn't mind if they kill him because they misunderstand him, his passionate concern, far over-riding any desire for his own preservation, was that they should repent.

Jeremiah 26:15 Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring

innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city, and on its inhabitants- Even the pagans had a great fear of innocent blood being counted to them (Jonah 1:14), and this was also inculcated in the Jews by the Mosaic legislation (Dt. 19:10; 21:8). We see here how the sins of a minority can lead to cursing upon a majority; all the inhabitants would be cursed if the princes had decided to kill Jeremiah. The effects of Adam's sin were similar.

For of a truth Yahweh has sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears- The word spoken was not just a general truth; Yahweh's word is a living word that is to come into the ears, intimately and personally, to every hearer. And the Bible to this day has the same effect.

Jeremiah 26:16 Then the princes and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets: This man is not worthy of death; for he has spoken to us in the name of Yahweh our God- We wonder why there was this *volte face*. The warning about the possibility of guilt for innocent blood (:15) presumably struck home. We conclude therefore that they did have a conscience, somewhere. And that conscience was piqued. We may assume that the majority of our audience are conscienceless. But this isn't the case. We are all made in the image of God, and thereby have a conscience. We note that "all the people" now sided with Jeremiah, when they had "all" sided with the false prophets in :11; and yet by :24 they were again seeking to put Jeremiah to death. This is one of many Biblical examples of how crowds are so fickle.

A study of “the princes” of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God’s word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But “the princes” were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God’s word. And “the princes” were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God’s people- can be very fickle. And quite simply, groups of people go against their own consciences, and then others, like Zedekiah, assume that they solidly hold positions which underneath they do not. Joseph's brothers were similar. We need to see through all this, and realize that whatever facade may appear, people are subconsciously more sensitive to our message than may appear. This can be verified by a simple experiment. Stand on a busy street corner passing out tracts advertising a free coffee; and observe the reactions of those who take them. And then start passing out tracts advertising a free Bible or Gospel meeting; the reactions are quite different, because conscience has been confronted. See on :22.

Jeremiah 26:17 Then rose up certain of the elders of the land and spoke to all the assembled people saying- The "elders" are repeatedly presented as being against Yahweh and deeply culpable to judgment. And yet here we see that they had some kind of conscience, and awareness of historical and spiritual precedent. See on :16.

Jeremiah 26:18 Micah the Morashtite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the

mountain of the house as the high places of a forest- This didn't happen at the hands of the Assyrians, but it was deferred, reapplied and rescheduled to AD70 and the last days. And so the Babylonian judgment likewise could have been rescheduled or even ameliorated- if even a minority had repented at the time. But it seems there was no response to Jeremiah's message at all.

Jeremiah 26:19 Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Didn't he fear Yahweh, and entreat the favour of Yahweh- "Entreat" is the word usually used for 'causing pain'. This shows the openness and sensitivity of God to human prayer and desire.

And Yahweh relented of the disaster which He had pronounced against them? Thus should we commit great evil against our own souls- When Hezekiah studied the words of Micah, "did he not fear the Lord, and besought the Lord, and the Lord repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against him" (Jer. 26:19). Those words of Mic. 3:12 had their fulfillment annulled or delayed thanks to Hezekiah's prayer and repentance. Likewise Jonah's prophecy that in 40 days Nineveh would be destroyed, unconditionally, was nullified by their repentance. And so the judgment of Jerusalem was likewise open to negotiation right up to the last moment.

Hezekiah obtained forgiveness and acceptance for those who kept the Passover "otherwise than it was written"- thanks to his prayer (2 Chron. 30:18). In Hezekiah's time, all Israel had to repent to avert total destruction- but even though they didn't, the prayer of Hezekiah saved the nation (Jer. 26:13,19). All of Jerusalem would have been forgiven if there was even one that truly executed judgment, after the pattern of Phinehas (Jer. 5:1- or is this a reference to Messiah?).

Jeremiah 26:20 There was also a man who prophesied in the name of Yahweh, Uriah the son of Shemaiah of Kiriath Jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah- It's unclear whether this is another historical precedent quoted by the few elders of :17 in favour of not killing Jeremiah; or whether this was a counter precedent quoted by others at the court case of :10, justifying killing Jeremiah because another prophet had been killed for prophesying against Jerusalem. In any case, the fact that Uriah had been murdered for teaching what Jeremiah did remains as an indication of Jeremiah's bravery in so publically and forcefully teaching that same message.

Jeremiah 26:21 and when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men and all the princes heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt- As noted on :20, Jeremiah would have been aware of this, and he would have been careful to go into Egypt not because he feared, but because rather did he totally identify with God's apostate people. We too have situations like this, when we are forced to examine our motives; knowing that we can perform the same action from widely differing motives. And only we know our motives.

Jeremiah 26:22 and Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him, into Egypt- This was significant effort. But Jehoiakim was so desperate to falsify God's word about him that he went to all this trouble to destroy the messenger. See on :16. But God noted it all, and the name and

father's name of the man sent to do the dirty deed has been recorded all these centuries. He was likely the father in law of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:8).

Jeremiah 26:23 and they fetched forth Uriah out of Egypt, and brought him to Jehoiakim the king, who killed him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people- These graves are only elsewhere referred to in 2 Kings 23:6, where we learn that Josiah in his reforms had desecrated these graves near Jerusalem because they were associated with idolatry. Perhaps they were the graves of those sacrificed to Baal (the victims likely included people other than children). This prophet was therefore treated as a sacrifice to Baal, and was likely killed therefore in loyalty to the Baal cult. The word of the false prophets and false gods had thus prevailed against the speaker of Yahweh's word.

Jeremiah 26:24 But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah- Ahikam was one of those who were involved with finding and interpreting the "book of the law" that was discovered and was the basis for Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22:12,14); his son Gedaliah appears to have been faithful and to also have cared for Jeremiah after Jerusalem fell (Jer. 40:6).

That they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death- We note that "all the people" sided with Jeremiah in :16, when they had "all" sided with the false prophets in :11; and yet now by :24 they were again seeking to put Jeremiah to death. This is one of many Biblical examples of how crowds are so fickle.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 27

Jeremiah 27:1 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, came this word to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying- We have just read in Jer. 26:20-24 that Jehoiakim had sought out and killed a prophet who taught precisely what Jeremiah did. This serves to highlight Jeremiah's bravery in so publically witnessing to the same truths. The LXX omits this verse, however; and it would seem from :3,12 that the section here refers not to Jehoiakim but to Zedekiah (cp. Jer. 26:1). Some had already gone into captivity (:16). Some manuscripts read "Zedekiah" here.

Jeremiah 27:2 Thus says Yahweh to me: Make bonds and bars and put them on your neck- Jeremiah personally was to experience the bonds and bars which he was telling others about. The "bonds" refer to the bonds connecting the two pieces of wood which formed the yoke. He was human and therefore in the position of everyone else. And this is to be the basis of our appeal to people likewise.

Jeremiah 27:3 and send them to the king of Edom, to the king of Moab, to the king of the children of Ammon, to the king of Tyre and to the king of Sidon, by the hand of the messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah- All this effort was to try to convert those nations; by humbling themselves beneath Babylon they were humbling themselves beneath Yahweh's word and will. It was His intention that the peoples around Judah should repent along with Judah. "The messengers" were the representatives of those nations invited by Zedekiah in a bid to make alliances with them and thus form a coalition to protect them from Babylon. This is described elsewhere as prostitution. These envoys were to be sent back with yokes they were invited to wear, symbolizing their subjection to Babylon rather than their opposition

to Babylon. Edom joined in the destruction of Jerusalem along with the Babylonians, but Babylon later turned against Edom and destroyed her. Jeremiah's appeal at this point was not heard, and so we can imagine that the messengers refused to carry the yokes back to their rulers.

Jeremiah 27:4 and give them a command to their masters saying, Thus says Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel, You shall tell your masters- Yahweh had armies of Angels controlling and manipulating all human armies. The God of Israel was therefore in control of all the *eretz*; and Yahweh wanted them to accept that, which was tantamount to inviting them to accept Him as their God.

Jeremiah 27:5 I have made the earth, the men and the animals that are on the surface of the earth, by My great power and by My outstretched arm; and I give it to whom it seems right to Me- The nations on the *eretz* were no more than the animals, to whom God had also given their allotted portion. We note that there is no empirical reason given, no attempt at apologetics. This huge claim was simply made, and there was an internal credibility to it. And that is just the same today. God's amazing claims are of themselves the appeal and their credibility is within their own message, and is not strengthened by any appeal to other back up support. The "outstretched" arm of Yahweh is a term associated with God's redemption of Israel from captivity and bringing them into the *eretz*. This was to be His continued endpoint in view, the objective He had set in history, even if it were delayed, rescheduled and reapplied.

Jeremiah 27:6 Now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the animals of the field also have I given him to serve him- These animals may be simply parallel with the nations of :7; the same figure is in Ez. 31:6; Zeph. 2:14. Note how Nebuchadnezzar is presented as serving God; and the other nations serve him, and if they do this willingly, then by extension, they would be Yahweh's servants.

Jeremiah 27:7 All the nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the time of his own land come: and then many nations and great kings shall make him their bond servant- I have repeatedly observed that God's prophecies are conditional; indeed there are many different scenarios of judgment presented in Jeremiah, because the human variables (particularly of repentance) were themselves not forced by God, but the results of genuine human freewill decisions. And so the nations serving Babylon for the next three generations of Babylonian rulers is another example of one possible scenario which didn't come about because various preconditions (perhaps invisible to us at this stage) weren't met. The 70 year period of servitude to Babylon (Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10) would certainly have to be understood not literally but as a round number. Nebuchadnezzar died B.C. 561, his son Evil-Merodach reigned only two years; then in B.C. 555 Laberosoarchod became king, but was deposed after nine months by a usurper from another family, Nabonedus or Nabunita, who ruled until B.C. 538, when Babylon fell. A literal "seventy years" from this point comes only to B.C. 555. See on :17.

Jeremiah 27:8 It shall happen, that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon- The symbolism of the yoke is explained in Lam. 1:14, where it represents the yoke of sins. It is this which is lifted by the saving work of

Yahweh in Messiah. To willingly place their necks under the yoke was to recognize they had sinned and deserved this. As noted on :6, Nebuchadnezzar is presented as serving God; and the other nations serve him, and if they do this willingly, then by extension, they would be Yahweh's servants. Again we perceive that God was seeking to convert even the Gentiles.

That nation will I punish, says Yahweh, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the plague, until I have consumed them by his hand- There is no particular evidence that supernatural famines and plagues were used to destroy nations who resisted Babylon; as noted on :7, we are dealing here with a series of potential scenarios.

Jeremiah 27:9 But as for you, don't you listen to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreams, nor to your soothsayers, nor to your sorcerers, who speak to you saying, You shall not serve the king of Babylon- This is an appeal to the nations to not listen to their own prophets, but to Jeremiah as the only true prophet. We marvel at God's breadth of vision, initiative and wideness of hope to save- even these Gentile nations.

Jeremiah 27:10 for they prophesy a lie to you, to remove you far from your land, and that I should drive you out, and you should perish- "Remove you far" is a word used of Israel's exile at the hands of their invaders (Is. 6:12; 26:15). But this, like all judgments, was only a reflection of how they had gone far from God in their hearts (s.w. Jer. 2:5; Is. 29:13).

Jeremiah 27:11 But the nation that shall bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, that nation will I let remain in their own land, says Yahweh; and they shall till it, and dwell therein- This prophecy was consciously disobeyed by the Jews who remained in the land after Jerusalem fell; they fled to Egypt. We note the same conditions were given to Judah as to the Gentile nations around them; clearly it was the Divine intention that they should all repent together. To serve the king of Babylon was effectively to serve Yahweh, seeing he was Yahweh's servant. "Till" and "serve" are the same Hebrew words. Serving their own land was to be service to Babylon. But they all wanted so much more, attracted as people are today by the promise of absolute freedom; when this is only possible through service to God in repentance.

Jeremiah 27:12 I spoke to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live- According to the apocryphal book of Baruch, the exiles asked for 'deliverance'- but they redefined 'deliverance' as meaning being allowed to live prosperously in the land of their captivity (Baruch 1:12 cp. 2:14), rather than being delivered from Babylon and returning to Judah. In a way, the book of Esther shows how God heard this prayer. But the book of Esther therefore has a sad ending, with the Jews prosperous, loved and respected, and even further away from returning to the land. Indeed, Baruch 2:21 records them misquoting Jer. 27:12 about the need to obey the King of Babylon during their captivity, and understanding this as meaning they were to remain in Babylon! See on Jer. 29:10.

In the future, at the Lord's return, we will be saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9). Whilst this has already been achieved in a sense, it will be materially articulated in that day- in that we will feel and know

ourselves to be worthy of God's wrath, but then be saved from it. We are all to some extent in the position of Zedekiah and the men of Judah, who was told that if they accepted God's condemnation of them as just, and served the King of Babylon, then they would ultimately be saved; but if they refused to accept that condemnation, then they would be eternally destroyed (Jer. 21:9; 27:12). And the Babylonian invasion was a type of the final judgment.

Jeremiah 27:13 Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as Yahweh has spoken concerning the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?- Zedekiah refused to respond, and yet he did not actually die at the hand of the king of Babylon as here implied- not by sword, nor famine nor plague. He died of natural causes in prison (Jer. 52:11). Again, God's statements here are in terms of potential scenarios. Perhaps Zedekiah repented to some degree, and was as it were given credit for this. See on Jer. 21:7.

Jeremiah 27:14 Don't listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you saying, You shall not serve the king of Babylon; for they prophesy a lie to you- This was the classic message of false teachers- offering freedom, when in fact their message would make people slaves. Perhaps this was alluded to in 2 Pet. 2:19: "Promising them liberty, while they are in fact slaves to corruption. For of whom a person is overcome, of the same is he also brought into bondage".

Jeremiah 27:15 For I have not sent them, says Yahweh, but they prophesy falsely in My name; that I may drive you out, and that you may perish, you, and the prophets who prophesy to you- The impression is given that the false prophets prophesied *so that* God could drive them out. God confirms people in whatever way they choose to go.

Jeremiah 27:16 Also I spoke to the priests and to all this people saying, Thus says Yahweh: Don't listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you saying, Behold, the vessels of Yahweh's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon; for they prophesy a lie to you- The priests preached and taught the word they were given by the prophets. It was therefore important for the priests to listen to the true words of Yahweh and not the false ones. Jeremiah was a priest, and was asking his own family to therefore listen to him rather than the false prophets. The temple vessels had been taken away so that the temple couldn't function properly. The idea was that the people would be drawn closer to God through realizing that He could be served without the ritual of the temple. And they would be driven to personal relationship with Him rather than depending upon any religious dimension.

Jeremiah 27:17 Don't listen to them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: why should this city become a desolation?- The rhetorical questions are powerful; "Why die?" (:13). The city need not have "become a desolation"; and yet Jeremiah had prophesied 70 years of such "desolation" (s.w. Dan. 9:2). As explained on :7, there were various prophetic scenarios possible at this time. God was so sensitive to human repentance, and the degree of it, that He set up all these various possible scenarios in response to how far they would repent.

Jeremiah 27:18 But if they be prophets, and if the word of Yahweh be with them, let

them now make intercession to Yahweh of Armies, that the vessels which are left in the house of Yahweh, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, don't go to Babylon- See on :22. The more valuable vessels had already been taken in Jehoiakim and Jeconiah's time (:20). A true prophet would know that Yahweh's word was that Jerusalem and the temple would fall; and knowing this, and knowing Yahweh, the true prophets would have prayed that the word in their mouths would not come true. There is a gap between the Divine statement and its fulfillment, and within that historical gap there was time and opportunity for repentance to change the stated outcome. And a true prophet, like Jeremiah, would have perceived this.

Jeremiah 27:19 For thus says Yahweh of Armies concerning the pillars, and concerning the sea, and concerning the bases, and concerning the residue of the vessels that are left in this city- The laver remained after the deportations of :20. This was significant, in that it meant that a way of cleansing and forgiveness was still open, right up to the last moment.

Jeremiah 27:20 which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon didn't take, when he carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem- Perhaps he didn't take them because they were too heavy to easily transport. There is a parallel between the remaining vessels, and the remaining people. They were intended to see themselves as vessels in Yahweh's service.

Jeremiah 27:21 yes, thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that are left in the house of Yahweh, and in the house of the king of Judah and at Jerusalem- The implication is that some of the temple vessels had been moved to the royal palace, which had been built of cedar in an attempt to imitate the temple. And the king had moved some of the vessels of Yahweh's house to his own house. This usage of the Divine for ourselves remains an abiding temptation, in essence, for all generations of God's people.

Jeremiah 27:22 They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be, until the day that I visit them, says Yahweh; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place- The vessels of the temple were to be taken to Babylon- so says Jer. 27:22 plainly enough. *But* if the false prophets had repented and prayed, the vessels would not be taken to Babylon (Jer. 27:18). Prayer changes things, even the [apparently] expressly stated intention of God.

What Judah prayed for by the rivers of Babylon was indeed heard. There they had asked that God would "visit" them and "return" them (Ps. 80:14). The same two Hebrew words are to be found in Jer. 27:22, where we read that God would exile His people to Babylon and then "visit" them and make them "return". We meet the same two words in Zeph. 2:7, where God would 'visit and return' the captivity of the remnant of Judah. But when God did "visit" His people, just as when He 'visited' His people in the gift of His Son, they didn't want to 'return' or respond. Those who had desired 'the day of the Lord' at that time had been praying for it, when it was 'to no end' for them. And we have to ask ourselves whether we really mean our prayers for the Lord's return. Jer. 27:22 predicted that God would "visit" His people and "bring them up". Those very two words are found in the declaration of Cyrus as recorded in 2 Chron. 36:23: "God hath charged [s.w. "visited"] me to build him a house in Jerusalem… who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with

him, and let him go up [s.w. “bring them up”]”. The most powerful monarch in the Middle East made the humanly bizarre and inexplicable command to “go up” to the land. ‘Going up’ and ‘visiting’ are language associated with Angels. The people were being encouraged to follow the cherubim-Angel. But most of the people said ‘No that’s fine, we’ll give some money, but we’ll stay here thanks. We won’t be ‘going up’’. And in essence, we are *so* similar as a community.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 28

Jeremiah 28:1 It happened the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month- Hebrew thought tends to divide periods into two, the beginning and the end. So the fourth year of his reign could still be understood as "the beginning".

That Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet, who was of Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of Yahweh, in the presence of the priests and of all the people saying- The temple was Jeremiah's usual place of witness, as public as possible, standing there with the yoke upon his neck (:10); which was very brave, considering how unpopular and anti-establishment was his message.

Jeremiah 28:2 Thus speaks Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon- This is typical of false teaching. A true fact (that the yoke of Babylon would one day be broken) was presented in such a context and frame of reference that it was seriously false. The Babylonian yoke was to be lifted only when Judah repented; and they had not done so.

Jeremiah 28:3 Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of Yahweh’s house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried to Babylon- The specific detail, within exactly two years, is again typical of false prophets. They use detail as if to give credibility to their claims. But it is just an indication of how brazen they are in their falsity. As noted on :2, the characteristic of false teachers is that they twist God's true word; in this case, the promise of Jer. 27:22 that ultimately the temple vessels would be restored to Zion. See on :6.

Jeremiah 28:4 and I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, who went to Babylon, says Yahweh; for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon- Again (see on :2,3), this was a twist of God's true word. For Ezekiel, who was with those captives, had spoken of the possibility of their early restoration- if they repented. But like all people, they wanted the results of repentance and spirituality without the repentance and spiritual effort.

Jeremiah 28:5 Then the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people who stood in the house of Yahweh- Perhaps "Hananiah" was a name chosen by this false prophet, for the name means 'Yah has favoured', as if the promised time of grace and favour toward Zion had already come (alluding to the same words used in Is. 30:18,19; 33:2 etc.). It was one of the most continually attractive messages- the Kingdom without the path there, the crown without the cross.

Jeremiah 28:6 even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: Yahweh do so; Yahweh perform your words which you have prophesied, to bring again the vessels of Yahweh's house, and all them of the captivity, from Babylon to this place- As explained on :2-4, Hananiah was quoting true prophecies and yet saying they were to come about without any repentance. And Jeremiah recognizes this by saying that indeed these words will come true, but peace with God comes from relationship with Him and is not simply there for the wicked to grab.

Jeremiah 28:7 Nevertheless hear you now this word that I speak in your ears, and in the ears of all the people- This is the classic example of the need for God's words to be understood in context and not out of context.

Jeremiah 28:8 The prophets who have been before me and before you of old prophesied against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of plague- The idea seems to be that the bulk of the prophetic revelation had been of suffering and judgment; this far outweighed the material about "peace" (:7), and there were no prophecies about "peace" which did not foresee judgment and suffering as required before that "peace" was experienced. This is equivalent to Paul's comment that only through much suffering can we enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22).

Jeremiah 28:9 The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet shall happen, then shall the prophet be known, that Yahweh has truly sent him- See on :8. This seems to imply that no true prophet prophesied only peace to Israel- there was always an exposure of sin and an appeal to repentance. That was part of their ministry. And it was directed at the people of God, for the most part- to us, the ecclesia. And it's indifference, lack of passion, which, it seems to me, is the besetting tragedy of our age. When did you last really shed tears? When were you moved, really wrenched in your gut, by the suffering of others, by the sin of this world, your own sin, your part in humanity's tragic rejection of God… when did you last *feel* for God in His pain, as He sees His beloved children and creation walk away from Him day after day, second after second? When did you last feel ecstatic joy, deep sadness… in this post-modern world of surface level emotion? It's in all this that the words of the prophets and their personal nature as people challenge us- and their spirit is to be the spirit of our testimony to Jesus in this world.

Jeremiah 28:10 Then Hananiah the prophet took the bar from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and broke it- Hananiah realized that Jeremiah was preaching that the time of peace could only come by submitting to the yoke of Babylon in recognition of their sinfulness. It was only God who could lift that yoke, and Hananiah was claiming that he was acting on God's behalf. This truly was preaching peace with God when there could be no peace to the wicked.

Jeremiah 28:11 Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people saying, Thus says Yahweh: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon within two full years from off the neck of all the nations. The prophet Jeremiah went his way- There are times when there is no point in arguing back against dogmatic liars and false teachers. Jeremiah would have gone his way to the jeers of the crowd; for Hananiah doubtless spoke with eloquence and calm dogmatism. It was only a specific call from Yahweh which meant that Jeremiah did, later, make a response. At the time,

he simply walked away. Walking away is no sign that we have lost the argument; we are not called upon to argue back. God's truth will of itself be justified.

Jeremiah 28:12 Then the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the bar from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah saying- See on :11. It was God's preference to allow the people to weigh up the two alternative 'words from Yahweh' which they had heard.

Jeremiah 28:13 Go, and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus says Yahweh: You have broken the bars of wood; but you have made in their place bars of iron- To be placed under a yoke of iron was the punishment for breaking the old covenant (Dt. 28:48). Suddenly the significance of Jeremiah's *wooden* yoke became apparent; they could have chosen a far ameliorated version of judgment, if they had recognized their sins. But that possibility was now withdrawn. God likewise works with people today. The implication of the grammar here is that the iron yoke had been made by Hananiah. By refusing the ties that bind, they become heavier. Man's search for ultimate freedom is in vain, unless we accept the servitude God offers.

Jeremiah 28:14 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the animals of the field also- The reference to the animals may simply be an expansion of the idea of the nations having been given to him. Or perhaps there was a sense in which even the natural creation recognized that they had a new human master. This was to be the extent of God's communication of this truth. We note that the iron rather than the wooden yoke was placed upon the Gentile nations because of Hananiah's awful sin and the way Judah eagerly believed him (:13). If they had rejected him and accepted Jeremiah's message, then the yoke of Babylon upon the nations would have been lighter; and had they accepted Nebuchadnezzar as being Yahweh's servant and thereby willingly served Him through serving Babylon, it would have been broken altogether. So much was potentially possible for the Gentiles had Judah repented.

Jeremiah 28:15 Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah: Yahweh has not sent you; but you make this people to trust in a lie- The invitation to Hananiah to "hear..." was because this was an appeal for his repentance. The planned death of Hananiah could have not happened, had he repented. He didn't, and the people willingly believed his lies, because it was a message they were predisposed to accept. This is why false teaching is listened to. It is a question of moral rather than intellectual failure.

Jeremiah 28:16 Therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will send you away from off the surface of the land: this year you shall die, because you have spoken rebellion against Yahweh- He had a year to repent, but he didn't, and the fact he died only two months later suggests he hardened himself in his false message (:17). To refuse the yoke of Babylon was rebellion against Yahweh. For Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant, and so accepting bondage to him was accepting servitude to Yahweh. The allusion is to Dt. 13:5, where the false prophet who spoke rebellion against Yahweh was to be killed (s.w.), because he was bringing the people back into bondage. This is the great paradox- that refusal of the ties that bind to God is a return to bondage. And accepting His bondage is freedom.

Jeremiah 28:17 So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month- He died two *months* later (:1), perhaps alluding to his claim that the yoke would be broken within two *years*.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 29

Jeremiah 29:1 Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the residue of the elders of the captivity, and to the priests, to the prophets, and to all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon- This prophecy is in line with that of the good and bad figs of Jer. 24. The good figs were to be those who had first gone into captivity, who were to repent and then return; the bad figs referred to Zedekiah and his courtiers, and he is referred to as this in :17. But as noted on Jer. 24, that prophecy had only potential fulfillment and did not come true as potentially possible. That must be remembered in interpreting what follows here.

Jeremiah 29:2 (after that Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem)- These craftsmen may have been deported because they had helped build defences against the Babylonians. But the words are also used for the formers of idols; perhaps they were taken away so that those who remained would have less chance of committing idolatry and would repent.

Jeremiah 29:3 by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), saying- Zedekiah was Babylon's puppet king and so there was regular sending of messengers between the two cities.

Jeremiah 29:4 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, to all the captivity, whom I have caused to be carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon- The reminder was that the carrying into captivity had been done by God; the Babylonians were His servants, their armies controlled by Yahweh of armies. They were to realize this, and serve Babylon as if serving Yahweh.

Jeremiah 29:5 Build houses and dwell in them; and plant gardens and eat their fruit- This was a direct quotation from Is. 65:21 and Am. 9:14 about the situation in the Kingdom of God. Whilst waiting for the restoration of that Kingdom, they were to live the kingdom life as far as possible in exile; just as we are to live the life of the Kingdom, the eternal life, in this life. See on Jer. 30:18.

Jeremiah 29:6 Take wives, and father sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there, and don't be diminished- This would be stating the obvious unless we understand it as meaning that the Jews were being encouraged to intermarry with the people of Babylon. This was a special dispensation for a special occasion; because as noted on :7, the Divine intention was that Babylon should repent, and along with repentant Judah become part of a restored Kingdom of God on earth based in Zion.

Jeremiah 29:7 Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to Yahweh for it; for in its peace you shall have peace- "Peace" is often peace with God. Babylon could have repented; see on :6 and Jer. 51:8,9. Jer. 33:6; 43:12 can be read as meaning that it was God's intention that Babylon too should find peace with Him; Babylon's peace was to be that of Judah. From Zion, peace would be spoken to the Gentiles (Zech. 9:10). They were to pray for "peace" upon Babylon in the sense of peace with God; but either they didn't pray for this, returning to their nationalism and racial elitism; or Babylon didn't want it. Hence the predictions of the destruction of Babylon in later Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 29:8 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Don't let your prophets who are in the midst of you, and your diviners, deceive you; neither listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed- The prophets were "in the midst" of Jerusalem, in Zion itself. The common people caused the false prophets to dream their dreams; the expectations and hopes of the masses were perceived by the false prophets, and they perhaps genuinely dreamed what the people wanted; but those dreams were not of God but just the usual outcome of subconscious psychological forces in the Freudian sense.

Jeremiah 29:9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name: I have not sent them, says Yahweh- As explained on :8, it is one thing to have a dream, as the normal outcome of unconscious psychological forces; but it is quite another to falsely claim that this is from God. It is a playing God in the worst way.

Jeremiah 29:10 For thus says Yahweh, After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you and perform My word of grace towards you, in causing you to return to this place- The 70 year period of Jer. 25:11,12 didn't come true exactly. The 70 years of Babylon's mastery and Judah's captivity were not strictly fulfilled to the letter. See on :32 and Jer. 27:7; 31:22. That period was to involve the surrounding nations being subject to Babylon for that period. It was a potential, one of many possible scenarios. The nations around Judah didn't serve Babylon for 70 years. If the exiles had repented as intended, and had brought the other nations to accept Yahweh, then this may have been the scenario. But that didn't happen, and so as explained on Jer. 25:12, the period was recalculated and reinterpreted. And as noted on Jer. 10:18, the land was not completely desolate for the 70 year period. A 70 year period of desolation for Tyre in Is. 23:17 likewise didn't have a literal fulfillment because various unstated preconditions weren't met. From BC606, the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer. 25:1), to the fall of Babylon in BC539, is 67 years, not 70. So there was some flexibility in the time period. Yet the same 70 year period is mentioned here in Jer. 29:10 in a prophecy apparently given 11 years later than that of Jer. 25:12.

So the 70 years of Babylon's mastery and Judah's captivity were not strictly fulfilled to the letter. From the fall of Nineveh (612) to the fall of Babylon (539) was 73 years; or from Nebuchadnezzar's accession (605) to Babylon's fall (539) was 66 years (Dates taken from John Bright, *Jeremiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) p. 209). Was there a degree to which the period was prolonged or decreased, due to unstated variables- perhaps prayer, Judah's repentance, Babylon's repentance...?

Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49

years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. And yet there again, Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years (Ez. 4:6). Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... Perhaps some restoration could have happened to the ten tribes after 390 years (Ez. 4:5), although there's no sign it ever did. And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. In fact, if a person had been found who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap' (Ez. 22:30), God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. There were simply so many possible scenarios!

Baruch 6:2 is perhaps the most serious example of misquoting and willfully misunderstanding God's word. Here, Baruch [as Jeremiah's scribe] changes the prophecy of Jer. 29:10, that Israel were to be 70 years in Babylon and then return: "When you reach Babylon you will be there many years, a period seven generations long, after which I will bring you back". The 70 years are turned into seven generations. This was precisely the mindset spoken against in Haggai 1:2, whereby the Jews reasoned that the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple. "The time" referred to the time spoken of by Jeremiah- but Baruch had re-interpreted the 70 years as meaning seven generations. And yet all this was done with a surface-level reverence for God's word- the exiles considered themselves blessed because they had God's law (Baruch 4:4). Indeed, much of Baruch is a condemnation of idols and a demand to worship Yahweh. See on Jer. 27:12.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says Yahweh, thoughts of peace, and not of evil- The same words are found in Jer. 18:8; God will indeed think evil towards His people if they do not repent; but He says now that He thinks not evil but peace. This could be a reflection of His desperate hope and assumption that they would repent; or it could simply be that the pole of His desire for peace with men is finally stronger than His legitimate need to bring the evil of judgment upon them.

To give you hope and a future- God gave Judah in captivity "hope in your latter end" (RV)- a hope of restoration at the end of the 70 years. Yet they preferred the Babylon life, and rejected this hope. "Ye shall seek me…and I will be found of you" (Jer. 29:14) then becomes a conditional statement- then, *if* they sought the Lord, they would have been found of Him.

Stand and watch a stream of people passing along a busy street. The eager young woman, the tired, worried business man, the young father, the old, sick man, the middle aged woman with the blank eyes... the greatest tragedy to me is not so much death, that one day relatively soon these faces will all be face down or face up in the

dust of death, but rather... the tragedy is surely that they are living life without purpose. But for us, we recognize that God has a plan for us- and that plan is positive, to do us good and not harm in our latter end. Nothing is insignificant in our lives. Even the smallest incidents have significance for our character development. No meeting with anyone is a chance; we have the power of eternal life in our clumsy hands, through knowing the Gospel of life. Whoever we meet we are surely intended to meet, and extend the hope of life to them. Having a sense of purpose simplifies life. There are less choices; we don't over-extend ourselves trying to do too much, with all the stress and conflict which this results in. It is meaningless work rather than overwork that wears us down and robs us of our joy.

Jeremiah 29:12 You shall call on Me, and you shall go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you- As explained on :11, God is assuming Israel's repentance. Here we have His fantasy, if you like, of God for Israel. They would call upon Him and want to "go and pray to Me", in Jerusalem; and He would confirm that desire by miraculously returning them to Zion. But they didn't repent. And yet He still caused Cyrus to give the decree encouraging them to return- such was His desire to as it were force through His saving purpose with His people. That most of them didn't respond even to that is terrible, just as it is today.

Jeremiah 29:13 You shall seek Me and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart- Repentance and seeking God are related; thus Israel's restoration came when they were seeking God and (i.e.) repented (Jer. 29:12-14). However, there is good reason to think that Israel at this time were still spiritually weak; some of them had a *desire* to seek righteousness, and God accepted this. The connection between repentance and seeking God means that to withdraw fellowship from someone for not repenting enough, is to disfellowship them for not seeking God enough. The implication is that the rest of us have sought God enough- and therefore found Him. This is pure self-righteousness. In conclusion, God wants us to *be seeking* Him, but this *seeking* God does not imply *complete* repentance and forsaking of sin. There seems no reason to think that we should break fellowship with someone for not seeking God *enough*, if we admit that they are not seeking *evil*.

The LXX suggests that the praying and seeking was perhaps a condition of fulfillment: "And do ye pray to me, and I will hearken...and do ye earnestly seek me, and ye shall find me". But the next verses go on to say that because they had false prophets in Babylon, the wrath of God was against them all, and even those in the land would suffer because of them. And further (29:23-26), they committed adultery and vied for leadership amongst themselves. Judah did return, but evidently they didn't seek Yahweh with all their hearts beforehand. And thus they were not fully found of Him, and He did not therefore fully turn away their captivity. Indeed, by choosing to remain in Babylon, they themselves disallowed this turning away of their captivity.

Jeremiah 29:14 I will be found by you, says Yahweh, and I will turn again your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places where I have driven you, says Yahweh; and I will bring you again to the place from where I caused you to be carried away captive- As explained on :11,12, God is assuming Israel's repentance. Here we have His fantasy, if you like, of God for Israel. They would call upon Him and want to "go and pray to Me", in Jerusalem (:12); and He

would confirm that desire by miraculously returning them to Zion. God gave Judah in captivity "hope in your latter end" (:11 RV)- a hope of restoration at the end of the 70 years. Yet they preferred the Babylon life, and rejected this hope. "Ye shall seek me…and I will be found of you" (Jer. 29:14) then becomes a conditional statement- then, *if* they sought the Lord, they would have been found of Him.

Jeremiah 29:15 Because you have said, Yahweh has raised us up prophets in Babylon- Just as the faith of others can lead to forgiveness and salvation of third parties in some cases (see on Mk. 2:5), so the opposite can be the case. Because the exiles in Babylon chose to believe their false prophets and disbelieve Ezekiel who was there with them, therefore the "bad figs" would indeed be bad figs; those left in Judah were to receive judgment. Whereas in the Divine economy, those "bad figs" could have been saved by the repentance of the exiles who were already in Babylon. A lot depended upon that group, as Ezekiel often reminds them. See on :22.

Jeremiah 29:16 thus says Yahweh concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your brothers who haven't gone forth with you into captivity- As explained on :15, although these men were evil, God was prepared to avert or ameliorate their judgment for the sake of the spirituality and repentance of the exiles already in Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:17 thus says Yahweh of Armies; Behold, I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that can't be eaten, they are so bad- See on :1. As explained on :15, the "vile figs" were indeed "vile", but their judgment could have been averted or ameliorated for the sake of the spirituality and repentance of the exiles already in Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:18 I will pursue after them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth, to be an object of horror, and an astonishment- This removing / tossing to and from of Judah from their land uses the same word as in Dt. 28:25; in response to their breaking of the covenant, they would be "removed (s.w.) into all the kingdoms of the *eretz*, throughout the land promised to Abraham. But this curse could have been turned into a blessing; for the restoration prophets envisaged the nations of the *eretz* repenting and converting to Yahweh. This could have been achieved by the exiles witnessing to the various peoples and languages within the Babylonian / Persian empire. But this didn't happen as was potentially possible. The exiles didn't repent, and so their repentance and experience of the grace of forgiveness was not the powerful pattern of conversion to their neighbours which it could have been.

And a hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations where I have driven them- The hissing and mocking was because Jerusalem had been praised in David's psalms (e.g. Ps. 48:2; 50:2) as the joy of the whole earth and perfect in beauty (Lam. 2:15). Those Psalms of David were well known; for David after the Bathsheba incident had vowed to preach the good news of Yahweh's grace to the entire world. He had done so through his Psalms. His music ministry had been successful; the nations knew the songs about Zion being the joy of the whole earth and the perfection of beauty. And so they mocked it as it lay in ruins.

Jeremiah 29:19 because they have not listened to My words, says Yahweh, with which I sent to them My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but you

would not hear, says Yahweh- Those left in Jerusalem were indeed "vile figs" and had refused the prophetic word of Jeremiah and other true prophets. But they could have been forgiven for that for the sake of the repentance of the exiles in Babylon. Likewise the paralyzed man of Mk. 2:5 had his sins forgiven for the sake of the friends. Just as happened when Job prayed for his friends.

Jeremiah 29:20 Hear therefore the word of Yahweh, all you of the captivity, whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon- As noted on :1, this prophecy is addressing the same two groups as in Jer. 24; the captives were intended to repent and become the good figs, whereas Zedekiah and his courtiers who remained in Jerusalem would become the bad figs (Jer. 29:17). But that prophecy was only potentially true. Because now in Jer. 29:21-32 Jeremiah warns the exiles, those who were supposed to become good figs, that they were tolerating false prophets and following them.

Jeremiah 29:21 Thus says Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who prophesy a lie to you in My name: Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall kill them before your eyes- The "lie" was that of the serpent, "you will not really die", you have not sinned and will not sin, it is Yahweh who is being unreasonable with you... These false prophets were presumably targeted by Nebuchadnezzar because they predicted his overthrow and the restoration of the Jewish kingdom. But that was precisely the message of Jeremiah; but he was treated well by the Babylonians, because he saw these things as dependent upon Jewish servitude to Nebuchadnezzar, who he presented as a servant of Yahweh.

Jeremiah 29:22 and of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captives of Judah who are in Babylon saying, Yahweh make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire- Again we see the fickleness of God's people when they act *en masse*. They eagerly believed these men (:15), and then cursed them when they were burnt to death in the fiery furnace. Daniel's faithful friends had been saved out of that same furnace; perhaps they had blasphemously claimed to be equal to them, and certain of preservation likewise.

Jeremiah 29:23 because they have worked folly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken words in My name falsely, which I didn't command them; and I am He who knows, and am witness, says Yahweh- The uninspired apocryphal book of Susanna claims that two false prophets who were her neighbours tried to rape her in a park in Babylon, but she resisted them. She complained of their behaviour, but they falsely accused her and she was condemned to death- to be saved by the intervention of Daniel the prophet, who had the two rapists condemned to death. Whether this is true or not can never be known, but it would slot in at this point with the inspired account. And again we see that false teaching is nearly always associated with immorality, often in the sexual sense- rather than being a genuine intellectual misunderstanding.

Jeremiah 29:24 Concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite you shall speak saying- "Nehelamite" is literally a dreamer, a false prophet.

Jeremiah 29:25 Thus speaks Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, saying, Because you have sent letters in your own name to all the people who are at Jerusalem, and to

Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests saying- He wrote probably in the name of God; but God knew that he wrote only in his own name. Just as the prophets had their own dreams, but played God by claiming they were speaking in God's Name. This confusion between our name and God's Name is just as tempting today; e.g. the pastor who claims he has had a word from the Lord which requires his congregation to buy him an expensive luxury item.

Jeremiah 29:26 Yahweh has made you priest in the place of Jehoiada the priest, that there may be officers in the house of Yahweh, for every man who is mad, and makes himself a prophet, that you should put him in the stocks and in shackles- If Zephaniah son of Maaseiah (:25) was the brother of the false prophet in Babylon, Zedekiah son of Maaseiah (:21), then the political intrigue and nepotism is clear. This was of men and not God. The supposed command from Yahweh to put false prophets who were mad into the stocks runs quite contrary to the spirit of the law of Moses. Death was the punishment for false prophets, not public mockery. And mental instability was never a cause for punishment under Yahweh's law; that is the stuff of pure paganism. We note that both the Lord and Paul were likewise accused of madness, just as we too are viewed as "crazy" and "fools" by secular society.

Jeremiah 29:27 Now therefore, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth, who makes himself a prophet to you- Jeremiah accused the false prophets likewise of making themselves prophets. Clearly one side was right and the other wrong. The whole thing was set up like this so that the spiritually minded would intuitively perceive where the truth was.

Jeremiah 29:28 because he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, The captivity is long: build houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat their fruit?- By implication, the message therefore of the false prophets was that the captivity would be short, and perhaps instead of submitting to Babylon as a sign of their repentance and settling in there, the false prophets were teaching rebellion against Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:29 Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet- This was all in public, at the temple, in some kind of public trial.

Jeremiah 29:30 Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah, saying- This was presumably at the same time as the public trial (:29). Or maybe Jeremiah walked away with nothing more to say, leaving the people to perceive intuitively where truth lay. And then Yahweh spoke.

Jeremiah 29:31 Send to all them of the captivity saying, Thus says Yahweh concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I didn't send him, and he has caused you to trust in a lie- Causing to trust in a lie was the essence of the sin in Eden; the events there are the prototype of all subsequent human failure. The accusation that they had willingly trusted in lies is found throughout Jeremiah (s.w. Jer. 7:4,8; 13:25; 28:15). The people willingly believed his lies, because it was a message they were predisposed to accept. This is why false teaching is listened to. It is a question of moral rather than intellectual failure.

Jeremiah 29:32 therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his seed; he shall not have a man to dwell among this people, neither

shall he see the good that I will do to My people, says Yahweh, because he has spoken rebellion against Yahweh- The implication is that that generation would "see the good that I will do to My people"; but Shemaiah would die prematurely and would not see it. This is further evidence that the idea of 70 years captivity was not the only possible prophetic scenario at the time; see on :10.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 30

J*eremiah 30:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying*- Previously in Jeremiah there has been the implication that right up to the last minute, the fall of Jerusalem and exile was avoidable by repentance. Now in Jer. 30-34 we have the tacit assumption that this will indeed happen, but the focus is upon the future restoration from that calamity, and the way it was designed to elicit repentance.

Jeremiah 30:2 Thus speaks Yahweh, the God of Israel saying, Write all the words that I have spoken to you in a book- This may refer specifically to Jer. 30-34, the prophecies of the restoration which were to be the spiritual handbook for the exiles, in that their experiences were to be understood in this context as leading them to repentance.

Jeremiah 30:3 For, behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will turn again the captivity of My people Israel and Judah, says Yahweh; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it- Time and again, Jeremiah had prophesied how Yahweh would *bring again* His people and the vessels of the temple back to the land (Jer. 30:3,18; 31:23); and this all had a fulfillment in the return from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah. It was then that in some sense Yahweh 'brought again Zion' (Is. 52:8). The very same word used by Joel [translated "bring again"] is to be found in the references to Judah's return at the restoration (Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh. 7:6; 8:17). The same word is to be found in Ezekiel 38:8 and 39:27, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. Their return from exile at what is called 'the restoration' wasn't associated with a return to God in repentance; and so these prophecies have been reapplied and rescheduled, to the repentance of a new, spiritual Israel under the new covenant in Jesus Christ; and to the final repentance and return of God's natural people.

Jeremiah 30:4 These are the words that Yahweh spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah- It was God's intention that the experience of repentance and receipt of grace would lead to both Judah and the ten tribe Israel being united, and returning as united to Zion. This didn't happen, but the unity of the new Israel is predicated upon these experiences (and not simply upon a common theology).

Jeremiah 30:5 For thus says Yahweh: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace- It was God's intention to bring peace at that time, peace with Him through repentance (see on Jer. 29:11), but instead their lack of repentance left them in chronic fear and trembling at the prospect of destruction by Babylon. They should have trembled (s.w.) at God's word in repentance (Ezra 9:4; 10:3; Is. 66:2,5); but they

now trembled at the prospect of condemnation. Whichever way, man comes to trembling before his God. And we are to tremble and repent, rather than trembling in the condemnation of the last day.

Jeremiah 30:6 Ask now, and see whether a man does travail with child: why do I see every man with his hands on his waist, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness?- The psychological collapse of the condemned is a major theme of the prophecies of judgment. But even in the figure of men becoming like travailing women, there is within the metaphor the hope of new birth. GNB "Can a man give birth to a child?" suggests that what might seem impossible would in fact be brought about by God's grace. "Waist" is GNB "stomach".

Jeremiah 30:7 Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it- The Divine intention was that the Babylonian invasion and destruction of Jerusalem was to be unprecedented. But Dan. 12:1 reapplies this language to the last days, when Jacob's final time of trouble will be ended by the resurrection from the dead at the coming of "Michael", representing the Lord Jesus. The planned potential didn't happen at the time of Babylon, but these words will come to their final term in the last days. Jacob's previous 'times of trouble' had all been at the hands of their neighbouring enemies (Jud. 10:14; Neh. 9:27; Jer. 14:8) and Esau, and so it shall be in the final time of trouble for Jacob. The salvation of Jacob from the time of trouble is however defined in Jer. 15:11 as being through the salvation of a remnant of them.

The Lord seems to allude here, and direct us to understand that these words will be fulfilled in the last days: "Then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Mt. 24:21).

Jeremiah 30:8 It shall come to pass in that day, says Yahweh of Armies, that I will break his yoke from off your neck, and will burst your bonds; and strangers shall no more make him their bond servant- The pure grace of God's dealings with Jacob is brought out in how Jer. 30:7,8 prophecies that in the time of Jacob's trouble, "I will break his [the invader's] yoke from off thy neck. This was the promise given to Esau- and one could say that Jacob having got all he did, at least Esau should be allowed to have the little promise given to him. But now even this is given to Jacob- at the time of his 'trouble, his final down treading for centuries of disobedience. Judah had "broken the yoke and burst the bonds" of their covenant relationship with God (Jer. 5:5), but He by grace had broken the yoke and bonds of those who enslaved them (Jer. 2:20; 30:8).

Jeremiah 30:9 But they shall serve Yahweh their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up to them- The yoke of servitude to Babylon was to be replaced by the lighter yoke of servitude to Yahweh and "David", a Messianic ruler in the line of David. This could have been Zerubbabel, but he failed; and so clearly the prophecy has final fulfillment in the Lord Jesus, who was "raised up" from the dead by Yahweh.

Jeremiah 30:10 Therefore don't you be afraid, O Jacob my servant, says Yahweh; neither be dismayed, Israel- Isaiah's restoration prophecies contained not only many clear commands to *not fear* at the time of the restoration (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8; 51:7; 54:4), but also a clear statement that if they were truly the re-established Kingdom, they would not fear: "Thou afflicted, tossed with tempest [s.w. Zechariah

7:14 re. how Judah was 'tossed around' by the 70 years captivity] I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires... and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for *thou shalt not fear*: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee... and all thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Is. 54:11-14). The adversaries to the rebuilding *did* make the returned exiles afraid: "For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands" (Neh. 6:9). Likewise Ezra 3:3: "And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries". Nehemiah exhorted the people *not* to be afraid perhaps on the basis of Jeremiah's words (Neh. 4:14). Their fear and problem-oriented view of life stopped the Kingdom bursting forth into their experience. That fear was rooted in an obsessive self-interest that eclipsed a true faith in that which is greater and larger than us as individuals. And so it can be with us.

For, behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid- This salvation from far off must be understood in the context of how God says that He was potentially near to Judah, but they had chosen to keep Him "far off" (s.w.) in their hearts; see on Jer. 12:2;23:23. Even from that situation, God's grace could work on their hearts. They were taken "far [off]" to captivity because they had Him far from their hearts.

Jeremiah 30:11 For I am with you, says Yahweh, to save you- This alludes to Isaiah's "Emmanuel" prophecy of the Messiah who would be "God with us". 'Yah's salvation' is Yehoshua, Jesus.

For I will make a full end of all the nations where I have scattered you, but I will not make a full end of you- Earlier God had threatened to make a full end, the same phrase is found in Is. 10:23 and Zeph. 1:18. But now God promises that He will not make a full end (Jer. 5:10,18; 4:27; 30:11; 46:28). God is not capricious; but His love and pity is such that He is unafraid to not do according to His wrath. In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority. And this God is our God. This change by God was in response to Jeremiah's prayer of Jer. 10:24, where the same words are used; Jeremiah as representative of the people asked not to be corrected to the point of destruction, but to be corrected "in measure". See on :19.

But I will correct you in measure, and will in no way leave you unpunished- The frequent appeals for Judah to be "instructed" use the same word translated "punish" (Lev. 26:18). The idea was that the punishments were to be instruction; they were not the lashing out of an offended Deity. It was God's hope, even 'fantasy' would not be too strong a word, that His people would realize this, and come to say "You punished / instructed me, and I was instructed" (Jer. 31:18 s.w.). That correction / punishment was to be "in measure", the same phrase is used by Jeremiah as Judah's representative when he asked to be corrected "with justice / judgment" (Jer. 10:18). His personal reformation was to be that of Judah; see on :13. The paradox is that Judah deserved total destruction, as Jeremiah and other prophets do state at times; and yet the "just" judgment was that which resulted in reformation and not total destruction. That justice involved them not being left "unpunished"; the guilty cannot be "cleared" (s.w. "unpunished"; Ex. 34:7; Nah. 1:3). That is a fundamental part of God's character. The problem was that the Jews of Jeremiah's time considered themselves "innocent" (Jer.

2:35 s.w. "unpunished"). They had to be convicted both of their sin and of God's grace, in punishing / correcting them less than their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13).

Jeremiah 30:12 For thus says Yahweh, Your hurt is incurable, and your wound grievous- But Yahweh healed the incurable (Jer. 30:17). This is the Bible paradox of God's love of Israel and desire for their redemption. As noted on :11, they deserved total destruction, but God's wonderful way with Israel was to punish them less than their sins deserved and yet do so with justice.

Jeremiah 30:13 There is none to plead your cause, that you may be bound up: you have no healing medicines- The false prophets had failed to heal them by offering them "peace" without repentance (s.w. Jer. 6:14; 8:11). As noted on :11, Jeremiah was Judah's representative, and he too had been healed when there was no healing possible apart from the Divine (Jer. 17:14 s.w.). Jeremiah in depression seems to have lost faith in the healing promised in Jer. 30:13, for he laments amongst the ruins of Jerusalem that Zion is without a healer (Lam. 2:13).

Jeremiah 30:14 All your lovers have forgotten you; they don't seek you- The lovers were the surrounding nations whom she had trusted in; they were destroyed by Babylon or sided with Babylon.

For I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the greatness of your iniquity, because your sins were increased- God was the healer of the wound as well as the wounder (:15). Let us not forget His hurt and experience of having been wounded. In Jer. 6:7, God laments that the continual bubbling forth of their wickedness, as from a perpetual fountain, was matched in His continual woundedness. That God can be wounded by our behaviour... is a stunning concept. This reveals the extent to which God has sensitized Himself toward man, when we are but ants before Him, the King of the cosmos. Yet the same word is used here of the deep wounding of God's people by the invaders (Jer. 14:17; 30:14); but God felt that Himself even before they did.

Jeremiah 30:15 Why do you cry for your hurt? Your pain is incurable: for the greatness of your iniquity, because your sins were increased, I have done these things to you- The wounder was God, who was Himself wounded in their hurt, and yet He was also their healer. See on :14. Their wound was incurable by any apart from Him.

Jeremiah 30:16 Therefore all those who devour you shall be devoured; and all your adversaries, each one of them, shall go into captivity; and those who despoil you shall be a spoil, and all who prey on you will I give for a prey- God's love for Israel is such that even in their guilt He still avenges them. The structure of the book of Revelation reflects the principles of this verse; the seals speak of the judgments on Israel in the last days, but they are very similar to the later series of judgments, which are upon her latter day desolators. "Devour" means to consume to destruction; the paradox is that Israel were devoured but survived by grace, just as they were cured of an incurable wound. The adversaries of Judah didn't all go into exile at the time of Jeremiah; this is another indication that these prophecies of the restoration are to be reapplied and rescheduled to the last days.

Jeremiah 30:17 For I will restore health to you, and I will heal you of your wounds, says Yahweh- To be cured of an incurable wound was to be achieved only by God's

grace. Likewise the broken earthen bottle which was smashed couldn't be made whole again- apparently (Jer. 19:11). But the miracle of grace was that like the useless burnt vine branch of Ez. 15 and the marred linen girdle buried by the Euphrates, the smashed bottle, like Ezekiel's dry bones vision, could be made whole again. The stripes upon the suffering servant could 'heal' Israel (s.w. "made whole", Is. 53:5). Jeremiah had preached as much, that being made whole again was possible (Jer. 3:22; 30:17; 33:6 s.w.). The rhetorical question of Lam. 2:13 "Zion... who can heal you / make you whole again?" (s.w.) had its answer in Yahweh.

Because they have called you an outcast, saying, It is Zion, whom no man seeks after- God is very sensitive to the words said about His people, even when they are suffering for their sins. His patience and hurt with all the countless words of anti-Jewish mockery over the centuries... is the more amazing. None of Zion's one time lovers sought her (:14). But God did. And His desperate hope was that they would seek Him, and He would as it were meet them in joy. God is in search of man, of Israel in particular; our 'search for the truth' or 'for God' is not made in limbo, beneath the apparent silence of the steely skies. God is in search of man too. "And going out to find Him, I met Him coming toward me", in the words of a Yiddish poem. They were indeed outcasts, thrust away ones, because the false prophets had thrust them away from Yahweh (Dt. 13:10 s.w.), and God had confirmed this by 'casting them out' as outcast from Him (s.w. Jer. 8:3; 29:18). But still God was and is so deeply sensitive to that being negatively commented upon.

Jeremiah 30:18 Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will turn again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have compassion on his dwelling places- Although Judah were encouraged to build houses in Babylon (Jer. 29:5), they were to perceive them as mere "tents" compared to their permanent dwelling place, which was back in the cities of Israel. And this is how we ought to perceive our homes, even if we lived in the house we were born in all our days. They are but tents compared to the ultimate permanence of our place in God's Kingdom.

And the city shall be built again on its own hill, and the palace shall be inhabited in its own former way- Jer. 30:18 RSV prophesies: "the city shall be builded *upon her own heap*, and the palace shall be *where it used to be*". And passages as varied as Zech. 1, Ps. 68 and Micah 4 all insist that the temple of the restored Kingdom was to built *within* the city of Jerusalem. This would all point towards the temple commanded in Ez. 40-48 being smaller than the huge edifice envisioned by Henry Sulley. See on Ez. 45:1.

Jeremiah 30:19 Out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of those who make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small- See on :11. "Few" is literally "brought to nothing". Judah were not literally 'brought to nothing'. This was in response to Jeremiah's prayer in Jer. 10:24- to correct / punish [s.w.] Judah, but not bring them to nothing. The promise of multiplication obviously alludes to the promises to Abraham; these were to be the basis of the new covenant which Judah were to enter, seeing that they had broken the old covenant.

Jeremiah 30:20 Their children also shall be as before, and their congregation shall be established before Me; and I will punish all who oppress them- The emphasis is upon restoration, "as before". The future kingdom of God will be a reestablishment of the Kingdom of God as it was in the form of Israel. The congregation "established

before Me" uses the language of the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7:16,26. The seed of David would be "before Me" for ever; the promises to David could have been fulfilled at Jeremiah's time, but they were not. And so the restoration will come to its final term in the last days through the Lord Jesus, the great seed of David.

Jeremiah 30:21 Their prince shall be of themselves, and their ruler shall proceed from their midst; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach to Me- When Judah returned, they could have entered into the new covenant, featuring "nobles [an intensive plural, meaning 'the great noble']… and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (Jer. 30:21). He would be a Jew, not a Gentile, fulfilling the promises to David (see on :20). Zerubabbel the Governor could have fulfilled this; but he flunked out. Yet God lifted up his spirit a second time (Hag. 1:14 cp. (Hag. 1:14 cp. Ezra 1:5); he was given a second chance, such was God's enthusiasm that he should achieve what was potentially possible for him. But again, he failed. He saw the glory of Babylon as more attractive than the hard work required to bring about Yahweh's eternal glory in Zion. It is noteworthy how God worked through this man's failures, and desired to give him (and all Israel) further opportunities. See on Jer. 23:5.

This leader who would come close to God in mediation would be willing to give his life to enable this. This must be connected with how Is. 53, describing Messiah's death, is actually in a restoration context (beginning in Is. 52). Could it not be that a Messiah figure could have arisen and died a sacrificial death to bring his people to God? Daniel 9 likewise associates the rebuilding of Zion with the death of "Messiah the prince" to reconcile Israel to God- perhaps potentially possible within a literal 70 week period from Cyrus' decree?

For who is he who has had boldness to approach to Me? says Yahweh- AV "who is this that engaged his heart to approach...". The Hebrew is literally 'who has braided / intermixed his heart'. David was a man after God's own heart, and his greater son was likewise to have a heart braided with that of God. It was the Lord Jesus, the man with the heart of God, who alone is able to fully approach unto God.

Jeremiah 30:22 You shall be My people, and I will be your God- Again this refers to the promises to Abraham; Judah would truly be the promised seed. The new covenant they would accept would be based upon the promises to Abraham.

Jeremiah 30:23 Behold, the storm of Yahweh, His wrath, has gone forth, a sweeping storm: it shall burst on the head of the wicked- This threat of terrible judgment is juxtaposed purposefully next to the language of the restoration. The wrath of God is indeed the prelude to the love of God. This is the same idea as the cherubim storm being used by Ezekiel to represent how the armies of Babylon had already "gone forth" and were about to burst over the wicked in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 30:24 The fierce anger of Yahweh will not return, until He has executed, and until He has performed the intentions of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it- There is a gap between God's statements and their execution, and in that gap there can be human repentance which means that the initial intentions or statements of God do not come about. But there had been no take up of that opportunity, and so the intents of God's heart concerning judgment were to come true. In repentance, "in the latter days", this would be completely, clearly understood. But the intents of God's heart were and are the salvation of His people; see on Jer. 29:11.

In this case, the wrath of God works towards this situation, whereby His saving, restoring purpose is made real.

The repentance of Israel must be associated with an opening of their eyes to God's word. There is no other way men can come to repentance. Jer. 30:24 prophecies Jacob's final homecoming, and then comments: "In the latter days (not now) ye shall consider (understand) it". *Then* Israel will consider and understand the words of their prophets. "The Lord hath poured out upon (Israel) the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes (quoted in Rom. 11:8 concerning Israel's blindness to Christ)... the vision of all (God's word) is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed... (but) in that day shall the (spiritually) deaf hear the words of the book" (Is. 29:10,11,17,18). This will be when the book is *un*sealed at "the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). We have shown elsewhere that Israel's minority repentance must occur prior to the Lord's return. Therefore there must be an upsurge in Biblical activity amongst those who will become the faithful remnant in latter day Israel. This will be brought about by the Elijah prophet- remembering that the Elijah prophet is framed in Malachi as a teacher of God's word, not just an imparter of it. Likewise John, in the spirit of Elijah, *taught* the people about the Lord's advent.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 31

Jeremiah 31:1 At that time, says Yahweh, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people- The intention was that the ten tribes along with Judah would repent and return together to Zion, entering covenant relationship again under a new covenant based upon the promises to Abraham, whereby all Abraham's seed were God's people (Gen. 17:8). It is the common relationship of God's people to the same one God, the joint experience of repentance and forgiveness, which binds His people together. This potential didn't happen, and therefore is delayed until the last days and also reapplied in the experience of God's redeemed people today.

Jeremiah 31:2 Thus says Yahweh, The people who were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest- The implication is that many Israelites perished in Egypt by "the sword", and then found grace in the covenant made with them after leaving Egypt, in the Sinai wilderness. "The sword" is used to heighten the similarities with those who survived the Babylonian onslaught, and in "the wilderness" of Babylon became the good figs of Jer. 24 who would repent and also find grace in a new covenant. That was the intention. Despite living in houses in Babylon on a permanent basis (Jer. 29:28), they were (like us) to perceive that life as temporary, and the sophisticated city of Babylon as a wilderness. As God caused Israel to find "rest" in the promised land through Joshua-Jesus, so the exiles were intended to; and so can we in some sense allow God to cause us to enter into that rest (Heb. 4:3). Despite God causing them to enter the rest, they didn't (Heb. 3:11). The causative power of God was refused by them, just as His people today can refuse the Holy Spirit's work.

They found grace in that they left Egypt taking the idols of Egypt with them, and actually wanted to return to Egypt. Just as Hosea knowingly married a prostitute, as God knew Israel's unfaithfulness from the start. The hint is that Israel in exile could likewise be saved by grace.

Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel "found grace in the wilderness" before, and they would do again, "When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest" (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would "cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". This is why Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11). Jer. 31:2 had prophesied of the returning Jews: "The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him *to rest*"- just as Zech. 1:11 describes the land being "at rest" when they returned to rebuild Zion. My point is that Yahweh didn't give up with His people because many chose to remain in Babylon, and those who did make the journey didn't believe His promises of protection very strongly. He zealously worked with whatever they could present Him with. And yet in the immediate context, we read later in Jeremiah of how the Jews who were left in the land chose to go to live in Egypt rather than participate in this potential exodus from Egypt. They refused the potential of the new covenant.

Jeremiah 31:3 Yahweh appeared of old to me saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you- This had been Jeremiah's consistent message; that although he had to speak of judgment to come, the essence was God's love. As God potentially caused them to enter the reset (:2), so He drew them out of Egypt into the desert by grace, and so would He do in returning the exiles from Babylon to the promised land. But most preferred to remain in Babylon, just as the call of the Kingdom is resisted by many today. The Hebrew for "loving kindness" is related to the word for "grace" in :2. Perhaps Jeremiah as Judah's representative experienced this 'drawing up' unto salvation when he was "drawn up" out of certain death in the dungeon (Jer. 38:13, s.w. "with loving kindness have I drawn you [up]", Jer. 31:3).

Jeremiah 31:4 Again will I build you, and you shall be built, O virgin of Israel- But Judah easily gave up the work of building; they had to be constantly coaxed to get on with it by Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah. They were, however, effectively declining to allow themselves to be built up into God's Kingdom, because they were too worried about building their own houses than God's. And so insofar as we too decline the spiritual upbuilding which there is available in God's word, so we decline a part in God's work of building a house for His Name. God would "build you, and you shall be built, O virgin of Israel". The "virgin" here refers to the temple which was to be built by God, and yet it also clearly refers to the actual people of Judah who returned. In other words, their attitude to the temple was their attitude to themselves. Because they had such a low value of their own worth before God, they treated His work with a similar low value. And there is a great lesson for us here.

The promise of being built had been conditional upon their obedience in Jer. 12:16 ("if... *then* shall they be built..."). But now it appears the condition has been dropped.

Again you shall be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who make merry- The allusion is to Miriam and the women of Israel rejoicing after the exodus from Egypt. But as noted above, the Jews chose to go to Egypt rather than share this potential. Jer. 31:15 (cp. Mt. 2:18) speaks of how Rachel

weeps for her slain children, but here she is portrayed as a virgin who takes her tambourine in hand and dances, entering a new covenant with her *ba'al*, her Lord, her husband, who has obliterated the memory of all her sins in a way that only a Divine being could do. Women in love are stereotypically associated with emotions of giddiness, hysteria, excitement, joy... and this is the language applied to weeping Rachel, weeping over the children God had taken from her. And *yet*... according to the New Testament quotations and expositions of Jer. 31, this is the very same 'new covenant' into which we enter in baptism. This is God's joy over us, and it should be ours over Him. The "Again..." suggests that as Miriam and the women of Israel celebrated the Red Sea deliverance with tambourines and dancing, so all Israel would rejoice at the deliverance from Babylon. And yet most didn't want to leave Babylon, and the miserable few who did respond to Cyrus' decree returned seeking their own material benefit and grumbled at the famine they found in the land. This was because they had not really repented.

Jeremiah 31:5 Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy its fruit- The reference to Samaria reminds us that the ten and two tribes were to be united; see on :1. They did this at the restoration, but became so obsessed with treading out the grapes that they did it even on the Sabbath, and thereby disallowed the fulfillment of the Kingdom prophecies which were dependent upon them keeping the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15; Isaiah 58:13).

AV: "the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things". Under the law of Moses, the planter couldn't eat of the fruit of a vineyard until the fifth year after planting. For the first three years it was considered uncircumcised, unclean, and therefore not to be eaten; in the fourth year it was holy to the Lord, the fruit belonged to Him; in the fifth year the planter could eat of it for himself (Lev. 19:23-25). But under the new covenant, the formerly unclean could be eaten; just as the description of the new boundaries of Jerusalem later in this chapter include places previously thought to be unclean. The unclean would be counted clean- that's the message. And that was to be true of people too.

Jeremiah 31:6 For there shall be a day when the watchmen on the hills of Ephraim shall cry, Arise, and let us go up to Zion to Yahweh our God- The reference to Ephraim reminds us that the ten and two tribes were to be united; see on :1. The ten tribes would worship at Zion in the rebuilt temple, and not in Jeroboam's high places. But most of them chose to remain in captivity; so much potential was wasted. The new covenant would bring unity between God's people. And those of His people who refuse to live like that are thus placing their covenant relationship with God in question.

Jeremiah 31:7 For thus says Yahweh, Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout for the chief of the nations: publish, praise, and say, Yahweh, save Your people, the remnant of Israel- It was God's intention that the restoration would not only unite Israel and Judah (see on :1), but the surrounding nations would turn to Yahweh and rejoice in His grace to Jacob; they would urge Yahweh onwards in saving His people, and share in that gracious redemption.

Jeremiah 31:8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth, along with the blind and the lame, the woman with

child and her who travails with child together: a great company shall they return here- The language of lame, limping Jacob and his wives and their children together all suggests Jacob returning from exile to his homeland. This could have happened at the restoration. "Company" translates a Hebrew word often used in the prophets of the company of nations associated with Egypt or Babylon, who would invade Israel and then be punished (Ez. 32:23 etc.). But the promises to Abraham were that a "company" (s.w.) of nations would and could become part of Abraham's seed (Gen. 28:3; 35:11; 48:4). The "great company" who were to participate in the restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel was intended to include this great company of Gentile nations, who at that time were to be judged but were intended along with the remnant of Judah to repent and come into covenant relationship with Yahweh, to "know Yahweh" as Ezekiel often expresses it. “A great company” didn’t return from Babylon, according to the records in Ezra and Nehemiah. The majority chose to stay in comfortable Babylon.

Lame, disabled [limping] and women in labour are a way of saying "Vulnerable people". But it seems the idea is that these vulnerable, forgotten, not public people lead the triumphant procession to Zion. It is the classic inversion; not the brave warriors, but the weak and vulnerable and non-military people who are the true victors. They come not simply with cries of joy and triumph, but with weeping for their sins (:9), again an inversion of the image of the 'triumphant return home'.

Often Jeremiah has used the image of a woman in labour to describe the trauma of the Babylonian invasion and exile (Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6, e.g. "Inhabitant of Lebanon, who makes your nest in the cedars, how greatly to be pitied you will be when pangs come on you, the pain as of a woman in travail!"). That labour was in vain if no repentance had been elicited, if no "new man" had been born out of it. But now the women in labour return in triumph, in that they come with weeping for sins (:9). Indeed pain in labour is a result of sin, part of the curse of Gen. 3:16. But out of the results of sin and the suffering for sin, there comes wonderful new life. There's so much pain in the book of Jeremiah; and the lesson is that pain and suffering only has meaning if we let it work its intended fruit. Otherwise it is all the more tragic. So in this image, the cries of the women in labour are cries of repentance for sin (:9), and so the pain brings forth new birth. Hosea laments that Israel were in the pain of a woman stuck in labour, whose child remained at the critical and most painful point. Or as in Hezekiah's time, the child came to the birth but there was not strength to bring it forth.

There is also the suggestion that even the feeble and frail, those who ordinarily would not have strength for so long a journey, would be empowered to make it. We likewise who cannot make the journey... are likewise empowered.

Jeremiah 31:9 They shall come with weeping; and with petitions will I lead them- The weeping would be in repentance and they would be lead back to Zion in response to their petitions. And yet it would also be with the joy of people who know they have been forgiven (:4). But this wasn't the scene at the restoration; those who returned came as colonists do, seeking land for themselves and a good life. And they found famine in the land and cities in ruins. LXX, “They went forth with weeping, but with consolation will I bring them back". This matches the later prophecy that Rachel need not weep for her children because they will return. They didn't. We can understand this to be a wasted potential, which indeed it was; but the theme of the new covenant appears to be that these people who went into captivity will return to the land and

stand there redeemed and transformed. And that can only really come about by a literal resurrection of "all Israel" by grace alone.

I will cause them to walk by rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first born- Both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to have a Babylonian military escort on the journey back; they weren't sure that they would be given "a straight way" with Yahweh's protection. Neh. 4:10 records that "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is *decayed* [s.w. "stumble", Jer. 31:9], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". They were easily discouraged by the words of the surrounding world, by the apparent hopelessness of their task; and thus they stumbled. Ezra 8:21 LXX describes how Ezra fasted for them to be given a "straight way", as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfill the prophecy. Note how Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim featured "straight" progress; the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to "keep in step with the Spirit"... They were to walk "each one straight before him" (Is. 57:2 RVmg.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). Ps. 107:2,7 RV speak of Israel being gathered out of the nations and being led in a "straight way" to Zion, as they had [potentially] been enabled to do on their departure from Egypt. Yet then they spent 38 years walking a distance coverable in just 11 days- because they did not walk in the "straight way". The house of Israel were to "measure the pattern" of the temple just as the Angel had done; they were to work in harmony with the Angel, laying out the temple exactly as the Angel had done in the preceding vision (Ez. 43:10 cp. Ez. 40:5-13). And we too are to follow where our Angel potentially enables us to go.

The restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:9 spoke of how the returnees would walk "in a straight way" (s.w.) "by the rivers of waters"- and surely Ezra consciously alluded to this when by the river Ahava he fasted for the exiles to return in a "right / straight way". He knew that these prophecies of restoration would not just automatically come true- they had to be fulfilled by much prayer, fasting and stepping out in faith. But so very few perceived that. And the challenge remains for us today- to walk in the way which God's Angels have potentially prepared for us, with prayer and boldness. I feel this is especially true in the matter of latter day witnessing.

And yet "Ephraim", the ten tribes, were to experience this. But they didn't- they remained in exile and assimilated with the world around them. They didn't experience the huge Divine potential made available here, as so many do not.

Jeremiah 31:10 Hear the word of Yahweh, you nations, and declare it in the islands afar off; and say, He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock- This continues God's fantasy, if you like, His earnest hope and wish, that the return of His people to Him would be blessed by the nations and they too would eagerly turn to Him. The scenario whereby Babylon was to be destroyed was not His ideal intention. Time and again the Lord Jesus reapplies the language of the restoration from Babylon to what He is doing to all men and women who heed His call to come out from the world and follow Him. The ideas of bringing His sheep, "other sheep of mine", who will hear His voice and form one flock under one shepherd (Jn. 10:16)- all these are rooted in the restoration prophecies (Ez. 34; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Jer. 31:1-10).

Jeremiah 31:11 For Yahweh has ransomed Jacob, and redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he- Redemption from he that is stronger is an allusion to the promise that Jacob would overcome his stronger brother, Esau (Gen. 25:23); and Esau as Edom was active in the destruction of Zion. But Jacob would be redeemed and return- if they wished. The suffering of God over the exiles all points forward to His later experience in the death of His Son. But note that God's suffering was particularly because Israel would not return to Him. Had they done so, the hurt of their past sins would have been erased in a moment. God redeemed and ransomed Jacob, thereby enabling them to return from Babylon- but the majority preferred to ignore the call to return because they were so caught up in the good life. And likewise the hugely costly redemption of the world in the blood of Christ is painful for God insofar as so many, the majority, refuse it. The pain of providing this ransom and the hurt of human sin was one thing; the refusal of the offer of a way back to relationship with Him is far worse. From this we can perceive how thrilled God is when we turn to Him. And further, appreciating it should inspire our preaching, knowing the Father's joy over just one true convert who will accept His ways in Truth and enter into loving relationship with Him.

Judah effectively refused their ransom and redemption. And so this great salvation was reapplied to salvation in Christ for a new Israel. These terms are together applied to our redemption from death (Hos. 13:14), and both terms are often used in the New Testament of our salvation in Christ.

Remember Jeremiah was speaking this "little scroll / book of comfort" of Jer. 30 and 31 after the Babylonian victory and the exile. Yet he is brave enough to criticize them, when it was Babylon who had personally saved him from Zedekiah's prison house and offered him material benefits and a pension for life as a result of his apparent "pro Babylon" stance. The prophecies he now utters would've made it impossible for him to remain in their good books and to enjoy their benefits. Jeremiah's prophecies weren't well received by his people, even though by giving them he alienated himself from Babylon. He was left therefore alone, alienated from his own people and also from the world around him. All because of his understanding of the hope of the Kingdom. Zech. 8:4 records the attitude to such prophecies: "Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the Lord of hosts?". Jeremiah by contrast said that "Nothing is impossible to You" (Jer. 32:17 "Ah Lord God! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is impossible for you").

Jeremiah 31:12 They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow to the goodness of Yahweh, to the grain, and to the new wine, and to the oil, and to the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all- This was the potential. The wheat, wine and oil were all withheld by Yahweh as a result of their selfish materialism, according to Haggai and Malachi. And Neh. 5:3 specifically mentions that a "dearth" came even in Nehemiah's time. The "watered garden" clearly alludes to Eden, which could have been restored at this time in the restored Kingdom, as Ezekiel's restoration prophecies make clear. This, along with the idea of no more tears of sorrow, is alluded to in Rev. 21:4; but it is all reapplied to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth at the Lord's return.

Jeremiah 31:13 Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together; for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow- The "sorrow... mourning" was that of the exiles and survivors of the Babylonian onslaught, as the book of Lamentations makes apparent. This could all have been dramatically reversed had they repented and allowed the restoration to happen as God intended. But they didn't repent, even when God attempted to as it were force through the restoration. The young and old didn't rejoice together- the old men wept at how small the temple was compared even with Solomon's, whilst the younger ones rejoiced (Ezra 3:12). Sorrow at realizing their sins is a feature of the Ezra and Nehemiah records- rather than joy in the real experience of God's redemption. Again, are there similarities with ourselves? The life in Christ, the Kingdom life, is of all joy and peace through believing, of joy and peace in the spirit of holiness. But is this the life and mindset which we live?

As discussed on :8,9, the mourning is of repentance. This morphs into joy at the experience of forgiveness and rightness with God. We note that all these predictions of reversal are apparently spoken to those who were then alive, as in :14. If in fact Jeremiah's first hearers died in condemnation and exile, then the good news and grace here is hard to perceive. It makes far more sense if, as discussed on Hos. 14, those very people will one day be resurrected to experience this great reversal. One other option is that it was God's intention that the exile be reversed very quickly, so that this happened to the initial audience. Jeremiah's advice to settle in for a long captivity, at least 70 years, would then be God's later amendment of this plan and intention.

Jeremiah 31:14 I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness- But the priests returned to mind their own fields because the tithes weren't paid to them (Neh. 13:10). One of the dominant features of salvation in God's Kingdom will be that of satisfaction, being satiated, utterly filled.

And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says Yahweh- When Israel were so far from God, He foretold the day when "my people will be gorged with my grace" (Jer. 31:14). The image of gorging upon grace is yet another reflection of the super-abounding nature of it. And this part of the new covenant to be made with Israel is true of us today, who have already entered that same covenant; it's a thought we can dwell upon as we eat at the Lord's table. And as we do so we can think of how God describes *His* feelings in all this: "I will find joy in them and in doing them good" (Jer. 32:41). God simply *loves* pouring out such grace. Let's try to catch something of this spirit of the grace of God. Let's try to adopt God's perspective. For what does He require more of a man, "but to do justly, and to *love* mercy (as God does, Mic. 7:18), and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8)?

Jeremiah 31:15 Thus says Yahweh: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children- "Ramah" means literally 'the high place'. There may be an allusion to how "Rachel", Jacob's idolatrous and faithless wife as representative of the women of Judah, had offered their children to Baal upon those high places. And now she realized that was all in vain. Apart from this approach, it is difficult to see any other specific significance in the mention of Ramah. The bitterness of her grief was because she knew she had sinned and sacrificed her children to that which had not profited; and yet even that grief could be assuaged by Yahweh's plan for her, if she would accept it. The historical Rachel died in sorrow, refusing comfort, and yet gave birth to Benjamin, 'son of my sorrow', renamed 'son of

my right hand'. She was an appropriate symbol for Judah in their suffering. Out of it all could come mere sorrow, or the birth of a Messianic king and people. It all depended upon whether or not they would accept comfort.

Ramah was where the captives were assembled before leaving for exile (Jer. 40:1). Rachel herself didn't weep there. But a voice was heard there like that of Rachel's weeping for Benjamin.

She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more- Is. 40:1,2 had spoken a message of comfort to the exiles: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God”. But [in full allusion to this prophecy], the exiles were like Rachel who refused to be comforted over her loss; they claimed they found “none to comfort” (Lam. 1:2,16,17,21). But they were willfully refusing the comfort of God’s repeated word of hope and restoration. They didn’t grasp the plain teaching of the prophetic word because they didn’t want to- it demanded too much of them, and a giving up of the comfortable Babylon life. Hence Is. 43:19 laments: “I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth [in the decree to return to Zion?], do you not perceive it?”. And do we "not perceive it?" time and again in our own lives, as to the potentials God is opening up?

Rachel refused to be comforted over Benjamin, but in fact he was alive and lived. The same words are used of Jacob mourning the apparent death of Joseph, "and he would not be comforted" (Gen. 37:35). But likewise, he was in fact alive. "Because they are no more" is also a term used about Jacob's grief over the apparent loss of Joseph (Gen. 37:30 he "is not", Reuben says; Gen. 42:26,30,32,36,40). Weeping for the children slain by the Babylonians was in fact weeping for those who would yet live and had not been ultimately lost- that's surely the idea. For Rachel is exhorted to cease her mourning, because of the new covenant. But for that to have meaning, they would need to be literally resurrected. That they 'live on' through "Israel" being transferred to any other entity would be cold comfort.

The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Much Christian material about Israel shows how they have returned to the land, rebuilt the ruined cities, made the desert blossom etc., as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah etc. The context of these prophecies often doesn’t fit a return to the land by Jews in the 20th century; but on the other hand, the correspondence between these prophecies and recent history is so remarkable that it can’t be just coincidence. So again we are led to conclude that a few words here and there within a prophecy can sometimes have a fulfillment outside that which the context seems to require.

Jeremiah 31:16 Thus says Yahweh: Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says Yahweh; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy- As explained on :15, it depended whether or not Rachel accepted the comfort of the prophetic word. Her "work", her labour pains in sorrow, could have been rewarded by the rebirth of a son, in the restoration of Judah from the land of the enemy.

God paints Himself as acting with the anger of a very angry husband, whose anger is rooted in the profoundness of His love for His wife. There is a dark side to intimacy. It’s why families, lovers, both spiritual and natural, experience the heights of both love and frustration / anger with each other. With a love like God’s, it’s inevitable that there is a strong element of jealousy and potential hurt over us. It has to be so. And yet as we know the story of the prophets never ends with the angry judgment- amazingly, given this level of anger and judgment / retribution, there is

always the passionate appeal for Israel to return, to recover love, romance and intimacy in the relationship. Taking as it were a snapshot of the nature of the judgments God expressed, this is indeed hard to swallow. It's hard to read Jer. 31:16-34, how God will slay Rachel's children, leave her weeping for them, and then dry her eyes and speak of a new covenant and new relationship with her. But the point of it all is that this indeed is how radical the cycle of sin, judgment and repentance really is in the lives of each of us. If a movie were to be made of all this, none of us would be able to resist it. The story of how through love gone sour, estrangement, rape and battery, a couple triumph in love and true, eternal intimacy. But this is the wonder and power of true repentance. And it is also a powerful window into the consequence and nature of human sin. These metaphors and images of God as the jilted lover convey the reality of sin and reconciliation in a way that no amount of prose ever could. And yet it wasn't only metaphor- all this was lived out in the feelings of Hosea for Gomer. He could only have had those feelings if he very deeply loved her. The whole story, the images and ideas… surely leave us knowing once and for all that our religion and relationship with God simply can never be merely abstract contemplation of Biblical ideas, devoid of commitment and passion in response to God's love. All these wonderful ideas come down to us through reading and reflection upon Scripture. But Bible reading, understood and felt as it should be, can from now on for us surely never again be a passive, neutral, private experience. If we truly are in covenant relationship with this wondrous God, it demands our all. Our failures, forgiven as they are, will haunt us for their awfulness; and the wonder of His love will never cease to move us to real tears in the midst of this unemotional, too busy, post modern world. And the experience of God's ever new love and forgiveness will lead us to rise above all the examples of failed relationships and marriages we are surrounded with, to realize quite simply that those whom we love, we forgive. And the vastness of God's love means that He genuinely forgives us. And we too will go on risking ourselves, making ourselves vulnerable, to love again, to forgive again, knowing His love for us. But of course all this hinges around our perception of our sins and unfaithfulness being what it is.

Jeremiah 31:17 There is hope for your latter end, says Yahweh; and your children shall come again to their own border- The historical Rachel died in sorrow, refusing to be comforted with the thought that her suffering had brought a son into the world. And so Zion could choose whether or not to accept the prophetic word of comfort, and to understand their sufferings as being but the labour pains which would bring forth the restored, revived Kingdom of God in Israel. The slain children of Rachel did not return to their own border- because they refused. And that generation died in exile, for the most part. The hope of the "latter end" which could comfort "Rachel" was that the children would return from the land of the enemy (:16). The last, great enemy is death, Paul teaches; and resurrection redeems from that last enemy. The resurrection of historical Israel, hard as it is to understand and fit with other Bible teachings, would certainly make the interpretation of this "comfort" far easier and logical. And gracious.

Jeremiah 31:18 I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, You have chastised me, and I was chastised, as an untrained calf: turn me, and I shall be turned; for You are Yahweh my God- See on Jer. 18:8. The appeal for Jerusalem to be "instructed" in Jer. 6:8 uses this same word translated "chastised", or "punish" (Lev. 26:18). The idea was that the punishments were to be instruction; they were not the

lashing out of an offended Deity. It was God's hope, even 'fantasy' would not be too strong a word, that His people would realize this, and come to say "You punished / instructed me, and I was instructed" (Jer. 31:18 s.w.). His desire was to turn them, to make them repent, and to return them (s.w.) to their land in glory. But they had to themselves desire to be turned. The work of the Spirit for us under the new covenant is the same; even if we lack the steel in our will to repent, we will be made repentant- if we desire the Spirit to move. Psychologically we will be empowered, or turned / made repentant, if we have that desire to be repentant. That desire is not the same as the repentance. It's not as if God is saying that if we repent, then He is there for us. The offer is more than that. It is that if we desire to repent, He will psychologically turn us. Repentance itself is therefore a gift (Acts 3:26; 11:18). The next verse is explicit to this effect; it is after the Divine turning that they repent.

Was repentance required for the new covenant to come into operation? We struggle throughout all the new covenant passages to understand this. Clearly there is the expectation of and need for repentance- an admission of guilt, a saying "Yes" to the new covenant, and asking to be "turned". But on the other hand, there is the impression of God forcing it through. Hosea explains this in terms of Hosea's love for Gomer, and God's for His people. The conditions weren't met; but still He wanted to force through a new covenant, a remarriage, a continued and eternal relationship. Simply because of His love. "Turn me and I shall be turned" is to be the credo of our lives, constantly and willingly repeated in faith it shall happen. Repent me [it's the same word, *shub*], and I will be repented... and then, I will myself repent (:19).

God's power to turn is part of the gift of the Spirit, which is part and parcel of the new covenant. To be turned away from sin is part of the covenant made with Abraham, which Paul understands to be the essence of the new covenant: "You are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham: And in your descendant shall all the families of the earth be blessed. To you first, God, having raised up His servant, sent him to bless you, in turning every one of you away from your sins" (Acts 3:25,26). The blessing of the covenant, fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, was this turning away from sin which is the desperate desire of every Godly man.

Jeremiah 31:19 Surely after that I was turned, I repented- See on :18. LXX "After my captivity I repented". The repentance comes after the turning. It is a gift. "To the Gentiles also has God granted repentance to life" (Acts 11:18). The idea of being given spirituality is repeated so often in the restoration prophecies. Thus Jer. 32:17 "I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all My heart and all My soul". The whole mental focus of God is involved in this. The word *shub* is used both of moral 'repentance', turning back, as well as the return to the land. But God is consistently presented as the causer of this turning / repenting. Jer. 33:7 is clear: "I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return" [also Jer. 30:3; 32:44; 33:11,26; 34:22; 42:12, seven times in total- a major theme]. Ez. 34:16 makes the spiritual aspect of this 'return' very clear: "I will seek that which was lost, and will cause to return that which was driven away". It's not simply that the lost is found because it wanders back home; it is "caused" to return. "I will be who I will be" teaches the ultimate causative nature of God. But it is in line with the characteristics of His Name and character, as declared when He pronounced His Name to Moses in Ex. 34. Yet those characteristics are in conflict and turmoil within Him, His grace in the end dominating His declared judgment of sin. And so His "I will [cause] to be" reflects that. The record of the new covenant in Jer. 32:41 concludes with the promise

that the whole essence of God is in this covenant: "I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul".

"I will be who I will be" seven times in Jeremiah declares that He will "cause" repentance / return of "the captivity". "The captivity" refers to the people of the captivity, defined in Ez. 34:16 as those who were lost. "The children of the captivity" is a common phrase (Ezra 4:1; 6:16 etc.). "Those who had come out of the captivity" uses "the captivity" to refer to the group of exiled persons, not "exile" in an abstract sense. "The Jews who had escaped, who were left of the captivity... The remnant who are left of the captivity" (Neh. 1:2,3) clearly uses "the captivity" to refer to persons. And that captivity, those persons, would be caused to return / repent.

And after that I was instructed, I struck on my thigh- Jeremiah speaks in the first person perhaps because he had a personal need for repentance and forgiveness, which typified that of Judah. The sins in view may have been things committed in "my youth", just as Israel's earlier sins were now finding them out. Now, "I groaned for the day of shame" in his youth (LXX). The result of this pure grace, of God turning us to repentance, leads to repentance in practice on our side.

I was ashamed, yes, even confounded, because I bore the reproach of my youth- Our shame should be before God for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God (Jer. 6:15). Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness. Thus Jeremiah recalls how his repentance involved being ashamed, and yet then being "instructed" (Jer. 31:19). It's through knowing this kind of shame before God that we come to a position where we are unashamed.

Jeremiah 31:20 Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says Yahweh- Here the two tribes are reminded that even after the deportation of the ten tribes ("Ephraim"), God still considered them His "darling child". Judah were so wrong to consider themselves so far superior to Israel, considering that God had no relationship with Ephraim because they lacked the Jerusalem temple. God's strong intention was to regather the ten tribes when Judah were regathered. But despite the yearning of God to do this, it didn't happen; because as noted on :18, they didn't even want to repent. The unrequited yearning of God for human repentance is a tragedy, and He must be so thrilled when we at least desire to respond. And Jeremiah experienced this same yearning of the heart for his people (s.w. Jer. 4:19). That yearning should be ours as we beg men and women to respond; our evangelism should be done out of a heart that bleeds for people.

"Yearns" is literally troubled, and is used of the roaring of the Babylonians against Judah, and the roaring and troubling of Jeremiah's heart (Jer. 4:19 "My anguish, my anguish! I am pained at my very heart; my heart is disquieted in me; I can't hold my peace; because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war"; Jer. 5:22: 31:35). God's internal turmoil, expressed in Hos. 11 as His repentings / changes of mind being kindled together, resulted in the pole of His loving grace as it were triumphing over the pole of His justified anger and judgment. Jeremiah's conflicted heart reflected God's heart, just as our hearts should.

Jeremiah 31:21 Set up road signs, make guideposts- We may well enquire how travellers were supposed to do this. Maybe the idea is that the first ones to repent were

to return and as it were pioneer the way for others to follow. It could be that the idea was that the return of God's people from captivity was to set up the way for the peoples of their captivity to follow them in coming to Zion and accepting Israel's God. Or perhaps the contradiction is purposeful; the question would naturally occur as to how they were supposed to do this. And the answer is that God would empower them and show them the way back to Him (see on :18).

Set your heart towards the highway, even the way by which you went: turn again, virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities- This could be specifically addressed to the ten tribes, "Ephraim" (:20), urging them to leave the lands of their captivity. If they had the mental desire, the heart, the set heart, the mindset, the desire to repent / turn again, then they would be turned again; both spiritually, back to God, and literally, back to the land (:18). This is the vision of Ps. 84:5 ESV: "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion". But it also had reference to the call for exiled Judah to return. The command to flee the land of the north [Babylon] is to be found in Is. 48:20; Jer. 51:6; Zech. 2:6; and they were to "*get thee up to the high mountain*" (Is. 40:9), using the same word about Judah 'going up' from Babylon to Israel. But the majority of Judah remained in Babylon. And the majority of those who did return, only did so in order for purely personal benefit- of having their own house and land. They 'went up' to the land, but not to Zion. With reference to Is. 40:9, Hag 1:7-9 exhorted them: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. *Go up to the mountain*, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much [i.e. they expected the promised Kingdom blessings], and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house". Their focus was on their own lands and farms rather than the glory of Zion (as Neh. 13:10,11). They stood related to the things of God's kingdom, but never ventured beyond their own personal self-interest. They would not accept that God manifestation rather than human salvation and pleasure was the essential purpose of their God.

Jeremiah 31:22 How long will you go here and there, you backsliding daughter?- The exile is described as a being tossed to and fro, continual movement within the empires who had taken them captive. But "how long" they were in exile was an open question; they could have been restored sooner had they wished it, and finally the 70 years of exile until full restoration of the Kingdom were reinterpreted in Daniel 9 to be 70 weeks of days, i.e. a far longer period. See on Jer. 25:12; 29:10.

For Yahweh has created a new thing in the earth: a woman shall follow after a man- This suggests that the woman, Judah, were to take the initiative with God by mapping out the roads they would take back to Zion- the suggestion could be that the 70 year period of captivity could have been shortened had Judah taken the initiative. This refers to the way in which Ruth and Naomi, herself a returned exile, summed up the courage to 'go after' Boaz, to present herself to him for marriage- reflecting the spiritual ambition of all those who seek redemption and restoration in Christ. If they had the desire to repent, then they would be given repentance [as well as forgiveness]; see on :18. But they had to take the initiative, in seeking it. And yet even that initiative was "created" by God.

A very slight change in the vocalization of the Hebrew text here gives the reading "a woman shall be turned into a man". And God would create this; He would give the stereotypically weak woman the courage and strength of a man. Or "turned" could be "returned"; God would create the desire for the woman to return to the man

who had divorced her and against whom she had committed multiple adulteries. Whatever the reading, the impression is that God would create desire and provide psychological strengthening in a new and superhuman way. This is the law being written in the heart, the work of the Spirit promised in the new covenant which God was offering His people at this time. Whichever way we read this, God "created" it; He would give them the initiative to follow after a man, or, would empower them with the strength of a man. This is the whole theme of this new covenant- that God would spiritually empower people beyond their own strength and desire.

This could be a reference to the virgin birth. Understanding it as a woman shall "encompass" a man, as the means of the restoration.

Jeremiah 31:23 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Yet again shall they use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I shall bring again their captivity: Yahweh bless you, habitation of righteousness, mountain of holiness- Jer. 33:16; 23:6 etc. outline God's intention that after the restoration, the rebuilt Zion would be named "The Lord our righteous one" because Jerusalem would be the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 31:23; 50:7). This is similar language to the restoration prophecies of Isaiah- the surrounding Gentile world would see / perceive / believe in "the righteous one" who would reign in the rebuilt Zion (Is. 62:2). The "mountain of holiness" is consistently used for Zion, with the intention that at the restoration from exile, Zion would become the "holy mountain" which features in the Kingdom prophecies of Is. 11:9; 56:7; 65:25; Joel 3:17; Obadiah 17, to which the restored exiles would return (Is. 66:20; Ez. 20:40; Zech. 8:3). The phrase is also used of heaven itself (Ps. 3:4 etc.). The idea was that the Kingdom of Heaven would be established on earth, centered in Zion. This could've happened at the restoration, but it didn't; the returned exiles were to build the 'holy mountain' in the new temple system they were commanded to build in Ez. 43:12. But they didn't fulfill that prophecy. And so Rev. 21,22 use the idea and apply it to the restored Kingdom of God on earth at the time of the Lord's return.

Jeremiah 31:24 Judah and all its cities shall dwell therein together, the farmers, and those who go about with flocks- The idea of farmers and shepherds living within the area of the restored Zion is found in Ez. 48:18 (see notes there). But the commands of Ez. 40-48 weren't obeyed by the returned exiles.

Jeremiah 31:25 For I have satiated the weary soul, and every sorrowful soul have I replenished- This is the sorrow of :12 (s.w.) being removed for the returned exiles- but they chose not to accept this possible scenario. God would work within them psychologically through His Spirit, all part of the promise of the new covenant which we are under too. As He had "filled" them with sorrow and panic at the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 13:13, s.w. "replenished"), so He would fill them with joy and take away their sorrow.

Jeremiah 31:26 On this I awakened, and saw; and my sleep was sweet to me- The preceding revelation had been given in a dream which Jeremiah, perhaps through Baruch, wrote down. He found this Kingdom vision "sweet", and yet he seems to forget it when he gets bogged down in the "sorrow" (cp. :25) of his book of Lamentations, failing to see the silver lining.

This awaking may suggest that the restoration would require a resurrection. He speaks as if the vision itself was what awoke him.

Jeremiah 31:27 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of animal- To sow seed within a family or house means to add new members to it. Israel and Judah were to be reunited at the restoration, and a totally new creation of people and even animals was to come. This will find its fulfillment when the Lord returns to reestablish the Kingdom, seeing that the exiles' lack of repentance precluded it from happening in their time. The Hebrew words for "sow... seed" occur together in the record of the Genesis creation, translated 'yielding / bearing seed' (Gen. 1:11,12,29 etc.). The idea is of a new creation, and is used of the situation in the restored Kingdom of God in Is. 30:23; 55:10; Ez. 36:9-11.

We note that this new covenant is yet future here- "the days come", as in :29 "In those days they shall no longer say...". Ezekiel's vision of the new covenant appears to be that it has come already at his time. We conclude that just a few years after Jeremiah is writing, Ezekiel saw the possibility that the new covenant had already come for those who were repentant. The question is whether any really were repentant. Jeremiah 5 describes how not even a single man could be found in the streets of Jerusalem who had truly grasped the covenant. But we could posit that perhaps the new covenant was not for those who remained in Judah; it was specifically for the exiles. The covenant was offered to the "remnant", but that remnant is simply defined in :2,3 as those who survived the Babylonian judgment upon Jerusalem. "Iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none: and sin in Judah, and none shall be found; for I will forgive those whom I leave as a remnant" (Jer. 50:20).

Jeremiah 31:28 It shall happen that like as I have watched over them to pluck up and to break down and to overthrow and to destroy and to afflict, so will I watch over them to build and to plant, says Yahweh- God had promised to build and plant them in a restored, Messianic kingdom in Israel (Jer. 31:28; 42:10; Ez. 36:36). But this was all conditional upon them continuing to obey His voice, otherwise He would change His plans (Jer. 18:9,10). Jeremiah had been given the power to speak the words of both destruction and building and planting (Jer. 1:10). This planting was simply because of God's word. Jeremiah's prophetic words had the power to plant and root up (Jer. 1:10). This was be done simply because God had spoken it, rather than in response to Judah's spiritual state. His word is thereby a word of grace, just as His creative words of Gen. 1 were pure grace.

Israel were told to "throw down", "break in pieces" and "utterly destroy" the idols and altars of Canaan. There were times during their history when they obeyed this command by purging themselves from their apostasy in this. The Hebrew words used scarcely occur elsewhere, except very frequently in the context of how God "broke down", "threw down" and "destroyed" Israel at the hands of their Babylonian and Assyrian invaders as a result of their not 'breaking down' (etc.) the idols. "Throw down" in Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 is the same word in 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 4:26; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14; Ez. 16:39; Nah. 1:6. "Cut down" in Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 later occurs in Is. 10:33; Jer. 48;25; Lam. 2:3. So Israel faced the choice: either cut down your idols, or you will be cut down in the day of God's judgment. Those who worshipped idols were like unto them. The stone will either fall on us and destroy us, or we must fall on it and become broken men and women (Mt. 21:44). For the man untouched by the concept of living for God's glory, it's a hard choice.

Jeremiah 31:29 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge- Part of their repentance would involve taking personal responsibility for sins, rather than blaming their situation on others, complaining that they were suffering from the effects of the sins of their fathers. To this day, this has to be part of repentance; a taking of the blame for our sins, rather than blaming anyone else or our gene pool. Ezekiel was up against this problem in his appeal to the exiles to repent. He labours the point in Ez. 18 that fathers cannot be held responsible for the spiritual failure of their children in all cases. Ez. 18:2 uses the same figure of eating sour grapes. This principle leads us to reflection upon the case of elders whose adult children fall into sin. It should be noted that the bishop's qualification is that he *knows* how to rule his own house (1 Tim. 3:5). It may be that as with Samuel and other elders, their children or converts do not 'turn out' well. If this is because there was a lack of spiritual leadership, this disqualifies a brother. But if he *knew* how to rule, but they rebelled, then he is not thereby disqualified.

The exiles blamed the exile on their fathers, but Ezekiel seeks to show them that they are acting just like their fathers. And they need to repent of that. Psalm 68 is not a prayer; rather is it an appeal to the exiles in the spirit of Ezekiel to make a clean break from their fathers' attitudes. And to perceive God's grace all through their history, and to trust in it. The exiles "used this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?" (Ez. 18:2). They were asked to stop saying that, and accept their situation was because they were sinning themselves. These same people who were blaming everything on their fathers' sins were asked: "Cast away from you all your transgressions in which you have transgressed; and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit" (Ez. 18:31). This is the new covenant. It was a requirement of the new covenant that they would stop thinking like this: "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer. 31:29). The appeal of many scriptures such as Ps. 78 is to get the exiles to a point where they would "say no more" that they were suffering unfairly, for the sake of their fathers' sins.

Jeremiah 31:30 But each one shall die for his own iniquity: every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge- See on :29. Their repentance would involve recognizing that they personally had committed the sins which they previously had blamed their fathers for. The exiles likely blamed their situation upon Manasseh's sins, without recognizing that they were repeating his sins themselves. And yet it seems that in Jer. 32:18, Jeremiah himself has something of Israel's wrong attitude, even though he theoretically knew that the children were suffering for committing the same sins as the fathers. We can know such truths in theory and yet struggle to accept them in practice.

The implication is that in the restored state, people would still sin and die. But they would be in covenant. This aspect of course will not apply in the future Kingdom.

Jeremiah 31:31 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah- Israel and Judah were to be united on the basis of their repentance, experience of forgiveness and joint part in this new covenant. It was refused by them at the time, but is now offered to all in Christ. And this unity between those within it should be likewise experienced. The cup of the

new covenant which features in the breaking of bread service is the visible symbol in our age of the commemoration of this covenant; and yet sadly it has become the tool for division within the body of those within the new covenant. This really is so tragic.

The new covenant could have then been established, requiring the abrogation of the Old Covenant [the law of Moses] on the basis of an acceptable sacrifice. Somehow, this would have been possible. But it was deferred until the time of the Lord Jesus. That covenant required Judah to have God's law written on their hearts, so that they each had the knowledge of God (Jer. 31:34); and yet Mal. 2:5-7 laments that the priests were more interested in divorcing their wives than teaching God's law to the people; their lips didn't keep nor teach the knowledge of God.

However the "new" covenant can equally be translated as a 'renewed' covenant; the word translated "new" is used in this sense in Lam. 3:22,23, God's mercies are new / renewed every morning. Because the essence of it is in the promises to Abraham, which Paul sees as the basis of the new covenant. Peter saw in the promises to Abraham the implication of Israel being 'blessed' through being turned by God to God (Acts 3:25,26)- which is clearly alluding to the language here in Jer. 31 of Israel being turned and *then* repenting.

The new covenant is presented as a fait accompli. "I will make a new covenant... I will put My law in their hearts (:33)... I will forgive their sin (:34)". No conditions are mentioned, just as the new covenant of Gen. 15, the oath to Abraham, was a one sided, unilateral covenant from God to Abraham. Paul argues that the promises to Abraham are the basis of the new covenant. They likewise were one sided promises. God passed through the sacrificed animal parts, but Abraham was powerless and asleep and didn't. The New Testament clearly applies this "new covenant" to us, but uses the word "testament", which has the idea of a last will and testament. Heb. 9:17 is clear: "For a will is of force where there has been death". The idea is that a will, a gift by way of inheritance testified in a testament or will, is a unilateral, one way gift. Once received, you cannot repay the person who gave it because they are dead. This is the word the New Testament chooses to use for "covenant" [although others could have been used], perhaps in order to emphasize this unilateral, total grace.

Jeremiah 31:32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt- That old covenant had been broken. It was not so much that the Lord Jesus removed it in His death; it had already been broken. For they had departed from their God and married the gods of the Gentiles; hence the reference to their breaking the covenant although God was their husband. The old covenant was the marriage contract between them and God. And yet He continued faithful to them at that time; hence AVmg. "Which My covenant they break; and should I (therefore) have continued an husband unto them?".

Which My covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Yahweh- Israel rejected God's covenant, and therefore He rejected them in that He broke the unbreakable-by-Him covenant (2 Kings 17:15,20; Zech. 11:10). In reality, they had rejected themselves, and broke the covenant (Jer. 31:32). It could not and would not be broken by Him- it was only they who could break it. And so with us.

Jeremiah 31:33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people- See on 1 Sam.

10:9. There is a repeated theme that Israel's entry into the New Covenant will be associated with God doing something to their hearts, confirming their own change of mind. In other words, the covenant is largely a matter of the mind. This new state of mind is in fact fundamentally part of being in covenant relationship with God. This leads us to the paramount need for us to develop genuine spiritual mindedness, the thinking, the breathing of God's Spirit in our minds. So God will act upon Israel's heart directly, using the medium of His word to do so. The initiative is God's; He will write His word upon their hearts. He is not passively offering people the opportunity to do it to themselves; He will do it to Israel. The same heart-swop operation is described in Ez. 36:25,26. Jer. 31:33 said that God would place His laws in Israel's heart; in Ez. 36 we read that He will place His Spirit in their hearts. It is the Spirit which makes us obedient to the word. Those within the new covenant today receive this same gift of the Spirit; not today in terms of miraculous gifts, but the operation of God on the human heart which brings about the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to be "their God" (Gen. 17:-8-10). In this sense the new covenant is based upon the promises to Abraham, and in essence preceded the old covenant given on Sinai. Entrance to the new covenant is by baptism, and therefore the gift of the Spirit is given at baptism, as is made clear in the Acts record.

Jeremiah has earlier commented about the state of Judah's heart at this time. It was so corrupt they themselves didn't realize how corrupt it was (Jer. 17:9); their sin was indelibly written and even engraved upon their heart (Jer. 17:1 "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart"). What seemed psychologically incurable was to be changed. God's law would be written there, they would be given a new heart, just as the tablets of the old covenant were broken and re-written. Likewise Jeremiah had earlier lamented: "they have forsaken My law which I set before them... but have walked after the stubbornness of their own heart" (Jer. 9:13,14). This problem would be resolved; the law would no longer be "set before them" and their heart have the choice whether to accept it. Instead, the law would be written in their hearts. Ezekiel's version of the new covenant has the same features. Israel were asked to "get a new heart and a new spirit" (Ez. 18:31). But they didn't, and so God promises to forcibly *give* Israel a new heart and spirit (Ez. 36:21).

There was nothing wrong with the law of itself. Kept in totality, fulfilled, it produced the character of the Lord Jesus. To have the spirit of the Lord Jesus is therefore the same as having the Mosaic law written within our hearts. Within the law, there was the command to internalize it, to circumcise the heart so that the heart was filled with love for God: "Fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul... Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart... Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live" (Dt. 10:12,16; 30:6). So the new covenant is about a kind of enforced internalizing of the Torah. This writing in the heart was what the covenant proposed to do. But as an unbreakable covenant, there was now no possibility of disloyalty to it. Sin, leaving the covenant, would no longer be possible. This is what eternity is about. And the process starts now. We notice more parallel between the old and new covenant in that the promise of the new covenant, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people", was in fact the same intention as the old covenant (Lev. 26:12; Ex. 29:45).

The writing of the law in our hearts in this life doesn't mean sinlessness. Paul alludes to the new covenant when he speaks of the law that is in his heart or mind, but

he laments that despite that he still sins (Rom. 7:23). Just as under the new covenant men still sin and die for that sin. But the covenant is eternal, and this will result in our sinful tendencies being eliminated at the resurrection. For then our whole bodies will be dominated by God's Spirit. But the path to that begins now. For 2 Cor. 3:3 is clear that the Spirit now writes on the tables of our heart.

Heb. 8 proves that we are under the new covenant by quoting from Jer. 31, which is a prophecy of how in the future, Israel will repent, and will enter into the new covenant. Twice the Spirit uses Jer. 31:31 to prove to us that we are under the new covenant now (see Heb. 8:6-13 and 10:16-19); yet Jer. 31 is a prophecy of how natural Israel in the future will enter into that covenant, after their humiliation at the hands of their future invaders. So we are being taught that our entering of the covenant now is similar to how natural Israel will enter that covenant in the future. The point is really clinched by the way the Spirit cites Jer. 31 as relevant to us today. The reasoning goes that because Jer. 31:34 speaks of sin forgiven for those who accept the new covenant, therefore we don't need sacrifices or human priesthood now, because Jer. 31:34 applies to us. So therefore God writing in our hearts is going on now, too. This is confirmed by Paul's allusion to Jer. 31 in 2 Cor. 3:3. God wrote with His Spirit on our hearts, He made a new covenant on the covenant-tables of our heart. Likewise 2 Cor. 1:22: "Who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the spirit in our hearts". There are several prophecies which speak of Israel entering that new covenant, and what it will mean to them. All of them, in some sense, apply to us who are now in the new covenant. All of us should be earnestly seeking to appreciate the more finely exactly what our covenant with God means, exactly what covenant relationship with God really entails.

Being God's people is now redefined. If God is working on our inward parts through His Spirit and we are responding- we are His people. "Israel" were previously defined by whether they were in covenant with Yahweh. The critical metric of the new covenant is whether a man has God's Spirit, even if his theology may slightly differ from his brother who also has that Spirit. Related to this is the metric of repentance; this is the sacrifice now required, as Hosea says, men are to offer their repentant lips and statements of repentance as "the calves of our lips". Peter connects repentance with the receipt of the Spirit. ["repent... that you may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"]. Hence believers with identical theology remain separated because one follows the Spirit and another doesn't; and believers with differing theology who both follow the Spirit find themselves united. It is the Spirit which unites; any attempt to create unity by purely intellectual, theological agreement [e.g. through a commonly agreed 'statement of faith'] is therefore at best misplaced idealism. And it never actually produces unity of any deep nor lasting nature.

Jeremiah 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother saying, Know Yahweh; for they shall all know Me, from their least to their greatest, says Yahweh- Prophet, priest and people were all to be sharing God's word; all society was to be involved (Jer. 23:34). But the false prophets gave their words to the priests, whose duty it was to teach their words; and then the people spread those words further. This was how Israel should have been, with the ordinary people spreading the knowledge of God's word; and indeed this is the ideal situation of the Kingdom age, although such a teaching ministry will ultimately not be needed because all shall know / have relationship experience of Yahweh through their experience of forgiveness. And those under the new covenant begin this now.

The old covenant involved priests teaching the people to "Know Yahweh". The priesthood had been the teaching mechanism for God's people to learn "the

knowledge of God". But as Jeremiah and the prophets frequently lament, the priesthood was corrupted and was spiritually dysfunctional, the priest's lips didn't keep the knowledge of God, as Malachi laments. There was therefore no effective teaching mechanism. And so under the new covenant, collective teaching was replaced by this direct teaching from God within individual hearts. This is a more radical change than may be at first apparent. And people today likewise struggle with it, because they prefer group teaching and acceptance of group think, even if the thinking is Godly, rather than the intensity of personal relationship with God and all that demands. Nobody in the new covenant can complain that they are left without good teaching, just because they consider the teachers at their church to be weak or irrelevant. We are taught directly by God, through His Spirit which is part of the new covenant; and therefore not really by going to church meetings. The Lord had these things in mind when He taught that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would teach His people all things (Jn. 14:26). God through His Spirit teaches directly, so that the disciples wouldn't even need to go and physically listen to the Lord Jesus to get this teaching. John sums it up in 1 Jn. 2:27: "the anointing which you received of him abides in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you". Surely this alludes to the promise of the new covenant here in Jer. 31.

Those under the new covenant will no longer need teaching from men. Exhortations as in Jer. 11:4,7 ("listen to my voice") and Jer. 32:33 ("though I taught them again and again") will no longer be necessary. This is the situation also envisaged in Is. 54:13 "All your sons shall be taught of Yahweh", i.e. directly, through His Spirit.

To "know" means to be in relationship. Hosea lamented often that Yahweh "knew" Israel, but they didn't "know" Him. In this light, we marvel that God says "they shall know Me". He is going to force through the relationship, to make them in relationship with Him. Even though relationship surely requires mutual freewill on both sides to enter it. This will be achieved "For I will forgive their iniquity". He offers forgiveness ahead of repentance, and the experience of this will bring them into relationship, 'knowing' Him. Just as the Lord shared His table with sinners, accepting them, in order to lead them into relationship with Him and repentance.

For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more- The knowledge of God will no longer have to be taught in theoretical terms because the experience of forgiveness is to know God. Being under the new covenant means that we will know Yahweh, on account of our sins being forgiven. We will be certain of their forgiveness, not just hoping for the best. So often the prophets use the idea of "knowing God" as an idiom for living a life totally dominated by that knowledge. The new covenant which we have entered is all about 'knowing' God. The knowledge of God elicits repentance, real repentance; and reveals an equally real forgiveness. It is possible for those in Christ to *in practice* not know God at all. Thus Paul exhorted the Corinthian church: "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God" (1 Cor. 15:34). The knowledge and practice of the presence of God ought to keep us back from sin.

In Jer. 14:10 we have read that "Yahweh does not accept them: Now He will remember their iniquity, and will punish their sins". Now, quite out of the blue, purely at His initiative, He says that He gives them a new covenant under which He will not remember their sins. This is the same conflict as in Hosea: "I will love them no more... I will love them freely". It is the outcome of His heart churning within Him, His "repentings kindled together" (Hos. 11), coming down on the side of unilateral gracious acceptance of them. Because of His love and desire to make it work, rather

than their repentance nor faithfulness. Earlier in Jeremiah, forgiveness had been offered if just one righteous man was found: "If you can find a man, if there are any who does justice, who seeks truth... I will pardon her" (Jer. 5:1), i.e., without her repentance. The new covenant is therefore predicated upon the perfection of Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Hence Paul teaches that the Lord's death confirmed the covenant, and we take the symbol of His blood as the token of it; the cup of the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins. Thus the cup of the new covenant is "unto the forgiveness of sins" (Mt. 26:28 Gk.). It is the covenant itself, which is unilateral, which gives forgiveness. Human repentance is not a condition for this. Although that new covenant can still be spurned.

Jeremiah 31:35 Thus says Yahweh, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who stirs up the sea, so that its waves roar; Yahweh of Armies is His name- Just as God stirs up the sea, so as noted on :33, He can stir up the human heart. The same immense power manifest in the natural creation is available in the spiritual creation of new hearts and people.

Jeremiah 31:36 If these ordinances depart from before Me, says Yahweh, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever- Israel did cease from being a nation, but only temporarily. The promise here is that God would not permanently "forever" reject them. Or we could understand this promise as meaning that "the seed of Israel" were a nation "forever" only because God changed the definition of them from natural to spiritual, as Gal. 3:27-29 and many New Testament passages makes clear. Or it could be that there was always a "seed of Israel" before God in that there was always a faithful, believing minority. There is reason to think that there has always been a “remnant” of Jews who believe in the true Messiah- Paul’s reasoning in Romans certainly implies this. If some Jews have always ‘held the truth’- then did we not ought to be seeking them out? For there aren’t so many within our community. Only if Heaven above can be measured “then will I cast off *all* the seed of Israel” (Jer. 31:37 RV). Clearly not *all* Israel have been cast off- only if the Heavens pass away will all the seed of Israel cease from being “before me”, i.e. in some sort of covenant with God (Jer. 31:36). Paul surely alludes here when saying that God has not [totally] cast off His people because there is always “the remnant”. There will always be a remnant of Israel open to true conversion in every generation.

Here and in :37 we have the eternal nature of the covenant stressed. A covenant can be broken by the failure of one side, as happened under the old covenant. The new covenant involves Israel never failing, because ultimately at the resurrection we shall be made sinless. Love for God and His ways will be instilled into us by nature, and the process leading to that begins now with the Spirit turning our hearts to Him. This is far more than simply meaning "There will always be Jewish people around"; that is a far too limited and simplistic interpretation of these promises. The "eternity" of Israel is because they are in the new covenant, which most natural Jews to this point have rejected. Israel under the new covenant will endure eternally. That's the idea. The contrast is always with the tragedy of the fact that Israel were previously not faithful to their covenant with God and broke it. But finally they will never be unfaithful to this new covenant, because they will be made obedient. The new heart given is one of obedience, as in Jer. 24:7 "I will give to them a heart to know me, that I am Yahweh. And they will be my people and I will be their God, for they will turn / be turned to me with their whole heart" [contrast Jer. 3:10]. Likewise Jer. 32:39: "I will give them one heart and one way, so they will fear me forever... I will put the fear

of me in their hearts, *so that* they will not turn from me". Likewise "I will not turn away from following them". God and man as it were married for ever, never turning away from each other; whereas so many 'turn away' from the Lord now. Then Israel will not turn away to other gods. If this is the eternity we seek, we shall be given it. This is what the new covenant is all about. Then there will be no possibility of turning away from the covenant, the freewill to sin will be no more, because current human nature will be changed. The work of prophets like Jeremiah was to urge loyalty to the covenant and to reform human behaviour. They clearly didn't have much success. All these appeals went largely unresponded to. Hence the new covenant, which although it begins now [it is quoted about us now in 2 Cor. 3, Heb. 8 and we take the cup of the new covenant now], is really a window onto what eternal relationship with God will look like. Thus they had been told to circumcise their hearts (Jer. 4:4); they had not done so, but the new covenant means God circumcising their hearts eternally. They were to wash / cleanse their hearts (Jer. 4:14), but the new covenant involved God doing this to them (Ez. 36:26).

The eternity of the new covenant is the basis for this promise of Israel's eternity. The statement that Israel would not "cease" from being a nation is therefore a blunt statement that the Israel of Jeremiah's day would somehow continue. The language and promise is strange and graceless to that "Israel" if all this means is that they are rejected and replaced by another nation of believers. The continuation of "Israel" by grace is hard to understand unless there is a literal resurrection of historical Israel. If a man marries a woman called Karen, loves her wonderfully, but she pushes off with other men, they divorce, she dies and remains to be judged and condemned by God; and the wonderful man marries another woman called Karen, who does respond to his love... where is his grace towards Karen number 1? It's hardly gospel good news to tell Karen number 1 that she's still loved and eternally valued, all is going to be ultimately good and OK, just because her husband now loves another woman called Karen. This is where replacement theology totally misses the point of all these prophecies, urging Rachel to dry her eyes because her slain sons shall return from the land of the enemy, God's love for her is eternal etc. And it is also hard to see them having much meaning unless the historical Israel are resurrected and "so all Israel shall be saved"- despite all the theological tensions that creates. The restoration of Job's fortunes likewise apparently involved the resurrection of his unfaithful, judged children; and he clearly represented Judah in their afflictions and restoration.

Jeremiah 31:37 Thus says Yahweh: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says Yahweh- But “My God will cast them away” (Hos. 9:17; Is. 54:6); the same Hebrew word occurs when God says He would “reject” Israel (Hos. 4:6). God spoke in His wrath, He has passion, but likewise His grace is such that He can relent from what He has spoken in His wrath. This is the paradox of His love and grace. For other explanations of the paradox, see on :36. It is the new covenant which means that the cast off become eternally not cast off.

Only *part* of Israel are blind to Messiah; a majority, but not all of them (Rom. 11:5,7,25). I don’t think that Paul is merely speaking of the situation in the first century, where clearly some Jews did believe. I say this because Jer. 31:37 clearly states that Israel will never be “cast off”; yet, according to Romans 11, Israel are only not cast off because some of them do believe in Christ. The fact Israel are not now totally “cast off” therefore indicates that there always will be a remnant of faithful Jews- faithful to God’s Son and trusting in grace rather than law (Rom. 11:6).

Therefore we should be hopeful that at least a remnant will respond to our preaching to them.

Jeremiah 31:38 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that the city shall be built to Yahweh from the tower of Hananel to the gate of the corner- Like the commands of Ez. 40-48 this is command more that prediction. This is the same basic dimension as in Ez. 40-48, but as noted extensively there, the exiles didn't obey it, building a far smaller temple and not following the ordinances commanded there; and thereby precluded the reestablishment of the Kingdom at that time. Nehemiah attempted to 'make holy to Yahweh' (:40) this area (Neh. 3:1; 12:39) but this was not how things continued.

Jeremiah 31:39 The measuring line shall go out further straight onward to the hill Gareb, and shall turn about to Goah- See on :38. LXX "compassed with a circular wall of choice stones". This was not then fulfilled, but the wall of costly stones is spoken of in Rev. 21:19, and Zech. 14:10 has the same ideas in view. The prophecies which the exiles didn't allow to be fulfilled were reapplied and rescheduled to the establishment of the Kingdom on earth at the Lord's return. The idea of these last two verses may be as noted on :5, that the previously unclean will be brought in to holiness. The unclean place of dead bodies will be counted as clean (:40). "Gareb" means 'place of the scabs', perhaps a place for unclean lepers; and "Goah" is connected by some to Golgotha, the place of execution. These unclean places would be brought within the boundary of the clean and holy. Just as would God's people.

Jeremiah 31:40 The whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields to the brook Kidron, to the corner of the horse gate towards the east, shall be holy to Yahweh; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more forever- See on :38. This included the valley of Hinnom, where the children were sacrificed to Baal. Finally there would be permanent cleansing, and Jerusalem would never again be thrown down. This will only finally come true in the latter day fulfillment, as Nehemiah's attempt to fulfill it (Neh. 3:28) was not followed up by the exiles.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 32

Jeremiah 32:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar- The siege began in the ninth year (Jer. 39:1). But the Babylonians temporarily left Jerusalem to deal with the Egyptians (Jer. 37:5), and Jeremiah tried to leave Jerusalem. But he was arrested, falsely accused and imprisoned, as Jer. 37 explains. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological; Jer. 32 speaks of his time in prison.

Jeremiah 32:2 Now at that time the king of Babylon's army was besieging Jerusalem; and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard, which was in the king of Judah's house- Although the Babylonians had generally left Jerusalem to fight the Egyptians (Jer. 37:5), they clearly left some of their army outside Jerusalem. "The court of the guard" doesn't mean that "the guard" were there; but rather that it was a section of the Palace court where prisoners were guarded.

Jeremiah 32:3 For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up saying, Why do you

prophesy and say, Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it- The message of Jeremiah was countercultural, and exactly the opposite of what people wanted to hear; and therefore in direct collision with the message of the false prophets. We are in a similar position with the message we speak in the last days.

Jeremiah 32:4 And Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall see his eyes- Zedekiah's response to a message he didn't want to accept was to shoot the messenger and discredit him. That is the same basic human response to the incisive personal challenge of God's word. That is why there is so much attempt to discredit the Bible. No matter how politely worded and with what apparent sophistication and eloquence, this is the same basic mindset as Zedekiah's desire to discredit Jeremiah.

Jer. 34:5 says that "You shall die in peace; and with the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so shall they make a burning for you; and they shall lament you saying, Ah Lord!". It surely has to be recognized that the 'prophecy' that Zedekiah would die in peace was conditional upon his obedience to the word of Jeremiah- even though those conditions aren't recorded (although they are implicit surely).

Jeremiah 32:5 And he shall bring Zedekiah to Babylon, and he shall be there until I visit him, says Yahweh: though you fight with the Chaldeans, you shall not prosper?- This 'visiting' was related to Zedekiah's repentance. He had earlier been told he would be killed, but in fact he died in peace and with respect (Jer. 34:5). This was presumably due to his repentance. God's 'visiting' him, His involvement in his life, was in response to that repentance; but it could also have been in giving him repentance. See on Jer. 31:18. It's as if God's purpose is somewhat like a navigation system; depending upon where we ourselves drive, the route to the intended destination is continually recalculated.

Jeremiah 32:6 Jeremiah said, The word of Yahweh came to me saying- The response to Zedekiah's opposition was not in further condemnation of him, but rather in repeated reassurance that for those open to it, the prophetic word of the restored kingdom was going to come about- no matter how unlikely that might immediately seem.

Jeremiah 32:7 Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle shall come to you, saying, Buy my field that is in Anathoth; for the right of redemption is yours to buy it- Jeremiah was a priest, so Hanamel also was likely a priest. But they were forbidden to own property. This strange command was therefore to demonstrate the degree to which truly the old covenant had been ended because Israel had broken the contract, and those who wished could accept the new one (Jer. 31:31,32). This would explain why in :8 Jeremiah appears to have been given some special reassurance that "then I knew that this was the word of Yahweh".

Jeremiah 32:8 So Hanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of Yahweh, and said to me, Please buy my field that is in Anathoth, which is in the land of Benjamin; for the right of inheritance is yours, and the redemption is yours; buy it for yourself- As explained on :7, this was illegal for

Jeremiah under the old covenant, for the priests were to have no "inheritance". But that covenant had been broken and therefore ended. This is why Jeremiah now receives special confirmation that truly, this request to buy property was "the word of Yahweh". For God speaks to us through situations.

Then I knew that this was the word of Yahweh- Peter knew that if it really was the Lord Jesus out there on the water, then He would bid him walk on the water to Him. Peter knew his Lord, and the sort of things He would ask men to do- the very hardest things for them in their situation. He knew how Jesus could be a demanding Lord. Likewise Jeremiah "knew that this was the word of the Lord" when he was asked to do something so humanly senseless- to buy property when he was in prison, when the land was clearly about to be overrun by the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 32:9 I bought the field that was in Anathoth of Hanamel my uncle's son, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver- This cheap price reflects the collapse of value in property due to the war. We wonder from where the imprisoned Jeremiah had this money. He presumably had access to some level of wealth, and had the silver brought to him in the prison. We can imagine how many people would have remarked upon his apparent foolishness. News of the transaction would have spread widely, and would have been a powerful testament to his faith in the fulfillment of his prophecies.

Jeremiah 32:10 I subscribed the deed, and sealed it, and called witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances- As noted on :9, this was a major testimony to faith in the prophetic word of restoration. This explains the emphasis in the record on witnesses and the public, legally attested nature of the transaction. Our lifestyles likewise should be public testimony to the fact that like Noah, we are living not for today, but structuring our life decisions around the future realities we believe in.

Jeremiah 32:11 So I took the deed of the purchase, both that which was sealed, containing the terms and conditions, and that which was open- "Contracts stamped upon clay tablets have been found in Babylonia, enclosed in an envelope of clay, on the outside of which an exact duplicate of the contract was impressed: if in course of time any disagreement arose, and it was suspected that the outside text had been tampered with, the envelope was broken in the presence of witnesses to see if the inside text agreed with it or not. Earthen jars containing such duplicate contracts have been excavated at Nippur". But see on :14. The LXX gives a different possibility, speaking of "this book of the purchase, and the book that has been read" (:14 LXX). The idea would be that the record of the purchase was to be stored together with the prophetic word of restoration. The prophetic word was to make the deed of purchase to have value once again. The expectation was therefore that the exile would be short, and Jeremiah and the Jews would return from it and enjoy a period of great economic prosperity during which the property would become very valuable. But this didn't happen. For the restoration was conditional upon Judah's repentance, as the covenant agreement made clear in Lev. 26. Ez. 4 speaks of a 40 year exile for Judah; Jeremiah speaks of a 70 year period, but Daniel 9 explains that due to lack of repentance, this has been extended to a 70 x 7 period, and Daniel would not live to see the restoration. And yet Ezekiel's appeals to the first exiles to repent seems to imply that they had they done so, further deportations need not have happened, and the restoration would've happened sooner. So we see the flexibility of God's purpose- conditional upon repentance. We see the same with the death of Adam "in the day you eat" the

fruit being delayed, and the destruction of Nineveh being abrogated. God is open to man and so sensitive to human repentance. And despite their impenitence, He sent with a mighty arm to restore them anyway through the decree of Cyrus. But even then they refused the Divine attempt to as it were almost force through His saving purpose with His people. He is not passive nor indifferent, despite the steely silence of the skies. He desperately wants our salvation despite our weakness. And He at times deals with human sin and impenitence in ways other than simply demanding our repentance. He overlooks sin, remembers we are dust, a wind that passes away; pities us as children. For any relationship in practice depends upon overlooking failure rather than insisting upon specific repentance for every failure. And we are to forgive others as we are forgiven. That is a foundation principle of the believing life.

Jeremiah 32:12 And I delivered the deed of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses who subscribed the deed of the purchase, before all the Jews who sat in the court of the guard- Adam Clarke offers a slight variation upon the suggestion made on :11: "A duplicate of the deed was drawn, which was not to be sealed, but to lie open for the inspection of those concerned in some public place where it might be safe and always to be seen. The original, which was sealed up, was put in an earthen pitcher in order to be preserved from accidents. This was delivered by the purchaser into the hands of a third party, to be preserved for the use of the purchaser, and witnesses were called to attest this delivery. They subscribed the book of the purchase, perhaps a town book, or register, where such purchases were entered. Baruch was a scribe by profession; and the deeds were delivered into his hands, before witnesses, to be preserved as above. Perhaps the law, in this case, required that the instrument should be thus lodged. But, in the present case, both the deeds, the original and the duplicate, were put into the earthen pitcher because the city was about to be burnt; and if lodged as usual, they would be destroyed in the general conflagration". In this case, we see again Jeremiah's faith in the fall of Jerusalem which he had prophesied.

Jeremiah 32:13 I commanded Baruch before them, saying- As explained on :12, this departure from usual custom was because Jeremiah believed Jerusalem was about to be burnt and all such records would be lost. The people apparently agreed to this, because it was tacitly obvious that Jeremiah's words about Jerusalem were going to be fulfilled.

Jeremiah 32:14 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, this deed of the purchase which is sealed, and this deed which is open, and put them in an earthen vessel; that they may continue many days- See on :11,12. However, the Hebrew translated "open" is the word for "exile", literally 'to be denuded', and thence 'to go into captivity'. If the need was simply to express the fact that a copy of the contract was visible to all, a different word would have been more appropriate. But this word is the one used for 'carrying away into captivity' (Jer. 29:7,14 and very often). So the idea may be that a copy of the deed was to be taken into captivity, and the sealed copy left in Jerusalem. This witness to faith in restoration was to be with the captives.

Jeremiah 32:15 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land- The idea was that this would be

the situation in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel which Jeremiah was prophesying. But here we read of buying for money, deeds, witnesses etc. The kingdom which was then possible was still somewhat human; the ultimate restoration of the Kingdom will not feature these things, and so we have to again conclude that the message of a restored kingdom was reapplied, reinterpreted and rescheduled to the last days. And not every detail of the original prophecies will therefore literally come about.

Jeremiah 32:16 Now after I had delivered the deed of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to Yahweh, saying- What follows, climaxing in :24 and :25, is again Jeremiah's struggle with God. He had been obedient, apparently for the sake of being obedient to a Divine command, but he struggled with how ever this could come true. Despite all the prophecies of the restoration which had already come through his mouth. This tension between theoretical knowledge and personal, enthusiastic belief in the truths contained therein remains the struggle within every believer of all ages. And realizing this we marvel the more at the Lord as "the word made flesh".

Jeremiah 32:17 Ah Lord Yahweh! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for You- As noted on :16, Jeremiah here struggles between what he knows theoretically, and accepting that spending his money on something which seemed ludicrous and fruitless was actually God's will. God will quote back his words to him in :27, asking him to believe in practice what he knew theoretically to be true. And we are invited to do so likewise through the experiences brought into our lives. Perhaps with later reflection (see on :25), Jeremiah realized that he had inadvertently quoted the words of God in reminding a likewise doubting Abraham and Sarah: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14). And the Hebrew word translated "hard" is that usually translated "wonder". In our moments of wonder, and as the afterglow of them permeates our lives, it becomes easier to believe that nothing is too wonderful for our God of wonders to do for us. For He *is* the God who does wonders, He *is* wonderful and awesome. Jeremiah theoretically learnt the lesson from God's words to Abraham and Sarah; for he alludes to it here. But God has to remind him soon afterwards in Jer. 32:26,27: "Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: *is* there any thing too hard [wonderful] for me?". We think we know all about wonder, when actually we don't. Our lack of total faith shows that we do indeed think God's wonder is limited. Because something is hard / marvellous in our eyes doesn't mean it is in God's eyes (Zech. 8:6).

Jeremiah 32:18 Who show loving kindness to thousands, and recompense the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them; the great, the mighty God, Yahweh of Armies is His name- His mention of the sins of the fathers affecting their children seems dangerously close to the very complaint of Israel which he had rebuked in Jer. 31:30. Jeremiah here himself has something of Israel's wrong attitude, even though he theoretically knew that the children were suffering for committing the same sins as the fathers. We can know such truths in theory and yet struggle to accept them in practice.

Jeremiah 32:19 Great in counsel, and mighty in working; whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give each one according to his ways, and according

to the fruit of his doings- Jeremiah had no problem in believing that God judges sin; but he finds it harder to believe in grace, and in the promised restoration. For he seems to think that God's judgment of sin surely precluded a restoration in which he would actually own the property he had just bought. We likewise struggle to believe the good news that seems too good to believe, preferring to wallow in the things of sin and its judgment.

Jeremiah 32:20 Who performed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even to this day, both in Israel and among other men; and made Yourself a name, as it is at this day- This is powerful proof that the concept of the Name of God is far more than simply a word, a lexical item, "Yahweh". It is primitive to then argue about the pronunciation of that word as if that is what the Name is all about. The Name was "made" progressively over time and the experience of God in the lives of me. It is however more than simply a reputation acquired in history. Verses 18 and 19 have listed some of the characteristics of the Name as it was declared to Moses in Ex. 34. It is the articulation of that Name in history, in the very human history of individual lives and hearts as well as in the path of nations, which progressively builds up the glory of that Name; and it came to its acme in the death of His Son on the cross.

Jeremiah 32:21 And brought forth Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, wonders, a strong hand, an outstretched arm and with great terror- The exodus from Egypt was presented in Isaiah and by allusion in Jeremiah as the template for Judah's restoration from Babylon. But with the Babylonians outside the city gates, it all seemed too hard to believe for Jeremiah; that he too would be exiled but restored. This is the limitation of any total or misplaced focus upon true theology, correct doctrine. It may all be true; but grasping correct theology is not the same as personal faith- that this is and shall be true for me. The wonder was that God brought Israel out from Egypt when they themselves didn't want to leave [Ex. 14:12 "Isn't this the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians?' For it were better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness"]; just as the exiles in Babylon were settled and at ease (as in the book of Esther), and had to be brought out by God almost forcing through His purpose.

Jeremiah 32:22 And gave them this land, which You swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey- Jeremiah knew the theoretical truth, that God could give His people the land as He had done historically, by amazing miracles. But he was being asked to believe that he personally would have an inheritance, a real tangible plot of land, in the restored Kingdom. For he tacitly realizes that God could again give Israel their land. But he falters when it comes to personally believing that he will be there, and that it will be personally real to him. So it can be for us. We may be able to fluently and confidently proclaim that the Kingdom of God shall be established on this earth, furnishing clear Bible proofs for it. But do we believe that we personally shall be there? This was the struggle of Jeremiah at this point, and surely it is not unknown to us.

Jeremiah 32:23 And they came in, and possessed it, but they didn't obey Your voice, neither walked in Your law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do: therefore You have caused all this evil to come on them- It seems that Jeremiah considered the sins of Israel so great that the promised restoration wouldn't happen, and therefore buying a property in the hope of such restoration was foolishness. Israel

were obedient to parts of the Mosaic legislation, and yet here Jeremiah claims that "they have done nothing of all that You commanded them". He correctly understood that obeying bits and pieces of a religious code, subscribing to some kind of spiritual culture in some parts of human life, is in fact 'nothing'. This will not save anyone; and that again is a challenge to us all. For over time, our faith does have elements of religion and culture within it. To break one part of the Mosaic law was to break all of it (James 2:10). And so in fact nobody apart from the Lord Jesus did anything of that which was commanded. The only way to salvation therefore was from a new covenant- the very offer God had just made in Jer. 31:32,33.

Jeremiah 32:24 Behold, the siege mounds, they have come to the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence; and what You have spoken has happened; and behold, You see it- "Behold" is asking God to 'see' the current realities as if He didn't see them; but the sentence concludes with accepting that "You see it". The theme of this section is that Jeremiah through his struggles with God, and having the courage to articulate them in words, comes to the right conclusions. God's response to him is merely confirming what Jeremiah had already come to perceive. This happens in our lives too.

Jeremiah 32:25 You have said to me, Lord Yahweh, Buy the field for money, and call witnesses; whereas the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans- Jeremiah stops short of charging God with folly, as we should. But he openly expresses his struggle with being asked to spend his money, perhaps all his savings and wealth, on what seemed to be pointless. Perhaps he stops short here, in mid sentence almost, because the answer was already clear to him- if indeed God could do all things, then He could restore Judah so that this purchase would be worthwhile and Jeremiah could enjoy his purchase. And as often happens with us, God's subsequent word to him simply confirmed to him the truth of the conclusion he had internally reached, unspoken, unarticulated as it was.

Jeremiah 32:26 Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah saying- As explained on :16,17, God is asking him to believe in practice what he knew theoretically to be true.

Jeremiah 32:27 Behold, I am Yahweh, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for Me?- See on :17. God quotes back Jeremiah's words of :17, asking him to believe in practice what he knew theoretically to be true. And we are invited to do so likewise through the experiences brought into our lives. See on Jer. 33:3.

Jeremiah 32:28 Therefore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it- God repeats word for word what was in Jeremiah's mind. This is the way His word works, taking our thoughts and fears right out of our minds.

Jeremiah 32:29 And the Chaldeans who now fight against this city shall come and set this city on fire and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs they have offered incense to Baal, and poured out drink offerings to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger- The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and

woman...that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4). Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4).

Jeremiah 32:30 For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done only that which was evil in My sight from their youth; for the children of Israel have only provoked Me to anger with the work of their hands, says Yahweh- God is agreeing with Jeremiah about the sinfulness of His people. "They have *only* provoked me" agrees with Jeremiah's claim that they had done nothing of that which was commanded them (:23). God at great length portrays the sinfulness of His people; but in order to lead up to the overpowering wonder of the way that He, the God who can do anything, can forgive and restore even such people. Jeremiah balked at this, just as we may encounter someone so mixed up in their mind with addictions and other issues that we wonder whether they can ever be psychologically healed. It's as if God goes through all their problems, agreeing with us that they are indeed incurable- and then cures them by His Spirit working in the innermost mind and heart of men.

Jeremiah 32:31 For this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and of My wrath from the day that they built it even to this day; that I should remove it from before My face- Jerusalem was first built by Jews at the time of David and Solomon, and it seems that even from that time it provoked Him to wrath, and He wanted to remove it from His presence. The historical record is therefore very gracious in not recording all the idolatry which was ongoing there even in those times.

Jeremiah 32:32 Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke Me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem- And therefore, the king, princes, priests and false prophets were to be punished through the Babylonian invasion. A study of “the princes” of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God’s word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But “the princes” were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God’s word. And “the princes” were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God’s people- can be very fickle.

Jeremiah 32:33 They have turned to Me the back and not the face- Israel were driven away from God's face / presence because they had already hid themselves from His face by their sins (Is. 59:2; Jer. 32:33 cp. 33:5). "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hos. 13:9) says it all.

And though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not listened to receive instruction- Several times God speaks of His rising up early in the

morning through the ministry of the prophets, every single day since Israel left Egypt (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25). The figure is stressed- God Himself rose up early every day to teach and appeal to His people (Jer. 32:33). Alarm clocks have changed our appreciation of this. Have you ever had to make yourself wake up before dawn, without an alarm clock? You can only do it by having a deep internal, subconscious awareness that you must get up early. You don't sleep well, you keep waking up and wondering if it's time to get up. So to make oneself rise up early was easily understood as a figure expressing great mental effort. And God did this *every day* for centuries...

Jeremiah 32:34 Instead they set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to defile it- Ezekiel was given a vision of how within the holy place, idols were worshipped and even depicted upon the walls.

Jeremiah 32:35 They built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech; which I didn't command them, neither did it come into My mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin- "Neither did it come into My mind" suggests God as it were surprised and outraged that Israel did these things. Although God is outside time, this mustn't lead us to conclude that He is somehow static and unfeeling; He reveals Himself as accommodating Himself to men to the extent that He has feelings of joy at the moment of our repentance (consider the Father rushing out to the returning son) and sorrow and anguish at the times of our apostasy (consider the Almighty "rising early and sending" the prophets). Although He is outside time, yet He limits His omniscience (as He evidently limits His omnipotence). It could even be that although He *could* see every possible future and foresee our behaviour well before our birth, He somehow ignores this possibility. This is why He is described as being disappointed at Israel's level of response to His love, shocked at their sins, surprised at their perversions (e.g. Jer. 19:5; 32:35).

Jeremiah 32:36 Now therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, concerning this city, about which you say, It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence- Who is meant by "you" is discussed on :43. It was God who had 'said' that the city would be given to the Babylonians. But He seems to here rebuke Jeremiah for having said this to Him. Because His point was, and is for us too, that focusing solely upon His judgment of sin is so unbalanced as to be a lack of faith.

Jeremiah 32:37 Behold, I will gather them out of all the countries where I have driven them in My anger, and in My wrath, and in great indignation; and I will bring them again to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely- Dwelling safely in Jerusalem was a far cry from how things were at that time, with the city besieged. God's message of restoration includes within it a complete recognition of their sins and His resultant, legitimate anger and fury with them. His 'indignance' is all understandable given the extent of His love; for genuine love cannot exist in a vacuum. The abuse of that love is going to provoke anger, otherwise the "love" was not really legitimate and genuine.

Jeremiah 32:38 and they shall be My people, and I will be their God- This alludes to the promises to Abraham (Gen. 17:8-10) which were the basis of the new covenant

God was now offering His repentant people (:40). This covenant therefore involved the blessing not only of the land, but if the new heart of :39. Thus Peter interprets the blessing promised to Abraham is a turning away of men from their iniquities- far more than forgiveness, but the power to spiritually change.

Jeremiah 32:39 and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for their good, and of their children after them- As explained on Jer. 31:33, the new covenant involves God doing a psychological miracle on the spirit / heart of men through *His* Spirit being mixed with their spirit. They were still envisaged as having "children after them"; the possibility was that this situation could have arisen for the exiles in a restored Kingdom of God in Israel. Earlier, God had given His people "one heart" to be obedient (2 Chron. 30:12 s.w.). The other reference to having "one heart" is when Judah had one heart to make David their king (1 Chron. 12:38). "David your king" is how the Messianic ruler of the restored kingdom is described (Ez. 37:24). God was willing to give them one heart for him. But they didn't repent, and refused to accept this new covenant. And so it didn't happen; but the essence of the promise has been reapplied to a new Israel who now can enter this same new covenant and receive the same gift of the Spirit, and it will come to its ultimate fulfillment when the Kingdom is fully established on earth at the Lord's return. But for now, the promise of the Spirit, the new heart which makes us fear God for our good, is absolutely real. He will put the fear of Him in our hearts (:40). Israel and Judah had previously taken the same "way", portrayed in metaphor as the way of sexual addiction and adultery against their God (s.w. Ez. 23:13). But now they would be given one way, one worldview, one mindset, which would lead to the things of God's Kingdom. This is not simply a case of confirming a person in the path they choose- it is giving people that heart and way, that mental pathway. All the exiles had to do was be willing to accept it, but they would not do even that. The power of pride and dislike of change was such that they didn't want this new heart and spirit; and that is why people today refuse to accept the movement of the Spirit in their lives.

Jeremiah 32:40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from following them, to do them good; and I will put My fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from Me- See on :39. God presents Himself in metaphor as following His people, perhaps alluding to a shepherd following His flock (Am. 7:15). He presents Himself as servile to His own people, so earnestly desirous is He to give us His fear in our hearts and to keep us from departing from Him. This relentless desire of God 'to do us good' is part of what it means to be in the new covenant with Him. His effort is presented here as being particularly concerning the state of heart of His people. He so wishes us to be spiritually minded, and will work through every issue in our lives night and day in order to achieve this.

Jeremiah 32:41 Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul- God solemnly promises "assuredly" that in truth, His whole heart and soul is behind doing His people good and saving them into His reestablished kingdom; see on :40. This is the huge activity operating upon those within the new covenant. God's entire mental and emotional activity is focused upon our salvation.

When Israel were so far from God, He foretold the day when "my people will be gorged with my grace" (Jer. 31:14). The image of gorging upon grace is yet another reflection of the super-abounding nature of it. And this part of the new covenant to be

made with Israel is true of us today, who have already entered that same covenant; it's a thought we can dwell upon as we eat at the Lord's table. And as we do so we can think of how God describes *His* feelings in all this: "I will find joy in them and in doing them good" (Jer. 32:41). God simply *loves* pouring out such grace. Let's try to catch something of this spirit of the grace of God. Let's try to adopt God's perspective. For what does He require more of a man, "but to do justly, and to *love* mercy (as God does, Mic. 7:18), and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8)?

Jeremiah 32:42 For thus says Yahweh: Like as I have brought all this great evil on this people, so will I bring on them all the good that I have promised them- The very phrase "bring... good", translated "good comes", is used in Jer. 17:6 about the unbelieving Jews: "For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when *good comes*, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited". The people who trust the flesh or the world for "good" rather than Yahweh will "not see when good comes". The true good that comes only from Yahweh will not be perceived if we are focused all the time upon the "good" we think we can get from trusting in the flesh. We will not perceive the beauty of a sunrise because we are so caught up in hoping that news of a lottery win is about to come through. Such people stay in the land of condemnation ["a salt land"] by their own choice. And so many of the exiles remained in Babylon, failing to perceive the "good" which was being brought about by the "good hand of God" at the restoration (s.w. Ezra 7:9; 8:18 etc.).

Jeremiah 32:43 Fields shall be bought in this land- The power of the incident would have been if the witnesses and Jeremiah saw Jeremiah inhabiting the property he had bought, after the people had been restored to the land. A property then bought dirt cheap during the siege would then be worth so much more, and the power of the prophetic word would have been declared. But the restoration didn't happen as was possible, and he died in exile in Egypt, never receiving the property. He will in some form receive it, therefore, at the resurrection; when like Daniel he will rise to stand in his allotted inheritance (Dan. 12:13). So this incident again serves to demonstrate how much potential was wasted, and the awful human resistance to God's desire to do them good.

About which you say, It is desolate, without man or animal; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans- The "you" could refer to Jeremiah, in which case we see him arguing with God, and his words being cited back to him by the God who knows every word and thought. If the "you" refers to the Jews, then we see how on one hand they believed Jeremiah's words about the Chaldean victory, evidence for which was all around them; and yet on the other, they desperately clung to their belief in their idols, hoping against hope that the obvious truth would in fact not be true. This is typical of human nature, and is the sad attitude and belief system which many carry with them to their grave planks.

Jeremiah 32:44 Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe the deeds, and seal them, and call witnesses, in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the hill country, and in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the South: for I will cause their captivity to return, says Yahweh- The idea was that this would be the situation in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel which Jeremiah was prophesying. But here we read of buying for money, deeds, witnesses etc. The kingdom which was then possible was still

somewhat human; the ultimate restoration of the Kingdom will not feature these things, and so we have to again conclude that the message of a restored kingdom was reapplied, reinterpreted and rescheduled to the last days. And not every detail of the original prophecies will therefore literally come about.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 33

Jeremiah 33:1 Moreover the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah the second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard, saying- It seems that God's answer to Jeremiah's doubts about the restoration in Jer. 32 didn't solve all his questions. And so God gives him another vision of reassurance about restoration. Jeremiah in Jer. 32 had felt that Israel's sins were such that restoration was impossible. God's answer is to take on board completely this concern, but to emphasize the power of His grace. If Jeremiah so struggled to accept the degree of God's grace and power to change hard hearts... we can expect that we will likewise. And so we need the further reassurance of this chapter just as Jeremiah did.

Jeremiah 33:2 Thus says Yahweh who does it, Yahweh who forms it to establish it; Yahweh is His name- To not restore Israel, to not save His people, would be akin to having formed / created the world but not establishing it as a realistic abode for His people. The language here is borrowed from Is. 45:18, where also in a restoration context, Israel are encouraged that God formed the earth to be inhabited. If nobody will inhabit that Kingdom, then all creation was but labour in vain. God wants to save, He rejoices in doing so. See on Jer. 32:40,41.

Jeremiah 33:3 Call to Me, and I will answer you, and will show you great things, and difficult, which you don't know- This may be a personal invitation to Jeremiah (see on :1). He "knew" the theoretical truth of the restoration, but he had to "know" it personally, even though that realization would be both great and difficult. See on Jer. 32:17,27. Jeremiah was representative of his people; in the restored kingdom, they would call and God would answer (s.w. Is. 58:9; 65:24; Zech. 13:9).

Jeremiah 33:4 For thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are broken down to make a defence against the mounds and against the sword- Jeremiah elsewhere criticized the building of these great houses on the walls of Jerusalem- for they were built on the back of abusing the poor for material and labour. They were finally torn down by the Babylonians (Jer. 52:13), but even before that, the owners themselves broke them down and the materials were used to shore up the breaches in the city walls. Likewise there are foretastes of judgment ahead of time in the lives of all God's people.

Jeremiah 33:5 While men come to fight with the Chaldeans, and to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have killed in My anger and in My wrath- The great houses were filled with dead bodies; the wealthy homes which were the epitome of their wealth, pride, materialism and unspirituality, became their tombs.

And for all whose wickedness I have hidden My face from this city- Israel were driven away from God's face / presence because they had already hid themselves from His face by their sins (Is. 59:2; Jer. 32:33 cp. 33:5). "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hos. 13:9) says it all.

Jeremiah 33:6 Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them- The broken earthen bottle which was smashed couldn't be made whole again- apparently (Jer. 19:11). But the miracle of grace was that like the useless burnt vine branch of Ez. 15 and the marred linen girdle buried by the Euphrates, the smashed bottle, like Ezekiel's dry bones vision, could be made whole again. The stripes upon the suffering servant could 'heal' Israel (s.w. "made whole", Is. 53:5). Jeremiah had preached as much, that being made whole again was possible (Jer. 3:22; 30:17; 33:6 s.w.). The rhetorical question of Lam. 2:13 "Zion... who can heal you / make you whole again?" (s.w.) had its answer in Yahweh.

And I will reveal to them abundance of peace and truth- This can be read as meaning that it was God's intention that Babylon too should find peace with Him; Babylon's peace was to be that of Judah (see on Jer. 29:7). As noted on :1, Jeremiah wondered as to whether God could really psychologically restore such a corrupted people; just as we may wonder whether the Holy Spirit can really heal the hearts of the abused and drug addicted. God is encouraging him that this really could happen; He could and can cure the psychologically incurable.

Jeremiah 33:7 I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first- Causing captivity to return can be read as simply meaning 'to revive the fortunes'. But they had been asked to return from exile to Zion, and spiritually, to return to their God. And here God is saying that He will cause them to return; if they wanted restoration and turning to God, then God would give this to them. Repentance is therefore a gift (Acts 11:18). His causative power operates directly upon the human heart; for this prophecy is a follow on and back up to that of Jer. 32:40.

Jeremiah 33:8 I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, by which they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, by which they have sinned against Me, and by which they have transgressed against Me- God would give not only repentance (:7) but also forgiveness. But His amazing offer labours the point four times in this verse- that they really had sinned against Him. And that needed to be recognized.

Jeremiah 33:9 This city shall be to Me for a name of joy, for a praise and for a glory, before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do to them, and shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure to it- The amazing grace of God to His people, giving them both repentance (:7) and forgiveness (:8), would result in a peace with God which would become legendary. All nations of the *eretz*, including those who had abused Israel, would hear and perceive this grace, and come trembling to the God of Jerusalem in order to themselves partake of it. This is what could have happened at the restoration, but it has been reapplied to the last days. Really perceiving this grace is enough indeed to make a man "fear and tremble"; not from fear of condemnation, but in awe at the surpassing grace extended.

Jeremiah 33:10 Thus says Yahweh: Yet again there shall be heard in this place, about which you say, It is waste, without man and without animal, even in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without animal- "Yet again" demonstrates that the new kingdom to be established would be a restoration of the previous kingdom of God in Israel, although

to a far grander extent. This is what will happen at the Lord's return to earth (Acts 1:6). There is an element of continuity with the previous kingdom; reminding us that the kingdom of God on earth is to be real and concrete and not purely abstract and immaterial. In Lamentations, Jeremiah laments the desolate state of the streets of Jerusalem; he appeared to have forgotten these wonderful prophecies of restoration, caught up as we can be in the tragedy of the moment.

Jeremiah 33:11 The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, Give thanks to Yahweh of Armies, for Yahweh is good, for His loving kindness endures forever; who bring thanksgiving into the house of Yahweh- In the final restoration of the Kingdom, there will be no marriage (Lk. 20:35,36). So this describes what could have been in the restored Kingdom at the restoration. It didn't happen, and therefore the essence of the prophecies will come true at the Lord's return- but not every detail. The building of the temple, institution of sacrifices etc. of Ez. 40-48 would appear to be another example of some of the literal physicalities intended which will not be literally fulfilled at the Lord's return.

For I will cause the captivity of the land to return as at the first, says Yahweh- We read in Jer. 33:11,26 of God 'causing' the captives to return. The Hebrew in this phrase is intriguing and impossible to adequately translate- the idea is 'I will cause by my very own self and will'. The whole force of God's personality and His passions and emotions was behind His causing Judah to return to the land. But most of them withstood it. And so as we spread the appeal of God to men to return to Him, there is a huge Divine 'will' behind our message, God Himself in all His passion is behind our appeals.

Jeremiah 33:12 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Yet again shall there be in this place which is waste, without man and without animal, and in all its cities, a habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down- "Yet again" demonstrates that the new kingdom to be established would be a restoration of the previous kingdom of God in Israel, although to a far grander extent. This is what will happen at the Lord's return to earth (Acts 1:6). There is an element of continuity with the previous kingdom; reminding us that the kingdom of God on earth is to be real and concrete and not purely abstract and immaterial. The idea of farmers and shepherds living within the area of the restored Zion is found in Ez. 48:18 (see notes there). But the commands of Ez. 40-48 weren't obeyed by the returned exiles.

Jeremiah 33:13 In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the South, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks again pass under the hands of him who numbers them, says Yahweh- See on :12. Ez. 20:37 speaks of the returning exiles as flocks passing under the rod of the shepherd, who counts them that none be lost. Verse 22 is a designed contrast; the redeemed as Abraham's seed cannot be numbered. And yet this shepherd, spoken of in the singular because one particular shepherd is in view, will be able to number them. The shepherd is seen as the Messianic priest-ruler; clearly this looks forward to the Lord Jesus, seeing the flock of exiles generally did not truly return.

Jeremiah 33:14 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will perform that word of grace which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and concerning the house

of Judah- Again it is emphasized that Israel and Judah would unite, due to the common experience of God's grace. To be not only forgiven of so much sin, but even caused to repent (see on :7,8), is indeed a word of grace. No covenant based upon obedience could lead to their restoration; it had to be of grace alone, as it has to be for us too.

Jeremiah 33:15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up to David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land- A branch growing out of David means that this person was the seed of David. Zerubbabel ['branch of God from Babylon'] could have fulfilled all this; but he didn't. The promised seed of David was therefore fulfilled in the Lord Jesus (Lk. 1:35,36). Executing justice and judgment was to be the characteristic of Abraham's seed (the same three words are in Gen. 18:19). The seed of David would be the seed of Abraham. The new covenant would be based upon the promises to Abraham. And yet it is God as judge of all the earth who executes justice (s.w. Gen. 18:25). So this literal descendant of Abraham and David was to be the manifestation of God; all clearly to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

Jeremiah 33:16 In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name by which it shall be called: Yahweh our righteousness- The effect of the Messianic ruler, the branch of righteousness of :15, will be that Jerusalem (put her for the people of Jerusalem and Judah) would also be known as "Yahweh our righteousness". The "our" refers not to Judah, but to some other group- the Gentile nations around them. As Yahweh had been her righteousness, imputing righteousness to them through the Messianic figure which looked forward to the Lord Jesus, so they would reflect their reconciliation to others. They would become righteousness for others as Yahweh had been their saving righteousness. This is to be our response likewise to what has been done for us by grace in Christ.

All this could have happened at the restoration. As Jerusalem was to be renamed "Yahweh is our righteousness" (Jer. 33:16 RV), so Ez. 48:35 likewise is a command rather than a prediction, that the city should be called this. But Judah didn't do this. The concept has been reapplied to those who call Yahweh's righteousness upon themselves in baptism. Jer. 33:16; 23:6 etc. outline God's intention that after the restoration, the rebuilt Zion would be named "The Lord our righteous one" because Jerusalem would be the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 31:23; 50:7). This is similar language to the restoration prophecies of Isaiah- the surrounding Gentile world would see / perceive / believe in "the righteous one" who would reign in the rebuilt Zion (Is. 62:2).

Jeremiah 33:17 For thus says Yahweh: David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel- This implies that the ruler in the line of David would have children and descendants who would eternally continue reigning on David's throne. That wonderful potential was not realized in Zerubbabel, and so the prophecy will come true in essence in that the Lord Jesus, the seed of David, will reign eternally.

In the context of the restoration from Babylon, David would never want a man to sit upon his throne; and no conditions to this are specified. And yet even within Jeremiah it is apparent that because of the failure of Judah's leaders, there would indeed come a time when there would be "none to sit upon the throne of David" (Jer. 22:30; 36:30). Yet *if* the Jews had done righteousness in Zedekiah's time, then instead

of the Babylonians entering the gates of Jerusalem there would have been “kings sitting for David upon his throne” (Jer. 22:4 RVmg.). But this condition is not mentioned in the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 nor in the apparent blanket statement of Jer. 33:17.

Jeremiah 33:18 Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, and to burn meal offerings, and to do sacrifice continually- This again was the potential possibility; the system of offerings was to be restored in the rebuilt temple, and the Levites who served there would have an unbroken line of descendants who continued that work. But they were impenitent; this didn't happen. Therefore Nehemiah was heartbroken that the temple was “forsaken”, because the “Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field” because the tithes weren’t paid to them (Neh. 13:10,11). The essence of it came to be fulfilled in the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus, but the detail obviously wasn't.

Jeremiah 33:19 The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah saying- It would appear that the fall of Jerusalem and exile meant that there was a feeling that the covenant relationship with God had been broken, and Israel were therefore no longer God's people. Those who fail can at times be so swallowed up with the sorrow of condemnation that they believe there can be no way back for them (2 Cor. 2:7). And so we have here the affirmation of God's eternal faithfulness to Israel.

Jeremiah 33:20 Thus says Yahweh: If you can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, so that there shall not be day and night in their season- The whole of creation was bound up with Israel; all of creation came about for our sakes, God's people. All the vastness is merely to provide a context for our redemption. Any breaking of covenant with God's people is therefore tantamount to a breaking of covenant with day and night, and the entire solar system which provides them. There is no record of God having a covenant relationship with those entities; but here we learn that He does, insofar as He has a covenant relationship with His people.

And yet the covenant with Israel was broken, both by them and later confirmed by God from His side (Zech. 11:10). The eternal nature of His covenant is therefore achieved by redefining the human parties; instead of the nation of Israel, the part became "David My servant" (:21), Messiah- and all in Him. The darkness that came down at the crucifixion would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant with Israel. Israel’s condemnation would be that “even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered “for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

Jeremiah 33:21 Then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant, that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne; and with the Levites the priests, My ministers- The old covenant was broken (Zech. 11:10). But the kingly and priestly lines did not continue after the restoration. As explained on :20, the covenant was only unbroken in that the human party was redefined, from Israel as a nation to a

singular king-priest who would be their representative- ultimately, the Lord Jesus. All those in Him would abide within the covenant, eternally.

Jeremiah 33:22 As the army of the sky can't be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured; so will I multiply the seed of David My servant, and the Levites who minister to Me- Verse 13 and Ez. 20:37 speaks of the returning exiles as flocks passing under the rod of the shepherd, who counts them that none be lost. Here there is a designed contrast; the redeemed as Abraham's seed cannot be numbered. And yet this shepherd, spoken of in the singular because one particular shepherd is in view, will be able to number them. The shepherd is seen as the Messianic priest-ruler; clearly this looks forward to the Lord Jesus, seeing the flock of exiles generally did not truly return. The seed of David was to multiply as the seed of Abraham; and it would be achieved as explained on :21, through the Messianic king-priest, the Lord Jesus, in whom all baptized into Him would also become part of this multitude of king-priests. But this far grander eventuality was only to come about because the possibility of fulfillment at the restoration didn't happen, because the line of David and the Levites precluded it.

Jeremiah 33:23 The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah saying- The assurance which follows may have been given in answer to some specific question from the audience, or may be addressing some personal question of Jeremiah. The specific objection is stated in :34.

Jeremiah 33:24 Don't consider what this people has spoken saying, The two families which Yahweh chose, has He not cast them off? Thus do they despise My people, that they should be no more a nation before them- The people of Judah appeared to think that now they had been treated like the ten tribes and sent into captivity, they like the ten tribes would be permanently rejected it. Judah had fed themselves with the elitist narrative that the exile of the ten tribes meant they were no longer the true people of God, whereas they as Judah had the temple with them, had not gone into exile, and were therefore God's true people. But now they too had gone into exile. This is the problem of being harshly judgmental of others; those who are such often then discover that they have actually committed the same sins as those they once so harshly judge. And their response is often to walk away from the things of God because they think that they too are condemned beyond redemption. And so Judah despised themselves now they too were carried away into exile and had lost the temple; considering they could never again be Yahweh's people. In this context comes the message of restoration, possible for those who believed in it.

Jeremiah 33:25 Thus says Yahweh: If My covenant of day and night fails, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth- The whole of creation was bound up with Israel; all of creation came about for our sakes, God's people. All the vastness is merely to provide a context for our redemption. Any breaking of covenant with God's people is therefore tantamount to a breaking of covenant with day and night, and the entire solar system which provides them. There is no record of God having a covenant relationship with those entities; but here we learn that He does, insofar as He has a covenant relationship with His people.

Jeremiah 33:26 Then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob, and of David My servant, so that I will not take of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and will have mercy on them- See on :11. One understanding of this would be that Yahweh 'cast away' Judah (Jer. 12:7; 23:33) but only because they had cast Him off (Jer. 15:6 s.w.); and yet He did not cast off His people in that the seed of Jacob was to be redefined- not as a nation, but as His great individual seed, Jesus, and all those baptized into Him. And yet perhaps here we against have the paradox of grace. God did not cast off His people (Jer. 33:26); Jeremiah personally was persuaded that God would not cast off His people for ever (Lam. 3:31). He will show them mercy as if He had not cast them off (Zech. 10:6); this reversal of their casting off was to be through the repentance of the exiled community (Lev. 26:44). But even this didn't happen, and yet God still did not cast them away (Rom. 11:2). His love and grace was such that He holds on to them. This desperate holding on to His people is seen in the experience of every person who joins God's people through baptism into Christ. They may indeed be cast off ultimately, but that is because they cast Him off, and wrestled against His insistent desire to keep hold of them eternally.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 34

Jeremiah 34:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army and all the kingdoms of the land that were under his dominion, and all the peoples, were fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of it, saying- The emphasis is upon how indeed all nations of the lands around Israel came to fight against Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 34:2 Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, Go speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire- This was surely a conditional prophecy, even though no condition is given at the time: "I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire". But the Jews made some sort of repentance, releasing their slaves… and the Babylonian armies retreated (Jer. 34:21,22). Then they enslaved their brethren again- and, v.22 says, only because of this did the Babylonian armies return and burn Jerusalem. Thus the initial prophecy of burning with fire was conditional. And the Jews realized this and therefore repented. In similar vein, "the king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land" was capable of not being fulfilled, if Judah would only have repented (Jer. 36:3,7,29).

Jeremiah 34:3 and you shall not escape out of his hand, but shall surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and your eyes shall see the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with you mouth to mouth, and you shall go to Babylon- This was still conditional; Zedekiah could have repented. It was because he did not humble himself before the words of Jeremiah that the destruction and exile happened (2 Chron. 36:12-17). Zedekiah did see the eyes of the king, but his eyes were then put out. But it seems that in his blindness he repented to some degree.

Jeremiah 34:4 Yet hear the word of Yahweh, O Zedekiah king of Judah: thus says Yahweh concerning you, You shall not die by the sword- This was the previous judgment upon Zedekiah and the royal family (specifically :20; Jer. 21:7,9; also Jer. 9:16; 15:9; 20:4; 24:10). The idea may be that if he repented, a different destiny was possible. And indeed, he died in peace, albeit blind and in exile. We can conclude

therefore that in the blindness and imprisonment he experienced, he did repent. Blindness was used as a spur to repentance in the lives of Saul, Elymas and others.

Jeremiah 34:5 You shall die in peace; and with the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so shall they make a burning for you; and they shall lament you saying, Ah Lord! Because I have spoken the word, says Yahweh- Previously, the fate of Zedekiah was to have been the consuming of his carcass in shame (Jer. 19:7). As noted on :4, the Divine intentions for Zedekiah were changed because of his later repentance. The prophecy here mentions no conditions. But consider the words of Ez. 12:13 about the same man: "My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon…yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there" [i.e. he would be made blind before arrival]. The surrounding verses give an accurate prophecy of how Zedekiah was captured whilst fleeing from Jerusalem. And the same is said in Jer. 32:4; 38:17. It surely has to be recognized that the 'prophecy' that Zedekiah would die in peace was conditional upon his obedience to the word of Jeremiah- even though those conditions aren't recorded (although they are implicit surely). See on :20.

Jeremiah 34:6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem- Given the power of Zedekiah against people like Jeremiah, this was spoken with great bravery, that was motivated by a real desire to see his repentance.

Jeremiah 34:7 when the king of Babylon's army was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for these alone remained of the cities of Judah as fortified cities- "Remained" is the word for "remnant". It is this "remnant" which could have repented and been saved. The rest of Judah had fallen apart from them. We constantly encounter all the potential salvations that were possible.

Jeremiah 34:8 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty to them- God's response to this covenant was to speak of His own covenant with Israel (:13). His covenant relationship with them was conditional upon their covenant attitude to each other; and that is an abiding principle. Relationship with God depends upon our relationship and attitude to each other; as John puts it, we cannot claim to love God without loving our brother. This is why attitude to others within the covenant is so critically important, as upon that our whole relationship with God may stand or fall. It was apparently a jubilee year, when the slaves should in any case be released. This explains why they had a choice; to give the land and people rest, or to allow the land and common people to "keep Sabbath" in the desolation and exile which would happen after the invasion.

Jeremiah 34:9 that every man should let his male servant, and every man his female servant, who is a Hebrew or a Hebrewess, go free; that none should make bond servants of them, of a Jew his brother- Heb. 'should work through them', i.e. "should employ them for forced labour". It was on the back of this kind of abuse that the wealthy had built their great houses in Jerusalem. They were supposed to release them anyway in the Sabbath year, and that year was a jubilee year as well (:17). If they enslaved their brethren, then they were to be enslaved by the Babylonians. If they

liberated their brethren, then they would be liberated from otherwise certain bondage (Jer. 30:8 uses the same language). Again we must perceive the point- that abuse of our brethren will lead to our condemnation. Our attitude to those weaker than ourselves is so critically important; it is upon this that our relationship with God depends. In the light of this, we must carefully reassess any policies of disfellowship which our church, fellowship or denomination demands us to uphold. As we have been called to freedom, our attitude to our brethren should be seeking to liberate them, rather than enslave them. The tragedy is that at the restoration, these abusive practices were revived (Neh. 5:5), when it was exactly because of them that Judah had gone into captivity.

Jeremiah 34:10 All the princes and all the people obeyed, who had entered into the covenant, that everyone should let his male servant and everyone his female servant, go free, that none should make bond servants of them any more; they obeyed, and let them go- All those obeyed who had entered the covenant; which might suggest some didn't even enter it. A study of "the princes" of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God's word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But "the princes" were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God's word. And "the princes" were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God's people- can be very fickle.

Jeremiah 34:11 but afterwards they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids- Note the play on the word "return". By making their servants 'return' to bondage, they were 'returning' to the bondage of sin and selfishness. And this example is so true to our lives- we can forgive a person at one point in time, or in some way 'release' them; but find it impossible to maintain that intensity, just as David failed with Shimei.

There was a clear commandment to release their bondservants in the Sabbath year (Ex. 21:2; Dt. 15:12). But these slaves had likely sold themselves into that bondage. And with Jerusalem consumed by plague, famine and the effects of the Babylonian siege, these people had no choice but to immediately sell themselves back into that slavery. Technically, it could be argued that the wealthier Jews had done nothing wrong. But clearly they had disobeyed the spirit of the law- that their brethren should not be in permanent bondage to them, but should be given the freedom which is intended for every human being. This keeping the letter of the law but breaking the spirit of it was deeply abhorrent to God; and so they are condemned for doing so. We cannot adopt a spirit of brinkmanship with God; rather are we to wholeheartedly follow the way of love, kindness, sensitivity and empathy.

The prophets not only reflected God's dismay and passionate feelings, they expressed their own dismay too. Lack of justice was a major concern of the prophets. But to us, injustice may be so commonplace we don't really worry about it too much. Given all the idolatry going on at the time of Jeremiah, we'd have expected the condition for being spared judgment at the hands of their invaders to be: 'Throw your

idols away!'. But here God had offered them a reprieve if they stopped abusing their brethren. When, temporarily, the Jews ceased doing that and proclaimed liberty to their brethren- the pending judgment was put on hold. When they again abused their brethren, not giving them the "liberty" which must be afforded to all those made in God's image, then the Babylonians returned. And we need to ask whether we proclaim liberty to our brethren- or abuse them by not allowing them the basic freedom which is the dignity God allows to each of His children. It's rather like Paul writing to the Corinthians, and firstly addressing the sin of their divisiveness. What about their drunkenness at the breaking of bread, false doctrine, idolatry, using temple prostitutes? Paul focuses firstly on the sin of their divisions.

Jeremiah 34:12 Therefore the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying- As noted on :11, what the wealthy had done was technically within the limits of the law, but was such an obvious abuse of it that God responds very sternly.

Jeremiah 34:13 Thus says Yahweh, God of Israel: I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying- God's covenant with His people at this point was dependent upon their abiding by the covenant agreement to not abuse and rather liberate their brethren. Accepting covenant relationship with God involves a solemn understanding that we are not to abuse the weak, but are to do to them as God has done with us. We are to take them out of bondage, not into it. And we can return people to bondage by guilt tripping them and places burdens upon them.

Jeremiah 34:14 At the end of seven years you shall let go every man his brother who is a Hebrew, who has been sold to you, and has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you: but your fathers didn't listen to Me- Serving six years was counted inclusively as serving to the end of seven years. There was to be a generosity of spirit in dealing with their brethren.

Neither inclined their ear- Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

Jeremiah 34:15 You had now turned, and had done that which is right in My eyes, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name- They turned in repentance, and then turned back (:16). The turning of their captivity was to be response to their final turning back to God; the idea of 'turning' / repenting is such a major theme in Jeremiah. For all their sins of rebellion and idolatry, the threatened judgment could have been turned away simply if they repented of this one thing. This highlights how critically important is love for our brethren, and not seeking to get out of our responsibilities to the weak by claiming technical obedience to Divine law. For this was just what they were doing- capitalizing on their brethren's poverty by letting them

sell themselves to them as slaves, abusing their services, and then technically releasing them but letting these poor people sell themselves back into slavery to them soon afterwards.

Jeremiah 34:16 but you turned and profaned My name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom you had let go free at their pleasure, to return; and you brought them into subjection, to be to you for servants and for handmaids- God's Name has within it the ideas of salvation, redemption and liberation of His people. To act contrary to that is to profane His Name. This is the essence of blasphemy. God will not let His Name be polluted by His people (Is. 48:11; Ez. 20:9). But they did pollute His Name (Jer. 34:16), and the restored exiles did just the same rather than learn any lesson (Mal. 1:7). God invites us to see His efforts to stop His Name being polluted as somehow defeated by the extent of Israel's pollutions. This theme comes out clearly in Ezekiel: they polluted Him, but He strove lest His Name should be polluted. Here is the extent of freewill which God gives man to sin- and also the extent of the hopefulness of God. It's as if He didn't imagine they would pollute Him as much as they did.

Jeremiah 34:17 Therefore thus says Yahweh: you have not listened to Me, to proclaim liberty each man to his brother and each man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim to you a liberty, says Yahweh, to the sword, to the plague and to the famine- The play upon 'proclaiming liberty' has more appropriacy when we appreciate that this was a Sabbath and jubilee year. There is definite allusion to the prophecy of Is. 61:1, that the reestablished Messianic kingdom would be heralded by a proclamation of liberty to the captives; the same Hebrew phrase is used. Jeremiah's proclamation of this liberty was therefore a foretaste of that; if the Jews had accepted it and themselves proclaimed it, then despite all their other weaknesses, the most amazing turnaround could have happened. They who were on the brink of miserable destruction and condemnation could have been transformed into the restored Kingdom of God. The liberty was proclaimed to them. But instead they preferred petty power over others; their short term selfishness was too great, and the most wonderful, eternal opportunity was missed. They refused to accept their weaker, poorer brethren as their neighbours and equal brothers. And so it is with people to this day.

And I will make you to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth- This removing / tossing to and from of Judah from their land uses the same word as in Dt. 28:25; in response to their breaking of the covenant, they would be "removed (s.w.) into all the kingdoms of the *eretz*, throughout the land promised to Abraham. But this curse could have been turned into a blessing; for the restoration prophets envisaged the nations of the *eretz* repenting and converting to Yahweh. This could have been achieved by the exiles witnessing to the various peoples and languages within the Babylonian / Persian empire. But this didn't happen as was potentially possible. The exiles didn't repent, and so their repentance and experience of the grace of forgiveness was not the powerful pattern of conversion to their neighbours which it could have been.

Jeremiah 34:18 I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts- The covenant in view seems specifically the covenant to release the slaves (:8). A calf was cut in two, representing how they would be cut in pieces if they failed to keep it. This contrasts with the new covenant,

which was based upon the promises to Abraham. As noted on Gen. 15, this was a unilateral covenant from God to man. Yahweh alone passed through the pieces, whereas Abraham remained powerless to do so. He was simply the recipient of grace. The old covenant in the law of Moses was different; it depended upon the human side keeping their part of the agreement. It seems that now, at this dire point, God was willing to retain Israel within the covenant, even though they had broken it- if they kept their side of it, in simply liberating their brethren and not abusing them. But they failed to do even that, and so they were to be cut to pieces. But in grace, even that didn't happen to them all. For many of them went into exile rather than being slain with the sword, and as noted on Jer. 33, Zedekiah died in peace rather than be cut in pieces.

Jeremiah 34:19 the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, who passed between the parts of the calf- As explained on :18, this meant that they were to be cut into parts, seeing they had broken the covenant. They of course would have argued that they didn't break the covenant; they had freed their slaves, but the slaves being in desperate straits had sold themselves back to them for another six years soon afterwards. But they were breaking thereby the obvious spirit of the law, and this was counted as having broken the covenant agreement made, to liberate their brethren.

Jeremiah 34:20 I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and their dead bodies shall be for food to the birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth- The covenant of Gen. 15 featured the passing between the pieces, with birds of prey eager to come and eat the pieces of the slain calf. They had broken the covenant and were to be treated likewise. As explained on :19, they would have argued that they hadn't broken the covenant in the letter; but they had in spirit. And so they were to be cut in pieces and eaten by wild animals, with no decent burial. All because they refused to liberate their brethren. But did this really happen to them? The impression is given that the royal family went into exile and Zedekiah himself died in peace. Here again we would then see God in wrath remembering mercy, such was His grace.

Jeremiah 34:21 Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army who have for now gone away from you- To be given into the hand / power of those who want to kill you is surely tantamount to saying that they will kill you. As explained on :4,5, this was initially the prophetic scenario for Zedekiah; he would die by the sword. But by grace this was changed; he didn't repent at that time when he was intended to, and yet he presumably did later, after he was blinded and imprisoned.

Jeremiah 34:22 Behold, I will command, says Yahweh, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant- The 'return' of Judah to the sin of abusing their brethren, even despite doing to technically in the name of casuistic obedience to the law, was what caused the Babylonians to return. God placed such huge significance upon their attitude to their brethren; to the point that He effectively makes the entire return of the Babylonians to destroy the city and temple to pivot upon this matter.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 35

Jeremiah 35:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying- The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically, but perhaps thematically. For this follows on from the theme of disobedience in Jer. 34.

Jeremiah 35:2 Go to the house of the Rechabites, and speak to them, and bring them into the house of Yahweh, into one of the rooms, and give them wine to drink- The Rechabites were a wandering tribe descended from the Kenites (1 Chron. 2:55; Jud. 1:16). Being given wine to drink by a prophet was a symbol of judgment. They refused to drink it because of their obedience to principle. Whilst judgment cannot be avoided, perhaps the idea is that people could be saved from judgment because of obedience- which is the context provided by the previous chapter (see on :1).

Jeremiah 35:3 Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brothers, all his sons and the whole family of the Rechabites- These three names all include the name "Yah". These wandering Gentiles (see on :2) had clearly accepted the Jewish faith and Yahweh as their God. If "the whole family" were brought into the temple for this occasion, they may not have been that numerous; they had all fled into Jerusalem for fear of the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 35:4 and I brought them into the house of Yahweh, into the room of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God- If as AV "a man of God", this may be a comment upon his spirituality. He would have been one of a very small remnant of faithful priests.

Which was by the room of the princes- The rooms around the temple were intended for the priests. But they were in coalition with the princes, and so the princes had some of the Levites' chambers in the temple.

Which was above the room of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the threshold- This may have been the Maaseiah of Jer. 21:1; 29:25; 37:3; 52:4, who was one of the "priests" who were generally condemned and judged. The temple was used for this object lesson in order to make a public witness to the priests and princes.

Jeremiah 35:5 I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine and cups; and I said to them, Drink wine!- The Hebrew for "bowls" is mainly used about the "bowls" of the candlestick. Perhaps abuse of alcohol had become part of the general apostasy and idolatry going on in the temple.

Jeremiah 35:6 But they said, We will drink no wine; for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us saying, You shall drink no wine, neither you, nor your sons, forever- "Our father" doesn't have to mean that the "Rechabites" were his literal descendants; they may have been attracted to this ascetic lifestyle and considered themselves the spiritual descendants of Jonadab.

Jeremiah 35:7 neither shall you build house, nor sow seed, nor plant a vineyard nor own one; but all your days you shall dwell in tents; that you may live many days in the land in which you live- Houses, fields and lands could legitimately be bought and

sold, and would be in the restored kingdom (Jer. 32:15). It seems the connection with this verse is intentional. The point could be that these people were obedient to principles which were not strictly correct, they were not kingdom principles; and God's people can take a lesson from those who are fiercely loyal to principles which aren't correct. For how much stronger should be our loyalty and obedience to that which is ultimately true. "If they can do *that* for *that*, then how much more should I..." give my best for His highest.

Jeremiah 35:8 We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, or our daughters- Drinking wine was in fact one of the covenant blessings. The commend not to drink wine was therefore out of step with God's kingdom principles; as noted too on :7. And yet despite the fact that the Rechabites 'got it wrong' in their understanding of things, their names openly reflect their commitment to Yahweh (see on :3) and despite their misplaced idealism and faulty understanding, God accepted that and held them up as an example to those of His people who were merely living according to the flesh.

Jeremiah 35:9 nor to build houses for us to dwell in; neither do we have vineyard, nor field, nor seed- It could be that these commands about vineyard and seed refer specifically to seeds of the vine, as if this strange situation arose from a desire to be Nazirites, but it became twisted into a tradition and formalism which they blindly adhered to. As noted on :8, the Rechabites come over as a case of misplaced idealism, and yet they are commended. We conclude therefore that intellectual purity of understanding is not utterly critical to acceptability with God.

Jeremiah 35:10 but we have lived in tents and have obeyed and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us- The phrase for "obeyed and done" is that used of Israel's obedience to the commandments of God in the old covenant (Dt. 6:3; 7:12 and often). The Rechabites are being held up as an example of how Israel ought to have kept their Heavenly Father's commandments. They didn't do so because they failed to grasp that He really was their Father and they had responsibility to Him which arose from a sense of personal family loyalty.

Jeremiah 35:11 But it happened, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians; so we dwell at Jerusalem- They were forced by the invasion to break some of their covenant loyalty; perhaps to make them reflect that the laws they were keeping were not in fact so important. They were driven into Jerusalem as the invasion was designed to drive the Jews to God.

Jeremiah 35:12 Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah saying- The lesson of the Rechabites was not just to be for those gathered in the temple at that time, but to be spread throughout the community (:13).

Jeremiah 35:13 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Go, and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive instruction to listen to My words? says Yahweh- This is not quite the same as saying "Will you not listen to My words". It was through receiving instruction that they would listen to or be obedient to God's words. The same phrase is translated "receive correction" (Jer.

2:30). The invasion was designed to correct them and make them sensitive and obedient to God's words; but they like us at times refused that education. We see here how God doesn't simply give commandments and waits for obedience to them. He takes the initiative in seeking to give stimulus for that obedience. In this sense He gives repentance, and not simply forgiveness (Acts 3:25,26; 11:18).

Jeremiah 35:14 The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab that he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; and to this day they drink none, for they obey their father's commandment: but I have spoken to you, rising up early and speaking; and you have not listened to Me- The Rechabites wouldn't drink wine nor live in cities, just because they respected the commands of their ancestor about these matters. Yet Yahweh God of Israel had been rising up early, sending His prophets, pleading with Israel to hear. And His people didn't take Him seriously at all. If the sons of Rechab could live as they did, based on their obedience to human words and traditions, why couldn't Israel even more so when it came to God's word? And so with us. There are communities which blindly follow the faith of their fathers, obedient to their traditions and demands regarding, e.g., whom they marry. If men and women can be so obedient to the word *of men*… shouldn't the word *of God* , black print on white paper that it is, but nonetheless the same word that made Moses tremble and that Sinai ablaze, have an even deeper impact and more insistent imperative in *our* lives?

Jeremiah 35:15 I have sent also to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return now every man from his evil way- The prophetic word was not generic, it had a way of appealing to every hearer individually.

And amend your doings, and don't go after other gods to serve them, and you shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers- Even when Jerusalem was about to fall to the besiegers, there was still the possibility that they could remain in the land- if they repented and humbled themselves before God's word.

But you have not inclined your ear, nor listened to Me- Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

Jeremiah 35:16 Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father which he commanded them, but this people has not listened to Me- Just as in Jer. 34 the whole purpose of God in destroying Judah could have been changed had they stopped abusing their servants, so here too there was a single challenge given- to accept that they hadn't obeyed their God as the Rechabites had obeyed their fathers. But they refused to humble themselves to realize that.

Jeremiah 35:17 therefore thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I

have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them, but they have not heard; and I have called to them, but they have not answered- "Heard" has the idea of 'understanding'. God expects us to understand much more than we think He does. Thus He condemned Israel in Jeremiah's time because He had spoken to them but they had not understood, and therefore they had not responded. They heard the word, as we read it, but they didn't really hear His voice. They thought that getting to grips with God's word was just for those who were into that kind of thing; with the result that God rejected them. The evil was pronounced, but in the gap between the statement and the fulfillment of it, they could have repented and changed the outcome; the evil would not then have happened. The pronouncement of judgment was not therefore stated simply in Divine anger; it was His calling to them. And yet they would not answer.

Jeremiah 35:18 Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he commanded you- The blessing was that they would eternally have their family members standing before God in the priesthood (:19). And yet the priesthood ended, and the children of Jonadab didn't eternally "stand before Me". So we can conclude that the idea here is that if they continued obeying their father, then God would count that as obedience to Him, and they would continue standing before Him. I noted above that the commandments given by Jonadab were not completely correct and were based upon misunderstandings. But God was eager that they continued keeping them. It's as if they had misplaced ideals and miseducated conscience; but God commended them for respecting that conscience, and encourages them to continue in it. We would perhaps have expected Him to correct them on an intellectual level, and redirect their zeal towards keeping His commandments rather than Jonadab's. But as with many folks today, it seems God accepts their intellectual failure on some points, and is glad they live in good conscience before Him within the limits of their understanding, even if there is a degree of misconception within that understanding.

Jeremiah 35:19 therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me forever- See on :18. This didn't actually happen, because they didn't continue upholding the precepts of their father. And the priesthood was ended.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 36

Jeremiah 36:1 It happened in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying- Perhaps this was at the end of the fourth year of the reign, just before the fast at the beginning of the fifth year was proclaimed (:9). Judah were still relatively prosperous at this time. This was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar; and so the events of this chapter come to a climax in the proclamation in :29 that this new king was to destroy Judah.

Jeremiah 36:2 Take a scroll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and against Judah and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day- Jeremiah's words were to Israel as well as Judah in that it was God's intention they should also repent, and join

with Judah in a reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel on the basis of a new covenant. However LXX reads "Jerusalem" for "Israel". The idea was that others would read and re-read these words.

Jeremiah 36:3 It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do to them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin- The evil purposed need not have come about- if they repented. The "purpose" of God is therefore open ended and sensitive to human repentance. This verse would be a parade example of it. Jer. 18:8; 26:3 use the same word to say that God will "repent of the evil that I purposed to do to them".

Jeremiah 36:4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of Yahweh, which He had spoken to him, on a scroll of a book- This usage of Baruch could have been because Jeremiah was illiterate; or because Jeremiah's current situation meant that the work of writing out a scroll was impossible for him.

Jeremiah 36:5 Jeremiah commanded Baruch saying, I am shut up; I can't go into the house of Yahweh- There is no mention that Jeremiah was imprisoned, although he may have been (s.w. Jer. 33:1; 39:15). The same word is used of Doeg being "detained before the Lord" (1 Sam. 21:7). Perhaps Jeremiah was unclean, or even under some rebuke from Yahweh which precluded his entry to the temple. The idea is that he was "unable" (s.w. 2 Chron. 2:6). He has used the word to describe how God's word was "shut up" within him and he had to as it were release it by speaking it (Jer. 20:9).

Jeremiah 36:6 therefore you go, and read in the scroll, which you have written from my mouth, the words of Yahweh in the ears of the people in Yahweh's house on the fast day; and also you shall read them in the ears of all Judah who come out of their cities- "The fasting day" may refer to the day of atonement, the only day of fasting required by the law. This would have been the most appropriate time to call for radical repentance.

Jeremiah 36:7 It may be they will present their supplication before Yahweh, and will return each one from his evil way; for great is the anger and the wrath that Yahweh has pronounced against this people- As often in the prophets, the appeal is to the individual- "each one..." (as in :3). The day of atonement was not to be some mere collective ritual; the breaking of bread service likewise can slip into this. It was intended to elicit personal repentance from each individual. No collective ritual could change things; only individual repentance. See on :16.

Jeremiah 36:8 Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of Yahweh in Yahweh's house- This was no mere secretarial task; for the appeal to repentance and message of condemnation would have been received with anger by many, and the natural reaction would have been to shoot the messenger.

Jeremiah 36:9 Now it happened in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, that all the people in Jerusalem, and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem, proclaimed a fast before Yahweh- The

LXX has "the eighth year" which would better fit the events of 2 Kings 24:1-20. It could be that this special fast was proclaimed after news came through of the Babylonian defeat of the Egyptian army, which the Jews had always relied upon rather than trusting in Yahweh. We noted on :6 that Jeremiah's previous appeal had been made on the fasting day of the day of atonement. But clearly the fasting had not been unto repentance; and now another fast is proclaimed. The collective ritual of that day had remained at the level of mere religion, just as the breaking of bread service can; and so now another fast was proclaimed, outside of the Mosaic law; for the day of atonement was in the seventh month not the ninth month (Lev. 16:29). Although it may be that Babylonian months are being used here.

Jeremiah 36:10 Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of Yahweh, in the room of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, at the entry of the new gate of Yahweh's house, in the ears of all the people- As explained on :9, this was the same book which had been read some months previously at the day of atonement. It was an attempt to get Israel to keep the spirit of that day although on a different date and apparently without the sacrifices- in the hope they would perceive the essential intention of the ritual, which was personal repentance. God may likewise move in the lives of His people to help them to the same position.

Jeremiah 36:11 When Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard out of the book all the words of Yahweh- Micaiah responds to the challenge of the words, and perceives the urgent need for national repentance. But he had heard these words delivered by Jeremiah over time, and presumably had heard them recited quite recently in :6-8. But as with us, the same words may be heard or read, but only at another reading does the personal reality of them strike home. Micaiah's response here is absolutely psychologically credible and imaginable.

Jeremiah 36:12 he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's room: and behold, all the princes were sitting there, Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes- See on :11. We may wonder why they were sitting in the room of the scribe. The reference may be to some senior scribe who was effectively the secretary of the Government; some manuscripts read "Elishama the scribe" (see :20). But the scribe in view may also be Baruch; as if they were there expecting to also hear Baruch's words from Jeremiah but in a private sitting. We at least get the impression that "the princes" were interested in hearing God's word. See on :14.

Jeremiah 36:13 Then Micaiah declared to them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the book in the ears of the people- We note the second and third hand nature of all this. Jeremiah spoke the original words of Yahweh, and Baruch wrote them down faithfully. Micaiah heard them and told the princes; the princes then attempt to tell their version of them to Zedekiah. But he then calls for the scroll itself, and destroys it. It's as if the record is careful to answer any objection that the truths of God's word got lost in transmission. The king is presented as without excuse.

Jeremiah 36:14 Therefore all the princes- A study of "the princes" of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God's word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back

from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But “the princes” were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God’s word. And “the princes” were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God’s people- can be very fickle.

Sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to Baruch, saying, Take in your hand the scroll in which you have read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand, and came to them- "Cushi" was likely not a real personal name, but a reference to the fact that this man Jehudi [a form of 'Judah' or as we might say, 'the Jew'] was descended from a Cushite. We recall how later it would be Ebedmelech the Cushite who saved Jeremiah from the dungeon. Perhaps the impression is being given that those of Gentile descent were more responsive to God's word than the Jews. The continual attempts by Judah to trust in Egypt rather than Yahweh over the years may have resulted in these Cushites coming to live in Jerusalem. And yet the result of that weakness on Judah's part was that some Gentiles turned to Yahweh. God always works through human failure rather than turn away in disgust and disengage from the situation.

Jeremiah 36:15 They said to him, Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Baruch read it in their ears- The invitation to "sit down" suggests he stood there uncertain as to whether they would wish to hear him read it to them. But they ask him to; see on :14.

Jeremiah 36:16 Now it happened, when they had heard all the words, they turned in fear one towards another, and said to Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words- See on :14. However, although their response was commendable, they perhaps failed to perceive that this was a call to personal repentance; see on :7. They immediately experienced group think; they assumed that the decision to repent must be taken on a group level, and so they were desirous for the king to hear the words and proclaim a group position. But as made explicit in :3 and :7, the call to repentance was specifically personal. This confusion of personal and corporate positions is so often seen in the living and thinking of those who are more strongly religious than they are spiritual.

Jeremiah 36:17 They asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How did you write all these words at his mouth?- As explained on :16, they were sensitive to the need for repentance, but were shying away from the personal challenge. And that desire to not let God's word personally "bite" is perhaps also reflected in their questioning, after some time had passed, as to whether this word they had heard was really Jeremiah's inspired word. The questioning of inspiration is likewise rooted in a desire not to hear God's word making radical demands of us.

Jeremiah 36:18 Then Baruch answered them, he pronounced all these words to me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book- See on :17. The idea is that he wrote down the words immediately Jeremiah spoke them. Baruch assures them that it was an accurate transcript with nothing of his own added in.

Jeremiah 36:19 Then the princes said to Baruch, Go, hide, you and Jeremiah; and let

no man know where you are- Perhaps the princes doubtless had in mind the fate of Uriah (Jer. 26:23). The suggested hiding place was the "Grotto of Jeremiah" near the "Quarries of Solomon" outside the Damascus Gate. See on :26.

Jeremiah 36:20 They went in to the king into the court; but they had laid up the scroll in the room of Elishama the scribe; and they told all the words in the ears of the king- They wished to make a public separation between themselves and the scroll, even though the words had touched their consciences. They intended to give the king a potted and perhaps ameliorated version, in the hope the king might make some surface level reforms in response.

Jeremiah 36:21 So the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll; and he took it out of the room of Elishama the scribe. Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes who stood beside the king- The events are described slowly and deliberately because of the gravity of the blasphemy which was to follow, and the consequences of it. The princes and courtiers heard the same word, and were therefore responsible for not responding to it.

Jeremiah 36:22 Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month: and there was a fire in the brazier burning before him- "The ninth month" seems to add nothing, and the LXX omits it. However the idea may be that the ninth month was a time of cold and rain (Ezra 10:9). The winter house was likely just the downstairs of his palace; the summer house was the upstairs, and not necessarily a separate building. Again we note the high level of detail in this record; not just the fire but the brazier is noted. It's as if the cameraman has zoomed in on the scene and is recording all the details, that we might imagine it. All the king did was to be done to Jerusalem; for the city was to become a brazier when the Babylonians judged it with fire.

Jeremiah 36:23 It happened, when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, that the king cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was in the brazier- "Leaves" is literally 'columns' or 'doors', which is what the sections of text looked like on the scroll. Cutting them was what was to be done to the columns and doors of the temple and the king's house. Our attitude to God's word will be directly reflected in our final judgment. The pen knife was Baruch's, and was probably attached to the scroll as part of his scribal equipment. The consciousness of the king's actions is laboured- he took the pen knife out of the scroll and used what was intended to sharpen the pen / word of God, and used it to destroy that word.

Until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier- He cut every "three or four leaves" and threw them into the fire, until the scroll was no more. We have the impression of a conscious act of slow, deliberate attempt to destroy God's word because he didn't like the message. This is why the Bible text has been so attacked, suppressed, physically destroyed, mocked and challenged by false claims- because the message hits home too hard in the subconscious. No other collection of documents has suffered the same extensive campaign against it- because there is nothing like God's word to pierce and challenge the conscience.

Jeremiah 36:24 They were not afraid, nor tore their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants who heard all these words- The king's actions were slow and deliberate; every three or four leaves were cut out of the scroll and burnt, and the onlookers would have watched the flames quickly devouring them. There is a time to

speak out, and this was such a time. All present are condemned for saying nothing, for making no sign of grief for what was being done to God's word. Although "the princes" aren't mentioned here, as a nod to their conscience toward the word of God (see on :14,25), they were in the end condemned for their attitude. This is typical of how sins of omission are counted by God as sins of commission. Silence is indeed culpable in situations like this. The sin of silence remains an abiding lesson for us of all generations.

Jeremiah 36:25 Moreover Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the scroll; but he would not hear them- Three of the five princes listed in :12 are mentioned by name as making this protest. Their protest was noted by God in the record; but their failure to tear their clothes is also noted (:24). They were touched in their conscience by God's word; but finally the sin of silence, despite their slight protest, was counted against them. Such was the nature of the blasphemy.

Jeremiah 36:26 The king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet; but Yahweh hid them- They had been advised to hide (see on :19), but apparently they had not done so. They were unashamed of God's word and the consequences for declaring it. And God looked after them. The hiding of these prophets recalls the hiding of the true prophets at the time of Ahab; the king is being set up as Ahab.

Jeremiah 36:27 Then the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the scroll and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying- This word presumably came to Jeremiah whilst in hiding (:26). The record labours the sin- the scroll was burnt, namely ["and" serves to introduce a parallel statement here] the words of God.

Jeremiah 36:28 Take again another scroll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned- This recalls how the wooden yoke of Jeremiah was broken by those who resisted that prophetic word, and was replaced by a yoke of iron (Jer. 28:13). God's word and the purpose reflected in it cannot be destroyed by shooting the messenger or burning Bibles. But if that is attempted, then the judgment is only increased.

Jeremiah 36:29 Concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah you shall say, Thus says Yahweh: You have burned this scroll saying, Why have you written therein saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from there man and beast?- This was in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (see on :1); and so the events of this chapter come to a climax in the proclamation in :29 that this new king was to destroy Judah. There was a studied refusal to believe that these words were from God. The accusation was that Baruch and Jeremiah had written these things; when they were transmitting God's word and not their own. In essence, this kind of thing continues to this day, no matter how it has been made intellectually respectable; God's words and His challenges to human conscience are passed off as merely the words of men.

The statements that the Babylonians would "certainly" destroy the land were all the same conditional prophecy, even though no condition is given at the time. But the

Jews made some sort of repentance, releasing their slaves… and the Babylonian armies retreated (Jer. 34:21,22). Then they enslaved their brethren again- and, Jer. 34:22 says, only because of this did the Babylonian armies return and burn Jerusalem. Thus the initial prophecies of burning with fire which were repeated here, were conditional. And the Jews realized this and therefore repented.

Jeremiah 36:30 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit on the throne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost- At the restoration from Babylon, David would never want a man to sit upon his throne (Jer. 33:17); and no conditions to this are specified. And yet even within Jeremiah it is apparent that because of the failure of Judah's leaders, there would indeed come a time when there would be "none to sit upon the throne of David" (Jer. 22:30; 36:30). Yet *if* the Jews had done righteousness in Zedekiah's time, then instead of the Babylonians entering the gates of Jerusalem there would have been "kings sitting for David upon his throne" (Jer. 22:4 RVmg.). But this condition is not mentioned in the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 nor in the apparent blanket statement of Jer. 33:17. Jehoiakim was not to be buried but his body thrown out to the elements, like an ass (Jer. 22:18,19; 36:29-31); but the idiom of "he slept with his fathers" (2 Kings 24:6) may imply that he had a more normal burial. This was a conditional prophecy, and perhaps even this blasphemous man repented to some degree.

Jeremiah 36:31 I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring on them, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them, because they didn't listen- "His servants" were those who watched the burning of the scroll and didn't tear their clothes. This sin of silence would lead to their judgment. And the ordinary people were likewise to be condemned, because there ought to have been mass popular revolt against Jehoiakim for what he did. Again, the lesson is all about "the sin of silence", especially when that silence is a suppression of conscience in order to merely continue a status quo which the conservative streak in every human nature tends to prefer.

Jeremiah 36:32 Then took Jeremiah another scroll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and there were added besides to them many like words- The judgments for sin were increased because of the refusal to accept the first judgments. We imagine the scroll being produced whilst in hiding (:26) and then being released so that Jehoiakim heard the contents. Baruch's faithful part in the publication of the word is again emphasized; for he was risking his life to do this. Again we wonder if Jeremiah was unable to write, seeing that again there is the same process of Jeremiah uttering words and Baruch transcribing them.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 37

Jeremiah 37:1 Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned as king, instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah- Jeconiah is now called Coniah; the "Yah" prefix is dropped from his name.

Jeremiah 37:2 But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, listened to the words of Yahweh, which He spoke by the prophet Jeremiah- Zedekiah certainly listened to them and was apparently eager to do so; but we see here the crucial difference between listening, and really listening. This remains a challenge to us, and the more familiar we become with the text of Scripture, the more intense is the challenge. It can help to read the same text from different versions or even in different languages if we can; to by all means try to let God's word hit us afresh as if for the first time. Again we note the parallel between the leadership and the "people of the land"; they got the leadership they subconsciously wanted.

Jeremiah 37:3 Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to the prophet Jeremiah saying, Pray now to Yahweh our God for us- God had three times told Jeremiah not to pray further for the people (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). But Jeremiah knew God well enough to still pray, and God was open enough to dialogue to still answer (:7). Zedekiah was no atheist- he wanted others to pray for him, although he personally would not hear God's word (:1). And he was earnestly interested in knowing whether there was any word from God for him (:17). We note Zedekiah's diffidence to approach Jeremiah directly; perhaps "the priest" was a relative of Jeremiah.

The prayers were asked for at the very time when Judah's hopes were upon Egypt defeating the Babylonians (see on :6). Although Judah were often condemned for trusting the Egyptians rather than Yahweh, they still wanted Jeremiah to pray for Yahweh's help to be with the Egyptians. This is typical of how they committed spiritual adultery with multiple partners, mixing faith in Yahweh with faith in Egypt. See on :8.

Jeremiah 37:4 Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people; for they had not put him into prison- To 'go in and out among' can be used as a metaphor for leadership or position of influence. But the term may simply mean he had free movement, and moved amongst the people with his message.

Jeremiah 37:5 Pharaoh's army had come forth out of Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they broke up from Jerusalem- It seems in essence that this situation will be repeated when the latter day Babylon as "king of the north" invades Israel (Dan. 11:44). Those who learnt anything from Bible history will see the similarity and put their faith in God rather than the hope of human deliverance. For Judah's faith was in Egypt rather than in their God.

Jeremiah 37:6 Then came the word of Yahweh to the prophet Jeremiah saying- This prophecy was to address the way in which Judah were eagerly watching to see whether Egypt would defeat the Babylonians, and thereby lift the threat to them. As the prophets often lament, their faith was in Egypt and not in Yahweh. It might have seemed absolutely the wrong time to make this challenge to them; but it had to be said, in hope they would repent. See on :3.

Jeremiah 37:7 Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, You shall tell the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me- This desire to get someone else to pray for you is often mentioned in the Bible. Israel could have had a direct relationship with God as they stood before Him at Sinai, but instead wanted Moses to mediate His word to them; Elymas wanted Peter to pray for him likewise. The unique feature of the one

true God is that He invites personal relationship with Him; spirituality rather than mere mass religion.

Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come forth to help you shall return to Egypt into their own land- The Egyptians had their own agenda for wanting to fight the Babylonians; they didn't come solely to save Judah. And yet that was how Judah liked to imagine it, and God here goes along with their reasoning.

Jeremiah 37:8 The Chaldeans shall return and fight against this city; and they shall take it- As ever, reading all of Scripture enables us to see the wider picture. We know from Jer. 34:16 that the Jewish leadership 'returned' from their covenant to liberate the poorer brethren whom they had previously abused; and so the Chaldeans would 'return' and destroy them because of this. But in this prophecy, the overall summary is presented. But the return of the Chaldeans was in fact a conditional prophecy; it need not have happened if the Jews had repented meaningfully of their attitude to their poorer brethren.

And burn it with fire- The punishment for a whore, which is how Jerusalem had been to God through trusting in Egypt and other nations against Babylon. See on :3.

Jeremiah 37:9 Thus says Yahweh, Don't deceive yourselves by saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us; for they shall not depart- I noted on Jer. 4:10 that Jeremiah had falsely accused God of deceiving the people. This corrects him on this point; the people were self deceived, through listening to the deceit of their false prophets (Jer. 29:8). As explained on :8, the Chaldeans could have 'departed' from them if they had let depart their brethren whom they were abusing as servants and slaves (Jer. 34:16). But instead of doing this, they chose to deceive themselves that the Babylonians would in any case depart from them. We see here how people believe what is subconsciously convenient to them. And indeed the unregenerate human heart is the great deceiver, and not some cosmic being called Satan.

Jeremiah 37:10 For though you had struck the whole army of the Chaldeans who fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet would they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire- The idea is that whatever temporary reverses the Babylonians might appear to suffer, the purpose of God was that they should be used to destroy Judah- unless the Jews repented. All human victories are but short term compared to the final judgment of God. And we need to get that right in our minds for all time. "Wounded" translates the word usually used for "thrust through", referring to the final death wound of a foe. The idea is therefore that even if they were struck down dead, they would be resurrected in order to do God's work against Judah. And this likewise was what could spiritually happen to Judah; they could be revived as the dry bones prophecy of Ez. 36 demonstrates.

Jeremiah 37:11 It happened that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army- "Was broken up" suggests someone broke them up. And that was God, in response to the Jews' apparent repentance of enslaving their brethren. Earlier they had asked Jeremiah to pray that the Chaldeans would be broken up from them (s.w. Jer. 21:2). God was not open to that request from Jeremiah- because the condition for the Chaldeans leaving was the peoples' repentance for abusing their brethren. Only they could do that, and no intercession from a third party could change that condition.

Jeremiah 37:12 then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to receive his portion there, in the midst of the people- Jeremiah had been told to purchase a field, which he would receive at the restoration (Jer. 32:7-9). It seems this was a momentary lack of judgment on his part- he wanted his inheritance right away, rather than waiting for God's time. However, the Hebrew is difficult here. The AV has "to separate himself thence in the midst of the people". It could equally mean that he had had enough of his ministry in Jerusalem and wanted to separate himself from being in the midst of an apostate people. He learnt his lesson- for at the end of his life, when given the choice of the easy life as guest of honour in Babylon or remaining in the ruined land of Judah, he chose to remain with God's people. And finally, when they disobeyed God and chose to flee to Egypt, Jeremiah went with them, to continue appealing to them. The Hebrew could also mean that he slipped through the gates hiding himself in the midst of the people. Whatever, these three translation options all suggest a not very good decision by Jeremiah. However, it could also be that he was being obedient to God's word- to go out to the Babylonians (Jer. 21:9; 38:2,18) in recognition of the fact that Judah had sinned and deserved to be dominated by their enemies in accordance with the covenant of Dt. 28. The fact the Chaldeans were in retreat at the time, apparently scared by the Egyptian army (:11), showed all the more faith on Jeremiah's part. But he was not allowed to do this act of faith and obedience by others- and so it can be with us. And yet when arrested, Jeremiah denies he is going to the Chaldeans (:14)- even though he had preached that this is what the Jews should do. So it does seem, however we look at this incident, that Jeremiah acted in momentary weakness.

Jeremiah 37:13 When he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he laid hold on Jeremiah the prophet saying, You are falling away to the Chaldeans- The details are given as if the cameraman is close up, to enable us to imagine the scene; and the full details of Irijah's family background are given because of the significance of his false accusation. There were Jews who had fallen away to the Chaldeans (s.w. Jer. 38:19), but the implication is that Jeremiah felt his motives to be totally different.

Jeremiah 37:14 Then Jeremiah said, It is false; I am not falling away to the Chaldeans. But he didn't listen to him; so Irijah laid hold on Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes- Jeremiah himself taught that Israel should surrender to the Babylonians, in accordance with God's word. He himself tried to do this, in obedience; but he was caught by the Jews. He promptly denied that he was doing this, overcome by the patriotism of the moment, in a desire to save his skin (Jer. 37:14; 38:2).

Jeremiah 37:15 The princes were angry with Jeremiah and struck him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the scribe; for they had made that the prison- In this Jeremiah was a type of the Lord Jesus, indeed more than this- Jeremiah might have been a potential Messiah figure of some sort, but Judah rejected him. The way the servant is beaten, imprisoned and has his hair pulled out (Is. 50:4-11) reminds us of how the prophet Jeremiah was treated the same way by the Jews when his message was rejected (Jer. 20:2; Jer. 37:15). "Jonathan the scribe" may have been a secretary; or a religious scribe. His complicity is therefore the worse.

A study of “the princes” of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God’s word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But “the princes” were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God’s word. And “the princes” were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God’s people- can be very fickle.

Jeremiah 37:16 When Jeremiah had come into the dungeon house and into the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days- These "cells" were cabins excavated out of the sides of the shaft of the dungeon. "Many days" there would have left people with post traumatic stress if nothing else.

Jeremiah 37:17 then Zedekiah the king sent and fetched him: and the king asked him secretly in his house saying, Is there any word from Yahweh? Jeremiah said, There is. He said also, You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon- The 'word' that Zedekiah would be delivered into the hand of the Chaldeans had already been given several times by Jeremiah (Jer. 21:7; 22:25; 32:4; 34:3,21). Perhaps this was no new revelation, but rather Jeremiah reminding Zedekiah of God's word. We can seek some new insight, some new 'word from the Lord'- when actually the answer is staring us in the face in His word which we already know. We perceive that Zedekiah was desperate to hear God's word; despite being characterized as not listening to it (:2). The religious conscience within all men is strong; and those who have been exposed to the one true God will always be unable to totally forget Him. Zedekiah was asking for this revelation from God at the very time when all his hopes were pinned upon salvation from Egypt (:5); and yet even then, he had this uncanny sense that he needed revelation from Yahweh. We recall Saul's desperate seeking for God's word the night before he was killed.

Jeremiah 37:18 Moreover Jeremiah said to king Zedekiah, Wherein have I sinned against you, or against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison?- Jeremiah's questions were perhaps simply to plead for deliverance from what appeared certain death in the dungeon (:20). But perhaps he also was seeking for Zedekiah's repentance for having treated him like this. Jeremiah hoped this would be elicited by presenting Zedekiah with the question as to what, exactly, had Jeremiah done wrong? And what had provoked his imprisonment was his touching of the king's conscience by challenging him to repent. And Jeremiah was asking the king to recognize that, and live according to his conscience before Yahweh.

Jeremiah 37:19 Where now are your prophets who prophesied to you saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land?- "Your prophets" sounds as if Zedekiah had surrounded himself with those who spoke what he wanted to hear; it's as if he had appointed his personal prophets. We can effectively do the same, by listening only to those teachers whom we know are going to say that which we wish to hear.

Jeremiah 37:20 Now please hear, my lord the king: please let my supplication be

presented before you, that you not cause me to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, unless I die there- We sense the awful desperation of Jeremiah, facing a slow and miserable death. When Zedekiah called Jeremiah out of the prison house to meet him and show him the word of God, he ought to have perceived that he was going through the very experience of Pharaoh with Joseph (Jer. 37:17,20). Jeremiah's desperate plea not to be sent back to prison to die there surely echoes that of Joseph to his brethren; for Jeremiah was let down like Joseph had been into a pit with no water in, so reminiscent of Joseph (Gen. 37:24). But Zedekiah didn't want to see all this; he should've listened to Jeremiah, as Pharaoh had listened to Joseph and saved himself. It was all potentially set up for him; but he refused to take note.

Jeremiah 37:21 Then Zedekiah the king commanded and they committed Jeremiah into the court of the guard; and they gave him daily a loaf of bread out of the bakers' street- The events of chapter 38 show how this assurance was not kept by Zedekiah- a reflection of his powerlessness, as well as the weakness of his character. We sense Zedekiah wanting to do the right thing, to save God's prophet from death, even bringing him to live in the court of the guard within his own palace; and yet being so consumed by issues of image; and fears about irrelevancies that arise from assuming we are not going to die, nor face Divine judgment for our sins.

Until all the bread in the city was spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard- This could have been the words of Zedekiah, as if he recognized there would come about a point when all the bread was finished, and Jeremiah was to be fed until the very end. But the idea may be that it was when this point was reached that the walls were breached and the city fell (Jer. 52:6); as if to say that Jeremiah had bread right up to the end.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 38

Jeremiah 38:1 Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah and Pashhur the son of Malchijah heard the words that Jeremiah spoke to all the people saying- Gedaliah was the son of the Pashhur of Jer. 20:1 who had put Jeremiah in the stocks. Jucal is that of Jer. 37:3. The other Pashhur is that of Jer. 21:1.

Jeremiah 38:2 Thus says Yahweh, He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine and by the plague; but he who goes forth to the Chaldeans shall live, and his life shall be to him for a prey, and he shall live- Jeremiah himself taught that Israel should surrender to the Babylonians, in accordance with God's word. He himself tried to do this, in obedience; but he was caught by the Jews. He promptly denied that he was doing this, overcome by the patriotism of the moment, in a desire to save his skin (Jer. 37:14; 38:2). Jeremiah wanted to flee the city so as not to die; he very nearly did die of famine (:9), in order to achieve his total identification with his sinful people. This identification was why the Lord died the death of a criminal on the cross.

The prediction of death by plague in Jer. 21:6 was therefore conditional. Those prophetic words need not have come true if Israel had been obedient to this call to surrender. "Passes over" is literally "to fall down". They were to accept their condemnation, and thereby save their lives. Their lives would be to them "for a prey", literally, as booty taken from a conquered city. This was and is the great paradox- that

surrender, acceptance of defeat, was the great spiritual victory. In the future, at the Lord's return, we will be saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9). Whilst this has already been achieved in a sense, it will be materially articulated in that day- in that we will feel and know ourselves to be worthy of God's wrath, but then be saved from it. We are all to some extent in the position of Zedekiah and the men of Judah, who was told that if they accepted God's condemnation of them as just, and served the King of Babylon, then they would ultimately be saved; but if they refused to accept that condemnation, then they would be eternally destroyed (Jer. 21:9; 27:12). And the Babylonian invasion was a type of the final judgment.

Jeremiah 38:3 Thus says Yahweh, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it- It was on one hand "sure" and certain, but right up to the very end, it was possible for Judah to repent and the siege to be lifted. 'Given... and taken' is the term used for how Yahweh gave the cities of Canaan to Israel and they took them (Josh. 10:32). He had given Jerusalem into the hand of their enemies- exactly the opposite of how people then understood a tribal god to act. He was supposed to always protect his city from the hand of their enemies, regardless of their morality. Yahweh was showing Himself to be so much more than mere religion, a simple tribal god. Denominationalism can be little more than believing in tribal deities.

Jeremiah 38:4 Then the princes said to the king, Please let this man be put to death; because he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words to them: for this man doesn't seek the welfare of this people, but their hurt- The hands of the Jews are contrasted with the hands of Babylon (:3). They were as it were arm wrestling against God's intentions. The Jews were to be repentant and "seek the welfare" or "peace" of *Babylon*, to the end Babylon might repent and become part of God's restored kingdom (Jer. 29:7). This was such a radically different agenda to that of the flesh. By their impenitence, the Jews were seeking hurt and not peace / welfare to themselves (Am. 5:14 s.w.).

Jeremiah 38:5 Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand; for the king is not he who can do anything against you- The LXX makes this clause a comment of the narrator ("For the king was not able..."). Jeremiah in :15 didn't consider this to be the case, understanding it rather as an excuse. Zedekiah ought to have reflected that his lack of hand / power in this matter was true on a larger scale too; for he had been given into the hand of the Babylonians (:3). God may bring a smaller scale situation into our lives to teach us of our powerlessness on a larger scale.

Jeremiah 38:6 Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchijah the king's son, that was in the court of the guard- AVmg. "the son of Hammelech" (Jer. 36:26). This was as it were the punishment cell within the prison.

And they let down Jeremiah with cords. In the dungeon there was no water, but mud; and Jeremiah sank in the mud- See on :22. The only way to eat would have been to have food lowered down, and seeing the city was suffering famine, chances of survival were slim. The pit in which there was no water would have reminded him of Joseph's experience (Gen. 37:24), and he may well have looked therefore towards some miraculous deliverance. His thoughts at this time are in Lam. 3, where he wrote in his mind a prayer or psalm about it. But he felt his prayers were shut out by the covering placed upon the dungeon (Lam. 3:8,53), and he was enclosed within hewn

stone (Lam. 3:9)- what the dungeon walls were made of. It was presumably a sewer, with excrement falling before his face. He therefore felt he was in a living death and burial, surrounded by gravel stones as if in a grave (Lam. 3:16). His enemies mocked him from above (Lam. 3:14), pouring water that was probably excrement upon him (Lam. 3:54; as the dungeon was a sewer), his teeth were broken from the beating and perhaps from the descent into the dungeon (Lam. 3:16), and he felt bitter with God rather than full of faith and hope in deliverance (Lam. 3:15). But then his faith revived, reflecting how God had still not destroyed Judah by His great grace (Lam. 3:22), and therefore every day he survived until morning he saw as God's grace to him, in which he could hope (Lam. 3:23). He realized he was Judah's representative; for they too were to be sent forth from Babylon, the pit in which there was no water (Zech. 9:11). And this gave him hope; just as God's great grace to Israel historically should be basis for our hope. See on :13.

Jeremiah 38:7 Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, a eunuch who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon (the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin)- This was the spot where Jeremiah had been arrested (Jer. 37:13) and earlier had been put in the stocks there (Jer. 20:2). Perhaps therefore the king's inner thoughts were upon Jeremiah, and Ebedmelech was guided therefore to approach the king at just the right time.

Jeremiah 38:8 Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house and spoke to the king saying- He approached the king outside of the king's house, privately. Always we sense Zedekiah's concern about image and what others would think of him.

Jeremiah 38:9 My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is likely to die in the place where he is- Heb. "is dead of hunger on the spot". This kind of apparent exaggeration is common in Semitic languages.

Because of the famine- Jeremiah had frequently prophesied that the impenitent Jews were to die of the famine. Now, Jeremiah is on the brink of death because of famine. He was led by these experiences to absolutely identify with the condemned. Just as the Lord Jesus died the death of sinners, of a criminal, and thereby tasted death for every man. Being a captive in the dungeon who is released is exactly the language of Isaiah about the release of the exiles from captivity. Jeremiah was their example and personification. They could have followed his path, but chose to remain in that dark dungeon of Babylon.

For there is no more bread in the city- This was only true at the end (Jer. 52:6); if it were literally true, there would have been no point in releasing Jeremiah. This exaggerated language is not corrected, as often in the Biblical record.

Jeremiah 38:10 Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian saying, Take from here thirty men with you, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies- That it would take thirty men to get Jeremiah out of the dungeon indicates the serious depth to which Jeremiah had sunk. And there was the possibility of opposition to Ebedmelech if he attempted to do this alone. We can imagine the racism against an Ethiopian, especially as Egypt / Ethiopia had now been shown to be false friends of Judah and powerless to help Judah. Yet God so loves to work through the despised and marginal.

Jeremiah 38:11 So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took from there rags and worn-out clothes and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah- It was common in those days to symbolically tear clothes in grief. And what then happened to the clothes? They were kept in the treasury, as the material itself was valuable. These symbols of past repentance were used to save Jeremiah's life.

Jeremiah 38:12 Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, Put now these rags and worn-out clothes under your armpits under the cords. Jeremiah did so- We note Ebedmelech's sensitivity, imagining how the cords would bite into Jeremiah's armpits unless there was some material to cushion them. His voice echoing down the sewer would have seemed as the voice of God responding to Jeremiah's feeble prayers as recorded in Lam. 3.

Jeremiah 38:13 So they drew up Jeremiah with the cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard- Perhaps Jeremiah as Judah's representative experienced the 'drawing up' unto salvation offered to Judah in the new covenant, when he was "drawn up" out of certain death in the dungeon (Jer. 38:13, s.w. "with loving kindness have I drawn you [up]", Jer. 31:3). His hope in salvation from the pit was because he perceived he was Israel's representative; see on :6. The dungeon "was in the court of the guard" so Jeremiah would have lived continuously within sight of the dungeon of death, the ultimate punishment cell in the makeshift prison.

Jeremiah 38:14 Then Zedekiah the king sent and took Jeremiah the prophet to him into the third entry that is in the house of Yahweh- Or, "the entry of the body-guard". Perhaps this was the king's special entry to the temple (2 Kings 16:18).

And the king said to Jeremiah, I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me- Zedekiah was aware that Jeremiah would be tempted to give him only some of God's word, hiding from him the harder parts. Zedekiah wanted God's truth, and yet was unprepared to act upon it. That is so true of so many people, and probably of all of us at some times and in some ways. To 'want to find the truth' can be trendy and attractive; but the question is not so much as to whether we have an interest in finding it, but will we do with it once confronted with it. See on :26.

Jeremiah 38:15 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me- Jeremiah clearly didn't accept Zedekiah's plea of impotence in :5. Instead of simply begging Zedekiah for deliverance and saying what Zedekiah wanted to hear, Jeremiah comes over as absolutely committed to the truth of God's words about the situation.

Jeremiah 38:16 So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah saying, As Yahweh lives, who made us this soul, I will not put you to death- The fact God has given us life ought to mean that we are truthful and honest in our words; and that we will seek to preserve the life of others rather than take it from them. This is all the implication of the most basic truth of the Genesis record- that God created man and made him a living soul / creature.

Neither will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life- This may have been said with a nod towards "these men" nearby. It contradicts Zedekiah's

excuse that he could do nothing against the will of his courtiers in :5. We too can plead weakness, railroading and impotence to justify our lack of purpose and commitment to principle.

Jeremiah 38:17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: If you will go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and you shall live, and your family- Jeremiah picks up on Zedekiah's comment that God made us this soul (:16). This is the way towards dialogue; using the words and phrases of others and reframing them in a way which will therefore be the more persuasive to them. God here offers salvation from the whole judgment scenario for the sake of just one thing- if Zedekiah had surrendered to Babylon. Likewise if the Jews had properly released their bondservants, then the Babylonians would have departed. All the idolatry, murder and spiritual prostitution would have been overlooked just for the sake of one act of obedience. These offers were made in order to highlight the importance of the request being made- in this case, to accept the rightness of the Divine judgment for sin. Just one man's humility could have averted so much suffering. But human fear and pride was too great to allow it.

Jer. 34:5 says that "You shall die in peace; and with the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so shall they make a burning for you; and they shall lament you saying, Ah Lord!". It surely has to be recognized that the 'prophecy' that Zedekiah would die in peace was conditional upon his obedience to the word of Jeremiah- even though those conditions aren't recorded (although they are implicit surely).

Jeremiah 38:18 But if you will not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire- God somehow arranged things within His purpose so that Zedekiah's repentance would have enabled the salvation of all Israel. But his failure to repent meant that judgment came on His people. What this shows is that there are times and places where God is willing to save people for the sake of the spirituality of a third party, but if he or she fails in this, deliverance doesn't *necessarily* arise from another place, as it would have done in Esther's time.

And you shall not escape out of their hand- Zedekiah's attempt to escape the city was therefore made in conscious disobedience to these words.

Jeremiah 38:19 Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews who are fallen away to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand and they mock me- These were the Jews who had accepted their judgment was just and had surrendered. They had likely been abused by Zedekiah and the Jewish leadership beforehand. And so he feared they would mock him. Jeremiah had used just this word about what would be done to Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Jer. 6:9), but Zedekiah's pride was such that he feared the mocking of his fellow Jews more than he did that of the Babylonians. We have a window here into the extent of his pride, and the fears which arise from pride.

Jeremiah 38:20 But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver you. Obey, I beg you, the voice of Yahweh, in that which I speak to you: so it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live- These Jews were those who had heeded Jeremiah's warnings and surrendered to the Chaldeans in recognition of their sins. They were therefore

probably known to Jeremiah, and would therefore welcome Zedekiah's surrender. The implication is that Zedekiah's soul would not live unless her surrendered. But he didn't surrender. Yet by grace he was not killed, but actually died in peace in Babylon. Presumably he did therefore repent, and God by utter grace changed his deserved punishment.

Jeremiah 38:21 But if you refuse to go forth, this is the word that Yahweh has shown me- The Hebrew for "refuse" is only elsewhere used of Pharaoh refusing to let Israel go (Ex. 8:2; 9:2; 10:4). The deliverance of Israel was likewise being allowed to hinge upon the humility or pride of one man. Zedekiah was surely intended to see the appeal to precedent in Biblical history, just as we often are. This is one advantage of being familiar with the text and basic narrative of the Bible through daily Bible reading.

Jeremiah 38:22 behold, all the women who are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Your familiar friends have deceived you and have prevailed over you. Your feet are now sunk in the mud, and they now turn away from you- Preaching has to be personal. For God is all about the salvation of persons; and He hungers for intimacy with her persons whom He has created. We each make an individual witness, and that witness is intended by God to be uniquely suitable for certain people within our sphere of contact. Jeremiah is an example of how our witness to others should be framed in the language of our own experiences, thus giving it credibility. He had just been in the dungeon, where he had sunk down in the mud (Jer. 38:6). But he soon afterwards appeals to Zedekiah to have the courage to do what God wants and not what his princes think is humanly smarter. Metaphorically, Jeremiah says, it was Zedekiah whose "feet are sunk in the mire" (Jer. 38:22). 'Spiritually, you're like I was physically', was what Jeremiah was saying. And because he personalized his message in this way, it became all the more credible. Thus a blind brother can speak about our spiritual blindness with an obvious appropriacy and credibility which the sighted lack. This is why all witness simply has to be personal- impersonal handing out of tracts or hiding behind web sites on the internet isn't the essentially personal witness which God intended.

Jeremiah 38:23 They shall bring out all your wives and your children to the Chaldeans; and you shall not escape out of their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and you shall cause this city to be burned with fire- Zedekiah's attempt to escape the city was therefore made in conscious disobedience to these words. We note the emphasis upon the suffering of women and children (:22,23). It is simply so that there are consequences of human sin which mean that others are affected far beyond the sinner. The innocent suffer because of the sins of others. That is why sin is so multi dimensional; although in this case it would be true to say that the women themselves were also guilty of idolatry (Jer. 7:18; 44:17). But this could have been overlooked for the sake of one man's humble repentance.

Jeremiah 38:24 Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and you shall not die- Again, his claim of being impotent to save Jeremiah in :5 is shown to be false. He was worried lest it become known that God had made this deal with him, whereby his repentance alone could radically affect the outcome for Jerusalem. Again, his pride and concern about image is so pathetically apparent. His offer of not killing Jeremiah if he didn't publish this latest word from the Lord is in

fact similar to what he imagined the princes' position would be (:25). So this was but a carefully calculated offer.

Jeremiah 38:25 But if the princes hear that I have talked with you, and they come to you and tell you, Declare to us now what you have said to the king; don't hide it from us, and we will not put you to death; also what the king said to you- This connects with how Zedekiah had asked Jeremiah not to "hide" God's word from him; see on :26.

A study of "the princes" of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God's word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But "the princes" were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God's word. And "the princes" were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God's people- can be very fickle.

Jeremiah 38:26 then you shall tell them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there- The dungeon of death was in the court of the guard, where Jeremiah was now located. He likely was quartered just meters away from it. "Jonathan's house" was perhaps a name for that dungeon of death. And Jeremiah surely had requested this, and so this was not untrue; but it was a hiding from the princes of what had really transpired. Zedekiah had asked Jeremiah not to do this to him, but to give full disclosure of God's word (:14). He ought to have reflected upon this inconsistency, and instead have openly told the princes of the situation and his obedience to God's word.

Jeremiah 38:27 Then came all the princes to Jeremiah, and asked him; and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they left off speaking with him; for the matter was not perceived- The fact we are now reading of it shows that it was of course finally perceived. LXX "And they were silent, because the word of the Lord was not heard". Zedekiah heard the word, but didn't really hear it; just as we can hear and read the word of God but not really hear it. This surface level hearing of God's word becomes a more acute temptation as we become the more familiar with the Bible text.

Jeremiah 38:28 So Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken- We imagine the Babylonian soldiers closing in on the court, the guards fleeing, and the soldiers encountering the grateful but confused prisoners.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 39

Jeremiah 39:1 It happened when Jerusalem was taken, (in the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and besieged it- The exacter date is given in Jer. 52:4-7, meaning that the siege lasted exactly 18 months.

Jeremiah 39:2 in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city)- The Babylonians made a breach in the wall to the north, from where the cherubim had left and would return. But Zedekiah tried to escape by digging a hole in the southern wall (Ez. 12:12). He did to the city what the Babylonians did, living out his own condemnation; see on :7. This "breach" is the same word used for the breaking up of things at the time of the flood (Gen. 6:11), a well established foretaste of the destruction of Jerusalem by the flood waters of the Babylonians, albeit with the promise of a new creation coming as a result of it.

Jeremiah 39:3 that all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate- The gate separating the citadel of Zion where the temple was, from the rest of Jerusalem. In other words, the temple was about to be taken.

Nergal Sharezer, Samgarnebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris, Nergal Sharezer, Rabmag, with all the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon- These are titles rather than personal names. Many of them are plays on the names of their gods, such as Nebo. Rabmag was the master of the magi, and the idea was that the gods of Babylon had triumphed over Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 39:4 It happened that when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, then they fled and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls- It seems Zedekiah had taken refuge in the temple. From there, he saw the princes of Babylon who had breached the northern wall and were now at the temple gate (:3). And so they fled by "the king's garden", which was his own private entrance to the temple, and then came to the double walls of the southern perimeter of the city. Zedekiah himself dug through those walls, the strongest point of his defence and human strength (Ez. 12:12). He was being taught that all human defence, and the physical temple, was not going to save him.

And he went out towards the Arabah- "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain '"went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13).

Jeremiah 39:5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath- The main lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modeled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies. That weak, vacillating man basically loved God's word, he wanted to be obedient, but just couldn't bring himself to do it. And so he was, quite justly, condemned. It's as if the Lord saw in that wretched, pathetic man a type of all those He came to save. And even in this wretched position, the Lord will pick us up and carry us home. Pursuing and overtaking are the words used of the punishment to come upon those who broke the covenant (Dt. 28:45).

And he gave judgment on him- He 'spoke judgments', as if Zedekiah were a common criminal no longer protected by his royal status. 2 Kings 25:5 adds the detail that his army was scattered from him; he was left alone to face judgment. This was

God's intention; to make Zedekiah face judgment alone, so that he might be the more in touch with his God and repent. For this is one function of the loneliness which God brings.

Jeremiah 39:6 Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon killed all the nobles of Judah- The princes were killed, but Zedekiah was spared. He had been given a wonderful opportunity to repent in Jer. 38, but had spurned it. And yet he was still spared the loss of his life, although he had been told he would lose his life (Jer. 38:17). Presumably his deep repentance as he faced his condemnation was so impressive that God spared his life; whereas the princes didn't repent.

Jeremiah 39:7 Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon- This is how Jeremiah saw Nebuchadnezzar's eyes (Jer. 34:3) and yet came to Babylon without seeing it (Ez. 12:13). Zedekiah fled Jerusalem disguised as a woman with his face so bound around with some disguise that he couldn't see (Ez. 12:12). He was living out his own condemnation, which was to be blinded. See on :2.

Jeremiah 39:8 The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people with fire, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem- Israel were told to "throw down", "break in pieces" and "utterly destroy" the idols and altars of Canaan. There were times during their history when they obeyed this command by purging themselves from their apostasy in this. The Hebrew words used scarcely occur elsewhere, except very frequently in the context of how God "broke down", "threw down" and "destroyed" Israel at the hands of their Babylonian and Assyrian invaders as a result of their not 'breaking down' (etc.) the idols. "Throw down" in Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 is the same word in 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 4:26; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14; Ez. 16:39; Nah. 1:6. "Cut down" in Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 later occurs in Is. 10:33; Jer. 48;25; Lam. 2:3. So Israel faced the choice: either cut down your idols, or you will be cut down in the day of God's judgment. Those who worshipped idols were like unto them. The stone will either fall on us and destroy us, or we must fall on it and become broken men and women (Mt. 21:44). For the man untouched by the concept of living for God's glory, it's a hard choice.

Jeremiah 39:9 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people who remained in the city, the deserters also who fell away to him, and the residue of the people who remained- The "remnant" is the remainder of those who had not died from the sword, famine or plague. But there was a large element of "the poor of the people" (:10) who remained.

Jeremiah 39:10 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, who had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time- The majority of the population remained, because they were those who had nothing and were abused by the wealthy minority; and they received their vineyards and fields. They did well out of the Babylonian invasion; and that was Babylonian policy, to deport only the leadership and ingratiate themselves to the poor masses, in the hope they would thereby have their loyalty.

It needs to be noted that poverty has a way of distracting, terribly so. Merely giving aid to the poor won't automatically make converts- true converts. It's simply not true that desperately poor people will somehow respond better than others to the

Gospel. The Jews left in the land at the time of the exile were the very poorest. But actually these were the spiritually weaker in the long run, and it was the more wealthy who went to Babylon who were the “good figs” of Jer. 24:3-8.

Jeremiah 39:11 Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon commanded Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard concerning Jeremiah saying- Nebuchadnezzar was then at Hamath, Antioch on the Orontes. He would have heard about Jeremiah from the Jews who had already defected in response to Jeremiah's prophecies, and they would have told him of Jeremiah's prophecies; which was why he was well disposed toward Jeremiah, perhaps ignorant of or choosing to ignore the other prophecies about Babylon's destruction.

Jeremiah 39:12 Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do to him even as he shall tell you- 'To set the eyes upon for good' (Heb.), "take care of" or "look well unto", could mean that God's eyes, the Angels, would bless the "good figs" in captivity and lead them to repentance and salvation. For that is the ultimate "good" which God plans for His people. But twice we read that Jeremiah could have gone into captivity and been looked upon for good (Jer. 39:12; 40:4 s.w. "I will set My eyes on them for good" in Jer. 24:6). Yet Jeremiah declined; he chose to suffer affliction with the condemned, with the bad figs of the Jer. 24 prophecy, so that he might still help them to repentance. This looked forward to the Lord's death as a sinner on the cross. And it is to be our spirit too, ever seeking the repentance of those who otherwise will be condemned rather than enjoying time solely with those who apparently will be saved.

Jeremiah 39:13 So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard sent, and Nebushazban, Rabsaris, Nergal Sharezer, Rabmag, and all the chief officers of the king of Babylon- The top brass of Babylon were all involved in this singular mission- to locate and do well to this individual called Jeremiah. Such was God's deep desire to reward and care for Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 39:14 they sent, and took Jeremiah out of the court of the guard, and committed him to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, that he should carry him home: so he lived among the people- But initially Jeremiah was taken captive in chains (Jer. 40:1), perhaps in the confusion which arose after the sacking of Jerusalem. He was released from those chains and given the best treatment, given a place in the house of Gedaliah whom the Babylonians had appointed governor. But Jeremiah had a heart for people, wanting only to minister God's word to them. Even that relatively luxurious position is described according to how Jeremiah perceived it- he lived "among the people". And this of course is an example to us, wherever our lot be cast.

Jeremiah 39:15 Now the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the guard, saying- This is the word that had come to Jeremiah previously. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological, but arranged by theme. Here the theme is that God wonderfully preserved Jeremiah because of his faithfulness; and He did the same for Ebedmelech.

Jeremiah 39:16 Go and speak to Ebedmelech the Ethiopian saying, Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring My words on this city for evil, and

not for good; and they shall be accomplished before you in that day- Jeremiah was "shut up" in prison (:15); so 'going' is used in the figurative sense, as a metaphor to describe taking the Gospel to someone, even if we are confined to our bed. See more examples of this noted on 1 Pet. 3:19.

Jeremiah 39:17 But I will deliver you in that day, says Yahweh; and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid- To march into the prison with 30 men and rescue Jeremiah from the dungeon of death was nothing less than staging a jail break. Ebedmelech showed huge faith and devotion in doing this, and naturally feared for his life afterwards. His deliverance from the Jews was to encourage him that like Jeremiah, his life would be saved from the Babylonians too. "You shall not be given..." is just what Zedekiah had been encouraged- if he had repented (Jer. 38:20). He likewise was "afraid of... men", the same Jewish princes who were out to kill Ebedmelech. We see here the thematic nature of the book of Jeremiah. God worked in the same way in parallel lives, and some accepted His promises and others didn't.

Jeremiah 39:18 For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but your life shall be for a prey to you; because you have put your trust in me, says Yahweh- His life would be to him "for a prey", literally, as booty taken from a conquered city. This was and is the great paradox- that surrender, acceptance of defeat, was the great spiritual victory. LXX "and you shall find your life" is alluded to in the Lord's promise that he who loses his life [or risks losing it] for the Lord's sake shall find it (Mt. 10:39; 16:25). The reward for Ebedmelech was not just that he would save his physical life, but that he would find his true life. He thereby stands representative of us all.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 40

Jeremiah 40:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh- There is no prophetic revelation for some time in the passage, as the following historical summary was required to give context to it.

After Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah, who were carried away captive to Babylon- As explained on Jer. 39:14, initially Jeremiah was taken captive in chains, perhaps in the confusion which arose after the sacking of Jerusalem; despite the specific command of none less than Nebuchadnezzar to give him special care and honour. He was released from those chains and given the best treatment, given a place in the house of Gedaliah whom the Babylonians had appointed governor. But Jeremiah had a heart for people, wanting only to minister God's word to them. Even that relatively luxurious position is described according to how Jeremiah perceived it- he lived "among the people" (Jer. 39:14). And this of course is an example to us, wherever our lot be cast. Perhaps Jeremiah went through this brief experience of being bound in chains so that he, like the Lord Jesus, could experience the condemnation of his people despite being personally innocent.

Jeremiah 40:2 The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, Yahweh your God pronounced this evil on this place- The captain knew this because Jeremiah's prophetic words had been published and were well known. This is to Jeremiah's credit; that he didn't just keep his unpopular message to himself.

Jeremiah 40:3 and Yahweh has brought it, and done according as He spoke: because you have sinned against Yahweh, and have not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing has come on you- As noted on :2, Jeremiah's earlier words had been well distributed. We note that Nebuzaradan uses the covenant Name of Yahweh. As intended, the whole tragedy was used to magnify God's Name and word amongst the Gentiles. People at that time understood a tribal god as always defending his own city. But this man understood that Yahweh was not such a tribal god; He brought judgment against His own people because He had a moral agenda, and was deeply sensitive to sin against Him. At that time, the whole concept of sin as a felt offence against a deity was unheard of.

Jeremiah 40:4 Now, behold, I release you this day from the chains which are on your hand- Jeremiah was representative of Judah; they too could have been loosed from their chains if they had repented and adopted God's perspective as Jeremiah did. Jeremiah was to be their pattern.

If it seems good to you to come with me into Babylon, come, and I will take care of you; but if it seems bad to you to come with me into Babylon, don't- 'To set the eyes upon for good' (Heb.), "take care of" or "look well unto", could mean that God's eyes, the Angels, would bless the "good figs" in captivity and lead them to repentance and salvation. For that is the ultimate "good" which God plans for His people. But twice we read that Jeremiah could have gone into captivity and been looked upon for good (Jer. 39:12; 40:4 s.w. "I will set My eyes on them for good" in Jer. 24:6). Yet Jeremiah declined; he chose to suffer affliction with the condemned, with the bad figs of the Jer. 24 prophecy, so that he might still help them to repentance. This looked forward to the Lord's death as a sinner on the cross. And it is to be our spirit too, ever seeking the repentance of those who otherwise will be condemned rather than enjoying time solely with those who apparently will be saved.

Behold, all the land is before you; where it seems good and right to you to go, there go- This is the language of Israel entering the land (Dt. 3:18 etc.). Again, Jeremiah was the representative of Judah and the living example of what could have been, and what could yet be for them.

Jeremiah 40:5 If you remain, then return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever you think it right to go. So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go- We are sometimes given such great freedom of choice, in order that we might have a chance to search our motives and do that which we "think right". Jeremiah's response is a stellar example to us. He chose to suffer affliction with God's people rather than seek his own security and prosperity in Babylon. Sometimes there are no morally wrong choices before us; but what is required is the right motivation for the choices we make. To have gone to Babylon and worked on bringing about the fulfillment of the "good figs" prophecy would surely have been legitimate. Instead Jeremiah chose to remain with the condemned, the "evil figs" who would not respond... in the hope they would somehow respond. He chose to "dwell among the people".

Jeremiah 40:6 Then went Jeremiah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah, and lived with him among the people who were left in the land- It is repeatedly emphasized that Jeremiah "lived... among the people". Even though he lived in Gedaliah's house in relatively luxury, his living is described according to how Jeremiah perceived it- he lived "among the people" (also :1; Jer. 39:14). And this of course is an example to us, wherever our lot be cast.

Jeremiah 40:7 Now when all the captains of the forces who were in the fields, even they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him men, and women, and children, and of the poorest of the land, of those who were not carried away captive to Babylon- The existence of surviving Jewish military units indicates that the total destruction of Judah as intimated in Jeremiah's earlier prophecies didn't totally come about. In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps the mediation and repentance of a minority led to Him ameliorating His judgments. That is a theme of all his prophecies.

Jeremiah 40:8 then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men- Ishmael was later to murder Gedaliah, considering that he was the rightful king of Judah. It seems he had taken refuge with Baalis king of the Ammonites during the Babylonian invasion (:14).

Jeremiah 40:9 Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan swore to them and to

their men saying, Don't be afraid to serve the Chaldeans: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon- Gedaliah was advocating the earlier appeal of Jeremiah; if the people accepted they had sinned and willingly accepted the judgment for it, servitude of their enemies, then all would be well for them. They were not to fear the Babylonians; the LXX and 2 Kings 25:24 say that they were not to fear "because of the servants of the Chaldeans", referring to the various Babylonian garrisons now stationed throughout the land.

And it shall be well with you- "Amend" in the earlier appeals for repentance (e.g. Jer. 7:5) is the word here translated 'to do well to'. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change.

Jeremiah 40:10 As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah, to stand before the Chaldeans who shall come to us- Gedaliah like any true leader was leading the way by example; living in the land and serving the Chaldeans, as he had advised others to do.

But you, gather grapes and summer fruits and oil, and put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken- There had been a sudden reversal of everything. The abused majority had now been given the wealth and cities of the wealthy minority who had abused them. Dwelling in the cities taken suggests again the inheritance of the land after the exodus. There was really the possibility of a new start. The harvest had not been harvested by the wealthy, and so the poor took it for themselves.

Jeremiah 40:11 Likewise when all the Jews who were in Moab, and among the children of Ammon, and in Edom, and who were in all the countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan- This dwelling of Israel's outcasts with Moab, Edom and Ammon was a repeat of what had happened during the previous Assyrian invasion (Is. 16:4). There were the same possibilities- of a miraculous Divine intervention and salvation.

Jeremiah 40:12 then all the Jews returned out of all places where they were driven, and came to the land of Judah to Gedaliah, to Mizpah, and gathered grapes and summer fruits very much- As explained on :10, this was the harvest not gathered by the wealthy minority, due to the war. Again we see similarities with the entrance of Israel into the land, where they possessed cities and ate harvest which they had not planted. It seems there was the possibility of some restoration of the Kingdom of God in Israel through these who returned from where they had fled. Jer. 8:20 uses the same term to describe how the summer fruits had ended as a result of Divine judgment; but apparently the summer fruits had returned.

Jeremiah 40:13 Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were in the fields, came to Gedaliah to Mizpah- Ishmael had presumably tried to get them to join in his plan of killing Gedaliah (:14); but Johanan and the other army commanders had refused to participate in the plot. Presumably they were of a mind to be obedient to Gedaliah's example of submitting to Nebuchadnezzar as Yahweh's servant, as a form of submission to Yahweh. This would have been especially difficult for military men who had been resisting the Babylonians. And yet it seems that they were willing to do this; otherwise they would have sided with Ishmael's desperate bid for independence from Babylon.

Jeremiah 40:14 and said to him, Do you know that Baalis the king of the children of Ammon has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam didn't believe them- The king of Ammon may have been personally against Jeremiah after hearing his prophecies about Ammon of Jer. 27:3, and the demand that Ammon submit to Babylon and thence to Yahweh God of Israel. He therefore was against Gedaliah, who clearly was acting in obedience to Jeremiah's prophecies by submitting to Babylon (understanding Nebuchadnezzar as Yahweh's servant) as a form of submission to Yahweh.

Jeremiah 40:15 Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly saying, Please let me go, and I will kill Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know it: why should he take your life, that all the Jews who are gathered to you should be scattered, and the remnant of Judah perish?- Johanan thought that Ishmael's plan would lead to Babylonian vengeance to the point of them slaying all who remained in Judah. This is indeed the language of some of Jeremiah's prophecies; and yet this never happened, because in wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps the mediation and repentance of a minority led to Him ameliorating His judgments. Ishmael did kill Gedaliah, and some of the Babylonians with him. And yet this total destruction of all Judah never happened; another testament to God's desperate grace and saving love toward His people.

Jeremiah 40:16 But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, You shall not do this thing; for you speak falsely of Ishmael- Ishmael was from the royal family (Jer. 41:1), and therefore assumed that he ought to be the rightful ruler of Judah rather than Gedaliah, who was but a willing puppet of Babylon. But it was not then the time to restore the Kingdom and throne of David, and certainly not in the form of someone as deceitful as Ishmael. Ishmael clearly disbelieved the prophecies concerning the ending of the royal family. Perhaps Gedaliah's willing naivety about

Ishmael was because he could not entertain any plan to slay a member of the royal family, remembering David's attitude to Saul.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 41

Jeremiah 41:1 Now it happened in the seventh month- Three months after the capture and two after the burning of the city.

That Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal and one of the chief officers of the king, and ten men with him, came to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they ate bread together in Mizpah- Ishmael was from the royal family, and therefore assumed that he ought to be the rightful ruler of Judah rather than Gedaliah, who was but a willing puppet of Babylon. But it was not then the time to restore the Kingdom and throne of David, and certainly not in the form of someone as deceitful as Ishmael. Ishmael clearly disbelieved the prophecies concerning the ending of the royal family. Perhaps Gedaliah's willing naivety about Ishmael in Jer. 40:16 was because he could not entertain any plan to slay a member of the royal family, remembering David's attitude to Saul.

Jeremiah 41:2 Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land- They failed to accept that Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant, doing His will, and therefore the appointment of Gedaliah was also sanctioned by God. Perhaps their game plan was that Baalis of Ammon would take over Judah, and Ishmael would be made the ruler (Jer. 40:14). People will commit murder and any manner of sin for the sake of dreams of power.

Jeremiah 41:3 Ishmael also killed all the Jews who were with him, with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war- If Ishmael truly wished to do the best for Judah by becoming their ruler, he surely would not have killed his fellow Jews. But he did so because he was working for the king of Ammon and was following his agenda, in hope of personal benefit and power thereby; see on :2.

Jeremiah 41:4 It happened the second day after he had killed Gedaliah, and no man knew it- This perhaps was why he killed all the Jews and Babylonians present (:3); to delay the spreading of the news, and to enable himself to carry out the plans of the king of Ammon and establish his own power.

Jeremiah 41:5 That there came men from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even eighty men, having their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and having cut themselves, with meal offerings and frankincense in their hand, to bring them to the house of Yahweh- This could mean that a shrine had been erected in Mizpeh. Or it could refer to 80 people coming to offer offerings and perform some kind of worship at the site of the Jerusalem temple even after the Babylonian destruction. Significantly, they were from the decimated ten tribe kingdom of Israel. Clearly even amongst them, a minority were still relatively faithful; contrasting with Judah's boast that they alone were faithful and God had rejected Israel. There's ample historical reference to the essential ground plan and some structure still standing even after the Babylonians had effectively destroyed it and rendered it useless (See R.S. Foster, *The Restoration Of Israel* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) p. 28; John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) p. 325; Martin Noth, *The*

History of Israel (London: SCM, 1983) p. 291). This makes it more appealing to consider Ezekiel's vision as a blueprint for the exiles' reconstructing the existing temple, rather than a totally new structure. We also must compare this fact against the prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel which speak of total destruction of man, beast and everything in the land. That didn't happen to the extent envisaged. Perhaps God in pity simply didn't carry out all His intended wrath. Or maybe there was a modicum of repentance or intercession which ameliorated His plans. Or perhaps He realized that the intended judgments would not in fact bring about the repentance envisaged at the time, and therefore the full extent of those judgments has been rescheduled and reapplied to the last days.

Jeremiah 41:6 Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went: and it happened, as he met them, he said to them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam- This weeping was presumably in pretence grief at the loss of the temple, encouraging them to think that he like they (see on :5) were loyal to Yahweh worship. Perhaps it was their loyalty to Yahweh worship which was his motive for enticing them to come to Mizpah and murdering them; see on :5. We wonder what other motive he may have had.

Jeremiah 41:7 It was so that when they came into the midst of the city, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah killed them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men who were with him- There is an ongoing theme of pits. Jeremiah was cast into the pit; and yet was miraculously saved. It's as if that experience was to connect him with the experiences of the suffering faithful, making him look forward the more to the Lord Jesus as the representative Saviour.

Jeremiah 41:8 But ten men were found among those who said to Ishmael, Don't kill us; for we have stores hidden in the field, of wheat, barley, oil and honey. So he stopped, and didn't kill them among their brothers- These signs of material wealth would have been as the treasure hid in a field. They would have given Ishmael the details of how to find them, or perhaps the keys to the pits. We see here his materialism, crude and plain. There is a strange theme of pits- faithful men were cast into them (see on :7), whilst the unfaithful filled them with their own wealth.

Jeremiah 41:9 Now the cistern in which Ishmael cast all the dead bodies of the men whom he had killed along with Gedaliah was the same which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with those who were killed- This connection is perhaps because of the continued theme of civil war between God's people. The men killed by the would be leader of Judah were from the ten tribe kingdom (see on :5). Asa king of Judah had made this pit at the time of his war with Baasha king of the ten tribes.

Jeremiah 41:10 Then Ishmael carried away captive all the remainder of the people who were in Mizpah, even the king's daughters, and all the people who remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam; Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive, and departed to go over to the children of Ammon- The daughters of Zedekiah were high value captives and would have been high on the list for deportation. The fact they were allowed to remain in the land was another sign of Yahweh's grace; but that grace

was spurned and abused by Ishmael in that he tried to take them out of the land, to Ammon.

Jeremiah 41:11 But when Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done- These military commanders were committed to taking Jeremiah's advice and surrendering to Babylon, in recognition of their personal sins against Yahweh and the rightness of the Babylonian domination. What Ishmael had done appeared to totally destroy the potential to do that, as they would have assumed the Babylonians would now kill them and the possibility of such surrender and repentance was now impossible. Hence their great anger with Ishmael.

Jeremiah 41:12 Then they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon- This was only a mile north of Mizpah. the "pool of Gibeon" of 2 Sam. 2:13.

Jeremiah 41:13 Now it happened that when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces who were with him, then they were glad- Again we see the power of influence of just one man. Those with him realized the folly of his actions and were glad to see the opposition to them.

Jeremiah 41:14 So all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned about and returned and went to Johanan the son of Kareah- Again a play is made upon the words for repentance, turning around and turning back to God.

Jeremiah 41:15 But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the children of Ammon- We wonder if those eight men were in fact Ammonites, as Ishmael appears to have been an agent of the king of Ammon, hoping to use him in order to establish himself as some kind of ruler of Judah.

Jeremiah 41:16 Then took Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after that he had killed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the men of war, and the women, and the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon- These women were the daughters of the king; they were high value captives, along with the military leaders and eunuchs, the former leadership. They had been preserved in the land by grace, rather than being taken captive to Babylon. To leave the land was therefore a denial of that grace.

Jeremiah 41:17 And they departed, and lived in Geruth Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt- Or, the sheepfolds of Chimham. They ought not to have even though of going into Egypt, but should have trusted Yahweh's further grace to be shown to them, despite the foolish provocation of the Babylonians by Ishmael; see on :16; Jer. 42:2.

Jeremiah 41:18 Because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor over the land- Jeremiah was to assure them that in fact God's grace would continue to them through the grace of Nebuchadnezzar; he would not take revenge by slaying all Judah as they feared (Jer. 42:12). Fear is so often

based upon lack of faith; and such fear can become gripping and all consuming. This fear of certain revenge proving unfounded, by God's grace, is what Jacob learnt after his sons pillaged Shechem. The surrounding tribes did not attack and destroy him, as he had thought would inevitably follow.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 42

Jeremiah 42:1 Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near- These people appeared to have had faith and spirituality, enough to intend surrendering to the Babylonians in recognition of their sins; see on Jer. 41:11. And yet now they lost their faith in saving grace; they thought grace surely couldn't extend this far, in preserving them from the Babylonians whom Ishmael had so provoked by killing some of their soldiers along with Gedaliah, their appointed ruler of the land. This ability to believe in Divine grace only so far... is typical of our struggles too.

Jeremiah 42:2 And said to Jeremiah the prophet, Please let our supplication be presented before you, and pray for us to Yahweh your God, even for all this remnant; for we are left but a few of many, as your eyes do see us- They asked for prayers and direction, but they were already assembled and prepared to go to Egypt for fear of the Babylonians whom Ishmael had so foolishly offended (Jer. 41:17). We too can pray and yet already have our mind made up as to what we shall do. We likewise note the human desire to ask someone else to pray for us. There is something within us which makes us shy away from the possibility of real personal engagement with God Almighty; we would prefer some system of religion, someone else to pray for me... rather than engage directly with Him.

Jeremiah 42:3 That Yahweh your God may show us the way in which we should walk, and the thing that we should do- As noted on :2, they had already decided that the way they should walk was to Egypt. Any other possibility seemed to them to risk certain death or captivity. We too can rule out any options apart from those we see immediately before us, and faith is about accepting those other options when they are presented by the Father. "The way in which we should walk" is the repeated phrase used of Israel's exodus from Egypt (Dt. 1:31,33; 8:2 etc.). Likewise the request to be shown what they should do or "make" is framed in terms of the instructions given Israel in the desert (Ex. 18:20). But the crucial difference in their case was that they were seeking to return to Egypt; whereas the way Israel had been shown had been out of Egypt. We too can quote Biblical precedent but get it all so wrong, as we are simply using those ideas to justify our own path.

Jeremiah 42:4 Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray to Yahweh your God according to your words; and it shall happen that whatever thing Yahweh shall answer you, I will declare it to you; I will keep nothing back from you- We pass through one experience to prepare us for another. He had tempted not to reveal everything to Zedekiah; but here he likewise must hide or "keep back" nothing. The message he had for them was to be directly opposed to what they were expecting and wanting to hear. Earlier he had been forbidden to pray for the

people; and yet now he is confident that his prayer will be answered. But the idea may have been not to pray in an intercessory sense.

Jeremiah 42:5 Then they said to Jeremiah, Yahweh be a true and faithful witness among us, if we don't do according to all the word with which Yahweh your God shall send you to us- The implication was that if God was to reveal something to them through His word, then it was axiomatic that they must do accordingly. God i a witness over His word, as Jeremiah's prophecy began by pointing out. Our interaction with His word is likewise monitored; it can be no academic study or amassing of information. We are to live accordingly.

Jeremiah 42:6 Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of Yahweh our God to whom we send you; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of Yahweh our God- The Jews left in the land after the Babylonian invasion begged Jeremiah to tell them God's word: "Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord" (Jer. 42:5,6). But when they heard His words, their response was: "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth" (Jer. 44:16,17). Their apparent zeal for Bible study came to nothing when the results were inconvenient to them (and we can take a lesson from this). But I wonder whether they actually said "We will certainly do whatsoever goeth forth out of *our* mouth"? Maybe they did; but perhaps this is what their rejection of *God's* word was tantamount to, and therefore this is the way their words are recorded.

Jeremiah 42:7 It happened that after ten days the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah- God tells Jeremiah not to pray for them as He won't hear him; but then Jeremiah does pray and God hears and changes His mind as a result of this (Jer. 42:7,10). The ten day period was perhaps to help them prepare themselves for the unpopular message. As the days went by, their natural reaction would have been to get going for Egypt as soon as possible, given their fear of Babylonian revenge for the murders committed by Ishmael. The delayed response was therefore to get them used to the idea of remaining in the land.

Jeremiah 42:8 Then called he Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest- "Johanan" means 'God's grace', but he seems not to have believed that grace could extend so far as saving him from the offended Babylonians. Jeremiah called all the people, because he felt that remaining in the land was connected with their salvation; he didn't want any decisions made merely by the leadership, but for all individually to make their choices.

Jeremiah 42:9 And said to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel to whom you sent me to present your supplication before Him- The people had presented a supplication to Jeremiah (the same words are used in :2), but Jeremiah stresses that the supplication has been presented before God. They perhaps really wanted Jeremiah's blessing on their proposed migration to Egypt; whereas Jeremiah was reminding them that their requests had really been taken by him before the presence of Almighty God. The wonder of prayer can easily be lost upon us. The same term is also found in Jer. 36:7, where the hope was that the people would "present their supplication before Yahweh and repent". But they were instead asking Him if they

could run away to Egypt. The personal sense of repentance and confession just wasn't there.

Jeremiah 42:10 If you will still live in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I grieve over the distress that I have brought on you- God had promised to build and plant them in a restored, Messianic kingdom in Israel (Jer. 31:28; 42:10; Ez. 36:36). But this was all conditional upon them continuing to obey His voice, otherwise He would change His plans (Jer. 18:9,10). Jeremiah had been given the power to speak the words of both destruction and building and planting (Jer. 1:10). They who remained in the land were the "evil figs" of Jer. 24; but God was prepared to act differently, so eager was He to reestablish the Kingdom.

If Judah had remained in the land and not fled to Egypt, God would have repented of the evil He had promised, and would there and then have restored the land and rebuilt Jerusalem (Jer. 42:10 cp. Zech. 6:15); the whole restoration from Babylon would never have happened. But Israel would not. And yet the whole restoration exercise, as it happened, brought glory to God through the faith and spirituality of men like Ezra and Nehemiah. Behold once again 'Divine ecology'. God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6).

Jeremiah 42:11 Don't be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; don't be afraid of him, says Yahweh: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand- "Don't be afraid of the face of..." (Heb.) uses the very same words that were used to encourage Jeremiah to resist and not fear his opponents. As he had overcome all the faces of his opponents through obedience to God's word, so all Judah could have followed Jeremiah's personal example. This is indeed how the preacher must be; the word is to become flesh in us. As Jeremiah was not afraid before the faces of opponents, so Judah were to be like him before the Babylonians. See on Jer. 41:17,18. Although they were the "evil figs" of Jer.24, God sought to assure them of His change of plan concerning them; "I [Yahweh] am with you to save you" is very much the idea of Yehoshua, Jesus, Yahweh is our Saviour. Just as He had caused the surrounding tribes not to destroy Jacob after the pillaging of Shechem, so He would preserve Judah from the revenge of the Babylonians for the foolishness of Ishmael.

Jeremiah 42:12 I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you, and cause you to return to your own land- The experience of God's grace, mercy and acceptance was to be reflected through the king of Babylon choosing likewise not to take vengeance upon them, when he legitimately could have done so, after what Ishmael had done. We see here the struggle to believe in grace and mercy which is the root reason for the Gospel's rejection by men. The king would have caused them to return from where they were then located, perhaps already well on the way to Egypt, back to their own land.

Jeremiah 42:13 But if you say, We will not dwell in this land; so that you don't obey the voice of Yahweh your God- Those who don't want to be in God's Kingdom won't be; and all those who love the Lord's appearing will be accepted by Him. By refusing

to dwell in the land, they were disobeying God' saving purpose; and so they would not be in God's Kingdom and would be condemned (:16).

Jeremiah 42:14 Saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell- Jeremiah knew this was what they were thinking, and so did God. The choice of Egypt / the world is often made on the basis of unproven assumptions and images in the mind- e.g. that there, they would not lack bread and would not be at risk of war. These assumptions were and are so often false.

Jeremiah 42:15 Now therefore hear the word of Yahweh, O remnant of Judah: Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, If you indeed set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to live there- They had set their faces, hardened themselves psychologically, and therefore their request for God's word of guidance about their migration was inappropriate. And worse, they had set their faces against the will and intention of God for them. This is the difficulty of being truly humble before God's word; resigning all we once had hoped or assumed to be true, all our natural value systems and assumptions... before His, as they are expressed in His word.

Jeremiah 42:16 Then it shall happen, that the sword which you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine, about which you are afraid, shall follow close behind you there in Egypt; and there you shall die- As noted on :14, they were assuming that they would be free from famine and fear of war in Egypt. But this was not at all to be the case. The sword and famine destroying them in the land of Judah had been threatened them for their sins; they were only alive by grace. And yet they thought that by fleeing to Egypt they could escape their first condemnation, and not be judged by sword or famine. The grace available to them was that they could stay in the land of Judah and not experience the promised judgments. By fleeing to another land, there was no such guarantee. The truth was that they were not truly repentant, not really awed by God's grace, and loved Egypt / the world far more than the things of God's Kingdom.

Jeremiah 42:17 So shall it be with all the men who set their faces to go into Egypt to live there: they shall die by the sword, by the famine and by the plague; and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring on them- As explained on :16, sword, famine and plague were the judgments upon Judah for their sin. Those judgments would be lifted if they remained in the land to allow God's grace to work further and prepare them to be part of His restored Kingdom. But running off to Egypt was simply opting out of God's program, thinking that the world / Egypt could save them from the judgments which they deserved. Egypt had been demonstrated as unable to help them during the time of the Babylonian siege; but such mental habits and tendencies to always trust in Egypt were hard to break.

Jeremiah 42:18 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: As My anger and My wrath has been poured forth on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so shall My wrath be poured forth on you, when you shall enter into Egypt; and you shall be an object of horror and an astonishment, a curse and a reproach; and you shall see this place no more- They themselves had been inhabitants of Jerusalem; for the group included the eunuchs and the king's daughters. They ought to have partaken in the pouring out of wrath upon Jerusalem; they had only not experienced it by God's grace. They

therefore ought to obey Him now that He tells them where to be and where to remain in order to further avoid judgment. But the grace in saving them was apparently in vain, because they still sought salvation in Egypt and not Yahweh. God's wrath was only not poured upon Jerusalem because they had shown some humility (cp. 2 Chron. 12:7); but now they were hardening themselves in their assumptions about salvation in Egypt just had to be right.

Jeremiah 42:19 Yahweh has spoken concerning you, remnant of Judah, Don't you go into Egypt: know certainly that I have testified to you this day- Going into Egypt has nearly always been a bad move by God's children; they were expected to perceive those precedents from history. God's plan with them was clear and not open to interpretation- they were not to go into Egypt, not to do that which was the natural reaction and which seemed the logical path.

Jeremiah 42:20 For you have dealt deceitfully against your own souls; for you sent me to Yahweh your God saying, Pray for us to Yahweh our God; and according to all that Yahweh our God shall say, so declare to us, and we will do it- "Dealt deceitfully" is a phrase nearly always used in the prophets about the effect of false teachers and idols deceiving the people (Jer. 23:13,32; 50:6; Ez. 14:11 etc.). It could be that they had other prophets, false ones, telling them to go to Egypt; and they wished for the "OK" from Yahweh as well. Perhaps that was all their approach to Jeremiah amounted to.

Jeremiah 42:21 and I have this day declared it to you; but you have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh your God in anything for which He has sent me to you- Their disobedience is not recorded here, but is found in Jer. 44.

Jeremiah 42:22 Now therefore know certainly that you shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place where you desire to go to live there- The judgment of Jerusalem by sword, famine and plague had been ameliorated, by grace; these people had avoided it. But their refusal of grace and the Divine plan of salvation meant that they would have to experience it, and this therefore was to happen to them in Egypt. The Babylonian invasion of Egypt brought it about. The simple lesson is that no attempt to avoid God's judgments can ever work out. It is for us to repent and accept our worthiness of them, rather than cleverly seek to avoid them.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 43

Jeremiah 43:1 It happened that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking to all the people all the words of Yahweh their God, with which Yahweh their God had sent him to them, even all these words- The response of the people was immediate; they allowed themselves no time to meditate, but just followed their gut reaction of not accepting God's message because it was not what they wanted to hear.

Jeremiah 43:2 then spoke Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying to Jeremiah, You speak falsely: Yahweh our God has not sent you to say, You shall not go into Egypt to live there- As explained through Jer. 42. these people had set their hearts and faces on going to Egypt, and their enquiry of Yahweh was simply seeking His confirmation of their own hunches

and desires. When they didn't receive this, they sought to get out of things by simply denying Jeremiah's Divine inspiration. Naturally this begs the question as to why they had asked for Yahweh's word through him, if they considered him uninspired. We see here the root reason why people disbelieve the Bible as Divinely inspired- it interferes too much with their own preferred way of life and thought.

Jeremiah 43:3 but Baruch the son of Neriah sets you on against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may put us to death, and carry us away captive to Babylon- Baruch was Jeremiah's secretary, so maybe they were implying that these words had been written by Baruch but had not actually come from Jeremiah himself. This is typical of how those who don't want to accept God's word will try to find all manner of problems with the mechanism of inspiration; when the root issue is their refusal to accept any Divine word which goes against their own gut desires.

Jeremiah 43:4 So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, didn't obey the voice of Yahweh, to dwell in the land of Judah- They of course had denied the inspiration of Jeremiah to the point that they considered these words just the uninspired words of Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary. But the reality was that they were being disobedient to nothing less than the "voice of Yahweh".

Jeremiah 43:5 But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces took all the remnant of Judah, who were returned from all the nations where they had been driven, to live in the land of Judah- These people had been restored to the land as some kind of incipient fulfillment of the prophecies of restoration. To take them off from the land to Egypt was to disallow that potential restoration of "the remnant of Judah".

Jeremiah 43:6 the men, and the women, and the children, and the king's daughters, and every person who Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan; and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah- Jeremiah and his secretary Baruch surely could have refused to move to Egypt. Jeremiah had been offered a luxury retirement in Babylon, underwritten by none less than the king of Babylon personally. But he died in poverty and perhaps of famine, without any respect, in Egypt... just because of his huge devotion to God's apostate people, willing to try to bring restoration even to the condemned... even at the cost of his own life and happiness.

Jeremiah 43:7 and they came into the land of Egypt; for they didn't obey the voice of Yahweh: and they came to Tahpanhes- This was a border town, whose inhabitants had not been kind of Judah previously (Jer. 2:16).

Jeremiah 43:8 Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying- This was as it were one last appeal before the people officially entered into Egypt; for Tahpanhes was the border.

Jeremiah 43:9 Take great stones in your hand, and hide them in mortar in the brick work, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah- This would only have been possible if the palace was crumbling; which would have served to warn them of the waning power of Pharaoh.

Jeremiah 43:10 and tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon- This would have been by Angelic action. The same phrase is used of God sending forth an Angel to take a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:7,40).

My servant- Judah liked to imagine that *they* were the "servant of Yahweh" spoken of in Isaiah's recent prophecies. But this didn't make them God's people and therefore inviolate from judgment. Nebuchadnezzar was also Yahweh's servant but would be judged for his actions.

And will set his throne on these stones that I have hidden; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them- They would not escape the King of Babylon; he would spread his pavilion over the stones hidden in the palace of Pharaoh at Tahpanhes.

Jeremiah 43:11 He shall come, and shall strike the land of Egypt; such as are for death shall be put to death, and such as are for captivity to captivity, and such as are for the sword to the sword- This is a quotation from Jer. 15:2. This is what could have happened had they received their judgment in Jerusalem. By grace they were spared that, and then by grace again, they would have been spared it at the hands of the Babylonians who were tempted to revenge the murders performed by Ishmael. But since they were ungrateful for that great grace shown, then those judgments would catch up with them. Fleeing to Egypt would not save from Divine judgment; only repentantly casting themselves in humility upon His grace would do so.

Jeremiah 43:12 I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them, and carry them away captive: and he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd puts on his garment- When refugees arrive in a host country, totally at the peoples' mercy, they scarcely start condemning the people. But Jeremiah had to inform Egypt that Nebuchadnezzar would soon "pick clean the land of Egypt like a shepherd picking lice from his clothing and then depart unmolested" (Jer. 43:12). Our position with this world, and our message to it, is no different in essence. See on Jer. 51:59.

And he shall go forth from there in peace- This can be read as meaning that it was God's intention that Babylon too should find peace with Him; Babylon's peace was to be that of Judah (see on Jer. 29:7).

Jeremiah 43:13 He shall also break the pillars of Beth Shemesh that is in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of Egypt shall he burn with fire- Beth Shemesh is 'house of the sun' and probably refers to Heliopolis, which has the same meaning. "The pillars" refer to an avenue of obelisks in front of the temple erected by Thothmes III (BC 1500), one of which remain, and the other is “Cleopatra’s Needle,” placed on the Thames Embankment in London in 1878.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 44

Jeremiah 44:1 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who lived in the land of Egypt, who lived at Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis and in the country of Pathros, saying- The Jews may well have gone to live with other Jews who had settled there previously. Most of these places [excluding Pathros] were near the border with Judah, as if they were looking to return to Judah once things had

stabilized. Woe had already been declared upon these towns where the disobedient Jews went to live after the Babylonian invasion of Judah; from the prophecy of Jer. 46:14, they ought to have already been aware of what Jeremiah declared to them- that even there in Egypt, the Babylonians would come and judge them.

Jeremiah 44:2 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: You have seen all the evil that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and behold, this day they are a desolation, and no man dwells therein- That evil came because of their idolatry; and yet they had fled to Egypt and were continuing in such idolatry (:8). Their attitude was therefore that it was good fortune that they had avoided the judgments for idolatry; and they were eagerly carrying on with it. They refused to see that God's grace was trying to lead them to repentance; and that judgment for sin will fall, regardless of where on the globe one is situated.

Jeremiah 44:3 because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke Me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, to serve other gods that they didn't know, neither they, nor you, nor your fathers- Not only is the logic of choosing God's way so powerful, but the way of the flesh is not satisfying. Sin became a weariness to Israel even before they reaped the punishment for it (Is. 57:10); their mind was alienated from the lovers they chose; they left the one they left the God of Israel for (Ez. 23:17). They always wanted *new* gods; they were never satisfied with their idols. And it seems that now the same was happening; they were looking to adopt new gods they had found in Egypt.

Jeremiah 44:4 However I sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them saying, Oh, don't do this abominable thing that I hate!- A love as strong as God's is going to also elicit the emotion of hatred and anger when that love is rejected and abused. He "hated" (s.w.) Judah's insincere worship and relationship with Him (Is. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4). But it is hard to separate the sin from the sinner. That distinction may be helpful for us in order to avoid judging others too personally, but God it seems doesn't make that decision. He gave Israel into the hands of those who hated her (s.w. Ez. 16:27,37) and in that sense He hated her. The feelings of hatred which Hosea had for Gomer due to her abuse of His love were those of God for Israel: "There I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). God is not simply "love" in the abstract. He is love for real, with all the emotion and psychological complex which goes along with love; and this will include hatred if that love is abused.

Jeremiah 44:5 But they didn't listen nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods- Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

Jeremiah 44:6 Therefore My wrath and My anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as it is this day- They had failed to recognize that God is serious about judging sin; they thought that because they had so far escaped that judgment therefore it would not come. Distance was no object to God; the fact they were in Egypt didn't mean they were hidden from Him or that judgment could only come or happen whilst they were communicant members of the temple cult in Jerusalem. Judgment will come- and resignation from a church or from God *in toto* , moving out of the area... will not stop judgment coming.

Jeremiah 44:7 Therefore now thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: Why do you commit great evil against your own souls, to cut off from yourselves man and woman, infant and nursing child out of the midst of Judah, to leave yourselves none remaining- Their sin was against their own souls. Likewise the rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman...that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4). Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4).

Jeremiah 44:8 in that you provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to live; that you may be cut off, and that you may be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth?- The Jews considered that they had as it were resigned from Yahweh, so they were free to worship as they wished. But this wasn't the case. We cannot resign from Him. They would become a reproach and curse for this, and thus dishonour Yahweh. We note again that the essence of idolatry is a trust in the work of our own hands. This is what makes idolatry an abiding issue in the lives of God's people.

Jeremiah 44:9 Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, the wickedness of the kings of Judah, the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?- We note the emphasis upon the sins of the women (:17,21). In those days, religion was largely a hobby for men, and the women followed their husbands' religion where and when required. But we see here that the women are held personally accountable; for God values men and women equally, desiring that each person exercise a personal conscience toward Him.

Jeremiah 44:10 They are not humbled even to this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in My law, nor in My statutes, that I set before you and before your fathers- To walk in God's laws was to be the result of their humbled repentance. This is one reason why we have Divine laws- to provide a channel through which we can express that intangible and non-specific love of God which we feel upon repentance.

Jeremiah 44:11 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will set My face against you for evil, even to cut off all Judah- See on :7. All would be destroyed; but the same chapter speaks of a remnant that would not be (:14,28). This is the Bible paradox of God's love of Israel and desire for their redemption.

Jeremiah 44:12 I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to live there, and they shall all be consumed; in the land of Egypt shall they fall; they shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine; they shall die, from the least even to the greatest, by the sword and by the famine; and they shall be an object of horror, an astonishment, a curse and a reproach- This is an allusion to Jer. 15:2. This is what could have happened had they received their judgment in Jerusalem. By grace they were spared that, and then by grace again, they would have been spared it at the hands of the Babylonians who were tempted to revenge the murders performed by Ishmael. But since they were ungrateful for that great grace shown, then those judgments would catch up with them. Fleeing to Egypt would not save from Divine judgment; only repentantly casting themselves in humility upon His grace would do so.

Jeremiah 44:13 For I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the plague- As noted on :12, their attempt to avoid Divine judgment by living in Egypt was not going to work. There can be a sense that we can resign from everything to do with God's truth; and live with no sense of judgment to come. These Jews who fled to Egypt are proof that this is not the case. God's grip is strong upon us and He wishes us for His Kingdom till the day we die.

Jeremiah 44:14 so that none of the remnant of Judah, who have gone into the land of Egypt to live there, shall escape or be left to return into the land of Judah, to which they will have a desire to return to dwell there: for none shall return save such as shall escape- They thought they could forget about the things of Yahweh once they were in Egypt. But they were to face condemnation there, and in their time of condemnation, they desperately wanted to return to their land [cp. the Kingdom]- but it was all too late. Cain is another type of the rejected- instead of going as far away from Divine things as possible after his condemnation, he went to live on the east of Eden- where the cherubim were, guarding the barred entry to God's paradise (Gen. 4:16). This desire to be in the Kingdom but it being too late is the 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' the Lord speaks about; a mental torment absolutely self inflicted.

Jeremiah 44:15 Then all the men who knew that their wives burned incense to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, even all the people who lived in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah saying- Pathros was in the far south of Egypt, and may have included Jews who had been resident in Egypt for some time. Being so far south, they were confident that Jeremiah's prophecies that the Babylonians would find them even there would for sure be proved untrue.

Jeremiah 44:16 As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of Yahweh, we will not listen to you- This is rank disobedience. But they phrase it in terms of there perhaps being a difference between the words of Yahweh and those of Jeremiah. These are the words Jeremiah "(you") had spoken, not from Yahweh but only "in the

name of Yahweh". This kind of petty doubting of the process of Divine inspiration is often deployed by those who simply don't want to accept the demands of His word upon them personally.

Jeremiah 44:17 But we will certainly perform every word that is gone forth out of our mouth, to burn incense to the queen of the sky, and to pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we plenty of food, and were well, and saw no evil- See on :19; Jer. 7:18. The Jews left in the land after the Babylonian invasion begged Jeremiah to tell them God's word: "Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord" (Jer. 42:5,6). But when they heard His words, their response was: "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth" (Jer. 44:16,17). Their apparent zeal for Bible study came to nothing when the results were inconvenient to them (and we can take a lesson from this). But I wonder whether they actually said "We will certainly do whatsoever goeth forth out of *our* mouth"? Maybe they did; but perhaps this is what their rejection of *God's* word was tantamount to, and therefore this is the way their words are recorded.

Jeremiah 44:18 But since we left off burning incense to the queen of the sky, and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine- As noted on Jer. 43:11, the consumption by sword and famine was because they were in Egypt. They had been spared this whilst in the land of Israel. By grace they had been spared death by sword and famine in Jerusalem, and then by grace again, they would have been spared it at the hands of the Babylonians who were tempted to revenge the murders performed by Ishmael. But since they were ungrateful for that great grace shown, then those judgments would catch up with them. Fleeing to Egypt would not save from Divine judgment; only repentantly casting themselves in humility upon His grace would do so. Their complaint that they had received those judgments, finally, in Egypt... was inappropriate in the extreme.

Jeremiah 44:19 When we burned incense to the queen of the sky, and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her, without our husbands?- It was this very behaviour which had brought the Babylonians upon Jerusalem (Jer. 7:18). "The queen of heaven" was a Babylonian fertility god, otherwise called Ishtar, shaped like the moon or the planet Venus. It was the god of female fertility, hence the note that the women and children were a large part of its worship. Each female devotee was expected to sleep with the male cult prostitutes of this cult. And then sacrifice one of their children to it. No wonder this so upset God, seeing that He was the source of Israel's fertility, and their children were born to Him and not to the supposed queen of heaven. The women later protested that they were impenitent of this worship of the queen of heaven, and they did so with the full blessing of their husbands; this was significant, seeing that the cult involved sleeping with other men and offering their children to Ishtar.

Jeremiah 44:20 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, to the men, and to the women, even to all the people who had given him an answer, saying- It is twice emphasized

that Jeremiah replied "to all the people". None could claim they had not heard God's response.

Jeremiah 44:21 The incense that you burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, didn't Yahweh remember it, and didn't it come into His mind?- There was the idea that God forgot their sin; that that was all back there and back then, but now they had moved to Egypt, all was different. We too can reason the same way, wrongly assuming that time and geography make a pseudo atonement for our sins. God had been hurt deeply by their idolatry, and it continued to come into His mind. Judgment was going to come for it.

Jeremiah 44:22 So that Yahweh could no longer endure you, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which you have committed; therefore your land has become a desolation, an astonishment and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is this day- Yahweh had been bearing their sin ("s.w. "endure"), but there came a point where this was no longer appropriate if they were continuing in those sins.

Jeremiah 44:23 Because you have burned incense, and because you have sinned against Yahweh, and have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh, nor walked in His law, nor in His statutes, nor in His testimonies; therefore this evil has happened to you, as it is this day- What was worse was that this group had come to Jeremiah seeking God's word, and apparently had some interest in obeying it. But there was a willfulness in their sin which made their judgment inevitable. The evil done to the land of Judah "happened to you, as it is this day"; they were wrong to think that by running away to Egypt, they had avoided Divine judgment.

Jeremiah 44:24 Moreover Jeremiah said to all the people, and to all the women, Hear the word of Yahweh, all Judah who are in the land of Egypt- There is strange emphasis on all the people being addressed, including the women. This reflects God's inclusive approach, recognizing the women as well as the men were guilty and likewise also capable of repentance. It is not God's way to punish a majority just for the sins of their leadership; the entire community were addressed and thereby were responsible.

Jeremiah 44:25 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, saying, You and your wives have both spoken with your mouths, and with your hands have fulfilled it saying, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of the sky, and to pour out drink offerings to her- Their hands fulfilled what their mouths spoke in that those hands formed the cakes to the queen of heaven, and performed the rituals.

Establish then your vows, and perform your vows- God will confirm people in the path they wish to take both for good and bad, hence we are to pray "lead us not into temptation".

Jeremiah 44:26 Therefore hear the word of Yahweh, all Judah who dwell in the land of Egypt: Behold, I have sworn by My great name, says Yahweh, that My name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt saying, As the Lord Yahweh lives- This implies that every single Jew in Egypt was to be killed. Such threats of total destruction of every Jew in Judah had been made earlier

by the prophets, and yet not carried out in the end because of God's way of remembering mercy in the midst of wrath. And it was to be the same here; the Assuan papyri show that the Egyptian Jews in the century following were a flourishing community and were worshippers of Yahweh and not idolaters. Perhaps it was this level of turning toward Yahweh which meant that God changed these threatened judgments.

Jeremiah 44:27 Behold, I watch over them for evil, and not for good; and all the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until they are all gone- The language of total destruction is immediately ameliorated in :28, when we read that some of them would return into Judah.

Jeremiah 44:28 Those who escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah, who have gone into the land of Egypt to live there, shall know whose word shall stand, Mine, or theirs- This is proof enough that the language of total destruction of all Jews in Egypt was not going to literally happen.

Jeremiah 44:29 This shall be the sign to you, says Yahweh, that I will punish you in this place, that you may know that My words shall surely stand against you for evil- Egypt was given into the hand of their enemies so that Judah might learn something from this. We see the condemnation of others in order to warn us. There is a gap between the statement of judgment, and its execution. In that gap we can repent and change the otherwise inevitable outcomes. The propblems of the Pharaoh Hophra (see on :30) were to be a sign to the Jews that the Babylonian judgment would surely come upon them.

Jeremiah 44:30 Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of those who seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who was his enemy, and sought his life- All that we know of the fate of Hophra is derived from Herodotus (2:169), who states that Amssis "gave Apries over into the hands of his former subjects, to deal with as they chose. Then the Egyptians took him and strangled him".

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 45

Jeremiah 45:1 The message that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words in a book at the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying- The reference is to the words written in the roll or scroll of Jer. 36:1. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological but thematic; here, the theme which continues from Jer. 44 is that of Baruch, who went with Jeremiah to die with the apostate Jews in Egypt.

Jeremiah 45:2 Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, to you, Baruch- God's word to Baruch begins with a quotation from Baruch's own feelings (:3).

Jeremiah 45:3 You said, Woe is me now! For Yahweh has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and I find no rest- In the historical record of Jer. 36, Baruch appears to just do what Jeremiah tells him in writing the record of Jeremiah's

words. But this led him to risk death. The "pain" was how he like Jeremiah felt the pain of the condemned people; but he experienced additional "sorrow", reflected in his restless groaning, perhaps related to fear of imprisonment and death for his work in transcribing the prophecies. The Father was comforting Baruch that He knows human words, even those said quietly in frustration. But even in that 'finding no rest' he was fellowshipping Israel's experiences for breaking the covenant, such was his identity with them (s.w. Dt. 28:65).

Jeremiah 45:4 You shall tell him, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up; and this will be so in the whole land- Jeremiah's words had the power to break down and pluck up; and indeed the words he had transcribed would come about. There was no way to stop that; the time for changing outcomes had passed.

*Jeremiah 45:5 Do you seek great things for yourself? Don't seek them; for, behold, I will bring evil on all flesh, says Yahweh; but your life will I give to you for a prey in all places where you g*o- Baruch, the faithful scribe of Jeremiah 36, had to be reminded later to stop seeking great things for himself. His life would be to him "for a prey", literally, as booty taken from a conquered city. This was and is the great paradox- that surrender, acceptance of defeat, was the great spiritual victory. Moving to Egypt to live with a condemned group of Jews, with only further suffering to look forward to, meant resigning all material hopes. Clearly Baruch had his eye upon "great things" for himself, and he seems to have been upset that now he was never going to achieve them. But all such material things were to be destroyed in the day of evil upon "all flesh"; the one thing which would survive that was his life. His life, a life with God in it, was what he would salvage; and a life like that is worth losing everything material in order to gain. This is the same promise as made to Ebedmelech in Jer. 39:18. LXX "and you shall find your life" is alluded to in the Lord's promise that he who loses his life [or risks losing it] for the Lord's sake shall find it (Mt. 10:39; 16:25). The reward for Baruch and Ebedmelech was not just that they would save their physical life, but that they would find their true life. They thereby stand representative of us all.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 46

Jeremiah 46:1 *The word of Yahweh which came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations*- Ezekiel also at this point gave prophecies against Egypt and the surrounding nations. As noted on Ez. 29-32, many of the details didn't come true at that time. The essence will do in the last days. But the prophecies were part of a wider potential scenario in which Judah would repent, as would Israel who were already in captivity; and the nations conquered by Babylon would also come to "know Yahweh", to come into relationship with Him. But this didn't work out as hoped; and so the application of these prophecies has been transferred and reapplied to the last days.

Jeremiah 46:2 Of Egypt: concerning the army of Pharaoh Necoh king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah- The significance of the victory is that it was a sure sign to Judah that their trust upon

Egypt was futile; now Egyptian military power had been demonstrated useless. God was, for now, on the side of Babylon; they were His servants, and resistance to them was futile.

Jeremiah 46:3 Prepare the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle!- This was the cry of "The Egyptian officers" (GNB).

Jeremiah 46:4 Harness the horses, rise up, you horsemen, and stand forth with your helmets; furbish the spears, put on the coats of mail- Egypt is portrayed as replete with all the latest military technology and human strength, all of which was seen by Judah as so attractive, but by God as so abhorrent and meaningless.

Jeremiah 46:5 Why have I seen it?- Now we have God's perspective, how He saw things. ""But what do I see?" asks the LORD" (GNB). However, this could be another interjection from Jeremiah, complaining that the visions which he had to preach, about violence and judgment, were quite against the grain of his sensitive soul (Jer. 46:5 RV; 47:6). The fact that true preaching is a carrying of the cross explains why Paul felt that the fact that to preach what he did went right against his natural grain, was the proof that indeed a "dispensation of the Gospel" had been given to him. Likewise Jeremiah complained. There is therefore no such person as a natural preacher in the ultimate sense.

They are dismayed and are turned backward; and their mighty ones are beaten down and have fled apace, and don't look back: terror is on every side, says Yahweh- Although the Egyptians went forward so confidently into battle, God saw them as fleeing in terror.

Jeremiah 46:6 Don't let the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; in the north by the river Euphrates have they stumbled and fallen- Ez. 32:31 says that Pharaoh would die in this battle. However there is no record of Pharaoh being killed at Carchemish, although the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle, now housed in the British Museum, claims that Nebuchadnezzar "crossed the river to go against the Egyptian army which lay in Carchemish. They fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat, decisively. As for the rest of the Egyptian army which had escaped from the defeat so quickly that no weapon had reached them, in the district of Hamath the Babylonian troops overtook and defeated them so that not a single man escaped to his own country". We would expect a mention of the death of Pharaoh but there is none. And the account of the battle of Carchemish here in Jer. 46:3-12 doesn't mention it either. Again we see that the prophetic scenario envisaged didn't completely come about, although the essence of it will in the last days.

Jeremiah 46:7 Who is this who rises up like the Nile, whose waters toss themselves like the rivers?- This is said in retrospect, seeing that the Egyptians are now "dismayed and turned backward" (:5). They had once been seen as the rising power, rising up as the Nile, and Judah had been attracted by this, rather than trusting in Yahweh.

Jeremiah 46:8 Egypt rises up like the Nile, and his waters toss themselves like the rivers: and he says, I will rise up, I will cover the land; I will destroy cities and its inhabitants- Egypt had its eyes upon dominating the *eretz*, "the land" promised to

Abraham, including Judah. Yet Judah had sought their help against Babylon, refusing to see the obvious- that actually Egypt wanted to dominate them and destroy their cities just as Babylon was to do.

Jeremiah 46:9 Go up, you horses; and rage, you chariots; and let the mighty ones go forth: Cush and Put, who handle the shield; and the Ludim, who handle and bend the bow- These are the mercenaries, from various African countries, who fought for Egypt and are being sent forth. The "mighty ones", horses and chariots are portrayed in these terms to show they are a pathetic imitation of Ezekiel's cherubim, which could have fought for Judah had they trusted in Yahweh.

Jeremiah 46:10 For that day is of the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself of His adversaries: and the sword shall devour and be satiate, and shall drink its fill of their blood; for the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, has a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates- Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant, and therefore the adversaries of Babylon were His adversaries; and He would destroy them. Judah's desperate trust in Egypt was therefore siding with Yahweh's enemies.

Jeremiah 46:11 Go up into Gilead and take balm, virgin daughter of Egypt: in vain do you use many medicines; there is no healing for you- This "daughter" may be that of :19, the daughter "who dwells in Egypt", the Jewish communities in Egypt, who were to be joined by the unfaithful Jews who later joined them under Johanan (see on Jer. 44:1). Gilead's balm was well known (Gen. 37:25; Ez. 27:17). There was balm and a physician in Gilead which could heal the sick person- but they wouldn't go to it (Jer. 8:22). The cure had been readily available- but Judah had refused to make use of it.

Jeremiah 46:12 The nations have heard of your shame, and the earth is full of your cry; for the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty, they are fallen both of them together- This may refer to the shame of the fact that a far smaller Babylonian army of 18,000 destroyed the Egyptian army of 40,000 at Carchemish. "The mighty man" would be they of :9, the mercenaries upon whom Egypt relied.

Jeremiah 46:13 The word that Yahweh spoke to Jeremiah the prophet, how that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon should come and strike the land of Egypt- The language of smiting Egypt is that of the plagues (Ex. 3:20; 12:12,13 s.w.). Again there is the implicit hope that as a result of this, there would be a glorious exodus and reentry of the promised land by Judah. See on :23.

Jeremiah 46:14 Declare in Egypt, and publish in Migdol, and publish in Memphis and in Tahpanhes: say, Stand forth, and prepare; for the sword has devoured around you- These were the very towns where the disobedient Jews went to live after the Babylonian invasion of Judah; from this prophecy, they ought to have already been aware of what Jeremiah declared to them- that even there in Egypt, the Babylonians would come and judge them (Jer. 44:1). The declaration to Egypt is effectively an appeal for repentance; as noted on :13, the predicted 'smiting' of Egypt was to be a repetition of that at the time of the Exodus. The gods of Egypt were smitten, but the smiting was ideally in order to elicit repentance. The word of judgment was as good as executed; but they were to "stand forth and prepare", a call to repentance.

Jeremiah 46:15 Why are your strong ones swept away? They didn't stand, because Yahweh pushed them over- GNB: "Why has your mighty god Apis fallen? The LORD has struck him down!'". As at the exodus there was the 'smiting' of Egypt's gods, so again it would be. But this was all ideally intended to elicit repentance.

Jeremiah 46:16 He made many to stumble, yes, they fell one on another: and they said, Arise, and let us go again to our own people, and to the land of our birth, from the oppressing sword- This speaks of the mercenaries fighting for Egypt running away to their homelands.

Jeremiah 46:17 They cried there, Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise; he has let the appointed time pass by- GNB "Give the king of Egypt a new name—'Noisy Braggart Who Missed His Chance'". As the Pharaoh at the time of the exodus was given a chance to repent, so now again (see on :13-15). As explained on Ez. 30:21, God had worked to bring about the healing of Egypt in her repentance after her first defeat by the Babylonians. But she didn't respond. Therefore Jer. 46:17 AV says of Pharaoh: "he has let the appointed time pass by". He was given a window of repentance but he refused it. The breaking of Pharaoh's arm as prophesied in Ez. 30:21 was in fact by being a staff of reed to Judah which collapsed. This was all the very opposite narrative to that which the faithless Jews at the time wished to believe- that the strong arm of Pharaoh would save them from the Babylonians. Instead, both Judah and Egypt would collapse as it were in a heap together before the Babylonians. And from this debased state they were both intended to arise as repentant, knowing Yahweh. But they didn't.

Jeremiah 46:18 As I live, says the King whose name is Yahweh of Armies, surely like Tabor among the mountains, and like Carmel by the sea, so shall he come- That is, with the same towering strength. The appeal to locations in Palestine was because those being addressed were not so much Egyptians as the Jews dwelling amongst them (:19).

Jeremiah 46:19 You daughter who dwells in Egypt, furnish yourself to go into captivity; for Memphis shall become a desolation and shall be burnt up without inhabitant- The daughter refers to the Jewish communities in Egypt. This ought to have been understood by the Jews who wanted to go and join the Jewish communities already existing in Memphis and elsewhere in Egypt; they were to also go into captivity. See on Jer. 44:1.

Jeremiah 46:20 Egypt is a very beautiful heifer; but destruction out of the north has come, it has come- GNB "Egypt is like a splendid cow, attacked by a stinging fly from the north".

Jeremiah 46:21 Also her hired men in the midst of her are like calves of the stall; for they also are turned back, they are fled away together, they didn't stand: for the day of their calamity has come on them, the time of their visitation- The apparent strength of Egypt was largely dependent upon their mercenaries; this prophecy emphasizes that. But Judah didn't seem to want to appreciate that. They were but "fatted calves fed in her" (LXX); they were loyal only insofar as they were fed and paid by Egypt.

Jeremiah 46:22 The sound of it shall go like the serpent; for they shall march with an army, and come against her with axes, as wood cutters- This is just how the

Babylonians came upon Jerusalem, with axes to cut down the cedarwork of the temple (Ps. 74:5,6). Judah were not to think they had cleverly escaped judgment through moving to Egypt; judgment would still come to them.

Jeremiah 46:23 They shall cut down her forest, says Yahweh, though it can't be searched; because they are more than the locusts, and are innumerable- Just as Egypt had been plagued by locusts (see on :13), so those plagues were to be repeated. And yet again there was therefore the hope for repentance and exodus because of that.

Jeremiah 46:24 The daughter of Egypt shall be disappointed; she shall be delivered into the hand of the people of the north- This is the daughter of :19, the Jewish daughter of Zion who lived in Egypt. They would be disappointed in Egypt; and again there is an abiding lesson. All trust in idols or in the things of Egypt, the world, will end in such disappointment, just as in due course Babylon would be disappointed in her idols (Jer. 51:17).

Jeremiah 46:25 Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, says: Behold, I will punish Amon of No- GNB "Amon, the god of Thebes". Egypt was to be punished by Babylon, and in due course Babylon too was to be punished (s.w. Jer. 25:12). Jeremiah's prophecies ought to have enabled God's people to see that all human strength waxes and wanes, and all finally comes to His judgment.

And Pharaoh, and Egypt, with her gods, and her kings; even Pharaoh, and those who trust in him- Those who trusted in Egypt's idols and gods were the Jews (:24).

Jeremiah 46:26 And I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their lives, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of his servants; and afterwards it shall be inhabited like in the days of old, says Yahweh- GNB "But later on, people will live in Egypt again, as they did in times past. I, the LORD, have spoken". This is the language of restoration; it was clearly God's plan to restore not only His own people and land, but those of the surrounding peoples.

Jeremiah 46:27 But don't you be afraid, Jacob My servant, neither be dismayed, Israel: for, behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid- The Jewish exiles in Egypt did indeed have something to fear and be dismayed about; but if they were repentant, then they would be restored even from Egypt into a new kingdom of God revived in the land of Israel. In the future, they would be unafraid; and even in the face of the Babylonian attack, they could still be unafraid. If they were truly penitent and on God's side, then they could live the kingdom life there and then, just as we can. This salvation from far off must be understood in the context of how God says that He was potentially near to Judah, but they had chosen to keep Him "far off" (s.w.) in their hearts; see on Jer. 12:2;23:23. Even from that situation, God's grace could work on their hearts. They were taken "far [off]" to captivity because they had Him far from their hearts.

Jeremiah 46:28 Don't you be afraid, O Jacob My servant, says Yahweh; for I am with you: for although I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, I will not make a full end of you- Earlier God had threatened to make a full end, the same phrase is found in Is. 10:23 and Zeph. 1:18. But now God promises that He will not make a full end (Jer. 5:10,18; 4:27; 30:11; 46:28). God is not capricious; but His love and pity is such that He is unafraid to not do according to His wrath. In wrath

God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority. And this God is our God.

But I will correct you in measure, and will in no way leave you unpunished- The frequent appeals for Judah to be "instructed" use the same word translated "punish" (Lev. 26:18). The idea was that the punishments were to be instruction; they were not the lashing out of an offended Deity. It was God's hope, even 'fantasy' would not be too strong a word, that His people would realize this, and come to say "You punished / instructed me, and I was instructed" (Jer. 31:18 s.w.). That correction / punishment was to be "in measure", the same phrase is used by Jeremiah as Judah's representative when he asked to be corrected "with justice / judgment" (Jer. 10:18). His personal reformation was to be that of Judah. The paradox is that Judah deserved total destruction, as Jeremiah and other prophets do state at times; and yet the "just" judgment was that which resulted in reformation and not total destruction. That justice involved them not being left "unpunished"; the guilty cannot be "cleared" (s.w. "unpunished"; Ex. 34:7; Nah. 1:3). That is a fundamental part of God's character. The problem was that the Jews of Jeremiah's time considered themselves "innocent" (Jer. 2:35 s.w. "unpunished"). They had to be convicted both of their sin and of God's grace, in punishing / correcting them less than their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13).

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 47

Jeremiah 47:1 The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before that Pharaoh struck Gaza- Judah were tempted to trust in the Philistines against Babylon. But this prophecy makes the point that they were to be struck by both Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah 47:2 Thus says Yahweh: Behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall become an overflowing stream, and shall overflow the land and all that is therein, the city and those who dwell therein; and the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall wail- The overflowing river refers to the army from the north (Jer. 46:8; Is. 8:7). That overflowing stream of Babylon was going to overflow the entire *eretz*, and that included the territory of the Philistines. It was a useless to think that Babylon could be resisted through alliances with people within the *eretz*.

Jeremiah 47:3 At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong ones, at the rushing of his chariots, at the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers don't look back to their children for feebleness of hands- The word for the "rushing" noise of the cherubim wheels in Ezekiel is used elsewhere about the noise of the chariots of Israel's enemies and the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 10:22; 47:3; Nah. 3:2). The Angelic armies of Heaven were therefore revealed on earth in the chariots of Babylon; it was both Babylon and the Angelic cherubim behind them who took Judah captive, and who could also return them to their land. Hence the stress in Ezekiel's vision that the wheels of the cherubim were on the earth / land. Clearly enough, the things that go on in our lives, even those things which appear as brutal and tragic as the Babylonian chariots were to Judah and the nations in the land like the Philistines, are not random machinations of men; they are, in some unfathomable way, under the direct control of a God of love, who only means to do us good at our latter end.

Jeremiah 47:4 because of the day that comes to destroy all the Philistines, to cut off

from Tyre and Sidon every helper who remains- The connection with Tyre and Sidon is in that the Philistines were in league with them. Judah would be left without any helper (Lam. 1:7 s.w.). Yahweh alone was the helper of His people (Is. 50:7 s.w.).

For Yahweh will destroy the Philistines, the remnant of the isle of Caphtor- Crete, the origin of the Philistines (Dt. 2:23; Am. 9:7).

Jeremiah 47:5 Baldness has come on Gaza; Ashkelon is brought to nothing, the remnant of their valley: how long will you cut yourself?- The cutting of themselves was in order to beg their idols to arise and help them (1 Kings 18:28). But they would not. Absolutely all human help was to be cut off; and therefore those who realized this would trust in Yahweh alone. "The remnant of their valley" is LXX "the remainder of the Anakim", or giants. Again, all human strength was to be brought to nothing; and we do well to live life in that belief today.

Jeremiah 47:6 You sword of Yahweh, how long will it be before you be quiet? Put up yourself into your scabbard; rest, and be still- See on Jer. 46:5. Jeremiah responds to the prophecy he has to utter against the hated Philistines by begging the Father to limit these judgments, presumably on account of their repentance: “O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still” (Jer. 47:6). Think too of how he almost interrupts a prophecy he is giving to Israel about judgment to come by appealing for them *therefore* to repent (Jer. 4:13,14). Our handling of the prophecies of judgment to come should have a like effect upon us: they should inspire us to an inevitable witness. Each of our days cannot be just ‘the same old scene’ when we see the world in this way.

Jeremiah 47:7 How can you be quiet, since Yahweh has given you a command? Against Ashkelon, and against the seashore, there has He appointed it- This may be Jeremiah's reply to himself. These windows into Jeremiah's struggles are profound; to preach the message of God's word may well involve our struggle with it. "Quiet" is the word just used in Jer. 46:27 of how Jacob shall be "at rest" when restored; and with the Philistines also, there is the implicit hope that there will be "rest" or "quiet" once the judgments of the sword have been carried out. For they too were intended to participate in the peace to come upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 48

Jeremiah 48:1 Of Moab. Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Woe to Nebo! for it is laid waste- The city, not the mountain (Num. 32:38).

Kiriathaim is disappointed, it is taken; Misgab is put to shame and broken down- The present tenses are used because the threatened judgments are so certain. I suggest that there is a particular address to the Jews who had taken refuge in Moab, just as the previous chapter addresses the Jews who had taken refuge in Egypt (see on :18).

Jeremiah 48:2 The praise of Moab is no more; in Heshbon they have devised evil against her. Come, and let us cut her off from being a nation. You also, Madmen, shall be brought to silence: the sword shall pursue you- "Heshbon" and "devised" are similar words, and so there is a word play here. Likewise "Madmen" and "brought to silence". The idea is that they had done this to themselves. Judgment is really self-inflicted and an extension of what the condemned did to themselves.

Jeremiah 48:3 The sound of a cry from Horonaim, desolation and great destruction!- See on :4. In Is. 16:3, Moab had been asked to accept the exiles of Judah and thus shield them from "spoiling" (s.w. NEV "desolation"). It seems that they had spoiled the Jewish refugees and not at all shielded them from the spoiling of the northern invader, both at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. And so their attitude to their brother [for Moab and Israel were all related to Abraham] becomes the basis for their judgment. This is a continual theme, and one that will continue to our own judgment.

Jeremiah 48:4 Moab is destroyed; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard- Isaiah had also spoken of this crying out of Moab in their time of judgment, and it motivated him to himself cry out for them. We too will appeal to men with conviction, as Isaiah's heart cried out for Moab like a young heifer about to be slaughtered, feeling for them in what would come upon them, and desperately appealing for their repentance. Because the Moabites would cry out and their voice would be heard, "*my* heart shall cry out for Moab" (Is. 15:4,5,8). As the Lord Jesus is a representative Saviour, we too must feel the judgment that is to come upon others, and in that sense cry out for them as they will cry out.

Jeremiah 48:5 For by the ascent of Luhith with continual weeping shall they go up; for at the descent of Horonaim they have heard the distress of the cry of destruction- See on :4. The same words for "cry of destruction" are found in the description of Jerusalem's fall in Zeph. 1:10. The Jews who had fled to the mountainous crags of Moab to escape Divine judgment were going to receive exactly that judgment; leaving us a lesson, that we will not avoid judgment. We need to repent of our sins, rather than psychologically try to avert judgment coming.

Jeremiah 48:6 Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness- As noted on :4, this is an appeal for repentance. God wanted Moab saved too. LXX has "be like a wild ass in the wilderness", which is hard to capture. Through repentance, they could avoid the capture and destruction which was otherwise inevitable.

Jeremiah 48:7 For because you have trusted in your works and in your treasures, you also shall be taken: and Chemosh shall go forth into captivity, his priests and his princes together- Their "works" were their idols, which are repeatedly described as the works of human hands (Dt. 4:28 etc.). And this is the essence of idolatry today- a trusting in our own works. Perhaps the reference is to the valuable stones in the Chemosh idol, which was therefore going to be taken into captivity as a valuable item. But it was understood that a god of a people or town always fought for its people, and if overcome, then it as it were goes into captivity (Is. 46:1; Am. 1:15). This was the difference with Israel's God Yahweh, the God who threatened to destroy His own city and temple because of His sensitivity to His peoples' sins; the God who brought their enemies upon them.

Jeremiah 48:8 The destroyer shall come on every city, and no city shall escape; the valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed; as Yahweh has spoken- The reference is to the Jordan valley and to the tableland of Moab. The Hebrew phrase for 'none escaping' has been used by Jeremiah in describing the Babylonian judgment

(Jer. 34:3; 38:18; Ez. 17:18). The Jews (see on :18) thought they could escape by running to Moab; but it is foolish to think we can play games with God.

Jeremiah 48:9 May wings be given to Moab, that she may fly and get her away: and her cities shall become a desolation, without any to dwell therein- This may be Jeremiah's interjection, wishing that Moab would take the way out- which was through repentance and turning to Yahweh. The "wings" of the mighty cherubim were there to deliver God's people, or whoever trusted in Him.

Jeremiah 48:10 Cursed is he who does the work of Yahweh negligently; and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood- If Babylon was negligent in judging Moab, they would be cursed.

Jeremiah 48:11 Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remains in him, and his scent is not changed- The idea therefore is that by Moab going into captivity, their scent and taste would change; in other words, they would repent. The same figure is used of how the captivity of Judah was likewise to bring about their repentance (Zeph. 1:12). This was in view throughout all these judgments, that the nations around Israel would repent. We are baptized into the Name of Jesus, and bear that Name in the eyes of men. The Hebrew concept of a name meant really a renown, an understanding of the person. The Bride comments that “thy name is as ointment poured forth” (Song 1:3), likening the name to the smell of perfume. The “scent” of a nation is likewise their reputation, the message they give out (Jer. 48:11; Hos. 14:7). We are the savour of Christ (2 Cor. 2:16), we bear His Name, and therefore anyone carrying the Name is thereby a witness to Him.

Jeremiah 48:12 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will send to him those who pour off, and they shall pour him off; and they shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles in pieces- There was to be no possibility for Moab to return to their former taste and scent (:11); the bottles of wine themselves would be broken. Yet this was all because God wanted them to radically change.

Jeremiah 48:13 Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their confidence- The idol cult at Bethel was used by Judah too (Am. 5:5). Israel's repentance and restoration was to signal that of the surrounding nations like Moab (see on :11). But they sadly failed. Clearly enough, God’s ideal intention even in Old Testament times was for the Gentiles to respond to the Hope of Israel. The aim of God’s judgments upon Moab were so that they might be ashamed of their idols, and that their “flavour” might be changed to be more pleasing to Israel’s God (:11); see on :28.

Jeremiah 48:14 How do you say, We are mighty men, and valiant men for the war?- The present tense is used; they at that time were confident in their own strength, but the Divine word of judgment was as good as fulfilled, so that :15 also uses the present tense in saying that "Moab *is* laid waste".

Jeremiah 48:15 Moab is laid waste, and they are gone up into his cities, and his chosen young men are gone down to the slaughter, says the King, whose name is

Yahweh of Armies- These titles are in contrast to Chemosh, god of Moab, which means ' the powerful / subduing one'.

Jeremiah 48:16 The calamity of Moab is near to come, and his affliction hurries fast- This is a quotation from Dt. 32:35 about the judgments of Israel (Dt. 32:36). As suggested on :18, it is the Jews in Moab who are being addressed here.

Jeremiah 48:17 All you who are around him, bemoan him; all you who know his name, say, How is the strong staff broken, the beautiful rod!- It would be Judah who particularly lamented the breaking of the strength of Moab, because she was one of the nations Judah trusted in against the Babylonians. We note how 'knowing his name' means to have trusted and understood Moab based upon his history and characteristics; and likewise to know Yahweh's Name is far more than simply knowing the word "Yahweh".

Jeremiah 48:18 You daughter who dwells in Dibon, come down from your glory, and sit in thirst; for the destroyer of Moab has come up against you, he has destroyed your strongholds- The daughter who dwelt in Egypt referred to the Jews who had fled there for salvation from the Babylonians; see on Jer. 46:19,24. Perhaps some had fled to Moab and been accepted there (from the time of Is. 16:4), and were confident that Babylonian judgment could never reach them. But the Babylonian destroyer of Moab would also come to them there. See on :20,22,23.

Jeremiah 48:19 Inhabitant of Aroer, stand by the way, and watch: ask him who flees, and her who escapes; say, What has been done?- This town was Moab's great pride; Mesha records on the “Moabite stone” that he “built (i.e. restored) the city".

Jeremiah 48:20 Moab is disappointed; for it is broken down: wail and cry; tell it by the Arnon, that Moab is laid waste- "Disappointed" is a concept more relevant to the Jews being disappointed in their trust in Moab, just as those who lived in Egypt had been of their trust upon Egypt (Jer. 46:24). The Jews who had fled to Moab would likewise be disappointed (see on :18).

Jeremiah 48:21 Judgement has come on the plain country, on Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath- These last two were priestly cities (Josh. 21:36,37). Israel had allowed these priestly cities to be lost to Moab, and thereby had decreased the accessibility of salvation intended for them. We can do the same in essence.

Jeremiah 48:22 Dibon, Nebo, Beth Diblathaim- "House of two figs". The Hebrew name may have been carried over by the Moabites from its original Israelite name; or perhaps the Jews living there gave it this name. See on :18.

Jeremiah 48:23 Kiriathaim, Beth Gamul, Beth Meon- The Moabites called the latter town Beth Baal Meon (Josh. 13:17), and it is noted like that on the Moabite stone. The absence of "Baal" could suggest that this was a town taken over by Jews who had emigrated there; see on :18.

Jeremiah 48:24 Kerioth, Bozrah, and on all the cities of the land of Moab, far or near- Kerioth could be another name for Ar (Num. 21:28; Am. 2:2). Bozrah is likely the Bezer of Dt. 4:43; Josh. 20:8; 21:36.

Jeremiah 48:25 The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, says Yahweh- This was the judgment to happen to Israel (Lam. 2:3; Am. 3:14). Again we see a similarity in the judgments, because it was the same Divine hand trying to also elicit repentance in Moab as well as Israel.

Jeremiah 48:26 Make him drunken; for he magnified himself against Yahweh: and Moab shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision- See on :42. This may be an invitation to Jeremiah to again take a cup of wine to Moab (Jer. 25:15). Moab need not have drunk this cup of judgment, had they submitted to Babylon and repented before Yahweh. As Moab derided Israel, so they would be (:27). Again we see the eternal truth- that how we treat God's people is the basis for our eternal blessing or condemnation.

Jeremiah 48:27 For wasn't Israel a derision to you? Was he found among thieves? For as often as you speak of him, you shake your head- Israel were indeed as caught thieves (Jer. 2:26), who were to be despised. The Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement from those who mocked Him. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This was exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles.

Jeremiah 48:28 You inhabitants of Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock; and be like the dove that makes her nest over the mouth of the abyss- They were intended to hide themselves in the rocks in repentance and be ashamed of their idols, just as Judah were to (Jer. 48:11,13,28 cp. Is. 2:19-21). Israel were to be the light to the Gentile world around them, the righteous servant who showed light to the Gentiles; their repentance and restoration was to signal that of the surrounding nations (see on :11). But they sadly failed.

Jeremiah 48:29 We have heard of the pride of Moab. He is very proud; his loftiness, and his pride, and his arrogance, and the highness of his heart- This is the ultimate reason for all condemnation. The pride of Moab is lamented also in Is. 25:11; Zeph. 2:8-10. This seems to be an expansion upon the prophecy of Is. 16:6.

Jeremiah 48:30 I know his wrath, says Yahweh, that it is nothing; his boastings have worked nothing- All external bravado and appearance is seen through by God; and we should also not find it attractive. Judah had found the bravado of Moab so attractive.

Jeremiah 48:31 Therefore will I wail for Moab; yes, I will cry out for all Moab: for the men of Kir Heres shall they mourn- Isaiah's love for the Gentiles whom he condemned (see on Is. 16:7) inspired Jeremiah to adopt the same attitude (Jer. 48:20,31-34); he too howled for those whose howling in condemnation he prophesied (Jer. 48:31 s.w.). As Moab cried out like a three year old heifer (Jer. 48:34), so did Isaiah for them (Is. 15:5). All this was done by Isaiah and Jeremiah, knowing that Moab hated Israel (Is. 25:10) and were evidently worthy of God's condemnation. But

all the same they loved them, in the spirit of Noah witnessing to the mocking world around him. Our knowledge of this world's future means that as we walk the streets and mix with men and women, our heart should cry out for them, no matter how they behave towards us, and there should be a deep seated desire for at least some of them to come to repentance and thereby avoid the judgments to come. Particularly is this true, surely, of the people and land of Israel. It ought to be impossible for us to walk its streets or meet its people without at least desiring to give them a leaflet or say at least something to try to help them see what lies ahead.

Jeremiah 48:32 With more than the weeping of Jazer will I weep for you, vine of Sibmah: your branches passed over the sea, they reached even to the sea of Jazer: on your summer fruits and on your vintage the destroyer is fallen- The "I" who is lamenting is God through Jeremiah. It is hard to lament the fall of the arrogant and abusive; but all the same, we see here the lament for the loss of every human being by God and His prophet.

Jeremiah 48:33 Gladness and joy is taken away from the fruitful field and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to cease from the wine presses: none shall tread with shouting; the shouting shall be no shouting- The Hebrew noun is used for both the joyous shout of the grape-treaders and for a battle-cry. The removal of the blessing of joy and wine recalls the covenant blessings being withdrawn from Israel for breaking the covenant; and again we suspect that it is the Jews living in Moab who are particularly in view (see on :18).

Jeremiah 48:34 From the cry of Heshbon even to Elealeh, even to Jahaz have they uttered their voice, from Zoar even to Horonaim, to Eglath Shelishiyah: for the waters of Nimrim also shall become desolate- This is a condensed form of Is. 15:4-6. Isaiah's prophecies about Moab hadn't come true at his time, but now they had the possibility of coming true in Jeremiah's time. The final fulfilment of every prophetic word will be in the last days.

Jeremiah 48:35 Moreover I will cause to cease in Moab, says Yahweh, him who offers in the high place, and him who burns incense to his gods- The implication could be that it was particularly the idolaters who were to be destroyed. The prophets condemn Israel for having adopted the gods of the surrounding nations, so perhaps these idol worshippers are specifically the Jews who had gone to live there; see on :18.

Jeremiah 48:36 Therefore my heart sounds for Moab like pipes, and my heart sounds like pipes for the men of Kir Heres: therefore the abundance that he has gotten is perished- This appears to be the interjection of Jeremiah for Moab. He really believed that what he was saying was going to happen to them, and his heart bled for them. See on 31.

Jeremiah 48:37 For every head is bald, and every beard clipped: on all the hands are cuttings, and on the waist sackcloth- This is a repeat of Is. 15:2. Such signs of mourning were forbidden to Israelites (Lev. 19:27; 21:5). But it seems that those mourning in Moab were Israelites who had taken refuge there, as they thought, from God's judgments through the Babylonians (see on :18). So the idea may be that they had become so identified with Moab that they acted as they did, and thus broke their covenant with Yahweh.

Jeremiah 48:38 On all the housetops of Moab and in its streets there is lamentation every where; for I have broken Moab like a vessel in which none delights, says Yahweh- Housetops and streets were where idols were worshipped; earlier Jeremiah has lamented that Jerusalem's streets and roofs were full of such idolatry. Moab was no better, and would suffer the same judgment. Moab was now going to be a vessel in which nobody delighted- including the Jews who had fled there for refuge.

Jeremiah 48:39 How it is broken down! How they wail! How Moab has turned the back with shame! So shall Moab become a derision and a terror to all who are around him- The same kind of language is used about the condemnation of Moab as is used for that of Judah. The idea is that they were intended to repent together, so that the revived kingdom of God in Israel would be populated by the repentant, surrounding nations too.

Jeremiah 48:40 For thus says Yahweh: Behold, he shall fly as an eagle, and shall spread out his wings against Moab- Just as Babylon came as an eagle against Judah, so it would against Moab (Jer. 4:13; Dt. 28:49). There was to be no avoiding Divine judgment. The wings of the cherubim were there for Israel's protection; but they had spurned them, and instead run to Moab for help (see on :18).

Jeremiah 48:41 Kerioth is taken, and the strongholds are seized, and the heart of the mighty men of Moab at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs- Again the metaphor has hope of a new birth out of this calamity. The Divine hope was that Moab along with Israel would repent and form a reborn people in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel.

Jeremiah 48:42 Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he has magnified himself against Yahweh- It is the Name of Yahweh which is to be magnified because of His special love for Israel (s.w. 2 Sam. 7:26), and therefore magnifying themselves against God's people was magnifying themselves against Yahweh (Zeph. 2:10). Any magnification of self against God's people is therefore a revolt against Yahweh and all that is implicit in His Name. We can do this, by magnifying our own desires and needs above those of His collective people.

Jeremiah 48:43 Fear, the pit and the snare are upon you, inhabitant of Moab, says Yahweh- Their relationship with Babylon would be a "snare" in that they united with them and were then destroyed by them.

Jeremiah 48:44 He who flees from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he who gets up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for I will bring on him, even on Moab, the year of their visitation, says Yahweh- Jer. 48:44; 49:5 describe condemnation as fear being brought upon people (as Job 3:25; Prov. 1:27), and Is. 24:18 and other passages speak of the condemned fleeing from “the noise of the fear”. “The fear” is almost a way of saying ‘the judgment of God’ (Lam. 3:47). The torment of the rejected will be their fear (1 Jn. 4:18). Psychologically, we need to get in touch with our own fears now, face our fears of condemnation eye to eye, and work through them- in repenting and coming to believe firmly in God’s gracious acceptance, living in the spirit of the true love which casts out fear. I know men and women who knew God and walked with the Lord, but now say ‘it means nothing to me’. They shrug when I nervously

mention to them the reality of judgment to come- and I'm not very bold at bringing the conversations around to that issue, because it is just so fearsome and of such magnitude. They tell me that they're indifferent. But somewhere deep within them, no matter what good actors they are before the stage of our human eyes, there has to be a deep and awful fear. And it is that fear which will be revealed and which will grip them in that final day. Perhaps the greatest mental torment of the rejected will be realizing how they could have been in the Kingdom of God; they will then perceive how great was the potential which they had had in the brief years of their mortality.

Jeremiah 48:45 Those who fled stand without strength under the shadow of Heshbon; for a fire is gone forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and has devoured the corner of Moab, and the crown of the head of the tumultuous ones- This quotes from the prophecies against Moab in Num. 21:28; 24:17. The final fulfilment of all the prophetic word will be at the last day, when the Lord Jesus as the "star out of Jacob" will destroy the latter day equivalent of Moab, and any Jews who have taken refuge with her.

Jeremiah 48:46 Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh is undone; for your sons are taken away captive, and your daughters into captivity- This is based on Num. 21:29. And yet Balaam's prophecies against Moab all have a latter day application. See on :47.

Jeremiah 48:47 Yet will I revive the fortunes of Moab in the latter days, says Yahweh. Thus far is the judgement of Moab- They too were intended to participate in the peace to come upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. It was God's intention to restore not just Israel, but all the peoples within the land, many of whom were in fact relatives of Abraham. The final fulfilment of these prophecies will be in the last day.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 49

Jeremiah 49:1 Of the children of Ammon. Thus says Yahweh: Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir? why then does Malcam possess Gad, and his people dwell in its cities?- I suggested on the previous two chapters that these judgments have in view the fact that some Jews had fled to Egypt (see on Jer. 46:19) and Moab (see on Jer. 48:11) to try to avoid Divine judgment. But those judgments would come. And some had also fled to Ammon. We know this because Ishmael was living there with a community of Jews at the time of the Babylonian invasion of Judah (Jer. 40:14; 41:10). This was why the people of the ten tribes ["Gad"; or LXX "Gilead"] were dwelling in the cities of Ammon. By doing so, effectively those Jews and Israelites were cutting themselves off from the covenant. They were losing their possession, as if they had "no heir".

Jeremiah 49:2 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard against Rabbah of the children of Ammon; and it shall become a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel possess those who possessed him, says Yahweh- Historically there was no fulfilment of this; Rabbah wasn't burnt and then possessed by Israel. As noted at the end of Jer. 48, the prophecies here will come to their final fulfilment in the last days. They could have come true in Jeremiah's time; the potential scenario was that Israel and Judah

both repented, the nations around them were judged and also repented, and together Abraham's fragmented family would be reunited in the revived Kingdom of God in Israel. This didn't then happen; but the prophetic thought and intention has been rescheduled and reapplied to the last days.

Jeremiah 49:3 Wail, Heshbon, for Ai is laid waste; cry, you daughters of Rabbah, clothe yourself in sackcloth: lament, and run back and forth among the fences- This lamenting could be a call to repentance- which was not responded to.

For Malcam shall go into captivity, his priests and his princes together- This is the same language as used about the Moabites in Jer. 48:7. It was understood that a god of a people or town always fought for its people, and if overcome, then it as it were goes into captivity (Is. 46:1; Am. 1:15). This was the difference with Israel's God Yahweh, the God who threatened to destroy His own city and temple because of His sensitivity to His peoples' sins; the God who brought their enemies upon them.

Jeremiah 49:4 Why do you glory in the valleys, your flowing valley, backsliding daughter? Who trusted in her treasures, saying, who shall come to me?- All trust in human strength, wealth especially, is abhorrent to God. Treasures or wealth can in no way buy off Divine judgment. However the reference to a "backsliding daughter" is more relevant to the daughter of Zion who was then living in Ammonite territory (see on :1). It is a term used about her and not the Ammonites in Jer. 31:22.

Jeremiah 49:5 Behold, I will bring a fear on you, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, from all who are around you; and you shall be driven out every man right forth, and there shall be none to gather together the fugitive- Jer. 48:44; 49:5 describe condemnation as fear being brought upon people (as Job 3:25; Prov. 1:27), and Is. 24:18 and other passages speak of the condemned fleeing from “the noise of the fear”. “The fear” is almost a way of saying ‘the judgment of God’ (Lam. 3:47). The torment of the rejected will be their fear (1 Jn. 4:18). Psychologically, we need to get in touch with our own fears now, face our fears of condemnation eye to eye, and work through them- in repenting and coming to believe firmly in God’s gracious acceptance, living in the spirit of the true love which casts out fear. I know men and women who knew God and walked with the Lord, but now say ‘it means nothing to me’. They shrug when I nervously mention to them the reality of judgment to come- and I’m not very bold at bringing the conversations around to that issue, because it is just so fearsome and of such magnitude. They tell me that they’re indifferent. But somewhere deep within them, no matter what good actors they are before the stage of our human eyes, there has to be a deep and awful fear. And it is that fear which will be revealed and which will grip them in that final day. Perhaps the greatest mental torment of the rejected will be realizing how they could have been in the Kingdom of God; they will then perceive how great was the potential which they had had in the brief years of their mortality.

Jeremiah 49:6 But afterwards I will revive the fortunes of the children of Ammon, says Yahweh- They too were intended to participate in the peace to come upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. It was God's intention to restore not just Israel, but all the peoples within the land, many of whom were in fact relatives of Abraham. The final fulfilment of these prophecies will be in the last day.

Jeremiah 49:7 Of Edom. Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Is wisdom no more in Teman?

Is counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom vanished?- All human wisdom is despised by God when it is used to justify unGodly behaviour. That was how He viewed the renowned wisdom of Edom, and it is how He must feel today.

Jeremiah 49:8 Flee, turn back, dwell in the depths, inhabitants of Dedan; for I will bring the calamity of Esau on him, the time that I shall visit him- The appeal to "turn back" may be a call to repentance; although of all the nations, Edom is the one of whom there is no hint of future restoration. "The calamity of Esau" was the thing he feared most, which was domination by Jacob. This was not fulfilled at Jeremiah's time; the prophetic potential was that a repentant Israel would have dominated the nations around them. But Israel didn't repent; and so the fulfilment has been rescheduled to the last days.

Jeremiah 49:9 If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave some gleaning grapes?- As we judge, we will be judged; even Babylon will be judged as she judged others (Rev. 18:20 RV), and Edom's judgments in Jer. 49:9 are an exact reflection of how she judged Israel, leaving no remnant (Obad. 5). And therefore we should almost jump at the opportunity to judge- with grace.

If thieves by night, wouldn't they steal until they had enough?- God as it were understands that a hungry thief will steal food (as taught in Prov. 6:30); but Edom had done far more than that. We see here God's sensitivity, and how He judges behaviour on a sliding scale, taking account of circumstantial factors. We are too easy to excuse sin by pleading situational ethics; but God as the only true judge can make this judgment in a way that we cannot. The implication of the argument is that a certain degree of theft or grape picking would have been acceptable with God. He recognized that Esau / Edom had a legitimate issue with Jacob, even though of course he should ideally have simply forgiven him. But God perceived that they had gone far beyond that. This is not to say that some degree of vengeance and sin is somehow OK with God, but beyond that invisible line, it is not. But on the other hand, God is used to judging human sin, and He does so with understanding, as the only true judge, taking into account all background factors which led to the sinful behaviour.

Jeremiah 49:10 But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: his seed is destroyed, and his brothers, and his neighbours; and he is no more- We would all claim to believe that God sees and knows all things, and yet our behaviour and thinking at times implies we think there are "secret places" hidden from His view. Edom had the same mentality (Jer. 49:10). God had specifically warned them that their ways were not "hid" from His eyes (Jer. 16:17 s.w.). And yet Israel like Edom thought they could hide from Him (Jer. 23:24 s.w.).

Jeremiah 49:11 Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in Me- This is a clear invitation to Edom to repent. They are asked not to focus solely upon their losses and the need to provide for their families in distress, but to trust in Yahweh. So easily faith in Yahweh is eclipsed by our sense that *we* can be and must be the saviour of the moment.

Jeremiah 49:12 For thus says Yahweh: Behold, they to whom it didn't pertain to drink of the cup shall certainly drink; and are you he who shall altogether go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, but you shall surely drink- Edom had the attitude that

the cup of Divine judgment could not come to them. This is a theme of all these final prophecies upon the nations- they thought, as did the Jews amongst them, that they could somehow avoid judgment. There were people who were not the objects of judgment who would suffer collateral damage from the judgments, and thereby they too drunk of it. So Edom shouldn't think that she should escape because of her geography and nature of her location.

Jeremiah 49:13 For I have sworn by Myself, says Yahweh, that Bozrah shall become an astonishment, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all its cities shall be perpetual wastes- The strength of the language against Edom always seems somewhat harsher than the words against the other nations; here God swears by Himself, as He can find no greater way to express the truth (Heb. 6:13). Perhaps this is because Edom, which is Esau, was Jacob's brother. What we do against our brother in the faith is so especially culpable before God. Edom or Esau was singled out for such special condemnation because he was Jacob's brother (Obad. 10). This was not the case for the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines etc. Jacob and Esau were admittedly somewhat separated, and Jacob hadn't been the best brother to Esau. But they were still brothers, and God expected much better of Esau / Edom than He did of the others. And here too we find a penetrating challenge. Our brethren whom we may view askance, from whom we may be separated by the way life has gone for us, are still our brothers. And we are judged very sensitively according to our attitudes toward them, especially in the time of their distress, however justified we may feel that distress to be.

Jeremiah 49:14 I have heard news from Yahweh, and an ambassador is sent among the nations saying- Jeremiah is telling Edom that he had heard inside news, as it were, from Yahweh. Surely the reason for telling Edom ahead of time is so that they might repent. The Hebrew for "ambassador" is also translated "messenger", which is also what the Hebrew for "angel" means. So perhaps an Angel is in view, sent amongst the nations to stir them up to a battle which would result in the destruction of Edom. It was as if Jeremiah was allowed a vision of the court of heaven, the heavenly throne room, where decisions were made and Angels sent out to operationalize them. Obadiah was given the same insight concerning Edom, as he reports in the same words in Obadiah 1.

Gather yourselves together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle- According to Obadiah, who repeats this prophecy with further interpretation, the judgment of Edom was to result in the restoration of Israel's Kingdom. This could have happened at various points in the history of Judah and Israel, but it didn't, because Israel didn't repent and the restoration was not conducted spiritually. The ultimate fulfilment of this prophecy, as of all prophecy, will be in the last days.

Jeremiah 49:15 For, behold, I have made you small among the nations, and despised among men- The past tense here must be compared with the present tense used elsewhere about Edom's pride at that time. It is therefore a prophetic perfect- God's word, both of judgment and salvation blessing, is so certain of fulfilment that it can be spoken as having already happened. This is why there are passages which speak of the believer's salvation as if it has already occurred, whereas at this point in human time we are still mortal. It was Israel / Jacob who were made small among the nations; Jacob was the "younger", s.w. 'smaller', son compared to Esau (Gen. 27:15,42). Esau / Edom was to receive the judgment of Jacob. This is a major theme of the Apocalypse,

that Israel's enemies suffer as she suffers; the seals of judgment upon Israel are in essence repeated in the vials of judgment upon the surrounding nations.

Jeremiah 49:16 As for your terror, the pride of your heart has deceived you- It was their apparently awesome human strength which deceived Esau / Edom, according to the parallel in Obad. 3. And in Obad. 7 it is the other nations in the confederacy against Israel who deceive Edom. They praised Edom's strength, and Edom's heart was thereby lifted up in pride. The problem with human strength is that it deceives; we thereby play God and become proud.

O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill- Pride is consistently given as the reason for the judgment of nations. God is so sensitive to it, and so should we be. The allusion is to how the houses in Petra were carved out of caves in the rock. Edom is recorded as having expelled the Horites from the area where the Edomites settled, and 'Horite' is literally 'a cave dweller'. The consistent message of the prophets is that human strength will not save ultimately, and is in fact an abomination to the God who loves humble trust in Him above all things.

Though you should make your nest as high as the eagle, I will bring you down from there, says Yahweh- Jer. 49:22 says that an eagle greater than them shall take them away from their mountain fortress.

Jeremiah 49:17 Edom shall become an astonishment: each one who passes by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all its plagues- This is the language of judgment upon Jerusalem; it would come also upon Edom. Esau would not be able to consider himself superior to Jacob; he would have the same judgment. But the full extent of the destruction of Edomite territory didn't then happen; see on :18,21.

Jeremiah 49:18 As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbouring cities, says Yahweh, no man shall dwell there, neither shall any son of man live therein- This has never quite come true for the land of Edom; the implication is that the whole area would be punished in some way which made the whole area uninhabitable, as happened to Sodom. But this has been rescheduled to the last days. See on :17,21; Jer. 50:12.

Jeremiah 49:19 Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the pride of the Jordan against the strong habitation: for I will suddenly make them run away from it; and whoever is chosen, him will I appoint over it: for who is like Me? And who will appoint Me a time? And who is the shepherd who will stand before Me?- This verse is repeated word for word in Jer. 50:44; and :20 is likewise about Babylon in Jer. 50:45. There is a theme that all the nations around Judah were to be given the same appeal for repentance. It was God's intention that they too repented, along with Israel and Judah, and formed part of a restored kingdom of God in the whole *eretz* promised to Abraham. This didn't happen at the time, and so it is reapplied and rescheduled to the last days. The chosen shepherd appointed over Edom or Babylon will then ultimately be the Lord Jesus, the good shepherd. But in the immediate application, it could have been Cyrus the Persian or Darius the Mede, who were the shepherds to be appointed over Edom and Babylon (Is. 44:28).

Jeremiah 49:20 Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh that He has taken against Edom; and His purposes, that He has purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: Surely they shall drag them away, the little ones of the flock; surely he shall make

their habitation desolate over them- See on :19. But Jer. 18:8 clearly states that this purpose could have been changed, using the same word to say that God will "repent of the evil that I purposed to do to them". It was God's intention that all the nations around Israel would repent along with His people, and turn to Him. Even Edom could have repented at this point. "Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh..." is surely an appeal for repentance. That God should make so much effort with hardened worldlings... indicates His depth of concern for human salvation. And it should encourage us in our witness.

Jeremiah 49:21 The earth trembles at the noise of their fall; there is a cry, the noise which is heard in the Red Sea- The idea is that the entire area of Edom suffers an earthquake, reminiscent of the earthquake and topographical changes which seem to have occurred at the exodus. The Red Sea was the limit of their territory- 1 Kings 9:26 speaks of "Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom". But this didn't happen as planned at the time; see on :18.

Jeremiah 49:22 Behold, he shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread out his wings against Bozrah: and the heart of the mighty men of Edom at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs- As noted on :16, the Edomites thought they were inaccessible as an eagle to Divine judgment; but a greater eagle would come upon them. Again the metaphor has hope of a new birth out of this calamity. The Divine hope was that Edom along with Moab (Jer. 48:41) and Israel would repent and form a reborn people in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel.

Jeremiah 49:23 Of Damascus. Hamath is confounded, and Arpad; for they have heard evil news, they are melted away: there is sorrow on the sea; it can't be quiet- This partly repeats the prophecy against Damascus of Is. 17:1-11; but Is. 17:7 is insistent that as a result of this, some in Damascus would repent. These prophecies of doom are not just droning on negatively; the hope is that they would respond to the news being given them ahead of time regarding their fall. The language of the restless sea alludes to Is. 57:19,20. They need not have been like that; peace with God was possible through their repentance.

Jeremiah 49:24 Damascus has grown feeble, she turns herself to flee, and trembling has seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken hold of her, as of a woman in travail- This was presumably because of the threat of Babylon, although there is little historical evidence about this; I suggest on :25 that this was part of a prophetic scenario which didn't then come about. The reason for her judgment was because of what she had done to God's people (Am. 1:3); she had judged them too harshly, with iron threshing instruments, overstepping the Divine command to judge His people. And that was to be the problem with Babylon herself, and the reason for her condemnation.

Jeremiah 49:25 How is the city of praise not forsaken, the city of My joy!- This has to be a reference to Zion, the joy of the whole earth (Ps. 48:2). Although Zion was far from being that at the time (Lam. 2:15), God saw (as we should) to the realities of the future Kingdom of God as if they were present realities. The prophetic scenario was that Damascus would fall, but Zion would be again exalted and indeed become the joy of the whole earth, no longer forsaken as she currently was. But the lack of repentance by both Israel and Damascus meant that this didn't work out at the time;

perhaps that is why as noted on :24 the Babylonian desolation of Damascus didn't happen at that time as it could. All these things will come to their final truth, in essence, in the last days.

Jeremiah 49:26 Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be brought to silence in that day, says Yahweh of Armies- This is the language of Zion's judgment. What they had done or wanted to do to God's people would be done to them. Again we see that even in Old Testament times, attitude to God's people is the basis for judgment. And that is an abiding principle for us today.

Jeremiah 49:27 I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall devour the palaces of Ben Hadad- This is alluded to in Am. 1:4,14. But the context of those prophecies is that it will happen in the day when Yahweh roars from out of Zion (Am. 1:2), in "the day of the whirlwind" (Am. 1:14). I suggested on :24,25 that these judgments on Damascus didn't come true as they could have done at the time, but will do so in the last days. And that seems to be the point of Amos repeating these words.

Jeremiah 49:28 Of Kedar, and of the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck. Thus says Yahweh: Arise, go up to Kedar, and destroy the children of the east- Babylon is portrayed as obedient to a Divine command to do so, acting as Yahweh's servant. Babylon's judgment was because they overstepped what they were commanded to do. Kedar and Hazor refer to the Bedouin Arabs (:29). Hazor may not refer to the city of that name but may be a take on *hazer*, an unwalled village of the type the Bedouins lived in (:31).

Jeremiah 49:29 Their tents and their flocks shall they take; they shall carry away for themselves their curtains, and all their vessels, and their camels; and they shall cry to them, Terror on every side!- This "terror on every side" quotes the judgment upon Judah in Jer. 6:25. Even the wandering Bedouin Arabs (see on :28) were to experience the judgments which came upon Judah. But this was so that they might be able to identify with God's people through this experience, and come to accept Israel's God. It is not simply so that 'what goes around comes around'; there is a purpose in these judgments repeating themselves. It was so that those who had witnessed and participated in the judgment of Israel might come to see how it felt, and thereby repent. We too are at times made to feel the effect of our actions upon others- for the same reason.

Jeremiah 49:30 Flee, wander far off, dwell in the depths, you inhabitants of Hazor, says Yahweh; for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has taken counsel against you, and has conceived a purpose against you- Hazor may not refer to the city of that name but may be a take on *hazer*, an unwalled village of the type the Bedouins lived in (:31). Taking counsel and conceiving a purpose are exactly the words used of what Yahweh does (Jer. 29:11; 49:20; 50:45). But here, Nebuchadnezzar does so. Clearly God placed in his heart to fulfill His will. This is how God can work; placing desires and ideas in the human mind. This work upon the human spirit is achieved by God's Spirit; and this is how His Holy Spirit can work in our lives if we are open to it. Babylon was not condemned because they conceived these purposes; but because they overstepped the commissions given, leading them into the sin which called forth such condemnation.

Jeremiah 49:31 Arise, go up to a nation that is at ease, that dwells without care, says Yahweh; that have neither gates nor bars, that dwell alone- Just as Babylon "conceived a purpose" against those who live without bars and gates (:30), so the latter day invader led by Gog will "conceive a purpose" (s.w. Ez. 38:10) to attack an Israel dwelling without gates and bars (Ez. 38:11). The Babylonian attack upon the Bedouin Arabs therefore serves as a prototype of the latter day attack upon Israel. The description of these people as 'dwelling alone' is the very phrase used of Israel (Num. 23:9); this highlights the connection.

Jeremiah 49:32 Their camels shall be a booty, and the multitude of their livestock a spoil: and I will scatter to all winds those who have the corners of their beards cut off; and I will bring their calamity on them from every side, says Yahweh- Whether Nebuchadnezzar did this is not strongly attested to historically. But as noted on :2,24, we are seeing here a potential scenario of what could have come about, but which was rescheduled to fulfilment in the last days.

Jeremiah 49:33 Hazor shall be a dwelling place of jackals, a desolation forever: no man shall dwell there, neither shall any son of man live therein- Just as was predicted of Edom (Jer. 49:18) and of the cities of Judah (Jer. 10:22). Divine judgment has the same hallmark wherever it is executed.

Jeremiah 49:34 The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying- The book of Jeremiah is not chronological but thematic. The theme here is of the nations around Judah being judged for what they had done to Judah. The fact Elam is mentioned as being judged at the beginning of Zedekiah's reign could imply that they had played some part in the early Babylonian attack upon Judah which resulted in the dethronement and captivity of Jehoiachin, whom Zedekiah replaced. Elam is not Persia proper; they were confederate with the Assyrians in attacking Judah earlier (Is. 22:6).

Jeremiah 49:35 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might- According to some of the cuneiform tablets acquired in 1878 by the British Museum, "At the very time when Nebuchadnezzar was taking an oath of allegiance from Zedekiah, he was also engaged in hostilities against Elam". So the breaking of Elam's power was to be by Babylon. The breaking of Elam's bow is because they had used their bow and quiver against Judah (Is. 22:6). Consistently, attitude toward God's people is the basis for judgment; and that is the lesson for us. The day of judgment will not be a theological examination, but rather a consideration of how we dealt with the hungry, thirsty and naked.

Jeremiah 49:36 On Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of the sky, and will scatter them towards all those winds; and there shall be no nation where the outcasts of Elam shall not come- These four winds appear to refer to Angelic powers (Zech. 6:5; Ps. 104:4). And yet the reference is to Babylonian forces. Babylon was a manifestation of the four cherubim figures seen in Ez. 1; they were controlled by God, doing His will. If we identify Elam with modern day Persia / Iran, we may see the parallel with how a vast army is bound by the Euphrates River by four Angels in Rev. 9:14,15. These four Angels would be the "four winds / spirits" of Jer. 49:36.

Jeremiah 49:37 I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies, and before those who seek their life; and I will bring evil on them, even My fierce anger, says Yahweh; and I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them- As noted on :36, the Babylonians were sent by God. They were His sword, sent by Him. The simple takeaway from all this is that there is no radical evil in the cosmos; all is under God's control and supervision.

Jeremiah 49:38 and I will set My throne in Elam, and will destroy from there king and princes, says Yahweh- This didn't happen at Jeremiah's time; but it was the potential. Their king and princes would be destroyed because Yahweh was to become their accepted king and they would thereby become part of His Kingdom. And it will come true at the last day; see on :39.

Jeremiah 49:39 But it shall happen in the latter days, that I will restore the fortunes of Elam, says Yahweh- They too were intended to participate in the peace to come upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. It was God's intention to restore not just Israel, but all the peoples within the land, many of whom were in fact relatives of Abraham. The final fulfilment of these prophecies will be in the last day. Although we perhaps see an incipient fulfilment in that there were Elamites who converted to the God of Israel in Acts 2:9.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 50

Jeremiah 50:1 The word that Yahweh spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by Jeremiah the prophet- To speak of Babylon in the hostile way the prophets do, especially as here signing oneself as the human author, was a brave and unpopular thing (Is. 13,14,21,46; Jer. 50,51; often in Zechariah). We know from Ez. 8, Jer. 44 and Zech. 5 that many Jews had accepted the idols of their Babylonian conquerors, rather like Ahaz did after his defeat by Assyria (2 Kings 16:10). The spirit of ridiculing the idolatry of Babylon whilst living in it, waiting the call to leave, is so relevant to modern Christians working, living and waiting in latter day Babylon. Jer. 25:13 had stated: "I will bring on that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations". These are clearly the words written in the prophecies against Babylon and the other nations here at the end of Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically; Jer. 25:13 sounds as if "this book" of Jeremiah had been finished at this point.

Jeremiah 50:2 Declare among the nations and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and don't conceal: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is disappointed, Merodach is dismayed; her images are disappointed, her idols are dismayed- This is the ultimate end of all idolatry, of all life lived without total devotion to God- disappointment. Life is only in Yahweh; both eternal life, and meaningful life now. Just before the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, the Jews within the city were making those very same idols, and would be disappointed in them just as Babylon was to be in the end (Jer. 10:14 s.w.). The desire to worship is built within the human condition. And we become like what we worship (Ps. 115:8). It is therefore critically important to worship the right thing.

The news of Babylon's fall was to be published. Jeremiah had been the object of special care from Nebuchadnezzar, and so these prophecies against Babylon would appear to be biting the hand which fed him. Perhaps this was why Jeremiah chose not to go to Babylon, but to remain with the poor remnant of Jews in Judah. He knew that Babylon was to fall and he was to proclaim that, but it would be easier to achieve his prophetic mission if he published that message from somewhere outside of Babylon. We too are in a similar apparently difficult position in proclaiming the fall of this world, upon which in a secular sense we depend.

Jeremiah 50:3 For out of the north there comes up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they are fled, they are gone, both man and animal- Just as Babylon had been the nation from the north who would bring God' judgments, so now she is to be judged from the north. She was to be made to realize how she had made others feel. It is not simply so that 'what goes around comes around'; there is a purpose in these judgments repeating themselves. It was so that those who had witnessed and participated in the judgment of Israel might come to see how it felt, and thereby repent. We too are at times made to feel the effect of our actions upon others- for the same reason.

Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation.

Jeremiah 50:4 In those days, and in that time, says Yahweh, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; they shall go on their way weeping, and shall seek Yahweh their God- This is critical for us to understand the prophecies about Babylon. The intended prophetic scenario was that the fall of Babylon would coincide with the repentance of both the ten tribes and Judah; they would come "together", on the basis of the common experience of weeping repentance, and return to Zion. It is the common experience of God's grace and recognition of our sins which is the basis for unity in practice amongst God's people, rather than any dry theological agreement. The weeping of Ezra and Nehemiah was the basis for their desire to return to Zion (Ezra 10:1; Neh. 1:4). But the 'restoration' of the Jews was generally not upon that basis. Many chose to remain in captivity, and those who did return were motivated by a desire for personal benefit in the land grants they expected to receive in the land. And the restoration prophets are clear that many of them were not at all spiritually motivated. So the intended prophetic scenario didn't come about, and this in turn affected the outcome of the prophecies of the fall of Babylon.

Jeremiah 50:5 They shall inquire concerning Zion with their faces turned towards it saying, Come, and join yourselves to Yahweh in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten- The potential new covenant of Jer. 31:31 is spoken about in Jer. 50, where we read that Babylon would fall as God's revenge for what they did to God's people, and then Judah in their exile would return to Zion whilst inviting others to come and join themselves to that same new covenant. Indeed at the time of Babylon's fall, Judah were to heed God's call to "Remove out of the midst of Babylon", who had taken them captives (Jer. 50:8,33). Babylon did fall; and yet Judah did not return. Indeed, Daniel the Jew became a senior ruler in the administration that followed

Babylon's fall (Dan. 5:31). They themselves refused the new covenant, and didn't invite Babylon and the surrounding peoples to join it. They would "ask the way to Zion" although their faces were already set to go there (AV); they would accept the call of Jer. 6:16 to ask or inquire for the Godly ways (s.w.), asking for their own intention to be confirmed; for their faces were already "turned towards it". And they would have been answered. But there is no evidence that they did ask for this.

Jeremiah 50:6 My people have been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray; they have turned them away on the mountains; they have gone from mountain to hill- God in His zeal to think positively about His people lays the blame upon their bad shepherds. But we have often noted throughout Jeremiah that the people and the leadership are usually addressed together; the people were punished for their own sins, and their shepherds were only teaching what they perceived the people themselves wanted to hear. But God is as it were gushing in His desire to be positive about His people; and that is how He feels toward us too. And we should reflect that positivity.

They have forgotten their resting place- Zion, their resting place, had been forgotten by them in exile, despite their cultural loyalty to it. This is proof enough that Christian culture of itself is not enough; in reality they had forgotten Zion, despite singing songs such as Ps. 137:5 which avow their eternal remembrance of Zion.

Jeremiah 50:7 All who found them have devoured them; and their adversaries said, We are not guilty, because they have sinned against Yahweh- The devourers of Israel considered themselves "not guilty" because Judah had sinned against their God. But the clear statement in Jer. 2:3 is that "All who devour him shall be held guilty". Punishing a sinner doesn't mean that those who do the punishing are thereby justified; we can be used by God, but that is no guarantee of righteousness or acceptability. This needs to be remembered by those who consider they can punish sinners within the church; they may well be held equally guilty for the lack of love they showed.

The habitation of righteousness, even Yahweh, the hope of their fathers- Jerusalem would be known as the habitation of the righteous one when Messiah came. But they refused that potential. Babylon is presented as being Yahweh's servant, doing what He commanded against both Israel and the nations. This raises the question as to whether God would then turn around and condemn Babylon for their obedience. I suggest that Babylon is condemned because they overstepped the bounds of their commission. Indeed God wanted Babylon to accept Him; that was His desire. It was their refusal to do so, and their abuse of God's people beyond what they were commanded, which was the basis for their condemnation.

Jeremiah 50:8 Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans- The offer of rest was rejected by the exiles then; but is taken up now by all who accept Christ, realizing that they are in the same state as the exiles in Babylon. "Come out from among them and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17) is picking up the language of Is. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7 concerning the return of the exiles from Babylon. The edict of Cyrus for the Jews to return to the land is in a sense pointing forward to God's command to us to leave the spirit of Babylon, the Gentile world, and go up to do His work. The returned exiles are us. Those who left Babylon did so of their own freewill (Ezra 7:13), and yet providential events stirred up their spirits to do this (Ezra 1:5); and the way was prepared in miraculous way. And so it is for us, in our exodus from this world and from the flesh.

God will confirm us in coming out from the world. He told His people to flee from Babylon, to come out of her and return to His land and Kingdom (Is. 48:20; 52:7; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7). Babylon offered them a secure life, wealth, a society which accepted them (Esther 8:17; 10:3), houses which they had built for themselves (Jer. 29:5). And they were asked to leave all this, and travel the uncertain wilderness road to the ruins of Israel. They are cited in the NT as types of us in our exit from this world (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4). Those who decided to obey God's command and leave Babylon were confirmed in this by God: He raised up their spirit to want to return and re-build Jerusalem, and He touched the heart of Cyrus to make decrees which greatly helped them to do this (Ezra 1:2-5). And so the same Lord God of Israel is waiting to confirm us in our every act of separation from the kingdoms of this world, great or small; and He waits not only to receive us, but to be a Father unto us, and to make us His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18).

And be as the male goats before the flocks- The idea was that Judah's repentance would have lead the Gentile flocks of nations to follow them to Zion in repentance. But this didn't happen, because the Jews weren't truly repentant, and the flocks didn't want to follow. Yet in essence it will come true in the last days.

Jeremiah 50:9 For behold, I will stir up and cause to come up against Babylon a company of great nations from the north country; and they shall set themselves in array against her; from there she shall be taken- Just as God stirred or raised up Babylon to invade Judah (Jer. 6:22), so He would stir up, or psychologically provoke, other nations to come and judge her (Jer. 50:9,41; 51:1,11 s.w.). This is greatly emphasized. The activity of God directly upon human hearts is a great theme of the Biblical revelation, and is to encourage us that He is eager to transform hearts, and to place desires within us beyond our own unaided psychological ability.

Their arrows shall be as of an expert mighty man; none shall return in vain- Every arrow would be guided by God to its mark.

Jeremiah 50:10 Chaldea shall be a prey: all who prey on her shall be satisfied, says Yahweh- Hab. 2:8 says that Chaldea would be a prey because of their violence against God's land and city. They had been commanded to take the land and city of God; but it seems their violence and bloodlust overstepped the bounds set by God. So it was not that God punished Babylon for being His servant. They were punished because they overstepped the boundary between legitimate punishment and abuse.

Jeremiah 50:11 Because you are glad, because you rejoice, O you who plunder My inheritance, because you are wanton as a heifer that treads out the grain, and neigh as strong horses- As explained on :10, it was the wanton, joyful plundering of Zion which was the basis of their condemnation. It was as if they were unmuzzled beasts not merely treading out the grain [performing the required judgments] but also eating the grain for themselves.

Jeremiah 50:12 your mother shall be utterly disappointed; she who bore you shall be confounded: behold, she shall be the least of the nations, a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert- The judgment was to be upon all Babylonia, not just the city of Babylon, who is here described as the mother of Babylon. All attempts to apply this verse solely to the city of Babylon are therefore misplaced; it refers to all Babylonia. And the whole area didn't become a literal desert; the fertile crescent remained fertile.

This recalls how the similar judgments upon the area of Edom likewise didn't come about at the time; see on Jer. 49:18. But this will happen in the last days.

Jeremiah 50:13 Because of the wrath of Yahweh she shall not be inhabited, but she shall be wholly desolate: everyone who goes by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues- As explained on :12, this was part of a wider prophetic scenario, whereby Babylonian would be made like this and a repentant Judah and Israel would return to their land and their God (see on :3,4). But that scenario didn't come completely true; although it will in the last days. The language of total desolation implies some radical intervention akin to what happened to Sodom; and that didn't happen.

Jeremiah 50:14 Set yourselves in array against Babylon all around, all you who bend the bow; shoot at her, spare no arrows: for she has sinned against Yahweh- I noted on :10,11 that the sin against Yahweh was in elevating herself to Divine status, and punishing Israel more than God intended. For Babylon had been God's servant, obeying His commands concerning Judah and the nations.

Jeremiah 50:15 Shout against her all around: she has submitted herself; her bulwarks are fallen, her walls are thrown down; for it is the vengeance of Yahweh: take vengeance on her; as she has done, do to her- The command to "shout" to cause the fall of the walls of Jericho was a reflection of the belief Israel were to have in the fact that God *had already* given them the city- for the Hebrew for "shout" usually refers to a shout of victory. The word is translated "... will I triumph" in Ps. 60:8; 108:9. The same idea of shouting in victory over a city which has been given to God's people recurs in Jer. 50:15- "Shout against her round about [cp. compassing the walls of Jericho]... her foundations *are* [present tense] fallen, her walls [cp. Jericho's] *are* thrown down". And this speaks of our latter day victory against Babylon- thus making the whole account of earnest relevance to us who live in the last days, and who will see Babylon fall by faith. Notice how literal Babylon fell by the water of the river being dried up, and the walls being opened- just the same sequence of events that occurred at Jericho.

Jeremiah 50:16 Cut off the sower from Babylon, and him who handles the sickle in the time of harvest- Aristotle claims that grain was grown within the walled city area of Babylon. But even the agricultural workers were to be cut off. This didn't really happen when the Medes conquered the city.

For fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn each one to his people, and they shall flee each one to his own land- The various captive peoples taken to Babylon would each return to their own land, and Judah were to do likewise. But this isn't how things quite turned out. This was the prophetic ideal scenario, but it didn't happen because many Jews preferred to remain in Babylon and they didn't repent. The impression given is that the attack upon Babylon would reduce the city to ruins immediately. But this didn't happen under the Medes; it was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18

with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

Jeremiah 50:17 Israel is a hunted sheep; the lions have driven him away: first, the king of Assyria devoured him; and now at the last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has broken his bones- "At the last" suggests that Nebuchadnezzar's abuse of Israel was "the last" suffering they would endure. That was the potential scenario; for had Israel repented at Babylon's fall, then a Messianic Kingdom of God would have been reestablished in Israel. But this didn't happen, and so this was not "the last" suffering of Israel.

The 'scattering' or 'driving away' to the gods of many different peoples (s.w. Jer. 3:13) would result in them being appropriately scattered amongst those nations (s.w. Esther 3:8; Joel 3:2). Judgment was really a reflecting back to them of what they in essence had done.

Jeremiah 50:18 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria- The Assyrians were overthrown by the Medes and the Chaldeans. The Medes would again be used against Babylon.

Jeremiah 50:19 I will bring Israel again to his pasture, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead- As noted on :3,4, the prophetic potential was that the fall of Babylon would coincide with the return of Israel to their land. But these events didn't happen together, because Judah didn't repent, and most of the ten tribes and Judah preferred to stay in exile. Carmel, Bashan, Mount Ephraim, and Gilead, were in the territory of the ten tribes, and they showed no interest in repenting or returning to the land.

Jeremiah 50:20 In those days and in that time, says Yahweh, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I leave as a remnant- This would be because they had accepted the new covenant (Jer. 31:34). But they didn't; and so the prophetic scenario was precluded from coming true at the time as was potentially possible. That will be true for Israel in the last days, and for those who accept the new covenant today. The wonderful certainty of salvation and freedom from condemnation is brought out by the wonderful figure of the courtroom. God is the prosecutor- yet He is the one who shall search for Israel's sin, and admit that it cannot be found (Jer. 50:20). God is both judge, advocate for the defence, and prosecutor- and this is God is for us, the guilty! Rom. 8:33,34 develops the figure at length. The person bringing the complaint of sin against us is God alone- for there is no personal devil to do so. And the judge who can alone condemn us is the Lord Jesus alone. And yet we find the one ‘brings the charge’ instead being the very one who justifies us, or as the Greek means, renders us guiltless. The one who brings the charge becomes this strange judge who is so eager to declare us guiltless. And the judge who can alone condemn, or render guilty, is the very one who makes intercession to the judge for us- and moreover, the One who died for us, so passionate is His love. The logic is breathtaking, literally so.

Jeremiah 50:21 Go up against the land of Merathaim, even against it, and against the inhabitants of Pekod: kill and utterly destroy after them, says Yahweh, and do according to all that I have commanded you- These names are chosen because of their

meaning; "Merathaim" is the word used in :24 for how they rebelled or struggled against Yahweh; "Pekod", where Nineveh was located and which had become a province of Babylon, is the same word used for "punish" in :18.

Jeremiah 50:22 A sound of battle is in the land, and of great destruction- Continually the stress is upon the destruction of "the land" of Babylon. To seek to apply these prophecies just to the city of Babylon is incorrect. The scenario of all Babylonia being destroyed didn't quite come true at the time as envisaged; the exiles didn't repent, and so the scenario didn't at that time come about.

Jeremiah 50:23 How is the hammer of the whole earth cut apart and broken! How is Babylon become a desolation among the nations!- Jeremiah had used the word for "hammer" earlier in describing the power of God's word (Jer. 23:29). Babylon had been a hammer on God's behalf, in fulfilling His word. Now a repentant Israel were to become that hammer, breaking all in pieces (Jer. 51:20-23). But this didn't happen, because Israel were not repentant and were therefore unwilling to be used by God for this. They could have been the little stone of Dan. 2:44 which returned from Babylon and destroyed the kingdoms upon the *eretz* in order to prepare the way for Yahweh's eternal kingdom. But they would not. And so these things are to come true in the last days, when a repentant and therefore willing Israel will become Yahweh's weapons to establish His Kingdom and do all the necessary 'breaking' (Jer. 51:20).

Jeremiah 50:24 I have laid a snare for you, and you are also caught, Babylon, and you weren't aware: you are found, and also caught, because you have struggled against Yahweh- The immediate application was in the Medes attacking Babylon unawares, by drying up the water of the protective river system around the city. Babylon had been given commands relating to Judah and the surrounding nations; but they had gone beyond fulfilling them, and had therefore striven against Yahweh, effectively declaring themselves to be Yahweh, and their kingdom as His Kingdom.

Jeremiah 50:25 Yahweh has opened His armoury and has brought forth the weapons of His indignation; for the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, has a work to do in the land of the Chaldeans- The Medes and their confederate peoples had been prepared by Yahweh for the work in hand; they had as it were been stored up in His armoury for this moment.

Jeremiah 50:26 Come against her from the utmost border; open her storehouses; cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly; let nothing of her be left- The impression is given that the famed storehouses of Babylon were to be opened at the same time as she was turned into heaps with nothing left. But this didn't happen when the Medes took the city. It was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

Jeremiah 50:27 Kill all her bulls; let them go down to the slaughter: woe to them! For

their day has come, the time of their visitation- It has been observed that the slaughterhouses were below the river, and when the river was dried up, the soldiers of the Medes approached into the city through those slaughterhouses.

Jeremiah 50:28 The voice of those who flee and escape out of the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of Yahweh our God, the vengeance of His temple- As noted on :3,4, we are reading here of a potential prophetic scenario which didn't actually come about at the time. The command to flee and escape from Babylon was largely ignored. The idea was that around the time when Babylon fell, the repentant Jewish and Israelite exiles would return to Zion. There, they would declare with joy that Babylon had fallen. But this isn't what happened. They didn't repent and most didn't return to the land. The prophecy is therefore to be reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear.

Jeremiah 50:29 Call together the archers against Babylon, all those who bend the bow; encamp against her all around; let none of it escape: recompense her according to her work; according to all that she has done, do to her- As noted on :26, much of Babylon did escape when the Medes attacked and conquered her. This projected scenario didn't come about at the time, and yet will do in essence in its latter day fulfilment.

For she has been proud against Yahweh, against the Holy One of Israel- I have repeatedly made the point that Babylon is presented as being Yahweh's servant, doing what He commanded against both Israel and the nations, with Him putting the ideas into the king of Babylon's mind. God surely would not then turn around and condemn Babylon for their obedience. I suggest that Babylon is condemned because they overstepped the bounds of their commission, they were proud, and established themselves as Yahweh with their kingdom as His kingdom.

Jeremiah 50:30 Therefore her young men will fall in her streets, and all her men of war will be brought to silence in that day, says Yahweh- This is what was done to Jerusalem, as Jeremiah frequently expresses in his Lamentations.

Jeremiah 50:31 Behold, I am against you, you proud one, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies; for your day has come, the time that I will visit you- Again, it was the pride of Babylon which led to her judgment; she had been Yahweh's servant, doing His will upon Judah and her neighbours. But she went too far and became exalted with pride, just as Is. 14 and other prophecies against Babylon make clear. The judgments against Babylon are perhaps the parade example of how seriously God views pride.

Jeremiah 50:32 The proud one shall stumble and fall, and none shall raise him up; and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it shall devour all who are around him- Again, as noted on :31, it was pride which was the reason for Babylon's judgment and not the fact she had invaded Judah; for that had been at Yahweh's bidding and initiative. The destruction of all the cities of Babylonia with fire didn't happen; indeed, the Medes didn't destroy Babylon itself with fire; see on :26. This was the potential prophetic scenario which didn't come about, because Judah didn't repent (see on :3,4).

Jeremiah 50:33 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: The children of Israel and the children of Judah are oppressed together; and all who took them captive hold them fast; they

refuse to let them go- Because the Jews oppressed Gentiles (Jer. 7:6 s.w.), therefore they were to be oppressed by them (Dt. 28:29,33 s.w.). They were acting as "the oppressor" to God's people too (Jer. 21:12 s.w.), and so they too were oppressed by the Babylonians. How they treated their brethren was directly related to how they would be treated in their judgment, and this principle applies for all time. Their judgments were appropriate to their sins, as were Babylon's. But again we have here an example of why I say that we are reading about a potential prophetic scenario. There is no evidence that Israel and Judah actually strongly wanted to be allowed to return to their land at the end of 70 years; Judah responded poorly to the decree of Cyrus to return, and most of the ten tribes remained willfully in exile. But the prophetic potential was that Israel and Judah "together" would repent and return together. But they chose not to. Had they done so, and earnestly wanted to return to restore Zion, then Babylon would have been guilty of acting as Pharaoh, refusing to let God's people go; and would have been punished appropriately.

Jeremiah 50:34 Their Redeemer is strong- At that time, God was willing to be strong to show Himself Judah's redeemer- but they chose to remain in Babylon under the Medo-Persian administration. So they did not ask the way to Zion and seek a new covenant with Yahweh; and thus the promises of a new covenant, strong redemption in Yahweh, a Messiah figure arising, were all delayed and re-interpreted in their fulfilment. See on :5.

Yahweh of Armies is His name: He will thoroughly plead their cause- "Plead their cause" is legal language. As explained on Jer. 25:31, it was a complicated case, with counter appeals which resulted in everyone being condemned- and yet Judah then being finally justified, by grace. Yahweh had this legal case with Judah whom He condemned, and then with the peoples who supported Babylon against her (Jer. 25:31); and then He has this case against Babylon (Jer. 51:36) during which He is advocate for Judah, whose cause He legally pleads in the court case (Jer. 50:34) of which He is judge as well as advocate for the defence. Being both advocate and judge, we see the certainty of Judah's final justification- if they chose to accept His amazing grace in justifying them.

That He may give rest to the earth, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon- The fall of Babylon was intended to lead to "rest" to the *eretz* promised to Abraham, in the form of the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. But this didn't in fact happen at that time. The prophetic picture here is only to come true in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear.

Jeremiah 50:35 A sword is on the Chaldeans, says Yahweh, and on the inhabitants of Babylon, on her princes and on her wise men- The idea of a sword hanging over Babylon is an image used elsewhere about Jerusalem, and the idea is that there was therefore an appeal for repentance. This is what God wanted to see from Babylon.

Jeremiah 50:36 A sword is on the boasters, and they shall become fools; a sword is on her mighty men, and they shall be dismayed- As noted on :31 and often, Babylon was judged above all for her pride and exaltation of human strength and wisdom. Babylon is set up as a fake Christ and Kingdom of God. She had proselytes and prophets ["boasters"] (Jer. 50:36,37); a mountain (Jer. 51:25); "The golden city" (Is. 14:4) with a thick, embellished wall (Jer. 51:58); springs and rivers within her (Jer. 51:36); "The praise of the whole earth" (Jer. 51:41). Her sin was that she thought of

herself in her own right as the kingdom of God, instead of humbling herself to become part of His Kingdom.

Jeremiah 50:37 A sword is on their horses, and on their chariots, and on all the mixed people who are in the midst of her; and they shall become as women: a sword is on her treasures, and they shall be robbed- The idea of a sword hanging over Babylon is an image used elsewhere about Jerusalem, and the idea is that there was therefore an appeal for repentance. This is what God wanted to see from Babylon. It was trust in horses, chariots and wealth which was so abhorrent to God; this was the basis for the pride which brought about her judgment; see on :31.

Jeremiah 50:38 A drought is on her waters, and they shall be dried up; for it is a land of engraved images, and they are mad over idols- This was partly fulfilled by the Medes diverting the course of the Euphrates in order to take Babylon by surprise; although Layard uncovered inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender. The judgments described here are upon her "land"; perhaps all the water sources are in view and not just the river around the city of Babylon. And this didn't happen to all of Babylonia. What was in view was a destruction of all Babylonia after the pattern of Sodom's destruction (:40). And that didn't happen; the prophetic scenario didn't come true at the time, and Rev. 18 alludes to these prophecies to demonstrate that they will come true in essence only in the very last days.

Jeremiah 50:39 Therefore the wild animals of the desert with the wolves shall dwell there, and the ostriches shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited forever; neither shall it be lived in from generation to generation- As noted on :26, much of Babylon did escape when the Medes attacked and conquered her, and the city continued being inhabited for some time. This projected scenario didn't come about at the time, and yet will do in essence in its latter day fulfilment, as Rev. 18 explains.

Jeremiah 50:40 As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbouring cities, says Yahweh, so shall no man dwell there, neither shall any son of man live therein- Such dramatic destruction of Babylon didn't happen at the hands of the Medes (see on :26). And we must bear in mind the many hints that the projected judgments were not just upon the city of Babylon but upon the land of Babylon i.e. Babylonia. The image of Sodom's destruction suggests direct, miraculous Divine intervention. This didn't happen at Jeremiah's time, but Rev. 18 alludes to all this and makes it clear that such Divine intervention will occur against latter Babylon in the last days.

Jeremiah 50:41 Behold, a people comes from the north; and a great nation and many kings shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth- Just as Babylon had been the nation from the north who would bring God' judgments, so now she is to be judged from the north. She was to be made to realize how she had made others feel. It is not simply so that 'what goes around comes around'; there is a purpose in these judgments repeating themselves. It was so that those who had witnessed and participated in the judgment of Israel might come to see how it felt, and thereby repent. We too are at times made to feel the effect of our actions upon others- for the same reason. For "stirred up", see on :9.

Jeremiah 50:42 They lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy;

their voice roars like the sea; and they ride on horses, each one set in array as a man to the battle, against you, daughter of Babylon- This quotes the condemnation of Judah in Jer. 6:23 and applies it to Babylon. What Babylon had done to Judah was to be done to her. There is a continuity in God's judgments, they all bear the same Divine hallmark. And the same desire to elicit repentance. The scenario here again doesn't quite fit the picture of what happened to historical Babylon. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future.

Jeremiah 50:43 The king of Babylon has heard the news of them, and his hands wax feeble: anguish has taken hold of him, pains as of a woman in labour- This is not quite the same as the impression given by surface level Bible teachers that the king of Babylon was rejoicing in his city, confident in his own strength, when the Medes diverted the course of the Euphrates and took the city by surprise. The record in Daniel 5 is correct, but that record doesn't contradict the information given here- that the king was already deeply concerned at the advance of the Medes. Here we read that he was feeble at the news of the enemy advance. Hence we should give due weight to the discovery by Layard of inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender.

Jeremiah 50:44 Behold, the enemy shall come up like a lion from the pride of the Jordan against the strong habitation: for I will suddenly make them run away from it; and whoever is chosen, him will I appoint over it: for who is like Me? And who will appoint Me a time? And who is the shepherd who can stand before Me?- This verse is repeated word for word in Jer. 49:19 about Edom; and :45 is likewise about Edom in Jer. 49:20. There is a theme that all the nations around Judah were to be given the same appeal for repentance. It was God's intention that they too repented, along with Israel and Judah, and formed part of a restored kingdom of God in the whole *eretz* promised to Abraham. This didn't happen at the time, and so it is reapplied and rescheduled to the last days. The chosen shepherd appointed over Edom or Babylon will then ultimately be the Lord Jesus, the good shepherd. But in the immediate application, it could have been Cyrus the Persian or Darius the Mede, who were the shepherds to be appointed over Edom and Babylon (Is. 44:28).

Jeremiah 50:45 Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh that He has taken against Babylon; and His purposes, that He has purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely they shall drag them away, even the little ones of the flock; surely he shall make their habitation desolate over them- See on :44. But Jer. 18:8 clearly states that this purpose could have been changed, using the same word to say that God will "repent of the evil that I purposed to do to them". It was God's intention that all the nations around Israel would repent along with His people, and turn to Him. Even Babylon could have repented at this point. "Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh..." is surely an appeal for repentance. That God should make so much effort with hardened worldlings... indicates His depth of concern for human salvation. And it should encourage us in our witness.

Jeremiah 50:46 At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth trembles, and the cry is heard among the nations- The fall of Babylon was intended to cause panic amongst the nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and her "cry" is frightening for those

nations. Rev. 18 interprets this for us, as meaning that the nations of the *eretz* were all confederate with and supportive of Babylon, and would take her fall as a body blow to themselves. But that was not the scene when the Medes took Babylon. Again, the prophetic scenario here described didn't fully happen when the Medes captured Babylon, or as Layard claims, Babylon opened her gates in surrender to the Medes. We are looking at a potential scenario which was precluded by the lack of repentance and desire for restoration in Israel and Judah (see on :3,4). But this is not to say that the prophecy was proven false; it is reinterpreted and rescheduled for the last days in Rev. 18.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 51

Jeremiah 51:1 Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will raise up a destroying wind against Babylon and against those who dwell in Lebkamai- see on Ex. 12:23. For "raise", see on :11. God makes His Angels spirits or winds (Ps. 104:4), so the invaders were under the direct control of God. "Lebkamai" is "Chaldea", written in the cypher called athbash (see on :41 and Jer. 25:26); just as "Sheshach" in :41 is equivalent to Babel. But why this apparent attempt to hide the reference to Babylon, when "Babylon" has just been mentioned? One suggestion is that the prophecy was given earlier, and Jeremiah sought to hide the direct reference to Babylon; but later inspired editing added the name "Babylon". Or we could stick with the AV: "Them that dwell in the midst of her". But that would raise the question as to why "Lebkamai" is "Chaldea", written in athbash.

Jeremiah 51:2 I will send to Babylon strangers who shall winnow her; and they shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her around- The image of winnowing suggests that there would be some good grain which would fall to the ground. Again we see that the intention of God was that some in Babylon would repent as a result of the judgments. God never lashes out in anger as it were, with the frustration of a more powerful being. Always there is the hope and intention of reformation and salvation for some through His necessary judgments.

Jeremiah 51:3 Against him who bends let the archer bend his bow, and against him who lifts himself up in his coat of mail: don't spare her young men; utterly destroy all her army- This wasn't really the scene when the Medes took Babylon. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; the Nabonidus Chronicle records that the people of Babylon welcomed Cyrus by spreading green twigs before him (James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 306b). Both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. See on :4.

Jeremiah 51:4 They shall fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans, and thrust through in her streets- This isn't the scenario which happened when the Medes took Babylon; see on :3. As mentioned often in commentary on Jer. 50, the judgments here are not only upon the city of Babylon, but upon the entire "land of the Chaldeans", Babylonia. The scale of sudden destruction implied didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. The prophetic scenario projected in these prophecies didn't fully happen, although it will do so ultimately in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear. This

was because Judah and Israel didn't repent and earnestly seek to restore Zion; see on Jer. 50:3,4,26. And this was intended to be connected with the realization of these prophecies upon Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:5 For neither Israel nor Judah is forsaken, of his God, of Yahweh of Armies; though their land is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel- The prophetic intention was that Israel and Judah would be reunited through the joint experience of repentance and receipt of forgiveness by grace, and would together return from exile to restore Zion; see on Jer. 50:3,4. But they preferred to remain in exile, and therefore failed to make use of the amazing grace offered to them- that despite being so guilty, God had not forsaken them. The word specifically means to be forsaken in the sense of divorced in a marriage; although God had said that effectively they had ended the marriage by breaking the marital covenant, and they were therefore divorced, yet His love was such that they were not forsaken by Him, despite the "guilt" of their unfaithfulness. But this great grace was spurned by them.

Jeremiah 51:6 Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and save every man his life; don't be cut off in her iniquity: for it is the time of Yahweh's vengeance; He will render to her a recompense- Jer. 51:6,45 make it clear that every single Jew ("every man his soul") was ordered by God to leave Babylon- and Jer. 51:60 clarifies that all these words were written down and that Seraiah read them to the Jews of Babylon. They were *all* supposed to "let Jerusalem come into your mind" (Jer. 50:50)- but in the end, only a minority like Nehemiah did so. Judah's disobedience was chronic and specific. They rejected all the wonderful things which God had worked out for them in potential. It was such a tragedy, as tragic as when we individually are our community as a whole repeat it in our contexts today. For the call to leave Babylon is quoted in the New Testament as an appeal for us to respond to in our day. Those who remained in Babylon rather than returning to Judah would be "cut off in her iniquity". But actually this threatened judgment didn't happen in that way. Most of the Jews did stay there, and simply assimilated into the world around them. And the scenario envisaged here therefore didn't happen; when Cyrus took Babylon, he didn't kill the Jews but rather encouraged them to return to their homeland, as he did the other exiled peoples he found there.

Jeremiah 51:7 Babylon has been a golden cup in Yahweh's hand, who made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are mad- "Mad" is the Hebrew *halal* which is usually used about praise (s.w. Jer. 20:13) which the nations shall finally give (Jer. 31:7 s.w.), although it can carry the sense of 'raving'. If madness was solely in view, another word would have been used. Perhaps the word choice was again to hint that they could come to repentance and praise of Yahweh as a result of the judgments- if they responded rightly.

Jeremiah 51:8 Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed- Babylon was not "suddenly" destroyed by the Medes; full weight must be given to the inscriptions uncovered by Layard which say that in fact Babylon opened her own gates to the Medes in surrender. It was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, which was still standing; and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to

Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

Wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed- This opens another window into what God potentially planned at this time. Balm in Jer. 46:11 refers to repentance. Surely this passage speaks of Judah appealing to Babylon to repent, and then coming out of her, returning to Judah, and leaving her to perish in her iniquity if she didn't repent. God's intention here was not carried out by Judah. They made no appeal for Babylon to repent. Only a few of them returned to Judah, most preferring the Babylon life. But *had they done what God suggested*, then the whole prophecies about Babylon's destruction would have become conditional prophecies, exactly after the pattern of Jonah's pronunciation of destruction upon Nineveh, which actually never came to pass because they did repent. So although the doom of Babylon was often prophesied, even this could have been avoided if Babylon had hearkened to the witness which Israel were supposed to make to her of their wonderful God. Remember how Jeremiah told the exiles to pray for the good of Babylon and to seek its' peace with God (Jer. 29:7).

Jeremiah 51:9 We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go each one into his own country- Consider the nuance of John Bright's strict translation of Jer. 51:8,9: "Wail over (Babylon)! Get ointment for her hurt- perhaps it's curable. Though we treated her, Babylon mends not". The implication is clearly that God intended to use Judah to bring about Babylon's repentance, and only because this failed did He finally "Give her up" to destruction (Jer. 51:9). If this scenario had happened, then the prophecies of judgment against Babylon would have been more clearly revealed for what I believe they were- conditional, upon her repentance.

For her judgement reaches to the sky, and is lifted up even to heaven- The idea of knowing God's judgments is frightening. Sin is its own judgment. Sins rise up to Heaven (2 Chron. 28:9)- and the judgment for them is spoken of as rising up to Heaven (same Hebrew words, Jer. 51:9). Sin and judgment are paralleled. Whenever we commit sin, we do so knowing (at least in one part of our brain) the judgment / condemnation which it is. The outcome of the judgment needn't be something mysterious to us; it isn't necessarily the great unknown to the thoughtful, self-reflective believer who *knows and loves and studies* God's judgments with the verve of David in Ps. 119

Jeremiah 51:10 Yahweh has brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of Yahweh our God- The exiles were warned time and again to flee from Babylon back to the land, so that they wouldn't share in the destruction of the city. There's no record they did so; and yet by grace, God seems to have preserved them from perishing or even suffering as a result of the Persian takeover of Babylon. Indeed, they prospered under the Persians, and as soon as Cyrus took Babylon he encouraged the Jews to return to rebuild Zion. The voice of the faithful remnant pleaded with the other exiles after the fall of Babylon: "Babylon is fallen... forsake her [as they had been told to do *before* Babylon fell, Jer. 51:6], and let us go and return to our own country... and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord" (Jer. 51:8,10). God's patient grace to the Jews in Babylon was amazing. The hope was that they would recognize that they had had righteousness imputed to them, and this was 'their' righteousness which had been "brought forth"; and their response was to declare in

Zion God's work, i.e. to begin rebuilding and restoring the temple and God's Kingdom there. But none of this was really fulfilled as was potentially possible.

Jeremiah 51:11 Make sharp the arrows; hold firm the shields: Yahweh has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes; because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it: for it is the revenge of Yahweh, the revenge for His temple- Just as God stirred or raised up Babylon to invade Judah (Jer. 6:22), sharpening her arrows (Ez. 21:21), so He would stir up, or psychologically provoke, other nations to come and judge her (Jer. 50:9,41; 51:1,11 s.w.). This is greatly emphasized. The activity of God directly upon human hearts is a great theme of the Biblical revelation, and is to encourage us that He is eager to transform hearts, and to place desires within us beyond our own unaided psychological ability. But the Medes didn't destroy Babylon; as explained on :3,8, there was no destruction of the city, and so much was left that it revived several times and asserted independence. He did not take full vengeance for what Babylon did in His temple because His own people were not eager to rebuild it and were not recognizant of their role in its destruction.

Jeremiah 51:12 Set up a standard against the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set the watchmen, prepare the ambushes- The watchmen here are not the Babylonian defenders, but the attackers. The concept is used as in Jer. 4:16 "Watchers [i.e. besiegers] come from a far country".

For Yahweh has both purposed and done that which He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon- There is a vision described in 1 Kings 22:22 of the Angels presenting their various plans of how to slay Ahab. God says to the one whose plan He accepts "Thou shalt persuade him (Ahab), and prevail also: go forth, and do so". Thus the Angel still has to "prevail" or 'struggle' to operationalize a command from God which they know is His will to perform; and we have to do likewise, not least in the preaching of the Gospel, both obeying and prevailing. This makes more sense of Jer. 51:12, which says that "The Lord (of Hosts / Angels, :14) hath *both* devised and done that which He spake" about Babylon.

Israel were told to separate themselves from Babylon because God had purposed to destroy that nation; they were asked to believe that what God had planned, He would actually do (Jer. 51:12), and therefore they should treat Babylon accordingly in their attitudes. Appreciating that God is beyond time, not just an everlasting being but without time, helps us to understand a whole range of Biblical issues. Faith is about adopting God's time-less perspective. Israel were told to separate themselves from Babylon because God had purposed to destroy that nation; they were asked to believe that what God had planned, He would actually do, and therefore they should treat Babylon accordingly in their attitudes. Appreciating that God is beyond time, not just an everlasting being but without time, helps us to understand a whole range of Biblical issues.

Jeremiah 51:13 You who dwell on many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come, the measure of your covetousness- As explained on :8, the victory of the Medes against Babylon was not then the "end" of Babylon. The prophecies of Jer. 50 and Jer. 51 imply a sudden fall of Babylon by supernatural means which would mean her immediate and permanent end. This didn't happen when the Medes entered Babylon. Again we see that the prophetic scenario didn't fully happen at that time; although Rev. 18 makes it clear that it will do so, in essence, in the last days.

Jeremiah 51:14 Yahweh of Armies has sworn by Himself saying, Surely I will fill you with men, as a swarm of locusts; and they shall lift up a shout against you- LXX "Sing songs of victory over you", an example of which we have in Is. 14, and one of which now follows in :15-19.

Jeremiah 51:15 He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding has He stretched out the heavens- As noted on :15, we have in :15-:19 a victory song which would be sung over Babylon. But the song of victory would be a declaration of Yahweh's power in creation. Only His people could sing this. And there is no evidence that the Jews did rejoice when Babylon fell. Like Daniel, they continued to prosper under Cyrus as they had under the Babylonians. They were intended to rejoice that Yahweh's wisdom was exalted, rather than that of the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 51:16 When He utters His voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, and brings forth the wind out of His treasuries- His power in the natural creation was reflected in how He brought a destroying wind against Babylon (:1); the vapours or waters which He makes to ascend from the ends of the earth were reflected in how He brought people from the ends of the earth to destroy Babylon (:27,28). These words are a repeat of Jer. 10:13, where they are in the context of rebuking belief in idols. The context is the same here (:17); and yet in reality, the Jews continued to believe in idols. For Ezekiel had to rebuke the exiles in Babylon for their idolatry. It was only after a few generations that they quit idolatry.

Jeremiah 51:17 Every man has become a brute, without knowledge. Every goldsmith is disappointed by his image; for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them- This is the very language used about the disappointment of the Jews when they made these Babylonian idols on the eve of Babylon's conquest of Jerusalem (Jer. 10:14). This is the ultimate end of all idolatry, of all life lived without total devotion to God- disappointment. Judah likewise would be disappointed in Egypt, the world (s.w. Jer. 46:24). Life is only in Yahweh; both eternal life, and meaningful life now. It was the idols who were primitive and without knowledge (Jer. 10:8); and those who make and worship idols become like unto them, also "primitive..." (Ps. 115:8). The desire to worship is built within the human condition. And we become like what we worship. It is therefore critically important to worship the right thing.

Jeremiah 51:18 They are vanity, a work of delusion: in the time of their visitation they shall perish- This quotes the words of Jer. 10:15, of how the Jews who made these Babylonian idols would be forced to this same realization.

Jeremiah 51:19 The portion of Jacob is not like these- Jacob inherits God, having Him as his portion; and God inherits Israel / Jacob. We see here the mutuality intended between God and Israel. This is yet another reflection of God's recognition that finally, Jacob fulfilled his promise to make Yahweh his God (Gen. 28:20). The lessons of Jacob's name change were finally learnt.

For He is the former of all things; and Jacob is the tribe of His inheritance: Yahweh of Armies is His name- It was the prophetic hope that Judah and the ten tribe

kingdom would unite as one in the restored kingdom of God in Israel. "Israel" is therefore described here as a singular tribe.

Jeremiah 51:20 You are my battle axe and weapons of war: and with you will I break in pieces the nations; and with you will I destroy kingdoms- The potential was that God would have used a revived Israel as an army to destroy Babylon (Ez. 37:10). The same message is given here. The strong emphasis here in :20-22 upon 'breaking in pieces' recalls the little stone of Dan. 2 cut out from the great mountain (Babylon) which was to destroy the kingdoms of men then dominating Israel and become a great kingdom of God on earth. This potential didn't happen; but it shall do finally in the last days.

Jeremiah 51:21 And with you will I break in pieces the horse and his rider- This is the language of the victory song (see on :14) against Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

Jeremiah 51:22 And with you will I break in pieces the chariot and him who rides therein; and with you will I break in pieces man and woman; and with you will I break in pieces the old man and the youth; and with you will I break in pieces the young man and the virgin- The Divine intention seems to have been that the exiles repented and themselves would seek to return to restore Zion (see on Jer. 50:3,4). Babylon would be given the opportunity to repent, and if they didn't, then the Medes would take their city, although there is not much hint in the prophecies of violent conflict between the Medes and the Babylonians. The actual destruction of the impenitent Babylonians would be done by God's use of Israel, to do to those Babylonians what they had done (according to Jeremiah's Lamentations) to the men, women, old people and children in the streets of Jerusalem. But the entire scenario simply didn't come about. For the prime mover in the whole sequence was the repentance of Israel, and this just didn't happen. But these prophecies will have their essential fulfilment in the last days.

Jeremiah 51:23 And with you will I break in pieces the shepherd and his flock; and with you will I break in pieces the farmer and his yoke; and with you will I break in pieces governors and deputies- Babylon had been a hammer on God's behalf (Jer. 50:23), in fulfilling His word (Jer. 23:29). Now a repentant Israel were to become that hammer, breaking all in pieces (Jer. 51:20-23). But this didn't happen at the time, because Israel were not repentant and were therefore unwilling to be used by God for this. They could have been the little stone of Dan. 2:44 which returned from Babylon and destroyed the kingdoms upon the *eretz* in order to prepare the way for Yahweh's eternal kingdom. But they would not. And so these things are to come true in the last days, when a repentant and therefore willing Israel will become Yahweh's weapons to establish His Kingdom and do all the necessary 'breaking' (Jer. 51:20).

Jeremiah 51:24 I will render to Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, says Yahweh- "In your sight" suggests that it was the same generation who could remember the devastation of Jerusalem who would now judge and destroy Babylon. The length of the exile period is again shown to be open ended; see on Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10. As explained on :22, Israel were not used at this time to judge the Babylonians, because they did not repent.

Jeremiah 51:25 Behold, I am against you, destroying mountain, says Yahweh, which

destroys all the land; and I will stretch out My hand on you and roll you down from the rocks- Babylon is set up as a fake Christ and Kingdom of God. She had proselytes and prophets (Jer. 50:36,37); a mountain (Jer. 51:25); "The golden city" (Is. 14:4) with a thick, embellished wall (Jer. 51:58); springs and rivers within her (Jer. 51:36); "The praise of the whole earth" (Jer. 51:41). Babylon was the mountain out of whom the little stone of the repentant exiles could have returned to reestablish God's Kingdom in Israel (Dan. 2:44). But they did not repent nor wish to restore God's Kingdom, and they rejected the new covenant offered to them upon which that Kingdom could have been established. A mountain rolling down sounds like the stones and lava hurled from the crater of an exploding volcano; this would match the idea of Babylon being destroyed in a similarly dramatic way as Sodom (see on Jer. 50:40). But this didn't happen as projected; although it will in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear.

And will make you a burnt mountain- Heb. 'a burning mountain'. Babylon was not much burnt by the Medes when they took it. And so this idea of a burning mountain is applied in a latter day context in Rev. 8:8. It is emphasized that the latter day Babylon will indeed be burnt (Rev. 18:9,18). But this could potentially have happened in Jeremiah's time, had Israel repented (see on :22).

Jeremiah 51:26 They shall not take of you a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but you shall be desolate for ever, says Yahweh- As explained on :25, this was to be because there would literally be no stone visible due to the effects of the volcano which was projected as happening. The lava flow would not leave a stone useful to any builder. But the volcano and Sodom-like destruction of Babylon and all Babylonia didn't happen (Jer. 50:40); it has been reapplied and deferred to the last days, and is alluded to in this context in Rev. 18.

Jeremiah 51:27 Set up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz: appoint a marshal against her; cause the horses to come up as the rough canker worm- LXX "like bristling locusts". "Prepare" is to sanctify. But we enquire whether these particular kingdoms were the ones who actually destroyed Babylon, and whether there was one specific "marshal" or LXX "commander" who coordinated her destruction. It's hard to prove this historically, because the destruction of historical Babylon was slow, as explained on :8. And there was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. The potential prophetic scenario projected here didn't happen, because the repentance of Israel which was to be associated with it didn't happen (see on Jer. 50:3,4). Whilst the essence of the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear through its allusions to Jer. 50 and Jer. 51, this is not to say that every detail will be.

Jeremiah 51:28 Prepare against her the nations, the kings of the Medes, its governors, and all its deputies, and all the land of their dominion- These nations were indeed "prepared" by God to fulfill the potential scenario here projected. But as explained on :22, the lack of Israel's repentance precluded the associated planned events from happening. So much Divine work goes to preparing potentials which we then waste.

Jeremiah 51:29 The land trembles and is in pain; for the plans of Yahweh against Babylon do stand, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without inhabitant- Again we note that this is said not only of the city of Babylon but of all Babylonia. The entire region was to be destroyed by an earthquake [the land trembling], related to the volcano of :25; there was to be supernatural destruction after the pattern of Sodom's destruction (see on Jer. 50:39,40). The image of Sodom's destruction suggests direct, miraculous Divine intervention. This didn't happen at Jeremiah's time, but Rev. 18 alludes to all this and makes it clear that such Divine intervention will occur against latter Babylon in the last days. The statement that "the plans of Yahweh against Babylon do stand" suggest that God's spoken words of judgment have a gap between them and their fulfilment; and in that gap, human repentance and mediation can result in a changed outcome. His desire therefore was that Babylon repent. But they did not, and so His plans stood.

Jeremiah 51:30 The mighty men of Babylon have declined to fight, they remain in their strongholds; their might has failed; they are become as women: her dwelling places are set on fire; her bars are broken- Hence we should give due weight to the discovery by Layard of inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future.

Jeremiah 51:31 One runner will run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken on every quarter- The idea is that bearing the news from opposite quarters, they meet at the king’s palace in the heart of the city.

Jeremiah 51:32 And the passages are seized, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are frightened- "Passages" can be "fords", and "reeds" can be "pools". This would then refer to the drying up of the river by the Medes in order to enter the city.

Jeremiah 51:33 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden; yet a little while, and the time of harvest shall come for her- Babylon "is" as if she has already been harvested and is being threshed; and yet harvest time is yet to "come for her". Here we have a parade example of God speaking in the present tense of things yet future, so certain are they of fulfilment. And yet within the metaphor of winnowing and harvest there is still the hope that at least some grain shall fall to the ground; that there would at least be some repentance in Babylon. This is always the hope resident within all Divine judgments.

Jeremiah 51:34 Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me, he has crushed me, he has made me an empty vessel, he has, like a monster, swallowed me up, he has filled his maw with my delicacies; he has cast me out- These were to be the words of the captive exiles of Zion (:35). In response to this, God would take vengeance for them against Babylon (:36). But we wonder whether the exiles were by this stage really angry with the Babylonians. Daniel and other Jews like him were now acceptable in Babylonian society, just as they were later at Esther's time.

Ezekiel's dialogues with the exiles in Ez. 18 and elsewhere indicate they were more bitter with God than they were with the Babylonians, and were in fact serving their gods. And so therefore the full vengeance of God in response to these projected words didn't happen (:36); which is why the judgments upon Babylon didn't come true at that time.

Jeremiah 51:35 The violence done to me and to my flesh be on Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and, my blood be on the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say- See on :34. "Done to me" suggests that it was the same generation who could remember the devastation of Jerusalem and its effects upon them and their children ("my flesh") who would now judge and destroy Babylon. The length of the exile period is again shown to be open ended; see on Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10. As explained on :22, Israel were not used at this time to judge the Babylonians, because they did not repent.

Jeremiah 51:36 Therefore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will plead your cause, and take vengeance for you; and I will dry up her sea, and make her fountain dry- See on :34. *As* explained on Jer. 25:31, it was a complicated case, with counter appeals which resulted in everyone being condemned- and yet Judah then being finally justified, by grace. Yahweh had this legal case with Judah whom He condemned, and then with the peoples who supported Babylon against her (Jer. 25:31); and then He has this case against Babylon (Jer. 51:36) during which He is advocate for Judah, whose cause He legally pleads in the court case (Jer. 50:34) of which He is judge as well as advocate for the defence. Being both advocate and judge, we see the certainty of Judah's final justification- if they chose to accept His amazing grace in justifying them.

Jeremiah 51:37 Babylon shall become heaps- The impression is given that she was turned into heaps with nothing left. But this didn't happen when the Medes took the city. It was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

A dwelling place for jackals, an astonishment and a hissing, without inhabitant- The language in Jer. 9:11 of Jerusalem's destruction into heaps haunted by jackals is applied to Babylon; and likewise the way Jerusalem was to become a hissing (Jer. 19:8) is also now to be true of Babylon. What latter day Babylon does to Jerusalem shall be done to her; and that is the theme of the book of Revelation, where the seals of judgment upon Israel become the vials of judgment upon the beast system.

Jeremiah 51:38 They shall roar together like young lions; they shall growl as lions' cubs- This suggests a violent resistance from the lions of Babylon. But full weight must be given to the inscriptions uncovered by Layard which say that in fact Babylon opened her own gates to the Medes in surrender. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; the Nabonidus Chronicle records that the people of Babylon welcomed Cyrus by spreading green twigs before him (James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.) (Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 306b). Both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. See on :4.

Jeremiah 51:39 When they are heated, I will make their feast, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake, says Yahweh- Although generally these prophecies have only a very loose fit with the taking of Babylon by Cyrus, this is indeed the scene described in Daniel 5 when Babylon fell during a feast. We note that they themselves made a feast, probably at the festival of the god Bel, and made themselves drunk; but God made them drunk. This is His way with men, to work through their own natural desires and decisions.

Jeremiah 51:40 I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams with male goats- Lambs, rams and goats may just be representative of all the classes of the people of Babylon. But there is no historical evidence that many people died when the Medes took the city, apart from Belshazzar. Such a fall of Babylon's entire society in a moment is to happen in the last days (Rev. 18).

Jeremiah 51:41 How is Sheshach taken and the praise of the whole earth seized! How is Babylon become a desolation among the nations!- "Sheshach" is a code name for Babylon. The Jewish kabbalists had a system called athbash, whereby the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is read as the last one, the second letter as the second to last letter, etc. "Sheshach" is the spelling of "Babylon" according to this; and yet the word *sheshach* means "humiliation", which was to happen to Babylon (Is. 47:1). We wonder why Jeremiah at times uses this term whereas at other times he is clear that he refers to "Babylon". If he was scared of repercussions, then we wonder why at times he does refer to "Babylon". I suggest therefore that he is simply making the point that proud Babylon was to be humiliated. For the essence of all human sin is pride, and judgment is therefore about humiliating pride. And we are to humble ourselves now. However I suggested on :1 that part of this material may have been written earlier, when he was still nervous about mentioning Babylon by name; and this would account for the positive actions of Nebuchadnezzar toward him when Jerusalem fell.

We note that Babylon was setting itself up as an alternative Zion, "the praise of the whole earth" being the title of Zion. This was the kind of blasphemy which called forth these judgments, rather than simply the invasion of Judah- for Babylon had been commanded by God to do that.

Jeremiah 51:42 The sea has come up on Babylon; she is covered with the multitude of its waves- As noted on Jer. 50:40, the destruction of Babylonian was envisaged as also including miraculous Divine destruction after the pattern of Sodom, which is now apparently beneath the Dead Sea. Hence the references to Babylon being destroyed by a volcano (:25) and earthquake (:29). But this didn't happen at the time, although it will in the last day fulfilment of these prophecies (Rev. 18). As explained on :22, the prophetic scenario didn't happen at the time because of Israel's lack of repentance. See on :62,63.

Jeremiah 51:43 Her cities are become a desolation, a dry land and a desert, a land in which no man dwells, neither does any son of man pass thereby- There is little point in claiming this was fulfilled in that historical Babylon was not rebuilt; the reference is to the plural "cities" and land of Babylonia. The entire territory was to be made like

this; see on :42. In any case, the taking of Babylon by the Medes didn't mean that people stopped living there; the city continued to prosper for long after that, several times asserting its independence. The fulfilment is to be in the last days, although the prophecy appears to be reapplied to a more symbolic "Babylon" in Rev. 18.

Jeremiah 51:44 I will execute judgement on Bel in Babylon- This didn't happen when Darius took Babylon. Soon after, Babylonia briefly recovered its independence under a native ruler, Nidinta-Bel, who took the name of Nebuchadnezzar III. A few years later, in 514 BC, Babylon again revolted and declared independence under the Armenian King Arakha; only on this occasion, after its capture by the Persians, were the walls partly destroyed. E-Saggila, the great temple of Bel, however, still continued to be kept in repair and to be a center of Babylonian patriotism. Among Babylonians, feelings were still strong that none had a right to rule over western Asia until he had been consecrated to the office by Bel and his priests. Accordingly, Cyrus henceforth assumed the imperial title of "King of Babylon", claiming to be the legitimate successor of the ancient Babylonian kings and the avenger of Bel and portrayed himself as the savior, chosen by Bel to restore order and justice. So again we see that although the essence of these prophecies will be totally fulfilled in the last days, there was often no short term fulfilment of them; and the longer term fulfilment will be of the essence of the prophecies and not all the detail.

And I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he has swallowed up- There was an element of this fulfilled in that Cyrus encouraged the exiled nations to return to their homelands, including the Jews. But there is also here the hint of a miracle; that the consumed Israel, eaten by the lion of Babylon, would somehow revive and resurrect, being brought forth out of the lion.

And the nations shall not flow any more to him: yes, the wall of Babylon shall fall- We have to remember that Jeremiah's prophecies about Babylon were given in the context of the prophecies about Judah's restoration. The fall of Babylon was clearly intended to be the signal that the Jews should leave and return: "Down comes Babylon's wall! Out from the midst of her, my people!" (Jer. 51:44,45). And Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon, made the decree for the Jews to return to their land. And yet... most of them remained. As explained on :8, the wall of Babylon didn't fall when Darius took Babylon. It was slowly destroyed over a long period. Passages like Jeremiah 50 imply that when Babylon fell, Judah would return to their land and flourish into the Kingdom of God. But this didn't happen. Another scenario worked out- Darius took over the kingdom of Babylon (Dan. 5:31), and the image prophecy of Daniel 2 explained that there would now have to be a succession of empires before the Kingdom of God would come. I therefore see Daniel 2 as a new prophetic scenario which would have to come into operation if Judah didn't do as they were told in the prophetic word. Hence the vision has two ways of being read- the whole image could represent Babylon and its next rulers, which would be destroyed in toto and replaced by the restored Kingdom of God at the time it fell; or, it could be read as a long term prophecy of the ensuing centuries, if Judah didn't turn into the Kingdom of God as they could have done. And this is the outworking that became necessary.

Jeremiah 51:45 My people, go away from the midst of her, and save yourselves every man from the fierce anger of Yahweh- See on :6. The Jews didn't leave Babylon to restore Zion because they were impenitent and didn't wish to; and so the projected scenario didn't happen. They did not suffer when Babylon fell to Cyrus, indeed as

soon as he entered the city he urged the exiles from the various nations to take their gods and religious equipment and return to their homelands.

Jeremiah 51:46 Don't let your heart faint, neither fear for the news that shall be heard in the land; for news shall come one year, and after that in another year shall come news, and violence in the land, ruler against ruler- "Ruler against ruler" is reapplied to the situation of the last days in Lk. 21:10. In that same context, the Lord Jesus alluded to "Don't let your heart faint" (Lk. 21:36) again in relation to things of the last days. Likewise "violence in the land" is applied to the last days in Lk. 21:23. The reference to the news coming one year and then again in the next year could mean that this fall of Babylon was to happen within two years of Jeremiah's prophecy being published. As noted on :24, the length of the exile period is thus shown to be open ended; see on Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10.

Jeremiah 51:47 Therefore behold the days come, that I will execute judgement on the engraved images of Babylon; and her whole land shall be confounded; and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her- The conquest of Babylon by the Medes was achieved with very little loss of life apart from that of king Belshazzar; see on :3. As explained on :44,52, her god Bel was not immediately "confounded" either, at least not in the eyes of men. Nor was the whole land of Babylonia exactly confounded with shock at Babylon's fall. And the implication of the prophecy is that all these things were to happen immediately, contiguous with Babylon's fall. So again we see that the projected prophetic scenario didn't come about at the time it potentially could have done, but will do so in the latter day fulfilment (Rev. 18).

Jeremiah 51:48 Then the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, shall sing for joy over Babylon; for the destroyers shall come to her from the north, says Yahweh- Here we have "heavens and earth" used as representative of God's people. For it was Zion and the "daughters of Judah" who were commanded to rejoice at Babylon's fall (Ps. 48:11). But there is no record of them obeying this command; for they were too caught up in Babylon by this stage. And so the prophecy will be fulfilled in a reapplied and rescheduled manner in the last days, when a slightly different group would rejoice over Babylon's fall: "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her" (Rev. 18:20).

Jeremiah 51:49 As Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the land- Again, this didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon, and the prophecies of Jer. 50,51 imply that all these things will happen suddenly and simultaneously, not over an extended period. The conquest of Babylon by the Medes was achieved with very little loss of life apart from that of king Belshazzar; see on :3. Vengeance was not fully taken by God upon Babylon for what they did to Israel because Israel had not repented, recognizing that actually those judgments had been rightfully deserved by their gross sins.

Jeremiah 51:50 You who have escaped the sword, go, don't stand still; remember Yahweh from afar, and let Jerusalem come into your mind- See on :6. This is an appeal for the exiles to desire to return to rebuild Zion. The implication is again that it was the same generation who had escaped the Babylonian sword who were to now return. The appeal to remember Yahweh from afar alludes to the words of Moses and Solomon, envisioning a time when exiled Israel would repent "from afar". But they

didn't. See on :24,35. Those verses also suggest that it was the same generation who could remember the devastation of Jerusalem who would now judge and destroy Babylon. The length of the exile period is again shown to be open ended; see on Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10. As explained on :22, Israel were not used at this time to judge the Babylonians, because they did not repent.

Jeremiah 51:51 We are confounded, because we have heard reproach; confusion has covered our faces: for strangers have come into the sanctuaries of Yahweh's house- Shame / confusion covered the faces of God's people when the temple was desecrated, but this was because their faces had not been covered with shame at their sins. The same phrase is used for this in Jer. 3:25. It's shame for sin now, or shame at judgment day. This was the intended statement of repentance to be made by the Jews, and it was this repentance which would trigger the Babylon judgments outlined here (see on Jer. 50:3,4). See on :52.

Jeremiah 51:52 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will execute judgement on her engraved images; and through all her land the wounded shall groan- "Therefore..." means that because of the statement of repentance made by the exiles in :51, God would judge Babylon's idols. Yet as demonstrated on :44,47, those idols were not immediately judged by the fall of Babylon to the Medes. The projected, potential judgment was precluded by Israel's lack of repentance, just as the detailed temple prophecies of Ez. 40-48 were likewise not fulfilled as they could have been at the time. If we enquire why, then, are all these potential details given... it is to teach us that likewise, finely detailed potential futures have been prepared for us in our lives. But unless we have the required humility and openness to God's ways, they will not come about.

Jeremiah 51:53 Though Babylon should mount up to the sky, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from Me shall destroyers come to her, says Yahweh- This repeats the language used of Edom, who thought they were so protected by their high position that no judgment could ever reach them (Jer. 49:16). The similarity is to show that it is pride which more than anything else was the reason for Babylon's judgment. The language of Is. 14:13,14 is also being alluded to; Babylon mounted up to heaven itself in her arrogance, playing God, effectively deposing Yahweh.

Jeremiah 51:54 The sound of a cry from Babylon, and of great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans!- I explained on :3 how there was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon. Nor was the land of the Chaldeans, i.e. Babylonia, subject to the kind of "great destruction" envisaged here; see on :25. But the fall of Babylon with a great cry and supernatural Divine destruction will ultimately come about in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear, even though the definition of "Babylon" may be redefined. As I have repeatedly explained, the lack of repentance by Israel precluded these Babylon events occurring when they potentially could have done.

Jeremiah 51:55 For Yahweh lays Babylon waste, and destroys out of her the great voice; and their waves roar like many waters; the noise of their voice is uttered- This suggests that the great voice of the king of Babylon will be replaced by the noise of waters which overcome her. Those raging waters could indeed represent the attacking nations; but as explained on :25, there has been projected the idea of Babylon being

laid utterly waste as Sodom was, involving an earthquake and volcano, and then being plunged underwater as Sodom was in the Dead Sea. This potential scenario didn't happen, because it was precluded by Israel's impenitence.

Jeremiah 51:56 For the destroyer has come on her, even on Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, their bows are broken in pieces; for Yahweh is a God of recompenses, He will surely requite- This wasn't quite the scene when the Medes took Babylon. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. Vengeance or "recompense" was not fully taken by God upon Babylon for what they did to Israel because Israel had not repented, recognizing that actually those judgments had been rightfully deserved by their gross sins.

Jeremiah 51:57 I will make drunk her princes and her wise men, her governors and her deputies, and her mighty men; and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake up, says the King whose name is Yahweh of Armies- Although generally these prophecies have only a very loose fit with the taking of Babylon by Cyrus, this is indeed the scene described in Daniel 5 when Babylon fell during a feast. We note that they themselves made a feast, probably at the festival of the god Bel, and made themselves drunk; but God made them drunk. This is His way with men, to work through their own natural desires and decisions. We note that "perpetual sleep" from which they would not awake indicates that the punishment is eternal death- and death is therefore unconsciousness. Eternal conscious torment is not a Bible teaching.

Jeremiah 51:58 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly overthrown, and her high gates shall be burned with fire- As explained on :44, the walls were not destroyed by the Medes when they took Babylon, and they were only demolished bit by bit over subsequent history. The dramatic fall of her walls, surely alluding to the fall of the walls of Jericho, just didn't happen. Indeed inscriptions have been discovered detailing the repair of damaged gates in the wall. Nor were they then burnt with fire, despite the impression given in these prophecies that all these judgments happen more or less simultaneously and not over an extended period of decades and even centuries. These things are all reapplied and reframed in the latter day destruction of "Babylon" in Rev. 18.

And the peoples shall labour for vanity, and the nations for the fire; and they shall be weary- See on Hab. 2:13. GNB "The work of the nations is all for nothing; their efforts go up in flames. I, the LORD Almighty, have spoken". Yet Babylon continued long after the Medes took it, and several times reasserted its independence. It is only in the last days that Babylon along with all human works shall be burnt permanently with fire (Rev. 18:8). But we can pause to take comfort and challenge from this- that all human labour shall ultimately come to nothing before God's judgment. Only the things of His Kingdom shall eternally endure.

Jeremiah 51:59 The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. Now Seraiah was chief quartermaster- It seems from Jer. 51:59-64 that Zedekiah made a visit to Babylon, along with his entourage, presumably to make some peace with Nebuchadnezzar before the final invasion. And yet Jeremiah takes the opportunity to send a prophecy of the doom of

Babylon along with Seraiah, one of Zedekiah's officers who accompanied him. Seraiah was brother to Baruch (Jer. 32:12), Jeremiah's scribe, and presumably therefore also loyal to Jeremiah and willing to undertake this very brave witness. For this was scarcely politically expedient; indeed, the whole message of Babylon's impending destruction must have been extremely hard to distribute at that time, for a whole number of reasons, not least that the rest of the entourage desperately wanted to appease Babylon, whose puppet rulers they were. Jeremiah later had to do the same kind of thing when he and the refugee Jews arrived in Egypt. See on :1 and Jer. 43:12.

Jeremiah 51:60 Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come on Babylon, even all these words that are written concerning Babylon- See on :6,59. We wonder why Jeremiah writes in the book and not Baruch, who had always been his scribe. Perhaps it was because Baruch's brother Seraiah was to physically take it to Babylon (see on :59) and they felt it better to clarify that this was not just a family thing. Or perhaps Baruch had failed to take Jeremiah's warning not to seek great things for himself (Jer. 45:5) and was wary of getting into trouble with their Babylonian masters by condemning Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:61 Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words- As explained on :59, this was a hugely risky and unpopular thing to do. His fellow Jews would have been hugely angry with him for doing so- if indeed he did what Jeremiah asked. For it was a huge thing to do, which would have endangered his life. Perhaps he didn't actually do it- because Nebuchadnezzar is very solicitous of Jeremiah's welfare some time later when Jerusalem fell. That is hard to understand if he had heard Jeremiah's words about Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:62 And say, Yahweh, You have spoken concerning this place to cut it off, that none shall dwell therein, neither man nor animal, but that it shall be desolate forever- This was a way of saying "Amen" to Yahweh's words, giving a brief summary of them in his own name, addressed to Yahweh. The prophecy that Babylon would be cut off an uninhabited didn't come true when the Medes took Babylon. Babylon existed for a long time afterwards. And yet the tenor of Jer. 50,51 is that all these judgments were to happen simultaneously and not slowly over a period of years. This didn't happen; and the only way Babylon could not be inhabited by animals would be if it were judged as Sodom and placed underwater- as previsioned in :42. Again we conclude that these prophecies about Babylon were what was potentially planned, but it was precluded by Israel's lack of repentance, which was the required condition to as it were trigger the Babylon prophecies; see on :22. The ultimate fulfilment will be in the last days, seeing these prophecies are the basis of Rev. 18.

Jeremiah 51:63 It shall be, when you have made an end of reading this book, that you shall bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates- Jeremiah's ministry began with the statement that his prophetic words had the power to destroy. Those words are therefore here connected with their object, Babylon. As those words would plunge underwater, so would Babylon. As suggested on :42, Babylon would be judged as Sodom and placed underwater- the waters of the Euphrates would flood over the destroyed city. That didn't happen at the time, for the reasons discussed on :62.

Jeremiah 51:64 And you shall say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again

because of the evil that I will bring on her; and they shall be weary- See on :63. "Sink" is s.w. "quenched" (Num. 11:2); as discussed on :25,26,42, Babylon was to be destroyed by a volcano, reduced to burning lava, and then submerged beneath the Euphrates for ever, never to rise up out of those waters. That was the prophetic potential for that time; but it was precluded from happening like that because Israel's repentance was the required condition to as it were trigger the Babylon prophecies; see on :22. The ultimate fulfilment will be in the last days, seeing these prophecies are the basis of Rev. 18.

Thus far are the words of Jeremiah- This would suggest that Jer. 52 was added by inspiration by an editor, or it could be that Jer. 52 was also written by Jeremiah, as was the book of Lamentations, but was not bound up in the earlier volume or edition of his prophecies.

JEREMIAH CHAPTER 52

Jeremiah 52:1 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem- Jeremiah's words finished in Jer. 51:64. This chapter agrees almost word for word with 2 Kings 24:18-25:30, although we note that the section about Gedaliah in 2 Kings 25:22-26 is omitted because the history of Gedaliah has been dealt with in more detail already in Jeremiah. It could be that the inspired editor of the book chose to as it were copy and paste the section from 2 Kings (with a few minor changes) as a helpful appendix to the book. Verses 28-30 give a different take however on their equivalent in 2 Kings 24:1-20.

And his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah- Zedekiah was thus brother of Jehoahaz but half-brother of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:31, 36).

Jeremiah 52:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that Jehoiakim had done- The implication is that he was intended to have learnt from the fate of Jehoiakim his half brother, but instead he acted just the same. God also brings people into our lives so that we might learn from their life path and destiny. We never specifically read of Zedekiah worshipping idols, and he hardly comes over as the worst of Judah's kings, but his "evil" was in the weakness of character which he displayed when faced with God's demand for him to submit to Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah 52:3 For through the anger of Yahweh it happened in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon- Zedekiah's rebellion was purely of his own device. But he is described here as rebelling "through the anger of Yahweh"; God intended to pour out His wrath, and so His hand was in the rebellion of Zedekiah, using that man's freewill decisions although through Jeremiah pleading with him not to go that way. We marvel at the perfect balance and intimate involvement in the psychology and decision making of people.

Jeremiah 52:4 It happened in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about- These forts had been portrayed and 'built' by Ezekiel when he drew them upon a tile in an acted parable (Ez. 4:1-3). Had the earlier exiles in Babylon

repented, then this would not have happened. Likewise if Zedekiah had repented, it would not have happened. We see here how God doesn't just let things happen in a disinterested way, allowing natural forces to take their course. What happened was so avoidable; Zedekiah's weakness could have been cancelled out, as it were, by the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel. And their refusal to repent could have been cancelled out by Zedekiah's repentance. Or if both of these elements failed, had the wealthy rulers of Jerusalem really let their slaves go free and not re-enslaved them, the siege could have been lifted. And there were other such factors and potential possibilities. Stubborn, proud refusal to bow our heads in repentance precludes so much from happening, and allows so much judgment to come which could have been averted.

Jeremiah 52:5 So the city was besieged to the eleventh year of king Zedekiah- Jer. 39:1,2 allows us to conclude that the city was besieged for exactly 18 months.

Jeremiah 52:6 In the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was severe in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land- Jeremiah had earlier prophesied that many would die from famine and plague during the siege. It was by special grace that Jeremiah in prison was given bread right up to the day that Jerusalem fell.

Jeremiah 52:7 Then a breach was made in the city- The Babylonians made a breach in the wall to the north, from where the cherubim had left and would return. But Zedekiah tried to escape by digging a hole in the southern wall (Ez. 12:12). He did to the city what the Babylonians did. This "breach" is the same word used for the breaking up of things at the time of the flood (Gen. 6:11), a well established foretaste of the destruction of Jerusalem by the flood waters of the Babylonians, albeit with the promise of a new creation coming as a result of it.

And all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night- "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain '"went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, who also went out at night, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). Zedekiah's experience of condemnation is presented as typical of every man condemned at the last day.

By the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden; (now the Chaldeans were against the city all around)- It seems Zedekiah had taken refuge in the temple. From there, he saw the princes of Babylon who had breached the northern wall and were now at the temple gate (Jer. 39:3). And so they fled by "the king's garden", which was his own private entrance to the temple, and then came to the double walls of the southern perimeter of the city. Zedekiah himself dug through those walls, the strongest point of his defence and human strength (Ez. 12:12). He was being taught that all human defence, and the physical temple, was not going to save him.

And they went towards the Arabah- The chalky depression in the midst of which the river Jordan ran.

Jeremiah 52:8 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him- The allusion is to how an Israel who broke covenant with their God would surely be overtaken by curses and judgment (Dt. 28:15). As his pursuers closed the distance between them and him, with him unable to gather more speed nor find a suitable place to run, now completely alone and without his bodyguards, he was a living exemplification of how Divine judgment will catch up with every man. He would then have dearly wished he had had the humility to listen to Jeremiah's pleas for repentance and submission. And he there was and is the exemplification of every man condemned before God.

The grace of Jesus framed the parable of the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho in terms of Zedekiah's flight from Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:4); a man who had repeatedly spurned the offers God made to him through Jeremiah, and who was attacked on that road by the Babylonians (cp. the robbers). Yet the parable shows that Christ will graciously save even a man like that; for according to the parable, Zedekiah represents every one of us.

Jeremiah 52:9 Then they took the king and carried him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; and he gave judgement on him- Zedekiah fled, was overtaken, wept (Ez. 7:27), judgment was given upon him (Jer. 52:9), he was punished in the presence of the king (Jer. 52:10), cast into prison (Jer. 52:11 cp. Mt. 5:25). He had his judgment in this life; and perhaps he may yet therefore be saved in the last day, seeing he apparently repented (see on :11).

Jeremiah 52:10 The king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he killed also all the princes of Judah in Riblah- We wonder why Zedekiah was spared but his sons were not. I will suggest on :11 that he later repented, even though he refused to repent and humble himself before God's word when he ought to have done. His sons presumably were foreknown that they would not repent, and so they were slain. Perhaps seeing their deaths made Zedekiah realize that they were dying because he had not repented when he ought to have done; for it was his lack of repentance earlier which, he was told, would bring about the death of women and children. We may just possibly have some window here onto the terrible problem of the death of children.

Jeremiah 52:11 He put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon, and imprisoned him until the day of his death- LXX "in the mill", as if he was in hard labour, now blinded, exactly like Samson (Jud. 16:21), and as the young men were made to (Lam. 5:13). And the similarities continued, in that it seems Zedekiah likewise did finally repent. Jer. 21:7; 27:13 had prophesied that Zedekiah would be slain by the sword of Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem fell. But Zedekiah wasn't slain by Nebuchadnezzar, but rather died in captivity. Perhaps he repented; or God chose to work out another path of judgment with Zedekiah which would achieve more glory for Him and His objectives than simply having him slain by the sword. The statement in Jer. 21:7 that Nebuchadnezzar would not show him "pity nor have mercy" and not spare him was therefore not fulfilled; because he was reflecting the God who had also said He would not spare or pity, but yet He did. I explained on Jer. 34:5 that Zedekiah died "in peace", peace with God, and the threatened judgments upon him weren't completely carried out-

presumably because he did finally repent. If we are to finally repent, then let us repent now before suffering comes upon us to elicit that repentance.

Jeremiah 52:12 Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, who stood before the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem- 2 Kings 25:8 says on the seventh day of the month. It could be that he arrived on the seventh day, and burnt the houses and temple (:13) on the tenth day. I suggested on :1 that the Kings record has been as it were copied and pasted into this appendix to Jeremiah, so we could have here a simple error in copying.

Jeremiah 52:13 and he burned the house of Yahweh, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, burned he with fire- Jeremiah elsewhere criticized the building of these great houses on the walls of Jerusalem- for they were built on the back of abusing the poor for material and labour. They were finally torn down by the Babylonians, but even before that, the owners themselves broke them down and the materials were used to shore up the breaches in the city walls (Jer. 33:4). Likewise there are foretastes of judgment ahead of time in the lives of all God's people.

Jeremiah 52:14 All the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around- We noted in the prophecies of Jer. 50 and Jer. 51 a special emphasis upon the breaking down of the walls of Babylon because of what they had done to Jerusalem, i.e. breaking down her walls. But we also observed on Jer. 51:44 that when the Medes took Babylon, the walls weren't broken down, and in fact they were only broken down bit by bit over the course of many years. So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. Vengeance or "recompense" was not fully taken by God upon Babylon for what they did to Israel because Israel had not repented, recognizing that actually those judgments had been rightfully deserved by their gross sins.

Jeremiah 52:15 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the poorest of the people, and the residue of the people who were left in the city, and those who fell away, who fell to the king of Babylon, and the residue of the multitude- Or as AVmg. "residue of the artificers" or workmen. I suggested elsewhere that these may have been those skilled in building the defences; or it could refer to those who were the makers of idols. See on Jer. 10:18.

Jeremiah 52:16 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poorest of the land to be vineyard keepers and farmers- This was probably the majority of the population. The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, didn't practice mass deportations. They removed the leadership of subjected peoples, and appointed locals as the leaders under their control. This is what they did to Judah, taking the royal family and priesthood into captivity, and establishing Gedaliah as puppet governor (Jer. 40: 7; 2 Kings 25:2) along with some local Jewish "elders" (Lam. 5:12), with Mizpeh rather than Jerusalem as the capital. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings

25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. Presumably the altar had been destroyed, hence no animal sacrifices are mentioned. It has been suggested that the book of Lamentations was written as part of a temple ritual or at least material to be recited at the site of the temple. See on Jer. 12:4; 13:19.

Jeremiah 52:17 The Chaldeans broke the pillars of brass that were in the house of Yahweh, and the bases and the bronze sea that were in the house of Yahweh they broke in pieces and carried all of their brass to Babylon- The breaking in pieces was likely for ease of transportation. But it also symbolized the ending of the temple system. Israel had broken the covenant, and the only way back to God was to be through repentantly accepting His new covenant, as explained on Jer. 31.

Jeremiah 52:18 They also took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the basins, the spoons and all the vessels of brass with which they ministered- These things were kept in Babylon and then sent back with the exiles, by the special decree of Cyrus. The new covenant offered to Israel at the time in Jer. 31 was not a repeat of the law of Moses, but it did include similar rituals. The worship system of Ez. 40-48 was command more than prediction, and it utilized these vessels.

Jeremiah 52:19 The captain of the guard took away the cups, the fire pans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the spoons and the bowls; that which was of gold, in gold, and that which was of silver, in silver- We get the impression that an orderly inventory was kept, with the vessels divided up according to their metal.

Jeremiah 52:20 They took the two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls that were under the bases, which king Solomon had made for the house of Yahweh. The brass of all these vessels was without weight- Although as noted on :21, the gold and silver was apparently weighed, and the bronze pillars measured.

Jeremiah 52:21 As for the pillars, the height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits; and a line of twelve cubits encircled it; and its thickness was four fingers. It was hollow- It seems the Babylonians weighed the gold and silver and also noted the height and diameter of the pillars. When the vessels were returned to the temple they were also weighed. There is the impression given that the temple was not pillaged in a wanton way.

Jeremiah 52:22 A capital of brass was on it; and the height of the one capital was five cubits, with network and pomegranates on the capital all around, all of brass: and the second pillar also had like these, and pomegranates- 2 Kings 25:17 gives "three cubits"; perhaps this smaller number is the actual measurement of the network of the capital, excluding the pomegranates.

Jeremiah 52:23 There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; all the pomegranates were one hundred on the network all around- In 1 Kings 7:20,42 each pillar is said to have had two rows of pomegranates, 100 in each, the one above and the other below the ornamental network of the capitals. The "100" may be a rough summary. "On the sides" could mean 'visible outwards i.e. four of the hundred in each row were hidden owing to the nearness of the pillar to the wall of the porch; leaving 96 visible, as stated here. Or it could be translated "hanging loosely", i.e. four of the pomegranates were fixed to the network on the capitals, while the rest hung in festoons between them.

Jeremiah 52:24 The captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest- An ancestor of Ezra (Ezra 7:1).

And Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold- The Zephaniah of Jer. 21:1 who refused to heed God's word and was associated with persecuting Jeremiah for speaking it (Jer. 29:25,29).

Jeremiah 52:25 And out of the city he took an officer who was set over the men of war; and seven men of those who saw the king's face, who were found in the city- Five men in 2 Kings 25:19. 'The seven who saw the king's face' was likely a technical term for his immediate courtiers or politburo, although they may have only numbered five men.

And the scribe of the captain of the army, who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land, who were found in the midst of the city- These sixty were surely not arbitrarily chosen, but were likely the priests in the temple "in the midst of the city", perhaps those whom Ezekiel had seen offering incense to the sun god in the temple precincts.

Jeremiah 52:26 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah- They were obviously seen as representative of the civil and religious leadership of Judah. It was deemed that they needed to be killed so that there was no leadership left; but this then makes it all the more amazing that Zedekiah was not killed as God had said he would be. It would seem that he was the logical one to die. We recall how when the Medes took Babylon, there was little bloodshed but king Belshazzar was slain. All this was to highlight to Zedekiah the amazing grace of his survival, and it seemed he did respond in repentance (see on :11).

Jeremiah 52:27 The king of Babylon struck them, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away captive out of his land- See on :26. I noted on :16 that perhaps the majority of Judah remained in the land. For most of the population were the poor masses. But the exile and destruction of the leadership is seen as "Judah" being carried away captive. But perhaps the phrase is used in order to connect with the description of the ten tribe kingdom being carried away captive out of his land (Am. 7:11,17; 2 Kings 17:23). It was as if to put a final end to Judah's supposition that was somehow morally better than Israel. They shared an identical judgment.

Jeremiah 52:28 This is the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year three thousand and twenty-three Jews- This is the deportation of Jer. 39:1. I noted on :1 that this chapter agrees almost word for word with 2 Kings 24:18-

25:30, although we note that the section about Gedaliah in 2 Kings 25:22-26 is omitted because the history of Gedaliah has been dealt with in more detail already in Jeremiah. It could be that the inspired editor of the book chose to as it were copy and paste the section from 2 Kings (with a few minor changes) as a helpful appendix to the book. But verses 28-30 give a different take on their equivalent in 2 Kings 24:1-20. It seems we should correct "seventh" into "seventeenth" (just as in 2 Chron. 36:9, for "eight" we should read "eighteen"); this avoids the number conflict with 2 Kings 24:14,16, which speak of those taken captive with Jehoiachin, earlier. The lower numbers in Jer. 52 are because they are omitting the Jews already taken into captivity in the previous incursions.

Jeremiah 52:29 in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred and thirty-two persons- These are those carried captive "from Jerusalem" itself, but not including those taken into exile after the capture of the city. The figures given in this section are far from complete, because Ezra 2:64 speaks of 42,360 returning, which is far more than went into captivity, even though perhaps the majority remained in Babylon. Perhaps like Israel in Egypt they multiplied supernaturally; or maybe many exiles from other nations and even Babylonians returned with them, being assigned to Jewish tribes and localities. And yet we must ever bear in mind that the Hebrew term "thousand" is often used for a grouping, rather than being a literal figure. But more likely we are reading here just of the leadership classes who were taken away.

Jeremiah 52:30 in the twenty third year of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred and forty-five persons: all the persons were four thousand six hundred- This deportation is not recorded elsewhere, although Josephus (*Antiquities* 10.9. 7) says that "Nebuchadnezzar in his 23rd year carried on considerable warlike operations in the direction of Palestine and in Egypt, carrying off Jews from that country to Babylon".

Jeremiah 52:31 It happened in the thirty seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, in the twenty fifth day of the month, that Evilmerodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah, and brought him forth out of prison- Lifting up the head out of prison recalls Joseph (Gen. 40:13,20); for the similarities with Joseph, see on :33.

Jeremiah 52:32 and he spoke kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon- There is no reason given for this amazing grace toward Jehoiachin, who would have been considered the legitimate king of Judah. The lack of explanation is perhaps to simply highlight that it was indeed pure grace. He may well have repented, but that is not mentioned. We get the impression that God pitied His people in their well deserved captivity- simply because He so loved them.

Jeremiah 52:33 and changed his prison garments. Jehoiachin ate bread before him continually all the days of his life- See on :34. The change of garments by the king would have recalled the experience of Joseph in Gen. 41:14. But Jehoiachin had not had the spirituality of Joseph, and he would have reflected upon that truth; and thereby perceived yet more the huge grace being shown him. We too may experience blessings which we are totally unworthy of, just so that we bow our heads in marvel at God's grace.

Jeremiah 52:34 and for his allowance, there was a continual allowance given him by the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life- Reflect how Daniel refused to eat the food sent to him from the King of Babylon; but God arranged for this very thing to be sent to Jehoiachin as a sign of His recognition of his repentance (Jer. 52:34)! God saw that Jehoiachin wasn't on Daniel's level, and yet He worked with him on his lower level.

Ezekiel had prophesied that those who survived the famine and invasion of Judah would go into captivity, "and I will draw out a sword after them" (Ez. 5:2,12). We would expect from this that the exiles would be persecuted and slain in captivity, and this surely was God's intended judgment. But in Esther we find the exiles in prosperity, in positions of power, and respected by their captors; and Jeremiah concludes his long prophecy with the information that Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled King, was exalted "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon" and he was given special favour and honour by the King of Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). I can only understand these things as pure grace. God showed tenderness and favour to His people in captivity, far above what He had intended or what they deserved. And He does the same with us- He gives us so much more than we deserve. And yet most of Judah abused that grace; they were so taken up with the good life God gave them in captivity that they chose to remain there and not participate in the restoration. And we *so* easily can end up abusing His grace likewise.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: LAMENTATIONS

LAMENTATIONS

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it,

respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

LAMENTATIONS CHAPTER 1

Lamentations 1:1 How the city sits solitary, that was full of people!-

Lamentations is full of acrostics. "Chapters 1 and 2 have three lines in each of their 22 verses, and the first line of each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 also has 66 lines,
with the first three lines each beginning with the first letter of the alphabet, the second three lines beginning with the second letter of the alphabet and so forth. Chapter 4 has two lines per verse, with only the first line of each verse beginning with the successive letter of the alphabet. Chapter 5 is unique in that it has 22 lines (the number of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet), but the alphabetic structure is not used". Lamentations 1-4 each have a clear acrostic structure, but Lamentations 5 doesn't- possibly because Lamentations 5 is a transcript of Jeremiah's actual prayer, from the heart, not poetry after the event, but a transcript of his words as they were. For man doesn't structure his desperate prayers as acrostics.

Jeremiah was Judah's representative; that is a key to understanding Lamentations. As Jerusalem sat alone, or "solitary", so had he and so did he. Earlier, Jeremiah is rebuked for his attitude of resenting that he "sat alone" and had kept away from the "assembly" of the rejoicers (Jer. 15:17,19); and so we are to assume that he said these things in resentment that he had had to stand alone amongst men. He resented how he "sat alone" (Lam. 3:28); yet this is the very term used of how Jerusalem was to "sit alone [solitary]" (Lam. 1:1). He was her representative, and yet he seems to have resented that. He was after all being representative of those who had hated him and tried to kill him. As Jeremiah wrongly lamented his own 'sitting alone', so he ought to have perceived that he should not have lamented Jerusalem's likewise. The book of Lamentations reveals Jeremiah, an undoubted man of God, in his lowest moments, as

Jerusalem was at her lowest moment; just as the book of Job reveals Job at times. And yet the whole book is made up of five carefully structured acrostic laments, with each verse beginning with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The chapters only vary in length because the verses have different lengths. So Lamentations is not simply the pouring out of random emotional grief. It has been written up, under inspiration, and the acrostic structure was presumably to help assist memorization of it. And yet so much of it is negative, and reveals Jeremiah charging God wrongfully and contradicting statements from God revealed in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's momentary lapse of faith was representative of that of his people after the fall of Jerusalem. But the idea is that the book progresses through the stages of grief and anger to genuine repentance and desire for restoration; and Jeremiah invites Judah to follow his example as their representative.

I suggest that the reason the book was inspired and was designed to be memorized was that it comes to a climax in Lam. 5:16-21. And the point is that there we have here a total confession of sin, and appeal for God to turn them to Himself (Lam. 5:21) and restore His relationship and Kingdom with Judah as before (Lam. 5:21). But the path there was a jagged graph; see on Lam. 3:40. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, and often in Ezekiel, I have made the point that so much hinged upon whether Judah repented after Jerusalem fell. If they did, then the new covenant would have been accepted by them, and the promises of the restored Kingdom would have come true. They generally did not repent, but it was Jeremiah's heartfelt desire that they did, following his own example. And so he wished them to identify with his feelings of anger with God, his struggle with God, his confusion... and thereby to be led to this conclusion of the matter in repentance and desperate appeal for restoration. But it seems Judah got caught up in the early stages of grief, never moved on from them, and failed to follow through to this confession of sin and appeal for restoration which we have in Lam. 5. The last verse of the book (Lam. 5:22) appears starkly out of context with the immediately preceding verses, with their appeal for restoration and confession of sin: "But You have utterly rejected us; You are very angry against us". I suggest this is purposeful, because this is as it were Judah's response to the book and the appeal to repent and appeal for restoration. They remained caught up in their grief and refused to repent and return to God because they considered He had removed Himself too far from them. And so the great prophetic potentials for a repentant Judah, described in such detail in the book of Jeremiah, didn't then come about; although the prophecies are reapplied and rescheduled to fulfilment in the last days.

Jeremiah was commanded not to make lamentation for the punishment of his people (Jer. 16:5). But he did, and God inspired the record of them in Lamentations, and because they are inspired words, He spoke through those words to all subsequent generations, wishing His people to work through their grief about the fall of Jerusalem as Jeremiah did; going through all the stages, even of anger with God, to come to the

confession of sin and earnest desire for the restoration of the Kingdom with which the book concludes. Even within Jeremiah, what begins as Jeremiah's cry from the heart often merges into God's- Jeremiah begins lamenting in Jer. 8:18, and then we find Yahweh becomes the speaker in Jer. 8:19. Jeremiah's conflicted emotions can be read as his having a too positive view of Israel, and his book of lamentations could therefore be read as a statement of protest at God's judgments. But it could also be that Jeremiah was so in tune with God's thinking that these struggles at the amount of suffering brought upon Judah were also God's. The struggles within Jeremiah would therefore reflect God's changes of mind and feeling about judging His people were endlessly "kindled together", just as they were reflected in Hosea's oscillations of feeling concerning Gomer; see on Hos. 11:8.

She has become a widow, she who was once great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a tributary!- The idea of God being destroyed in the destruction of His people (see on Jer. 6:26) may be the basis of the descriptions of Zion as being left widowed (Lam. 1:1; Is. 54:1-8). We ask the question- if she was a widow, who died? Her husband, God, was as it were dead. The very idea of the death of God is awful and obnoxious. But this was and is the depth of God's feelings at His peoples' destruction. But it could be that here we have Jeremiah in the utter depth of depression, feeling his God was dead. Earlier, in his own prophecies, he had spoken forth God's perspective; that Judah had been as a whore, never really loving Him and endlessly going off with other men (the surrounding nations and their idols), and thereby they forsook Yahweh and broke the marriage covenant. But here Jeremiah feels that Israel are a forsaken widow whose husband has died. He describes her as a gracious princess; when actually God through himself had described her repeatedly as a whore. And so the Lamentations begin with Jeremiah at rock bottom, as were all Judah. He felt God was dead. But we see him progress onwards from that, through the various stages of grief, to the begging for forgiveness and restoration at the very end of the book.

Lamentations 1:2 She weeps bitterly in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks- The phrase is only used in Num. 14:1, of Israel weeping all night when they were told they were not to enter the promised land because of their lack of faith. And this was their fault, not God's.

Among all her lovers she has none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they are become her enemies- This is one of many cases of self-justification in Lamentations (Lam. 1:2,19; Lam. 2:14; 4:13; 5:7), which contradicts the prophetic position, whereby blame is placed upon Judah, whereas now Jeremiah laments the situation as if Judah is being hard done by. In this case, for having lovers at all, in her unfaithfulness to Yahweh (Ez. 16,23 etc.).

Lamentations 1:3 Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction-

We expect to read that Judah went into exile for her sins, but Jeremiah cannot bring himself to say this. He says she was exiled because of her afflictions, which is rather a circular argument. This reflects Jeremiah's difficulty in accepting the full import of Judah's sins. It's as if Lamentations is almost an expression of resentment and even disagreement with the very words Jeremiah has spoken in his prophecy. No wonder he alludes so often to Job's words during the period when he was cursing God. Just quoting or alluding to a Bible character doesn't at all justify any man.

The same word is used of Jeremiah's affliction (Lam. 3:1,19); he was setting himself up as Judah's representative in the hope they too would pass through his pattern of depression, the stages of grief, and then repentance and begging for the restoration of the Kingdom which we find at the end in Lam. 5:16-21. See on Lam. 1:1.

And because of great servitude- This was the exaggeration of depression. For Judah were not abused in Babylon, nor were they put to slave labour as they were in Egypt; rather did they prosper so much that most didn't want to return at the restoration. They preferred life in Babylon. Jeremiah had himself explained that because they had served idols, therefore they were to serve Babylon (s.w. Jer. 25:6,11). Their "servitude" was therefore but the extension of their own choices. He had himself urged Zedekiah and the people to willingly serve the Babylonians in recognition of their own sins (s.w. Jer. 40:9); it was their refusal to do so that had resulted in their servitude in exile. As we all do in depression, Jeremiah was unbalanced here, focusing upon one aspect of a situation which he had himself recognized as absolutely legitimate.

She dwells among the nations, she finds no rest- This was written therefore at the end of Jeremiah's life when the exile was established, as he faced his own death in Egypt. He too as Israel's representative (:1) dwelt among the nations. But again his depression leads to exaggeration; there is no evidence that the Jews were moved around the Babylonian empire, making them find no rest. He himself had urged them to build houses in Babylon and settle down there. Being restless was a result of breaking the covenant (s.w. Dt. 28:65) which Jeremiah had repeatedly accused them of doing. They were suffering far less than their iniquities deserved. They refused to repent and in that sense they had no rest to their souls. If they had accepted the yoke of Babylon, then they could have rested in their own land (s.w. Jer. 27:11).

All her persecutors overtook her within the narrows- This alludes to the overtaking of Zedekiah as he fled Jerusalem; he was representative of his people. But as Jeremiah

well knew, in another part of his brain, Zedekiah's shameful flight and capture was completely his fault for not responding to Jeremiah's pleas to him.

Lamentations 1:4 The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn assembly- This again is a very positive take on the gatherings held in the temple. Ezekiel was shown in vision how the priests and elders were solemnly worshipping idols within the temple. And so God said that He "hated" their "solemn assemblies" (s.w. Is. 1:14). Yet in depression, Jeremiah laments that these "solemn assemblies" were no more (Lam. 1:4; 2:6). It was in fact better that none came to them.

All her gates are desolate, her priests do sigh: her virgins are afflicted, and she herself is in bitterness- See on :13. The "ways of Zion" were "desolate" because the curse for breaking the covenant was that Israel's "ways" would be "desolate" (Lev. 26:22 s.w.). Jeremiah multiple times used the word for "desolate" as the judgment which was to come; because "they [Judah] have made it desolate… the whole land is [will be] made desolate" (Jer. 12:11). But now he faces the reality of what he had so often preached, he finds it unbearable. For "afflicted", see on :12.

Lamentations 1:5 Her adversaries are become the head, her enemies prosper; for Yahweh has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her young children are gone into captivity before the adversary- These terms are all allusive to the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 28:44); Judah could have been the head of her adversaries had she been obedient to the covenant (Dt. 28:13). And Jeremiah recognizes this, on one hand, and yet laments that the curses have come true.

Jeremiah mentions Babylon by name around 160 times in his prophecy, but in Lamentations he never once says the word. He repeatedly speaks of God as the source of their judgment.

Lamentations 1:6 From the daughter of Zion all her majesty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture- It was these very princes who had persecuted Jeremiah and sought to kill him (Jer. 37:15; 38:4,25,27) as they did other prophets (Jer. 26:21). It is to Jeremiah's spiritual credit that he did not rejoice at all in the fall of his enemies but rather shared God's broken heart for the lost and the evil.

They are gone without strength before the pursuer- Another allusion to the princes fleeing Jerusalem with Zedekiah, only to be pursued, overtaken and slain. And Jeremiah finds this tragic and grieves for it. Only a heart with true love in it could come to these feelings.

Lamentations 1:7 Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that were from the days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the adversary, no one helped her; the adversaries saw her, they mocked at her desolations- The lack of help from Egypt and the nations to whom Judah had prostituted herself was quite clearly because Judah ought to have trusted in Yahweh and not them. So many times Jeremiah had predicted that Jerusalem would be mocked by her. We learn from this that it is one thing to preach a message, but quite another to actually see it come true. Jeremiah's ministry had begun with the warning that his prophetic words would have within them the power of great destruction, and he had been promised Divine psychological strengthening for his ministry. But he seems not to have wanted to make use of that.

Lamentations 1:8 Jerusalem has grievously sinned; therefore she has become as an unclean thing; all who honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yes, she sighs, and turns backward- She turned backward in shame, but her nakedness was apparent. Jeremiah had used this very figure, with the crudest of language, in Jer. 13:22,23 (see notes there). Jerusalem had been a whore and was to be judged as one, naked before her lovers. But now it actually happened... Jeremiah balked at the seriousness of sin, and how judgment really does come for sin.

Lamentations 1:9 Her filthiness was in her skirts; she didn't remember her latter end; therefore is she come down wonderfully; she has no comforter: see, Yahweh, my affliction; for the enemy has magnified himself- As noted on Jer. 13:22,23, Judah had behaved as the worst harlot, with no thought to her future. And now that future had come. On one hand, Jeremiah saw perfectly that the situation was because of their sin; and yet he struggled with seeing the judgments actually come. And he asks Yahweh to see his affliction. Again, this reflects his love for his people, that he should feel afflicted for those who had refused to hear his message. And yet he feels there is "no comforter", despite surely being aware of Isaiah's prophecy that Yahweh would comfort Zion at the restoration (s.w. Is. 51:3,12 "I, even I, am He that comforts you"; Is. 66:13 "so will I comfort you"; Is. 40:1; 49:13; 52:9). "Comfort" is the same word as "repent"; and God had said that He would repent (s.w.) if Judah repented (Jer. 18:8; 26:3). The real problem was that Judah had not repented, and Jeremiah refused to factor that into his feelings; see on Lam. 2:13.

The repeated request for Yahweh to "see" (:11,20 also) rather ignores the reason why Yahweh was not 'looking'; their sins had separated between God and themselves, as other prophets have made clear. Lam. 3:44 acknowledges this

cloud between God and His people but appears to blame God for it. It was repentance that would remove it.

Lamentations 1:10 The adversary has spread out his hand on all her pleasant things- This is the language of rape, the rapist spreading out his hand upon the victim. See on :8,9,10.

For she has seen that the nations are entered into her sanctuary, concerning whom You commanded that they should not enter into Your assembly- Jeremiah sees this as tragic, and yet he was fully aware that Judah had placed Gentile idols in Yahweh's holy place (Jer. 32:34).

Lamentations 1:11 All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for food to refresh the soul: look, Yahweh, and see; for I am become abject- Their "pleasant things" in :10 refer to their private parts. Jeremiah appears to excuse their prostitution by saying they did it because they were hungry. And yet his own prophecies had clarified that they were unlike whores who sold their bodies for money, but they even paid men to sleep with them. His feeling so abject was partly because of his refusal to face up to how sinful Judah had really been. But he reasons with all the obsessiveness of depression that they had prostituted themselves just to refresh (s.w. return or repent) their soul. Quite clearly they could do this through repentance and not sin. But he was utterly taken up with lamenting the judgments which had come and chose not (at this stage) to consider that all this was because of their sins.

Lamentations 1:12 Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look, and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which is brought on me- The extent to which Jeremiah's heart bled for his people is reflected in Jer. 9:1-3. He wished he had more moisture in his body, so that he could weep both day and night for Judah- and yet he goes on to describe them as proceeding from evil to evil in an ever downward spiral, shooting lies everywhere... Everyone is special, nobody is like anyone else. This is how God sees His children, and we should reflect this perspective. It is this which will make us arrestingly different from the people with whom we daily walk. We will cry out with Jeremiah: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?", unmoved and lost as they are in their own petty issues (Lam. 1:12). Everyone is special, nobody is like anyone else. This is how God sees His children, and we should reflect this perspective. It is this which will make us arrestingly different from the people with whom we daily walk.

With which Yahweh has afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger- The same word for how the people were "afflicted" (:4,5). Jeremiah was to be representative of Judah (see on :1).

Lamentations 1:13 From on high has He sent fire into my bones, and it prevails against them- Jeremiah parallels "me" and "them". He felt the burning of Jerusalem was a burning of his very bones. Such was his identity with a sinful people; see on :1. And such was his spirituality that there is never a hint of satisfaction in seeing those who had rejected and persecuted him getting their totally just deserts.

He has spread a net for my feet, He has turned me back- We sense here an anger with God, as if God had set a trap for him into which he had innocently fallen; and he says this in the midst of very strong identification with his people. It's as if he like the Jews of Ez. 18 felt that God had deceived him and his people. And yet Jeremiah had so clearly warned them of the judgment to come. It was hardly a trap for the unsuspecting and uninformed. Such anger with God was expressed by Job, and yet at the end of the book God says that Job only spoke what was right about Him. It's as if God accepted the cranky words of depression, and saw the anger with Himself as just part of the grieving process. The important thing was to move through the process stage by stage. And the end point in this grief was repentance and zeal for restoration (Lam. 5:16-21). Jeremiah's path was intended to be that of all the people whom he represented.

He has made me desolate and faint all the day- The physical "desolation" of the land would be matched by the internal, psychological desolation of the priests (s.w. "astonished"; Jer. 4:9). Jeremiah felt the same as the other priests; he was desolated / astonished (s.w.) at the desolation of Jerusalem (Lam. 1:4,13). We can read this as meaning that he as the righteous totally identified with the wicked; or that he was too identified with the wicked priests, and felt like them when instead he should have perceived that this was exactly the astonishment of the priests which he had prophesied in Jer. 4:9.

Lamentations 1:14 The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand; they are knit together, they have come up on my neck; He has made my strength to fail: the Lord has delivered me into their hands, against whom I am not able to stand- The anger with God of :13 now starts to mellow as increasingly Jeremiah recognizes his personal sins. He doesn't yet repent in so many words, but he does recognize his sins. This was the path Judah and the exiles were intended to likewise take, coming like Jeremiah to recognize that they had no strength; and that somehow, God was in all this- for "the Lord has delivered me into their hands".

Lamentations 1:15 The Lord has set at nothing all my mighty men in the midst of me; He has called a solemn assembly against me to crush my young men: the Lord has trodden as in a wine press the virgin daughter of Judah- Instead of feeling that God was dead (see on :1), Jeremiah now accepts that God has done the judgments, He had trodden the wine press. "My young men" may mean that his own personal male children had been killed in the invasion (also implied in :16). But it could be that he considered the young men of Judah as his children.

Lamentations 1:16 For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water- In Ez. 24:23 Judah is commanded not to weep but to lament beyond tears and all external mourning; they would mourn internally for their sins (s.w. Ez. 33:10). We wonder why Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, which appears to be a record of his external mourning. Whilst the book was inspired by God, at times Jeremiah there appears to be lamenting in a way inappropriate. He 'wept' (Lam. 1:16), whereas in Ez. 24:23 Judah were told not to externally weep. He did not take on board the idea that there was to be no mourning or weeping externally, but rather deep internal recognition of their sins. It seems the Jews were not obedient to Ezekiel's command not to externally weep but to internally mourn their own sinfulness; the same word for "weep" is used of how they did weep by the rivers of Babylon (Ps. 137:1).

Because the comforter who should refresh my soul is far from me- He feels there is "no comforter", when he implies there ought to have been. That comforter was God. Yet he says this despite surely being aware of Isaiah's prophecy that Yahweh would comfort Zion at the restoration (s.w. Is. 51:3,12 "I, even I, am He that comforts you"; Is. 66:13 "so will I comfort you"; Is. 40:1; 49:13; 52:9). "Comfort" is the same word as "repent"; and God had said that He would repent (s.w.) if Judah repented (Jer. 18:8; 26:3). The real problem was that Judah had not repented. And yet Jeremiah appears to blame God for not being present as comforter. This all sets us up for the climax of the book in Lam. 5:16-21, when Jeremiah confesses sin and looks for restoration. And there are plenty of moments before then in the Lamentations when he comes closer and closer to that final realization, which for us too is the end point of the path of every depression and struggle with God.

My children are desolate, because the enemy has prevailed- Perhaps Jeremiah's children were literally killed. Or maybe even in his depression and anger with God, he still manifested God; God's children were his children. But in that case, the enemy as it were prevailed [Heb. 'was stronger'] over God, whereas finally at the restoration, God shall prevail over His enemies (Is. 42:13 s.w.).

Lamentations 1:17 Zion spreads forth her hands; there is none to comfort her- As

explained on :16, God was there to comfort- if they repented. But in the obsession of his depression, Jeremiah focused on just one part of the picture. There was none to comfort her; but that was because she would not repent and accept His comfort.

Yahweh has commanded concerning Jacob, that those who are around him should be his adversaries- Jeremiah appears here to be slipping back into the common mindset, that a nation's god would support them and save them always. But Yahweh had a huge moral dimension to Him, which the pagan gods didn't. He called for enemies to come upon His people.

Jerusalem is among them as an unclean thing- And therefore, the implication is, Yahweh was not protecting them. But so often Jeremiah had previously lamented the unclean state of Jerusalem.

Lamentations 1:18 Yahweh is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandment: please hear, all you peoples, and see my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity-

It is indeed so that a confession that God is 'right' is a critical part of repentance. There is in this lament on one hand a complaint about the degree of punishment for sin, and yet also an expression of repentance. But the quality of that repentance isn't great; it is nuanced by the continual complaint that the judgment is greater than the sin deserved. We see a similarity with Job- this was his problem, as it is ours, to accept we are sinners and to make some degree of repentance, whilst retaining our inner conviction that our punihsment is greater than our sin deserves. But the lesson of Gen. 3 is that "just" one sin must lead to death and no right to life. Repentance is to confess that God is right; the Greek word *homologeo* translated "confession" means "to say the same thing as" or "to agree with" God. David's repentance was a statement that God is justified in His words and blameless in His judgments (Ps. 51:4). Refusal to confess our sins is to make God a liar (1 Jn. 1:10); to confess sin is therefore to say that God is truthful. This is why those who repented are described as 'justifying God', declaring Him right or just (Lk. 7:29). To repent is to submit to the rightness or 'righteousness' of God (Rom. 10:3). Pharaoah's brief repentance expressed this: "I have sinned; Yahweh is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (Ex. 9:27). Repentance is therefore a declaration of God's glory, accepting that He indeed is true: "Achan, My son, please give glory to Yahweh the God of Israel, and make confession to Him" (Josh. 7:19). We think of God talking about Job's repentance as speaking of Him what was "right" (Job 42:6).

This rebellion could refer to the words previously recorded in this lament, but they could also be a reference to Jeremiah's historical failure at the time of Jer. 15. In Jer. 15:15, Jeremiah asks for vengeance on his persecutors, and in Jer. 15:18 accuses God of

deceiving him. God's response is to ask him to repent of this, so that he can resume his prophetic work: "If you [Jeremiah] return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me [prophetic language]. If you utter what is precious, and not what is base, you shall be as my mouth" (Jer. 15:19). Perhaps Jeremiah had this incident in mind when he commented: "The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word" (Lam. 1:18). This indicates that at least in Jeremiah's case, he was not irresistibly carried along by the Spirit in some kind of ecstasy, having no option but to speak God's word. His speaking of God's word required that he shared the essentially loving and gracious spirit / disposition of his God. I have argued on :1 that the Lamentations are a path through depression and the various stages of grief; beginning with Jeremiah's statement in :1 that God was effectively dead, the Lamentations progress to the final repentance and wholehearted plea for the restoration in Lam. 5:16-21. But there are points during the 'journey' when Jeremiah does repent, and this is an example. But he quickly moves on from his confession of sin to lament again the present reality- that the young people had gone into exile.

Lamentations 1:19 I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and my elders gave up the spirit in the city, while they sought themselves food to refresh their souls- Jeremiah laments the situation as if Judah is being hard done by. Judah should never have had lovers, for this was unfaithfulness to Yahweh as Jeremiah himself has earlier made clear. This is one of many cases of self-justification in Lamentations (Lam. 1:2,19; Lam. 2:14; 4:13; 5:7), which contradicts the prophetic position, whereby blame is placed upon Judah. The priests and elders had been condemned by Jeremiah for their extreme wickedness, and their death in the city by famine had been explicitly predicted by Jeremiah. The reason of course was because they had sinned so badly and impenitently. So Jeremiah's confession of sin in :18 is soon drowned out, within his mind, by the sheer pain of the punishment for it, which he still feels to be unfair. And this is how repentance seems to go in practice; rarely is it just a momentary confession. There are waves and cycles to it, whereby we return time and again to our own self-justification and sense that the punishment for sin is disproportionate. This is the significance of the book ending with the confession of sin in Lam. 5:16-21 which is not then followed by another cycle of complaint at God's judgments of sin.

Lamentations 1:20 See, Yahweh; for I am in distress; my heart is troubled; my heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaves, at home there is as death- Jeremiah seemed to imagine that all the exiles were taken away to be slaughtered. That was true of some of the elders, but the exile generally was not to death camps. But clearly whilst these things were not totally true for him, he felt so totally identified with his condemned people that he speaks exactly as he imagined they felt.

Lamentations 1:21 They have heard that I sigh; there is none to comfort me; all my enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that You have done it: You will bring the day that You have proclaimed, and they shall be like me- Here we have Jeremiah totally absorbed with the feelings of the exiles, absolutely united with them in representation. Again we note the complaint that there is no comforter, when in fact there was- if they would repent and accept God's comfort. Is. 40:1,2 speaks a message of comfort to the exiles: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God". But [in full allusion to this prophecy], the exiles were like Rachael who refused to be comforted over her loss (Jer. 31:15); they claimed they found "none to comfort" (Lam. 1:2,16,17,21). But they were like Rachel who refused to be comforted, although the verses previous to that in Jer. 31 invite Israel to be not like Rachel but as the young woman who takes a tambourine and goes forth rejoicing in what God could do for her in restoring her. But they were willfully refusing the comfort of God's repeated word of hope and restoration. They didn't grasp the plain teaching of the prophetic word because they didn't want to- it demanded too much of them, and a giving up of the comfortable Babylon life. Hence Is. 43:19 laments: "I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth [in the decree to return to Zion?], do you not perceive it?". And do we "not perceive it?" time and again in our own lives, as to the potentials God is opening up?

Lamentations 1:22 Let all their wickedness come before You; do to them, as You have done to me for all my transgressions: for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint- Jeremiah's heart was "faint within me" both before (Jer. 8:18) and after (Lam. 1:22) the destruction of Jerusalem. He was so sure that the prophetic word would be fulfilled, that he even felt as if it had come true before it did. It was the heart of Judah which was faint (Is. 1:5), and Jeremiah identified totally with their feelings in sorrow with them. He eagerly asks God to judge the Babylonian confederacy for their sins. Yet there are many chapters in Jeremiah where he had prophesied that this would indeed happen, although as noted there, there was always an appeal and hope for their repentance. But Jeremiah is still at the stage of anger, with God and with any perceived instrument He had used.

LAMENTATIONS CHAPTER 2

Lamentations 2:1 How has the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He has cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and hasn't remembered His footstool in the day of His anger- It was Jeremiah who was angry (see on Lam. 1:22). But he seems to transfer that anger onto God, and he implies that this Divine anger was too fierce and therefore unmerited. Despite having so often himself

demonstrated why God's anger was appropriate and deserved. He was focusing on just one part of the whole picture and obsessing about it. Which is typical depressive behaviour. The cloud between God and Israel was the cloud of their own sins. And Israel had used her "beauty" for prostitution and unfaithfulness to Him. Israel had refused to serve Him, preferring the service of idols and the Gentiles; and so they were hardly His footstool.

Lamentations 2:2 The Lord has swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and has not pitied- Jer. 16:5 had explained why God appeared to have withdrawn His pity. The reason was that God's covenant, referred to as "kindness and mercy", was broken; they were not at peace with Him. And so they should not be pitied in their death. And yet although the covenant was broken by Israel, and God broke His side of it in response to that... He in fact still treated them as His covenant people. This is not to say that God is not serious about His statements. He is; but His love, grace and pity is displayed as the more extraordinary, in that it leads Him to break the words and threats spoken in justifiable and understandable wrath. For the same Hebrew phrase "loving kindness and tender mercies" is used again by Jeremiah in Lam. 3:22, where he reflects that these have not been withdrawn from God's people, even though Zion is now in ruins. Again we see a progressive movement in Lamentations through the stages of grief, and towards an understanding that God does love and pity His people, but they had precluded the experience of this by refusing to repent. This is why the climax of the lamentations is in the confession of sin, wholeheartedly and without any self-justification, which we have in Lam. 5:16-21.

He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought them down to the ground- Yet it was Jeremiah who had specifically "thrown down" Jerusalem and her fortifications through his prophetic word; see on Jer. 1:10, where the same word is used. His lament is therefore at best an indication that like us, he failed to realize the huge potential in God's word that he was preaching, and the eternal consequences which arise from someone hearing it.

He has profaned the kingdom and its princes- But they had profaned themselves; and the princes were those who had conspired to kill Jeremiah (Jer. 37:15; 38:4,25,27) as they did other prophets (Jer. 26:21). It is to Jeremiah's spiritual credit that he did not rejoice at all in the fall of his enemies but rather shared God's broken heart for the lost and the evil.

Lamentations 2:3 He has cut off in fierce anger all the horn of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy- Jeremiah was willfully ignorant of the obvious truth of Ps. 75:10: "I will cut off all the horns of the wicked, but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up".

He has burned up Jacob like a flaming fire, which devours all around- "Burned up" is used of how Babylon "consumed" Jerusalem with fire (Neh. 2:3,13 etc.). The people and their land were to be "consumed" by the fire which was contained in the words Jeremiah spoke (Jer. 5:14,17). But all who devoured / consumed them would be "held guilty" (Jer. 2:3; 10:25; 30:16). And yet in depression, Jeremiah lamented that the fire had consumed (Lam. 2:3; 4:11), when it was His owns words which had been that devouring fire. His lament was therefore tantamount to a statement of regret that he had been used as the vehicle for this devouring fire.

Lamentations 2:4 He has bent His bow like an enemy, He has stood with His right hand as an adversary, has killed all that were pleasant to the eye: in the tent of the daughter

of Zion He has poured out His wrath like fire- see on Lam. 3:13. Jeremiah appears now to be more angry with God than with the Babylonians, who had literally bent their bows and destroyed the temple. Jeremiah himself had been full of God's wrath and had poured it out upon the people in his prophetic words (Jer. 6:11). And now he apparently laments that, as if he was almost negating his own prophetic calling. It's as if he had then been on God's side, but was now too much on the side of his sinful people. What had once been deep within him he now as it were distances himself from.

Lamentations 2:5 The Lord has become as an enemy, He has swallowed up Israel; He has swallowed up all her palaces, He has destroyed his strongholds; He has multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation- The image of swallowing up portrays God as a beast, angry and judgmental upon His own people. It was the beast of Babylon who "swallowed up" Israel (Jer. 51:34 s.w.). The palaces, the great houses of the wealthy in Jerusalem, had been built on the back of abused labour, as Jeremiah had pointed out; and those houses were destroyed because offerings to idols had been made upon their roofs (Jer. 19:13).

Lamentations 2:6 He has violently taken away His tent, as if it were just in a garden; He has destroyed His place of assembly: Yahweh has caused solemn assembly and Sabbath to be forgotten in Zion- This again is a very positive take on the gatherings held in the temple. Ezekiel was shown in vision how the priests and elders were solemnly worshipping idols within the temple. And so God said that He "hated" their "solemn assemblies" (s.w. Is. 1:14). Yet in depression, Jeremiah laments that these "solemn assemblies" were no more (Lam. 1:4; 2:6).

And has despised in the indignation of His anger the king and the priest- "Despise" is usually translated "provoke". Jeremiah was really hurt and provoked by the opposition of his family (Jer. 23:17); and in that again he manifested Yahweh, who was likewise provoked by Israel (s.w. Dt. 31:20; 32:19). So Jeremiah seems to have forgotten all that and appears to object to God being provoked by His people; even though he had earlier lived out the same feelings of being provoked by the same group. Again we have the impression that now he is out of step with Yahweh, and yet even in this, he is manifesting the unreasonable pity of Yahweh for His condemned people.

Lamentations 2:7 The Lord has cast off His altar, He has abhorred His sanctuary; He has given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces: they have made a noise in the house of Yahweh, as in the day of a solemn assembly- As explained on :6, the feasts and holy place had been abused by Judah. They had made it no longer a "sanctuary", a holy place, but rather a profane place. Jeremiah himself had made that point in his prophecies (e.g. Jer. 7:11-14). But he chose, in his depression, to hold on to the old narrative, as we all do- in this case, that the temple site was holy space, and God had been wrong to allow the Gentiles to enter and profane it. But Isaiah as well as Jeremiah had often demonstrated that the holy place was within human hearts, and not any more to be understood in physical terms. Because the holy space had been made unholy by Israel. Jeremiah had taught in Jer. 7:12 and often that they were wrong to consider the temple a sacred space which somehow automatically preserved them from any prosecution for their sins. They had been reminded that God doesn't operate sacred spaces like that. God's earlier sacred space in Shiloh had been destroyed because of the wickedness of the people, and the Jerusalem temple was not going to be any different.

We note here and in :8 Jeremiah's particular concern for the walls of the temple being destroyed, the wall of Zion (:8). But Ez. 23:14 says that they had used those walls

to portray images of their idols. Jeremiah surely knew this. He was intent upon seeing just one aspect of a picture, repeating to himself a narrative which was seriously incomplete to the point of being wrong; and that was what his people were also doing.

Lamentations 2:8 Yahweh has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion- The evil purposed need not have come about- if they repented. The "purpose" of God is therefore open ended and sensitive to human repentance. Jer. 18:8; 26:3; 36:3 use the same word to say that God will "repent of the evil that I purposed to do to them"- if they repented. They did not. And despite knowing all this, Jeremiah seems to lament the execution of the evil purposed.

He has stretched out the line, He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying- "Not oppressed [the poor]" in Ez. 18:17 is literally 'to turn back the hand from'. God did not turn His hand back from destroying Jerusalem (Lam. 2:8 s.w.) because the people of Judah and those already in exile had not responded to Ezekiel's call to 'turn back their hand' from oppressing the poor. Their attitude to their poor brethren was to become God's attitude to them. And that is taught by the Lord Jesus in His parables as being the principle by which we too shall be judged.

He has made the rampart and wall to lament; they languish together- The Biblical record contains a large number of references to the frequent tears of God's people, both in bleeding hearts for other people, and in recognition of their own sin. And as we have seen, these things are related. Consider:

- "My eye pours out tears to God" [i.e. in repentance?] (Job 16:20)
- Isaiah drenches Moab with tears (Is. 16:9)
- Jeremiah is a fountain of tears for his people (Jer. 9:1; Lam. 2:8)
- David's eyes shed streams of tears for his sins (Ps. 119:136; 6:6; 42:3)
- Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37)
- Blessed are those who weep (Lk. 6:21)
- Mary washed the Lord's feet with her tears (Lk. 7:36-50)
- Paul wept for the Ephesians daily (Acts 20:19,31).

We have to ask whether there are any tears, indeed any true emotion, in our walk with our Lord. Those who go through life with dry eyes are surely to be pitied. Surely, in the light of the above testimony, we are merely hiding behind a smokescreen if we excuse ourselves by thinking that we're not the emotional type. Nobody can truly go through life humming to themselves "I am a rock, I am an island…and an island never cries". The very emotional center of our lives must be touched. The tragedy of our sin, the urgency of the world's salvation, the amazing potential provided and secured in the cross of Christ…surely we cannot be passive to these things. We live in a world where emotion and passion are decreasing. Being politically correct, looking right to others… these things are becoming of paramount importance in all levels of society. The passionless, postmodernist life can't be for us, who have been moved and touched at our very core by the work and call and love of Christ to us. For us there must still be what Walter Brueggemann called "the gift of amazement", that ability to feel and say "Wow!" to God's grace and plan of salvation for us.

Lamentations 2:9 Her gates are sunk into the ground; He has destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the nations where the law is not; yes, her prophets find no vision from Yahweh- It was little use lamenting that Israel were now amongst those who didn't live by Yahweh's law; for they had despised that law, and broken it completely- bearing in mind that it was the marriage contract between God

and themselves. The silence of Yahweh through the prophets is unsurprising. And yet God had spoken at length through Jeremiah as a prophet. But here he seems to mentally associate himself completely with the people in their unGodly self lamentation.

Lamentations 2:10 The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground, they keep silence; they have cast up dust on their heads; they have clothed themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground- see on Job 2:12. The elders here are of Zion rather than of Jerusalem, so perhaps the priesthood is in view. Jeremiah had frequently denounced them, and they had plotted his death. But now his heart bleeds for them- perhaps because as a priest he was related to them. Their grief for the loss of their temple was real enough. But they treated it as a mere talisman; Jeremiah had almost mocked their attachment to it earlier, in Jer. 7:4 Don't trust in lying words by saying, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple, are these". But now he feels so heartbroken for those who thought and felt like that. His identification at this time is completely with the people and not with the Divine, prophetic perspective. And yet it was this identification with them which led him to spurn the good life in Babylon and instead choose to live and die with the impenitent people in Egypt. We too are caught between our natural identification with humanity, and our knowledge of their sin and rejection of God's ways.

Lamentations 2:11 My eyes do fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my liver is poured on the earth, because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the young children and the infants swoon in the streets of the city- This and :12 appear to refer to the sufferings of the people during the famine in the siege, which Jeremiah himself had prophesied several times. His ministry had begun with the assurance that his words would have the power of destruction; and he had been psychologically strengthened for that ministry. But now the reality of what he preached swamped him to the point of apparent regret he had had anything to do with this destruction. The obvious, glaring point is that the people had willfully ignored all his appeals for repentance, had despised God's patience and grace- and so this had come because of that.

Lamentations 2:12 They ask their mothers for grain and wine, whilst they swoon as the wounded in the streets of the city, with their soul poured out into their mothers' bosom- We must remember that Jer. 7:11 and several times in Ezekiel have convicted the people of offering their children as sacrifices to idols in Yahweh's temple. The tragic picture painted here of suffering children and distressed parents must be balanced by that fact; a society who allowed that to happen and trusted in those idols was now receiving an appropriate judgment. But Jeremiah struggles with this. He focuses on the narrative formed by his own gut reactions, rather than the prophetic word he had himself uttered.

Lamentations 2:13 What shall I testify to you? What shall I liken to you, daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare to you, that I may comfort you, virgin daughter of Zion? For your breach is great like the sea: who can heal you?- The broken earthen bottle which was smashed couldn't be made whole again- apparently (Jer. 19:11). But the miracle of grace was that like the useless burnt vine branch of Ez. 15 and the marred linen girdle buried by the Euphrates, the smashed bottle, like Ezekiel's dry bones vision, could be made whole again. The stripes upon the suffering servant could 'heal' Israel (s.w. "made whole", Is. 53:5). Jeremiah had preached as much, that being made whole again was possible (Jer. 3:22; 30:17; 33:6 s.w.). The rhetorical question of Lam. 2:13 "Zion... who can heal you / make you whole again?" (s.w.) had its answer in Yahweh.

But we could read this as Jeremiah in depression appearing to have lost faith in the healing promised in Jer. 30:13, for here he laments amongst the ruins of Jerusalem that Zion is without a healer.

Jeremiah earnestly wishes to comfort them, and is frustrated that he cannot- despite surely being aware of Isaiah's prophecy that Yahweh would comfort Zion at the restoration (s.w. Is. 51:3,12 "I, even I, am He that comforts you"; Is. 66:13 "so will I comfort you"; Is. 40:1; 49:13; 52:9). "Comfort" is the same word as "repent"; and God had said that He would repent (s.w.) if Judah repented (Jer. 18:8; 26:3). The real problem was that Judah had not repented, and Jeremiah refused to factor that into his feelings; see on Lam. 1:9.

Lamentations 2:14 Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish visions; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity, but have seen for you false oracles and causes of banishment- There were many false prophets at the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; when in fact the true word of prophecy could have 'turned away' the captivity, if the exiles and the people left in Judah had responded to it (Lam. 2:14). Indeed it could have been that Zedekiah returned as "the prince" of the restored kingdom; see on Ez. 12:12. Ezekiel prophesied to the exiles in Babylon of what was going to happen to the Jews still in the land, exactly so that the exiles' repentance might avert those in the land suffering further. An ameliorated program of judgment and events would have been possible if they had repented.

This is one of many cases of self-justification in Lamentations (Lam. 1:2,19; Lam. 2:14; 4:13; 5:7), which contradicts the prophetic position, whereby blame is placed upon Judah, whereas now Jeremiah laments the situation as if Judah is being hard done by, with the masses suffering because of their false prophets- when Jeremiah himself has earlier said that the masses were as guilty as the false prophets, who only taught what the people wanted to hear.

The whole exile and return need never have happened- the prophecies of this need not have come true in the way they did, for even before the Babylonian invasion, Judah had been offered the prospect of eternally remaining in their land, if they repented (Jer. 7:7). And after it happened, Jeremiah commented: “Your prophets… did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity” (Lam. 2:14 NIV). It could have been ‘warded off’ by the peoples’ repentance. Note how Jeremiah, himself a prophet at the time, so wishes to take the blame upon himself for not pleading more powerfully with the people. Perhaps we will have similar feelings when the time of tribulation breaks forth in the very last days.

Lamentations 2:15 All that pass by clap their hands at you. They hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem saying, Is this the city that men called The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole land?- Jeremiah had foretold this (Jer. 19:8; 22:8), but now he seems stunned to see it happen. And yet he was so certain of the fulfillments of the prophecies that he often speaks in the past tense of those things which were yet future. The hissing and mocking was because Jerusalem had been praised in David's psalms (e.g. Ps. 48:2; 50:2) as the joy of the whole earth and perfect in beauty. Those Psalms of David were well known; for David after the Bathsheba incident had vowed to preach the good news of Yahweh's grace to the entire world. He had done so through his Psalms. His music ministry had been successful; the nations knew the songs about Zion being the joy of the whole earth and the perfection of beauty. And so they mocked it as it lay in ruins.

The Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement from those who mocked Him. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles.

Lamentations 2:16 All your enemies have opened their mouth wide against you; they hiss and gnash the teeth; they say, We have swallowed her up; certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it!- But Jeremiah earlier had portrayed these enemies as the "lovers" of Judah, to whom they had desperately prostituted themselves. They had sought their help against Babylon, making exclusive covenants with each of them, promising to worship their gods in the Jerusalem temple. And then the lovers realized that they were not the exclusive love of Judah, and therefore in anger turned against her and joined the Babylonians in destroying the temple which symbolized her adultery and unfaithfulness, both to God and man. But here again, Jeremiah is seeing things only from the perspective of what is immediately before his eyes; all he saw was these people as angry, exalting enemies. He shut his mind to the reasons why and the background. He is really a case study of man in depression.

Clearly Solomon was disobedient, and so the promise that people would "hiss" at the temple would obviously be fulfilled (1 Kings 9:8). Yet Jeremiah laments bitterly that men were 'hissing' at the ruined temple (Lam. 2:15,16) and complains God has been unreasonable. Jeremiah had clearly failed to accept the real extent of Judah's sin, and had shared in David and Solomon's wilful misunderstanding that the temple would be eternal. He failed to accept that Divine judgment is just, because he devalued human sin. And that is the root cause for all human complaint about suffering in this world.

Lamentations 2:17 Yahweh has done that which He purposed; He has fulfilled His word that He commanded in the days of old; He has thrown down, and has not pitied: He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you- The purpose of God to do these things had been expressed by Jeremiah himself. But he somehow distances himself from that, saying that this was stated "in the days of old". He imagines that it was the curses of Moses which were coming true. And that was long ago; and likewise he must have seen his own words of judgment as uttered as it were in another life, in olden days. He had forgotten his own prophetic mission.

He has exalted the horn of your adversaries- "Exalted" is the Hebrew word which forms part of the name "Jeremiah", 'Yah will exalt'. Jeremiah in depression is as it were mocking his own name, which he had assumed meant that Yahweh would finally exalt Israel, when now it seemed He was exalting her enemies. For "thrown down", see on :2.

Lamentations 2:18 Their heart cried to the Lord: wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night; give yourself no respite; don't let the apple of your eye cease- Here we see a movement towards a more spiritual pole after the self absorption of the previous verses. But he doesn't yet make explicit that the crying to the Lord should be in repentance, not simply for relief from present suffering. Jeremiah wanted his grief to be reflective of the grieving prayer of the remnant to their God: "Cry aloud to the Lord! O wall of daughter Zion! Let tears stream down like a torrent day

and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite!" (Lam. 2:18 RSV). His grief really was and is to be the pattern for others. Doubtless it influenced the Lord Himself, who wept over Zion (Lk. 19:41), inevitably holding Jeremiah in His mind.

Clearly there is an allusion to Jer. 14:17 "You shall say this word to them, Let my eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease". This could be read as an invitation to repent in tears, in the desperate hope God may yet change His intended judgment; hence LXX "Let your eyes shed tears day and night, and let them not cease: for the daughter of my people has been sorely bruised, and her plague is very grievous". But there is an ambiguity in the text, whereby apparently God is the one who is mourning night and day. Perhaps this is purposeful; they were to mourn as He did, seeing the coming judgments from His perspective, rather than from the human perspective of considering them as just a tragic misfortune. Jeremiah himself entered into this, for he wept night and day for Zion. But here in Lam. 2:18, Jeremiah appears to ask the remaining Jews in Jerusalem to pray night and day; and yet there too, the grammar is ambiguous. For he may be saying there that they had already done this. The truth was they had not, Jeremiah had done so, but contrary to what he hoped, God was not prepared to accept his tears of repentance and mourning as theirs (see on Jer. 14:11).

Isaiah had prophesied that God would not rest until Zion be restored. Watchmen would be set upon Zion's walls who would give Him no rest until the walls be rebuilt (Is. 62:1,6,7). At this time, Zion was felt by God to be the "apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8). This prophesy started to be fulfilled straight after the Babylonian invasion when Jeremiah urged the desolated people to pray: "O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease" (Lam. 2:18). The prayerful remnant gave *themselves* no rest; and thus was fulfilled the prophecy that *God* would have no rest. Sincere prayer according to God's will meant that there was a strange mutuality between the Father and those who prayed to Him. Both He and they considered Zion to be the apple of their eye; and thus the prayers were ultimately answered and Zion was restored.

Lamentations 2:19 Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up your hands toward Him for the life of your young children, that faint for hunger at the head of every street- Uplifted hands spoke of intense prayer. It is fitting that the Lord died with hands and arms lifted up above his head, rather than spread out in a crucifix form, seeing that uplifted hands is a symbol of God's promises being confirmed (Ez. 20:5,6,15; 36:7; 47:14), as well as intense prayer (Lam. 2:19; 1 Tim. 2:8; 2 Chron. 6:12,13; Ps. 28:2), which Christ was engaged in on the cross (Heb. 5:7).

And yet the intense prayer was for the lives of their children, rather than in repentance. As the Lamentations progress, the desire to pray to God becomes more focused upon repentance, and comes to a climax at the very end in Lam. 5:16-21. Jeremiah had a lot to say about children in his prophecies, especially about the way the people offered their infants to the idols, and the way in which Zedekiah's refusal to repent would lead to the suffering of innocent children. Although Jeremiah is getting 'warmer' by appealing for prayer to God, he is still not asking for the repentance toward God which was so essential. But as the Lamentations progress, that will come.

Lamentations 2:20 Look, Yahweh, and see to whom You have done thus! Shall the women eat their fruit, the children that are dandled in the hands? Shall the priest and the prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?- This seems a placing of false guilt on God. The Jeremiah prophecies have repeatedly stated that judgment was really but

an extension of the things they themselves did. They had offered their children to Gentile idols, and so their children would be slain by the Gentiles. The women were driven to eating their children in the famine, but they had earlier sacrificed their children to Baal. The prophets in view were the false prophets, who were responsible for teaching Judah to sin; and who had tried to murder Jeremiah. Jeremiah flips back into seeing things solely from the point of view of human tragedy, without factoring in all the background which he himself had been preaching for some years.

Lamentations 2:21 The youth and the old man lie on the ground in the streets; my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword: You have killed them in the day of Your anger; You have slaughtered, and not pitied- This had been the specific fate predicted by Jeremiah for their choosing to listen to false prophets rather than to him (Jer. 14:16). But now the people were cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, the true prophet, laments as if this judgment is somehow unreasonable. I feel that whilst the human tragedy was enough to make anybody cry "Too much!", Jeremiah is here out of step with the God who had inspired him to make just this prophecy in places like Jer. 14:16.

Lamentations 2:22 You have called, as in the day of a solemn assembly, my terrors on every side; there was none that escaped or remained in the day of Yahweh's anger: those that I have dandled and brought up has my enemy consumed- Perhaps Jeremiah lost his own children, hence his bitterness. But he could still be understood here as being totally identified with his own people, feeling their suffering as if it were his very own. Although in a sense he goes too far in this, his sense of identity with his sinful people is in another sense commendable. Seeing he had suffered so much from them and very nearly died at their hands, his love and identity toward them is a reflection of a truly spiritual heart. The terrors on every side were God's judgments on the people for how they had treated Jeremiah. Jer. 20:10 "Terror everywhere (GNB) / on every side" is one meaning of "Magormissabib "in Jer. 20:3. The terror to come upon Judah was partly because of their defamation of Jeremiah, who had spoken God's word to them. And yet now it comes, Jeremiah feels that there are terrors around *him* on every side, so deep was his sense of identity with his people. See on :21.

LAMENTATIONS CHAPTER 3

Lamentations 3:1 I am the man that has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath- The same word is used of Judah's affliction (Lam. 1:3); he was setting himself up as Judah's representative in the hope they too would pass through his pattern of depression, the stages of grief, and then repentance and begging for the restoration of the Kingdom which we find at the end in Lam. 5:16-21. See on Lam. 1:1.

Lamentations 3:2 He has led me and caused me to walk in darkness, and not in light- Lam. 2:21,22 have revealed a peak of identity between Jeremiah and his sinful people, who had tried to murder him previously. Although he appears to go too far in justifying his people, his identity with his people reflected God's identity with them even in their suffering for disobedience. Walking in darkness rather than light is the language of condemnation, and is used in John's letters in that sense. He was identified with Israel even in their condemnation, and in this looks forward to the intensely representative work of the Lord Jesus.

Lamentations 3:3 Surely against me He turns his hand again and again all the day- Jeremiah personalizes the suffering of Israel; he really felt he was the one being judged and condemned. See on :12.

Lamentations 3:4 My flesh and my skin He has made old; He has broken my bones- What follows is based upon Jeremiah's experience in the dungeon. But he seems to have reapplied those feelings to how he felt as the representative of God's people in their condemnation and suffering at the hands of their invaders; see on :19. Just as his lamentations were originally written to lament the death of Josiah, but he has extended and reapplied them to his grief for Zedekiah and Jerusalem (2 Chron. 35:25). He applies his lament for himself in the dungeon to how he laments for himself as the subject of Divine condemnation at the hands of the Babylonians. Even though he was personally innocent and didn't unduly suffer from the Babylonian invasion. In all this we have a window into the nature of the feelings of the Lord Jesus as He died on the cross, the death of a criminal, thereby tasting death for every sinful man- whilst personally innocent.

Lamentations 3:5 He has built against me, and surrounded me with gall and travail- Building against could refer to the building of bulwarks against the wall of Jerusalem (s.w. Dt. 20:20), as if Jeremiah feels as if he is Jerusalem. But the same words are used of how Jeremiah had been given God's word, in order to build against as well as destroy (Jer. 1:10). He felt torn between identification with God's word, and identification with his sinful people and his pity for them. "Gall" was specifically the judgment for Israel's sins (Jer. 8:14; 9:15) and for the false prophets (Jer. 23:15)- the very ones who had plotted to murder Jeremiah. But now he identifies himself even with his worst enemies in pity for them.

Jeremiah's deep identity with his people in their sinfulness and suffering for it all points forward to the Lord's identity with us, bearing our nature and on the cross totally identifying with sinners. Therefore His sufferings on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross.

Lamentations 3:6 He has made me to dwell in dark places, as those that have been long dead- And in this case, a priest like Jeremiah would feel ritually unclean and separated from God. It was the Lord's intense identity with us as sinners which likewise led Him to genuinely feel forsaken by God (Mt. 27:46). These feelings were in the first instance Jeremiah reworking his feelings when in the dungeon; see on :4. Perhaps that dark place felt like a tomb, and maybe dead bodies were thrown into it.

Lamentations 3:7 He has walled me about, that I can't go forth; He has made my chain heavy- Jeremiah was kept it seems in a cabin in the wall of the dungeon, and in chains. This would have been the basis for his feelings of being walled about. As he sees Judah going into captivity in chains, he recalled the time when he was in chains. Thus he reapplied his feelings in the dungeon to how he now felt as he saw Judah taken captive; see on :4.

Lamentations 3:8 Yes, when I cry, and call for help, He shuts out my prayer- The only way to eat in the dungeon would have been to have food lowered down, and seeing the city was suffering famine, chances of survival were slim. The pit in which there was no water (Jer. 38:6) would have reminded him of Joseph's experience (Gen. 37:24), and he may well have looked therefore towards some miraculous deliverance. His thoughts at this time are here in Lam. 3, where he wrote in his mind a prayer or psalm about it, but now reapplies this to his feelings for Israel. But he felt his prayers were shut out by the covering placed upon the dungeon (Lam. 3:8,53), and he was enclosed within hewn stone (Lam. 3:9)- what the dungeon walls were made of. It was presumably a sewer, with excrement falling before his face. He therefore felt he was in a living death and burial, surrounded by gravel stones as if in a grave (Lam. 3:16). His enemies mocked him from above (Lam. 3:14), pouring water that was probably excrement upon him (Lam. 3:54; as the dungeon was a sewer), his teeth were broken from the beating and perhaps from the descent into the dungeon (Lam. 3:16), and he felt bitter with God rather than full of faith and hope in deliverance (Lam. 3:15). But then his faith revived, reflecting how God had still not destroyed Judah by His great grace (Lam. 3:22), and therefore every day he survived until morning he saw as God's grace to him, in which he could hope (Lam. 3:23). He realized he was Judah's representative; for they too were to be sent forth from Babylon, the pit in which there was no water (Zech. 9:11). And this gave him hope; just as God's great grace to Israel historically should be basis for our hope. And so again we see his totally identity with Israel; God would not hear their prayers, having told Jeremiah not to pray to Him for them; and he feels that is true for himself personally, such was his identity with his people.

Lamentations 3:9 He has walled up my ways with cut stone; He has made my paths crooked- The cut stone was what he would have remembered from being in the dungeon; see on :8. The Jews had made their own paths crooked or perverse (s.w. Jer. 3:21; 9:5). But now Jeremiah seems to blame God for their sin as well as the judgment for it; see in :11. This total taking of their side is in one sense wrong, but yet it indicates the amazing identity of the Lord Jesus and even God Himself with impenitent sinners. For at the exile, God's heart bled for His sinful people, as Jeremiah's did, despite their impenitence.

Lamentations 3:10 He is to me like a bear lying in wait, as a lion in secret places- Babylon and the nations are portrayed as the beast waiting to pounce upon Judah in judgment. Jeremiah clearly sees that God is behind them, and appears more angry with God than he does with those Gentile nations. But he repeatedly refuses to see Israel's sin as the root cause for all this. See on :46.

Lamentations 3:11 He has turned aside my ways- As in :9, Jeremiah blames God for their sins. He recognizes that Israel's way had turned aside from God (s.w. 'revolted' Jer. 5:23; 6:28; Ez. 6:9), and he identifies with them in that, feeling he has personally turned aside. But he wrongly blames God for it. It is this nadir of spirituality which serves to highlight the wonderful climax of the book in Lam. 5:16-21 when he comes to total confession of sin and desire for restoration, taking full guilt for sin without blaming God or circumstance.

And pulled me in pieces; He has made me desolate- Continuing the likeness of Yahweh to a lion in :10. But Jeremiah was treated very well by the Babylonian lion; he was given preferential treatment and offered a good retirement package in Babylon. But

he as it were ignores that, and focuses upon his identity with God's people who had been torn apart by the lion.

Lamentations 3:12 He has bent His bow, and set me as a target for the arrow- Again as in :3, Jeremiah is intensely personalizing Judah's suffering. He feels he himself is mere target practice for God, and is the sole target for God's wrath; and yet as noted on :33, he does move on from this. This is typical depressive feeling; that the sufferer alone is suffering. And yet Jeremiah arrived in that position because of his deep identity with God's people. Depression is at times caused by identification with others who are suffering; internalizing their situation can be a factor in personal depression. It was so with Jeremiah; and yet he comes to this position from a basic love for the people.

Lamentations 3:13 He has caused the shafts of His quiver to enter into my kidneys- Notice how Jeremiah's bowels were turned for his people, because he felt that *he* had shared in their sin. The arrows of God entered into *his* kidneys, and this is why he so cried out in pain. But God's arrows were against a sinful Judah (Lam. 2:4). Yet Jeremiah so identified with them that he felt they had entered *him*; and this is why he could cry out in the way he did. Even though he hadn't rebelled, he felt that because they had, so had he, as he was so identified with them. He reached such a level of grief through identifying himself so closely with those for whom he grieved. Time and again, the descriptions of his personal suffering and grief are expressed in the terms of the very sufferings which he had prophesied as coming upon a sinful Israel. And so with us, if we feel and show a willful solidarity with the people of this world, with our brethren, then we will grieve for them. If we maintain the selfish, modern detachedness from them, then we will never have a heart that bleeds for them. Jeremiah could so easily have shrugged his shoulders and reasoned that Judah had had their chance; and it wasn't on his head. But he didn't. His attitude was that he had to seek the sheep until he found it.

There are intentional parallels between Jeremiah and Judah; he was their representative, as well as God's representative to them; just like the Lord Jesus. Jeremiah was afflicted (Lam. 1:9; 3:1) as Judah (s.w. Lam. 1:3,7); Built against (:5), as Jerusalem was "built against" by the invaders, Jer. 52:4; he "Waxed old", i.e. prematurely aged (:4), as the heavens and earth of Judah were to "wax old" (s.w.) and pass away (Ps. 102:26; 50:9; 51:6). Jeremiah felt his prayers were not heard (:8), as Judah's weren't. They "Hedged me about, that I cannot get out… inclosed my ways" (:7,9), just as Judah "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up [s.w.] your way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths" (Hos. 2:6). "He was unto me as a bear" (:10), as "I will meet them as a bear" (Hos. 13:8; Am. 5:19); and "As a lion", as God was to Judah through the Babylonians (Jer. 5:6; 49:19; 50:44 etc.). God bent His bow against him (:12), as against Judah (Lam. 2:4 s.w.). "Mine affliction and my misery" (3:19) are the same words in Lam. 1:7 "her affliction… her miseries". He drank gall (3:5,19), as Judah had to (Jer. 8:14; 9:15; 23:15). There were none to comfort him (Lam. 1:21), as none to comfort her (Lam. 1:9). He bore a yoke (Lam. 3:27), as Judah bore the yoke of condemnation by Babylon (Jer. 27:8,12).

And so Jeremiah feels that he himself has committed Israel's sin along with them: "*We* have transgressed and have rebelled" (Lam. 3:42). He feels that God will not hear *his* prayer (Lam. 3:44), even though this was only true for the people and not for Jeremiah personally. In this he looks forward to how the Lord Himself genuinely felt forsaken by the Father, even though He Himself was never forsaken.

Lamentations 3:14 I am become a derision to all my people, and their song all the day- Jeremiah has been identified so closely with the people, as demonstrated throughout this commentary so far. But this is the more noteworthy because he achieves this even although that people mocked him continually. He loved those who mocked him, and loved to the point of total self-identification with them.

We have another allusion here to Job (Job 30:9); likewise :12 complains that God has used Jeremiah and Zion merely for target practice, which is exactly the blasphemy uttered by Job (Job 16:12). Indeed, more than allusion- this is conscious quotation. Jeremiah thought that by quoting Job, he was on safe ground. But he failed to accept that Job was condemned for saying things like that, both by God and Elihu. And had to repent. For Job started 'perfect' but was convicted of sin by God and Elihu until he finally repented. His sin which he repented of was therefore his cursings of God in his speeches. Jeremiah seems to ignore that, and in fact places himself in Job's position.

Lamentations 3:15 He has filled me with bitterness, He has sated my thirst with wormwood- When in the dungeon, which is the basis for this chapter, Jeremiah was at the mercy of his tormentors for food and water. And they lowered down to him water with wormwood. The Lord too was offered such bitter drink on the cross.

Lamentations 3:16 He has also broken my teeth with gravel stones; He has covered me with ashes- This gives the impression of a living death, as if the ashes of the funeral pyre and the gravel of the grave had been poured upon his body. Jeremiah didn't die, neither in the dungeon nor in the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. But he felt as if he had. He thereby as it were "tasted death for every man" as did the Lord, so intense was his identification with his people (Heb. 2:9).

Lamentations 3:17 You have removed my soul far off from peace; I forgot prosperity- GNB "I have forgotten what health and peace and happiness are". Jeremiah had only known peace and prosperity before his prophetic call. So he seems to be complaining about and resenting his entire prophetic call.

Lamentations 3:18 I said, My strength is perished, and my expectation from Yahweh- Jeremiah appears to be alluding to Prov. 10:28; 11:7, using the same Hebrew words as there; with the implication that he is now amongst the condemned, who are left without hope- in contrast to the righteous, whose hope doesn't perish. He so identified with his condemned people that he absolutely felt a personal, condemned sinner; and perhaps there was something of that in the Lord's desperate cry "Why have You forsaken me?"; see on Mt. 27:46.

Lamentations 3:19 Remember my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall- See on :1. He had likely been given gall to drink as this was the punishment for false prophets (Dt. 29:18; Jer. 23:15). And yet in the judgment of Jerusalem, Jeremiah so pitied those who did this to him that he feels as if he has drunk the gall which they were to drink, such was his identity with them (see on :5). Thus he reapplied his dungeon experiences to his grief for Jerusalem; see on :4. GNB gives "homelessness" for "misery"; as if he felt his own uncertain residency, living temporarily at Gedaliah's house, was a way of fellowshipping the homeless exiles. Jer. 40:6 observes: "Then went Jeremiah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah, and lived with him among the

people who were left in the land". It is repeatedly emphasized that Jeremiah "lived... among the people". Even though he lived in Gedaliah's house in relatively luxury, his living is described according to how Jeremiah perceived it- he lived "among the people" (also Jer. 40:1; Jer. 39:14). And this of course is an example to us, wherever our lot be cast. In this manner we from relative luxury and stability can fellowship and identify with those who are literally homeless and exiles.

Lamentations 3:20 My soul still remembers them, and is bowed down within me- The referent of "them" is unclear. If the suggestion on :19 is correct, then it would refer to the homeless exiles, with whom Jeremiah identified through his far less radical homelessness. Or the reference could be to his former peace and prosperity noted on :17.

Lamentations 3:21 This I recall to my mind; therefore have I hope- The referent of "this" would seem to refer to the grace of Yahweh which he comments upon in :22. Jeremiah had previously been looking only negatively at what he "remembered"- a former life of peace and prosperity (:17,20). But now he recalls to mind Yahweh's many graces toward him. And again we have a lesson here for us in depression. We can focus solely upon the past losses, the negatives; but we can also choose to remember all the past graces. We have some power over what we recall to mind. And Jeremiah, who had been saved from death in the dungeon and other plots on his life by divine grace alone, had many "graces" he could remember.

Lamentations 3:22 It is because of Yahweh's graces that we are not consumed, because His compassion doesn't fail- See on :21. Jeremiah was commanded not to make lamentation for the punishment of his people (Jer. 16:5). But he did, and God inspired the record of them in Lamentations, and because they are inspired words, He spoke through those words to all subsequent generations. The reason for this was that God's covenant, referred to as "kindness and mercy" in Jer. 16:5, was broken; they were not at peace with Him. And so they should not be pitied in their death. And yet although the covenant was broken by Israel, and God broke His side of it in response to that... He in fact still treated them as His covenant people. This is not to say that God is not serious about His statements. He is; but His love, grace and pity is displayed as the more extraordinary, in that it leads Him to break the words and threats spoken in justifiable and understandable wrath. For the same Hebrew phrase "loving kindness and tender mercies" is used again by Jeremiah in Lam. 3:22, where he reflects that these have not been withdrawn from God's people, even though Zion is now in ruins. See on :39.

Lamentations 3:23 They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness- The fact life goes on morning by morning is itself a huge example of God's grace (:21) and faithfulness. In the dungeon, existence was a daily struggle. The fact Jeremiah was alive each morning was evidence to him of God's grace, and he recalls this to mind and applies it to the suffering of Judah. The fact some of them remained alive was evidence enough of His faithfulness. Remember that in the context, Jeremiah has been accusing God of unreasonably rejecting him and Judah. But now he sees that whilst there is life, there is no simply hope- but also the actual experience of God's faithfulness and grace every morning. See on :39.

Lamentations 3:24 Yahweh is my portion, says my soul; therefore will I hope in Him-

Jeremiah was a priest, and the priesthood were promised that although they would have no "portion" or inheritance, yet Yahweh was their portion (s.w. Num. 18:20; Dt. 10:9). Jeremiah returns to his basic, core spirituality. He had lost his peace, stability and prosperity (:17). But he shouldn't have focused on those things, because his relationship with Yahweh was his real portion. And he therefore had hope that in the restored kingdom, he would receive an eternal inheritance. Jeremiah was identified with Israel, and they were to be a nation of priests. They had lost their physical inheritance, so that they might become a nation of priests who had Yahweh as their inheritance. Here we see how the Father was working through their loss of their natural inheritance. And Jeremiah is emerging from his depression in appreciating this.

Lamentations 3:25 Yahweh is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him- Jeremiah reflects that in the dungeon, he had waited for Yahweh, and been delivered. Instead of focusing solely upon the losses, the tragedy of the invasion... he now turns towards the concept of waiting for Yahweh, and hoping in Him. But he confesses that the waiting and hoping will only be for the one who seeks Yahweh. Jeremiah is yet to come to the unconditional repentance which is the climax of the book in Lam. 5:16-21, but he is edging towards it by reflecting that the "hope" for those who "wait" for Yahweh is only for those who seek Yahweh. Isaiah's prophecies of a restored Kingdom for the exiles were for those who "wait for Him" (s.w. Is. 40:31; 49:23). And Jeremiah was surely aware of those prophecies.

Lamentations 3:26 It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of Yahweh- Jeremiah had so far in Lamentations been implying that he expected Yahweh to act immediately to save Judah from their tragedies. But now he recognizes that it is good to have to wait for that salvation. He still hasn't stated clearly that Judah must repent, and their condemnation [from which they needed salvation] was solely due to their sins. But he is edging closer to it.

Lamentations 3:27 It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth- Jeremiah realizes that his own sufferings had led him to wait and hope in Divine salvation, especially when he was in the dungeon awaiting death. And he realizes that his personal path must be Judah's. He had literally carried a yoke in the acted parable of warning Judah to submit to the yoke of Babylon (Jer. 27:2). And Judah were now themselves beneath that yoke, which was a figure of servitude to the Gentiles in Jer. 2:20. And he realized that it had been spiritually "good" for him. So instead of lamenting the exile, he was beginning to see a long term purpose and blessing in it.

Lamentations 3:28 Let him sit alone and keep silence, because He has laid it on him- Jeremiah may have himself in view here. See on :27. He considers such sitting alone as "good". Earlier he had been rebuked for his attitude of resenting that he "sat alone" and had kept away from the "assembly" of the rejoicers (Jer. 15:17,19); and so we are to assume that he had said these things in resentment that he had had to stand alone amongst men. He had resented how he "sat alone"; yet this is the very term used of how Jerusalem was to "sit alone [solitary]" (Lam. 1:1). He was her representative, and yet he seems to have resented that. He was after all being representative of those who had hated him and tried to kill him. As Jeremiah wrongly lamented his own 'sitting alone', so he ought to have perceived that he should not have lamented Jerusalem's likewise. But now he seems to have learnt his lesson, and sees his aloneness as "good".

Jeremiah sat in silence in the ruins of Zion just as the condemned Jews were to (Jer. 25:37 s.w.), totally identified with his sinful and judged people, in response to how there was to be no funeral wailing for the dead but rather, silence (Ez. 24:17).

Lamentations 3:29 Let him put his mouth in the dust, if so be that in this case there may be hope- Here Jeremiah edges closer towards the concept of repentance; for putting the mouth in the dust surely implies some regret. But GNB "We should bow in submission, for there may still be hope" would continue the allusion to the need to bear the yoke of the Babylonians in :27,28, and thereby come to the ultimate freedom of God's restored Kingdom in Israel.

Lamentations 3:30 Let him give his cheek to Him who strikes him; let him be filled full with reproach- Without yet appealing for unconditional repentance, Jeremiah edges yet further towards it. For to be smitten on the cheek was the sign of reproof for some kind of wrong doing; and he urges Judah to give their cheek to God to strike, and to allow themselves ["let him be..."] to filled with shame. For it was from this basis that they could come to a position of waiting for the Lord in hope. When the Lord Jesus was smitten on the cheek we see how He absorbed the spirit of these things.

Lamentations 3:31 For the Lord will not cast off forever- Yahweh 'cast off' Judah (Jer. 12:7; 23:33) but only because they had cast Him off (Jer. 15:6 s.w.). And yet God did not cast off His people (Jer. 33:26); Jeremiah personally was persuaded that God would not cast off His people for ever (Lam. 3:31). He will show them mercy as if He had not cast them off (Zech. 10:6); this reversal of their casting off was to be through the repentance of the exiled community (Lev. 26:44). But even this didn't happen, and yet God still did not cast them away (Rom. 11:2). His love and grace was such that He holds on to them. This desperate holding on to His people is seen in the experience of every person who joins God's people through baptism into Christ. They may indeed be cast off ultimately, but that is because they cast Him off, and wrestled against His insistent desire to keep hold of them eternally.

It has been observed that Lam. 3:31-36 is the central point of Lamentations: "Chapters 1-2 and 4-5 consist of twenty-two verses each (all except ch. 5 being acrostics), while chapter 3 is a triple acrostic consisting of sixty-six verses... Thus the book's careful literary crafting makes it very easy to locate its center, and it is instructive to note that Lamentations reaches its exact midpoint in 3:31-36, the kaph and lamed verses, which form both a numerical as well as thematic core".

Lamentations 3:32 For though He cause grief, yet He will have compassion according to the multitude of His graces- "Grief" or 'to grieve' here is the same word for in :33, where Jeremiah moves on from simply lamenting the "grief" to appreciate that this was not done willingly; and he now realizes that at best there is a paradox, in that God causes grief and yet at the same time is the God of all grace. And somehow His compassion will be revealed. Previously in the Lamentations, Jeremiah has seen only one part of the picture- the immediate suffering. But now he moves on to realize that there is another side to the dialectic, and that is God's grace. "Compassion" is the word used of what would be revealed when the exiled Israel repented and returned to God (s.w. Dt. 30:3). Jeremiah is moving towards the conclusion that radical repentance is required to release that revelation of compassion.

Lamentations 3:33 For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men-

This is a marked improvement from his earlier tone of criticism toward God. He had earlier complained that God was but an archer, using him for His target practice (:12). But now he recognizes that the ever present 'gracious' side of God means that we can never conclude that suffering is inflicted willfully by God nor in any merely capricious sense.

Lamentations 3:34 To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth- Instead, the restoration prophecies speak of Yahweh's releasing of the prisoners (s.w. Zech. 9:11,12; Ps. 68:6; 69:33; 79:11; 102:20). And yet Judah were prisoners, and apparently crushed. But Jeremiah begins to see that this is not to be man's last end. The prophecies of restoration, uttered by himself too, spoke of freedom for the prisoners. They were not to be always imprisoned, let alone crushed. Jeremiah is speaking here firstly of his own experience of prison- he had not been crushed there, but released. And his path was to be Israel's. But this is not to say that exiles were not crushed; the word is used about their crushing in Is. 57:15. But Jeremiah was coming to see that this was part of a bigger picture. He had used the same word of how a repentant Judah would be humbled or crushed, and then the suffering would end (Jer. 44:10). They were not willingly crushed nor need they remain crushed; for salvation and restoration was and is part of God's essential purpose and personality.

Lamentations 3:35 To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High- The idea is that when men come before God's face to be judged, God will not pervert their "right" or 'sentence'. This is parallel with :36- God will not "condemn a man unjustly in his judgment" (LXX). Jeremiah is rapidly moving away from his depressive focus upon just one part of the picture- i.e. the immediate suffering before his eyes. He accepts that God is just and will not bring condemnation for the sake of His own ulterior motives. Jeremiah is also recognizing that all the suffering was a result of a judgment given by God- and it was a right judgment.

Lamentations 3:36 To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord doesn't approve- LXX "condemn a man unjustly in his judgment". As explained on :35, Jeremiah is now realizing that the judgments which Judah were experiencing were just. God would never condemn unjustly.

Lamentations 3:37 Who is he who says, and it comes to pass, when the Lord doesn't command it?- The obvious complaint a reader would make to Jeremiah's earlier lamentations, his complaining about the judgments, is that they had all been prophesied by none other than Jeremiah himself. He had almost disassociated himself from his prophetic past. But now he reflects that the evil being experienced had all been spoken by Yahweh ahead of time. It was all within a tightly controlled Divine program.

Lamentations 3:38 Doesn't evil and good come out of the mouth of the Most High?- As noted on :37, Jeremiah is now accepting what to us the readers is glaringly obvious- the tragedy he has been lamenting had all arisen from the prophetic words which he himself had spoken. The evil came from Yahweh's mouth or word. And Jeremiah is driven to the same conclusion as the restoration prophecy of Is. 45:5-7- that both good and evil are alike from Yahweh. In his depressed state, he had seen only the evil as coming from Him. But now he starts to see a wider picture.

Lamentations 3:39 Why does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his

sins?- He had learnt in the dungeon that just to be alive is a sign of God's grace. And the more we appreciate and understand the function of our own bodies, the more we will likewise accept that our existence every moment is but by God's grace. This has been the force of Jeremiah's conclusions in :22,23. And so a living man should not complain. And Jeremiah moves again closer to the final truth he will arrive at in Lam. 5:16-21; here he recognizes that the judgment is a punishment for sin, and anyone left alive after it had no reason to complain about anything. This may be a helpful tool in coping with depression. The "living man" whom he challenges may well be himself.

Lamentations 3:40 Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to Yahweh- I have argued that the book of Lamentations begins with Jeremiah bitterly complaining that God is as good as dead (see on Lam. 1:1), with him looking solely at the tragedy before his eyes, and progresses to a climax of unconditional repentance in Lam. 5:16-21. But the progression is a jagged graph. There are increasingly points at which he does recognize that the sufferings are directly due to Judah's sins, he increasingly sees that there is a future hope and the God of judgment is also a God of grace. And he vaguely implies that repentance is needed, but always quickly returns to accusing God of unreasonable behaviour. And now in these verses he does speak clearly of the need for repentance. But his appeal for repentance here is still tinged with a cynicism, that God will not hear and has not listened (:42), and that He still lacks pity (:43), and has put a barrier between human prayer and His response (:44). Jeremiah has yet to come to the appeal for unconditional repentance with which the book climaxes.

And so in likely allusion to the descriptions of God searching and trying our hearts in the Psalms, Jeremiah says that Judah should "search and try our hearts"- we should seek to know ourselves as God does. David's invitations to God to search and try him (Ps. 17:3; 26:2; 139;23) imply he has done so himself (cp. Ps. 77:6). God now searches and tries the hearts, and will [at judgment day] give every man as his work shall be (Jer. 17:10 cp. Rev. 22:12). The spirit of man is [i.e. is intended to be] the candle which God also uses for His examination of men (Prov. 20:27); there is thus a link intended between our self-examination and the way God looks at us. His judgment must be ours. As sin is condemned by Him, so we should examine ourselves to the point of self-condemnation.

Lamentations 3:41 Let us lift up our heart with our hands to God in the heavens- As noted on :40, this appeal for repentance is still far from unconditional. Sacrifice was now impossible because the temple had been destroyed. But as a priest, Jeremiah surely had in view how that instead of 'lifting up' the heave offerings of animal sacrifice, the people were instead to grab hold of their own hearts and lift them up to God, and they could lift them as high as heaven. This is surely consciously alluding to how David realized that sacrifice and offering was not what God was essentially looking for, but rather broken, repentant and contrite hearts (Ps. 51:16,17). We marvel at how God worked through the loss of the temple to bring His people more fully to Himself.

Lamentations 3:42 We have transgressed and have rebelled; You have not pardoned- As noted on :40, this apparent appeal for repentance is tinged with the self justification which robs 'repentance' of its real power. To say 'OK let's repent, OK we sinned... but God, You didn't forgive us, and so [by implication] all this grief came upon us unfairly'... is to miss the point. Repentance axiomatically requires a declaration that God is right and we are wrong, our sin is inexcusable, His judgment is right, and only by utter grace can we now be saved. David learnt all this very well at the time of his

great repentance. Jeremiah has alluded to it in theory (see on :41), but he is still far from grasping the real spirit of David. And our repentance is often so similar. It's why repentance in practice seems to end up a process, rather than the one time act that it is intended to be.

Lamentations 3:43 You have covered with anger and pursued us; You have killed, You have not pitied- See on :40,42. Jeremiah is appealing for repentance, but goes straight on to accuse God of being a pitiless murderer. The word for "pitied" is used in a word play in 2 Chron. 36:15,17. God had pitied His people by patiently sending prophets like Jeremiah to them. But because they despised that pity, they didn't want it, He sent upon them the Babylonians who did not pity them. And so in Jer. 15:5, Jeremiah had asked the rhetorical question: "For who will have pity on you, Jerusalem?". And the answer was, only Yahweh. But now Jeremiah has slipped back to seeing only part of the picture, focusing on the tragedy before his eyes; and this refusal to see a bigger picture leads him to charge God wrongly with being pitiless. When Yahweh's pity is one of the most recurrent themes of His self revelation. Truly God had threatened in Ez. 5:11: "Neither shall My eye spare, and I also will have no pity". But the wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment.

Lamentations 3:44 You have covered Yourself with a cloud, so that no prayer can pass through- As explained on :40, here and in :43 Jeremiah seems to be tingeing his appeal for repentance with the thought that God had cut Himself off from His people, and placed a barrier between Him and them through which repentance couldn't pass. This all sets the scene for the final unconditional confession and appeal for repentance and restoration by grace which we have at the end of the book in Lam. 5:16-21. Here Jeremiah appears to be almost sarcastic; the cloud of incense from the incense altar, which as a priest he was familiar with, represented prayer (Rev. 8:3,4). But Jeremiah is saying that this cloud has been used by God as a barrier through which prayer could not pass. So his appeal for repentance in :40,41 is far from absolute.

We note Jeremiah laments that God is angry (:43) with their prayers. This is exactly the complaint of Ps. 80:4 where the exiles [or possibly Jeremiah] complained: "How long will You be angry against the prayer of Your people?". God had explained to the exiles quite clearly why their prayers made Him angry. They were a smoke in His nostrils because they offered them whilst burning the incense of prayer to other gods: "These are a smoke in My nose, a fire that burns all the day" (Is. 65:5). He has stated there why He was angered by their prayers. And their response is not to repent, but instead to ask 'How long till You just get over it?'. They ignored all the reasons *why* their prayers were angering God: "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!" (Is. 1:15 NIV); "though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ez. 8:18); "as He called, and they refused to listen, so they will call, and I will not listen" (Zech. 7:13). All these words were spoken to the exiles. We too can totally overlook God's conviction of us of our sins, and simply complain that He doesn't remove the consequences. That in fact is exactly what most people do. They lament all the outcomes of living in a fallen creation, without taking any serious personal responsibility for their sins.

Lamentations 3:45 You have made us an off-scouring and refuse in the midst of the nations- Paul alludes to this in 1 Cor. 4:13, where he says that God made him and the apostles like this to "the nations" to whom they preached; and yet more specifically, Paul considers that they were off-scouring and refuse in the eyes of the Jews. It's as if he realized that Jeremiah was not quite correct here; for Israel had made themselves to be despised amongst the nations, to whom they had prostituted themselves. And so Paul is saying that the Gentile "nations" are as the Jews, and the true Jews are prophets like himself, the true and spiritual Israel.

Lamentations 3:46 All our enemies have opened their mouth wide against us- Jeremiah likens the Gentiles to a devouring beast, and yet He has called God just that (:10). He sees God as making Himself gross, in that He was manifest through those nations. And that is a deeply unfair take on the whole situation. Again, Jeremiah has slipped back to seeing only one aspect of the picture. As with Job, God may well have cut him some slack in this because he was reasoning as someone who is the parade example of a man in depression.

Lamentations 3:47 Fear and the pit have come on us, devastation and destruction- Jeremiah initially wrote the lamentation of chapter 3 concerning his own enclosure in the pit / dungeon, in fear for his life. And yet he now reuses the material concerning Israel, his people with whom he was so identified; and yet apparently forgetting that he had been revived from that pit by grace.

Jer. 48:44; 49:5 describe condemnation as fear being brought upon people (as Job 3:25; Prov. 1:27), and Is. 24:18 and other passages speak of the condemned fleeing from "the noise of the fear". "The fear" is almost a way of saying 'the judgment of God' (Lam. 3:47). The torment of the rejected will be their fear (1 Jn. 4:18). Psychologically, we need to get in touch with our own fears now, face our fears of condemnation eye to eye, and work through them- in repenting and coming to believe firmly in God's gracious acceptance, living in the spirit of the true love which casts out fear. I know men and women who knew God and walked with the Lord, but now say 'it means nothing to me'. They shrug when I nervously mention to them the reality of judgment to come- and I'm not very bold at bringing the conversations around to that issue, because it is just so fearsome and of such magnitude. They tell me that they're indifferent. But somewhere deep within them, no matter what good actors they are before the stage of our human eyes, there has to be a deep and awful fear. And it is that fear which will be revealed and which will grip them in that final day. Perhaps the greatest mental torment of the rejected will be realizing how they could have been in the Kingdom of God; they will then perceive how great was the potential which they had had in the brief years of their mortality.

Lamentations 3:48 My eye runs down with streams of water, for the destruction of the daughter of my people- What he saw with his eye affected his mind / heart (:51). Let us not see the doom of others, the pain and suffering of another life, and walk on by not permanently moved. What we see should affect our heart- if we have a heart that bleeds. And a bleeding heart doesn't merely bleed- it *does* something concrete, in prayer and action. Consider other examples of the bleeding heart of Jeremiah: "Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth ["my stomach is in knots", the Net Bible], for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city" (Lam. 2:11). "For these

things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water… my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled" (Lam. 1:16,20). And this is the more impressive when we recall that it was his own people who had tried to murder him, and very nearly succeeded when he was cast into the dungeon. In this he reflects the amazing love of God for His people.

Lamentations 3:49 My eye pours down, and doesn't cease, without any intermission- He considers his tears to be his prayer to God, begging for intervention (:50). God often considers our situation and feelings to be our prayer of intercession. Otherwise, the acceptability of prayer would simply be a reflection of our ability to verbalize. And some are better at this than others. His lack of "intermission" is alluding to the appeal of Is. 62:7 to give God no rest until He reestablish Jerusalem. But again he is pleading a Scripture without attention to the wider context- which is that the reestablishment would come when Judah returned to their God. And then they would be returned to their land and Zion would return to her glory. Jeremiah has so often made this point in his prophecies, repeatedly playing on the word *shub*, to return / repent.

Lamentations 3:50 Until Yahweh look down, and see from heaven- The aspect of repentance is still missing from all this emotional appeal to God. At this stage, Jeremiah is still asking God to respond to the tragedy simply for the sake of the tragedy. See on :49.

Lamentations 3:51 My eye affects my soul, because of all the daughters of my city- What he saw with his eye affected his mind / heart. Let us not see the doom of others, the pain and suffering of another life, and walk on by not permanently moved. What we see should affect our heart- if we have a heart that bleeds.

Lamentations 3:52 They have chased me relentlessly like a bird, those who are my enemies without cause- Jeremiah now reuses material from a previous composition about his feelings in the dungeon, but reapplies those feelings to suffering Israel with whom he so identified. Those who had chased Jeremiah without cause were the Jews. And now he parallels those Jews with the Babylonians, and himself with the Jews. He ought to have perceived that in fact the Jews who had so persecuted him were but receiving the same judgment which they had passed upon him. But he didn't want to see that, because he in the end had a heart of love for his people; and that love manifested itself in a sense of identity with them. See on :66.

Lamentations 3:53 They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and have cast a stone on me- See on :52. The rest of this lamentation directly concerns Jeremiah's experience in the dungeon, where he experienced a living death. His point is that he now saw those experiences as those of Judah; he identified with them even in their death. And thus he points forward to the Lord Jesus, who by God's grace tasted the death of a sinner for every sinful person; and yet was like Jeremiah resurrected from it and was personally innocent of their sins.

Lamentations 3:54 Waters flowed over my head; I said, I am cut off- Jeremiah in the dungeon felt as if he was dead; see on :54. His enemies mocked him from above (Lam. 3:14), pouring water that was probably excrement upon him, as the dungeon was a sewer.

Lamentations 3:55 I called on Your name, Yahweh, out of the lowest dungeon- The implication was that as Jeremiah had called upon Yahweh and been saved from the dungeon, so should Judah. But still Jeremiah is begging for divine intervention simply on the basis that the people were in dire straits. Still he is not emphasizing the need for unconditional repentance, and that was what would lead to the deliverance and restoration he so hoped for.

Lamentations 3:56 You heard my voice; don't hide Your ear at my breathing, at my cry- This implies that Jeremiah was literally about to die, or he felt he was; and his last breaths were in prayer. And he wished Judah to pray likewise; although still in the analogy, there is no place for their repentance, which was so critical.

Lamentations 3:57 You drew near in the day that I called on You; You said, Don't be afraid- We don't know whether or not Jeremiah heard a literal voice telling him not to be afraid; perhaps the voice of Yahweh was manifest in the voice of Ebedmelech, who would have removed the stone and called down to Jeremiah "Don't be afraid!". But Jeremiah is now seeing this as hopefully representative of the restoration prophecies which assured Jacob not to fear, because they would be restored (Is. 43:1; Jer. 30:10). And likewise Yahweh would 'draw near' to the restored Judah (s.w. Jer. 30:21).

Lamentations 3:58 Lord, You have pleaded the causes of my soul; You have redeemed my life- Jeremiah understood his prayer as having entered the court of heaven, although it was offered from the absolutely lowest point; death by thirst and starvation in a deep sewer. And there in heaven, his case was judged, and the decision given to redeem his life from that living death. And so Ebedmelech was motivated by God to rescue him. And Jeremiah clearly thought this was possible for Judah, if they likewise prayed. But he is carefully omitting the factor of repentance, which was so critical for Judah.

Lamentations 3:59 Yahweh, You have seen my wrong. Judge my cause- Jeremiah was the innocent suffering wrongfully, and he could rightly ask Yahweh to judge his case and deliver him by doing justice rightly. But the analogy with Judah breaks down; because they needed to repent, and were suffering less than their iniquities deserved, but rightfully. See on :58.

Lamentations 3:60 You have seen all their vengeance and all their devices against me- The motive for Jeremiah's persecution and consignment to death was a wrongful desire for revenge because he had faithfully spoken God's word. But the situation of Judah was not analogous, because they were being judged for *their* "devices" against God (s.w. Jer. 6:19). Jeremiah had asked to see Divine "vengeance" upon the Jews who threw him into the dungeon (s.w. Jer. 11:20). But now he did see it, and his prayer was answered, he likes to change around the analogy; Babylon was taking vengeance upon Judah wrongfully, so he implied; and he asks God to take note of that and change things. But his appeal for 'right' to be done by reversing the Babylonian victory is misplaced-only repentance and throwing themselves upon grace rather than any concept of vengeance could change things.

Lamentations 3:61 You have heard their reproach, Yahweh, and all their devices against me- Jeremiah had prayed that the Jews would suffer Divine vengeance for reproaching him (s.w. Jer. 15:15). But now he is asking for God to revenge the Babylonians for reproaching those same Jews. As explained on :60, his appeal for 'right'

to be done by reversing the Babylonian victory is misplaced- only repentance and throwing themselves upon grace rather than any concept of vengeance could change things. The reproach against Israel was to be "everlasting" (s.w. Jer. 23:40). Only a desperate, repentant appeal to God's grace could change that, and not until Lam. 5:16-21 does Jeremiah finally advocate such an appeal.

Lamentations 3:62 The lips of those that rose up against me, and their device against me all the day- God not only heard the words spoken against Jeremiah, He even observed the lips of those who framed those words. This is how intensely He is sensitive to words; but see on :60,61.

Lamentations 3:63 You see their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their song- As noted on :62, God sees the lips of those who speak hard things, just as He sees the fingers which tap them on keyboards today. And He watched their sitting down and rising up, their body language. This is His sensitivity to His people, and Jeremiah is asking that God be likewise sensitive to the sufferings of Judah; but see on :60,61.

Lamentations 3:64 You will render to them a recompense, Yahweh, according to the work of their hands- These are the words of Joel 3:4,7; Obad. 15 about the works of Judah's enemies being rendered back to them. Jeremiah had prayed for this to be done to Israel; but now he asks for this policy to be applied to Israel's enemies. But see on :60,61. The truth was that Jeremiah had prayed for a recompense upon the Jews, and that was now happening before his eyes. And he was in vain seeking to backtrack and change things.

Lamentations 3:65 You will give them hardness of heart, Your curse to them- This is yet more evidence that God can work directly upon the human heart, even in response to the prayers of others for that. The climax of Jeremiah's imprecations against Israel was that they would be given hard hearts, and receive the curses for breaking the covenant. And indeed his prayer was heard. But now he was desperately trying (albeit in vain) to have his prayer reapplied to the enemies of Israel.

Lamentations 3:66 You will pursue them in anger, and destroy them from under the heavens of Yahweh- Yet Jeremiah in :43 has just complained that God had pursued His people at the hands of the Babylonians. Now Jeremiah's imprecation, uttered in the dungeon, had come true... he bitterly regretted it and resented God doing what he had asked. The lesson clearly is to be careful what we pray for, lest it come true. To be destroyed from under the heavens is what God wanted to do to Israel for their idolatry, meaning to disown them as His people (s.w. Dt. 9:14). That is what Jeremiah had prayed for his people when he was in the dungeon, and indeed they had broken the covenant and the curses for that were coming upon them (:65).

LAMENTATIONS CHAPTER 4

Lamentations 4:1 How the gold has become dim! The most pure gold has changed! The stones of the sanctuary are poured out at the head of every street- Gold by its nature is supposed not to tarnish; the precious stones in the sanctuary (presumably referring to those in the breastplate) were likewise supposed to be valued by their very nature, and not just poured out at the head of every street. The idea is that what was thought to have

been inviolate, the temple, had been violated. The precious stones are parallel with the precious sons of Zion (:2), who were perishing at the head of every street (Lam. 2:19). The false prophets had taught that Jerusalem would not fall because God would never give up Zion. And it seems Jeremiah now laments that indeed the apparently inviolate had been violated. Again he appears to be identifying too strongly, or in an inappropriate manner, with his sinful people. For he was overlooking the fact that "at the head of every street" there had been idols (Ez. 16:24,31) and little sanctuaries for them. And now their children were perishing in those very same places. The appeal needed to be for repentance, but instead Jeremiah is still focusing totally upon the tragedy before him and lamenting it; without considering the bigger picture as to why it was happening.

Lamentations 4:2 The precious sons of Zion- There is a connection with how earlier God had told Jeremiah He would reject him, unless he brought out the precious from among the base (see on Jer. 15:19). And this he apparently failed to do, and so he laments it. See on :1.

Comparable to fine gold, how are they now esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!- "Potter" translates the same word Jeremiah has used of how God as the potter or former has formed Israel in order to do His work (Jer. 18:2-6,11; 19:1,11; 33:2). According to Jeremiah's own parables, those who didn't respond to the potter's hands were to be broken. But now Jeremiah seems to object to this happening to Israel.

Lamentations 4:3 Even the jackals draw out the breast, they nurse their young ones: the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness- The idea is that the mothers had become apparently cruel and uncaring for their children, because the famine and thirst had led to them being unable to provide breast milk for their own children. Jeremiah seems to imply that this is an untenable situation for God to tolerate, since even the wild animals are able to feed their young. Again, as explained on :1, in his depression he is focusing upon just one aspect of a complex picture; and willfully overlooking the fact that these same women had sacrificed their children to Baal, and were the very ones who stubbornly claimed that worshipping the queen of heaven was preferable to Yahweh worship (see on Jer. 7:18; 44:17).

Lamentations 4:4 The tongue of the nursing child clings to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaks it to them- See on :3. 'Breaking bread' or 'eating bread' is simply an idiom for sharing in a meal (Is. 58:7; Jer. 16:7; Lam. 4:4; Ez. 17:7; 24:17; Hos. 9:4; Dt. 26:14; Job 42:11). 'Bread' is used for any food, just as 'salt' is used in the same way in Arabic. The way the Lord broke His bread with sinners, with anyone, is therefore evidence enough that the 'breaking of bread' is inclusive and not exclusive.

Lamentations 4:5 Those who fed delicately are desolate in the streets: those who were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills- Jeremiah seemed to find it especially tragic that the royal family [once "in scarlet", the colour of royalty] and the formerly wealthy were so desolate. But these were the very classes whom he had singled out for particular condemnation in his earlier prophecies. Now those prophecies had come true, he seems to almost resent it. We notice the connection with Job losing his wealth and sitting in dunghills- he was representative of Judah, and it seems his story was rewritten under

inspiration during the exile to make it relevant for them. But his captivity was turned when he repented without reservation; and that is the critical factor Jeremiah only fully accepts at the end of Lamentations.

Lamentations 4:6 For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands were laid on her- The idea is that Sodom perished in an instant and not at the hands of cruel people. Jeremiah laments this- as if implying that he considered Jerusalem's sin to have been less than Sodom's, but her punishment was greater. And yet Ez. 16:48, which was a contemporary prophecy which Jeremiah likely knew, states clearly that Judah sinned far more than Sodom. Jeremiah had commented in Jer. 23:14 that God considered Jerusalem as Sodom. But now he appears quite out of step with God's assessment; because he simply will not adequately factor in Judah's sin and need for penitence.

Lamentations 4:7 Her nobles were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk; they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was as of sapphire- Yet it was the nobles whom Jeremiah had singled out for particular condemnation. They were not at all snow white in God's eyes; that could only come through repentance (Is 1:18). But Jeremiah likes to think they were like this despite their impenitence. AV and some manuscripts read "Nazirites". In this case, Jeremiah would be alluding to the idea that those who kept the Nazirite vow experienced great blessing in their health and bodily appearance; and Jeremiah laments that this is now not the case. And yet Daniel and his friends appeared more healthy than the other Jews because they refused to eat food and drink wine that had been part of idol worship; whereas it seems that Jerusalem and its religious classes at Jeremiah's time were almost wholly given over to idolatry. Jeremiah's path from thinking God was effectively dead (see on Jer. 1:1) to the total repentance at the end of Lam. 5 was not a smooth journey; it was a jagged graph. In Lam. 3:40-42 (see notes there) he has come to a very limited idea of the need for repentance, but now he has slipped back to being out of step with God because of his depressive insistence upon seeing only the immediate issues which were before his eyes, i.e. the suffering in judgment of God's people.

Lamentations 4:8 Their appearance is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin clings to their bones; it is withered, it has become like a stick- See on :7. This appears to speak of the situation during the famine which occurred during the siege- and this death by famine had been predicted by Jeremiah. This implies that Jeremiah was having these thoughts during the siege; for he speaks of the nobles suffering like this (:7), and it was they who were either slain or carried into exile once the city fell. So Lamentations provides us with another perspective upon the Jeremiah we meet in the book of Jeremiah, who appears to bravely speak God's word and adopt His perspective. The reality is that at the same time, he was deeply struggling with the words he was teaching, and more than questioning some of it.

Lamentations 4:9 Those who are killed with the sword are better than those who are killed with hunger; for these pine away, stricken through, for want of the fruits of the field- The present tenses suggest Jeremiah was composing this lamentation as he observed (or heard about in prison) the effects of the famine during the siege; see on :8. "The fruits of the field" would only be restored once Judah repented and entered a new covenant with God (s.w. Ez. 36:30). But Jeremiah appears to think that they had a right to those fruits anyway, without that repentance.

Lamentations 4:10 The hands of the pitiful women have boiled their own children; they were their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people- Jeremiah earlier had had much to say in condemnation of the women of Jerusalem, who had offered their own children to the idols, and who both before and after the siege insisted on worshipping the queen of heaven in preference to Yahweh (see on Jer. 7:18; 44:17).

Lamentations 4:11 Yahweh has accomplished His wrath, He has poured out His fierce anger; He has kindled a fire in Zion, which has devoured its foundations- The complaint that the foundations had been destroyed, when fire would typically only burn the edges and surface of a city wall, suggests Jeremiah is at a low ebb of faith that there could ever be restoration.

Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4). Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4).

Lamentations 4:12 The kings of the land didn't believe, neither all the inhabitants of the world, that the adversary and the enemy would enter into the gates of Jerusalem- The fortifications of Jerusalem were apparently legendary; and indeed it took the might of Babylon 18 months to breach them. But the great prophetic theme is that all human strength is to be brought down by Divine judgment. We note that the *eretz,* the land promised to Abraham, is effectively "the world" from the perspective of the prophets. The prophets have little to say about the rest of the planet- including Russia and the Anglo-Saxon world.

Lamentations 4:13 It is because of the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her- As often noted, Jeremiah's path is a jagged graph- through depression to the final confession of sin without reservation at the end of Lamentations. Having been very insistent so far in this chapter that Jerusalem is suffering unfairly, and the suffering of her priests and leadership is particularly tragic, Jeremiah now does bluntly recognize that all this has happened because of their sins. They had tried to shed his blood, and had succeeded in killing other prophets. They had shed the blood of children and other animal sacrifices- and the false prophets and priests who taught their false words were directly responsible for this.

And yet perhaps even these words of Jeremiah somewhat contradict the prophetic position, whereby blame was placed upon all Judah, every part of society; whereas now Jeremiah laments the situation as if Judah is being hard done by, suffering for the sins of the leadership. The blame is being unfairly placed by him just upon the priests and prophets; whereas Jeremiah himself has earlier stated that all Judah must carry the blame (see on Jer. 17:20; 22:2; 25:5; 37:2).

Lamentations 4:14 They wander as blind men in the streets, they are polluted with blood, so that men can't touch their garments- The tenses are unclear in the Lamentations because Jeremiah has brought together various feelings that he had at different times- before, during (:14,17,18) and after the siege (:19) and exile (:18,20). LXX has "her watchmen staggered in the streets"; the watchmen were the prophets of:13. The reference is to the descriptions of blindness as a punishment for breaking the

covenant (Dt. 28:18; Jer. 23:12; Is. 29:9). They were polluted with blood already because of their attempted murder of Jeremiah and actual murder of other prophets, as well as those they sacrificed to the idols. Now, they are portrayed as wandering the streets covered in blood. That may have been literally the case, but they were covered in blood anyway in God's eyes. And this made them unclean.

Lamentations 4:15 Depart! they cried to them, Unclean! Depart, depart, don't touch! When they fled away and wandered, men said among the nations, They shall not live here any more- Translated this way, the paradox is developed that they who were now so covered in blood that nobody would touch them for fear of being made unclean (:14)- were the very ones who had condemned others as ritually unclean and had ordered them to get far away from them. Remember it is the priests who are being addressed here (:13). As they had driven away others for being unclean (when they themselves were unclean and covered with blood guilt), so now they were being driven away from their land as unclean. As Jeremiah so often demonstrates in his prophecy, condemnation was articulated in language which showed it to be but a continuation of attitudes and positions the condemned had already adopted in their lives.

Lamentations 4:16 The anger of Yahweh has scattered them; He will no more regard them- Not regarding them, not having them in His sight, means that He would permanently end relationship with them. But as noted on Lam. 4:15, this was but a reflection of how they had not regarded Him (s.w. Is. 5:12; 22:11). And yet by lamenting that Yahweh would not again have relationship with them, Jeremiah was overlooking the prophecies of restoration which he himself had given. His depression was such that at this point, he focuses only upon the present pain and will not look wider.

They didn't respect the persons of the priests, they didn't favour the elders- The "they" appears to refer to the Babylonian soldiers. But Jeremiah has given reason after reason as to why the priests and elders were not worthy of any respect and deserved only condemnation. But now he laments that, identifying so strongly with Israel again, after in :15 beginning to accept that they were suffering only what they themselves had in essence done in their days of opportunity. He sees their guilt- and then slips back to simply lamenting the situation as it was at that moment.

Lamentations 4:17 Our eyes still fail, looking in vain for our help- LXX "While we yet lived our eyes failed, while we looked in vain for our help". This may appear to contradict Jeremiah's feelings explained on Lam. 3:22,23,39, that to simply be alive is to know that God's grace continues to us, and finally His "help" shall be articulated to us, even if not in terms of immediate salvation. And again Jeremiah seems to be implying that they were looking to God for help "in vain". This is the mentality noted on Lam. 3:44, considering that God would not answer prayer. But Jeremiah was missing the point- that it wasn't simply prayer for immediate rescue which was required, but rather the prayer of repentance for forgiveness.

In our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save- A reference to Egypt, trust in whom was a large reason for their rejection by Yahweh. But Jeremiah appears to be writing here at the time of the siege or even after it, when Egypt was already no longer a viable help, having been crushed at the battle of Carchemish. And yet even then it would appear from Ez. 29:16 that they still vainly looked to Egypt for

help, and the survivors of the siege fled there despite being warned not to. The attraction of trusting human strength rather than Yahweh was so great. Instead of watching or looking to Egypt they should have looked to and waited upon Yahweh.

Lamentations 4:18 They hunt our steps, so that we can't go in our streets: our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end has come- The tenses are unclear in the Lamentations because Jeremiah has brought together various feelings that he had at different times- before, during and after the siege and exile. See on :14.

Jer. 16:16 suggests a total regathering of all who were in captivity as a result of fishers and "hunters" provoking the people to return to a restored kingdom. This didn't happen because the exiles preferred the soft life in Persia. The effort made wasn't responded to. Indeed Jeremiah later laments that the people were "hunted" after Jerusalem fell (s.w. Lam. 3:52; 4:18). He ought to have realized that the exiles were to be hunted back to the restored kingdom- if they responded. But in his depression, he focused only upon the negative, the glass half empty rather than half full.

Lamentations 4:19 Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the sky: they chased us on the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness- A reference to the Babylonian cavalry, and particularly of their pursuit and capture of Zedekiah as representative of all Judah. As noted on :14, Jeremiah now seems to be writing from some time after the fall of Jerusalem. He has edited his thoughts together in these Lamentations. He was not pursued nor chased; but he so identified with his people that he felt as if he had been.

Lamentations 4:20 The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of Yahweh, was taken in their pits; of whom we said, Under His shadow we shall live among the nations- This sounds a far too positive take upon Zedekiah, whose demise was directly due to refusing to listen to Jeremiah's words from God, and his impenitence. But instead of accepting that, Jeremiah seems to now think his demise to be so tragic. The way Zedekiah is described as "the prince" in Ez. 12:12 lays the basis for the later prophecies about "the prince" in Ez. 40-48. Had the exiles returned and rebuilt and operated the temple system as required there, another individual called "the prince" would have arisen. Perhaps the blind, repentant Zedekiah could have returned from exile and become the prince figure; this would then solve the otherwise strange prophecy of Is. 42:19, that the restored community would have had a blind leader. Likewise the exiles could have lived under the shadow of a great leader in exile (Lam. 4:20), fulfilling the prophecies of Messiah as a great tree. But none of those involved lived up to their potential.

Lamentations 4:21 Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Edom that dwells in the land of Uz: the cup shall pass through to you also; you shall be drunken, and shall make yourself naked- As Edom rejoiced against Jerusalem in the day of her destruction (Ps. 137:7), so she is bidden sarcastically to rejoice because she would again be judged with Jerusalem's judgment. Edom is noted as dwelling in Uz to point up the connection with Job; the whole book of Job was rewritten and reapplied to the drama of the exile, and it involved people from the land of Uz [the friends] being rebuked and finally having the imputed righteousness of Job revealed to them.

Lamentations 4:22 The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, daughter of Zion; He will no more carry you away into captivity: He will visit your iniquity, daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins- But Zion was carried into captivity by God again,

not least under the Romans, as well as by Antiochus, and she will be again in the last days. What was potentially possible was that Judah repented, returned both to God and Zion, and the Kingdom of God would have been reestablished in Israel- never again to be destroyed. That was the potential, but their lack of repentance precluded it. So Jeremiah's statement here appears to be his desperate hope that Zion's judgment had ended and now there would be restoration. But again, he refuses to factor in the aspect of their repentance.

LAMENTATIONS CHAPTER 5

Lamentations 5:1 Remember, Yahweh, what has come on us: look, and see our reproach-

Lamentations 1-4 each have a clear acrostic structure, but Lamentations 5 doesn't- possibly because Lamentations 5 is a transcript of Jeremiah's actual prayer, from the heart, not poetry after the event, but a transcript of his words as they were. For man doesn't structure his desperate prayers as acrostics. And yet Lam. 5 has 22 lines, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. We get the impression, bearing in mind that the other chapters are all acrostics, that he began intending to pray in an acrostic but emotion and passion took over.

The invitation to "look" must be understood in the context of how Jeremiah has complained that God placed a cloud between Himself and His people, through which no prayer could pass (Lam. 3:44). And in Lam. 4:16 he has just stated that God was not looking at His condemned people. He said that in depression, just spot staring at the reality of suffering they were then experiencing. If it felt like God had permanently cast them off, then that was how he felt it was. But now he accepts that although God apparently will not look at them, yet He can be appealed to. But still he is asking God to simply take pity upon the tragedy of suffering people; he still must factor in the critical aspects of repentance and forgiveness.

Lamentations 5:2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens- To lose an inheritance was a major tragedy in the thought of those times. The loss of inheritance was not a tragedy unfelt by God. God was losing His inheritance in that He was allowing it to be consumed (Jer. 12:9), 'polluting it' (Is. 47:6). No man would ever spoil his own inheritance like this; but God did, such was His belief in the need to punish His people for their sins. And yet the metaphor of lost / spoilt inheritance reflects how painful this was for God, felt as a personal loss. The whole idea elicits sympathy for God in this tragic loss.

Lamentations 5:3 We are orphans and fatherless; our mothers are as widows- Again we note Jeremiah's intense identification with those who had suffered. For he speaks of "we" and "our", rather than of "they" and "theirs". Surely Jeremiah means to remind God of His special care for these categories in His law.

Lamentations 5:4 We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold to us- Perhaps the Bedouin tribes took over Jerusalem after it fell, and sold water and firewood to the Jews. See on :9.

Lamentations 5:5 Our pursuers are on our necks: we are weary, and have no rest- Again his depression leads to exaggeration; there is no evidence that the Jews were

moved around the Babylonian empire, making them find no rest. He himself had urged them to build houses in Babylon and settle down there. Being restless was a result of breaking the covenant (s.w. Dt. 28:65) which Jeremiah had repeatedly accused them of doing. They were suffering far less than their iniquities deserved. They refused to repent and in that sense they had no rest to their souls. If they had accepted the yoke of Babylon, then they could have rested in their own land (s.w. Jer. 27:11). Jeremiah had advocated accepting this yoke; and yet again he seems somewhat out of step with God as he complains about it.

Lamentations 5:6 We have given the hand to the Egyptians, to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread- Jeremiah appears to be writing here at the time of the siege or even after it, when Egypt was already no longer a viable help, having been crushed at the battle of Carchemish. And yet even then it would appear from Ez. 29:16 that they still vainly looked to Egypt for help, and the survivors of the siege fled there despite being warned not to. The attraction of trusting human strength rather than Yahweh was so great. Instead of watching or looking to Egypt they should have looked to and waited upon Yahweh.

To give the hand was a metaphor for making a covenant agreement. Ez. 17:18 roundly condemns it as unfaithfulness to God. Yet Jeremiah appears to justify the way Judah had done this by saying that they did it "for bread" (Lam. 5:6), as if the famine sent by God to bring about their repentance was so severe that the alliances were not just for political and military protection, but for basic food. This was how low the one time beautiful prostitute of Ez. 16 had fallen; just "for bread" she made the agreements which meant that she had to have the idols of these people in the Jerusalem temple. Clearly these 'givings of the hand' were wrong, and yet Jeremiah laments as if they were somehow justifiable. But Ez. 17 clearly condemns them as immoral acts. For God as Judah's husband would surely provide her with bread. The lack of it was to bring her back to Him, but instead she responded by madly making more spiritually adulterous covenants. We too can respond to God's chastening hand either by total repentance and casting ourselves upon Him, or by madly seeking to get around His chastisement by yet further sin and unfaithfulness.

But perhaps here we have the beginnings of a sense of repentance; for now finally Jeremiah begins to look back at their spiritually adulterous covenants with the nations, and recognizes that their exile is due to that. See on :16.

Lamentations 5:7 Our fathers sinned, and are no more; we have borne their iniquities- In Ez. 16:56,63 we noted that God wished to stop Israel using certain proverbs. He paid attention to their sayings, their language, their throwaway expressions. All language is significant to God, and He aimed to reform even the kind of language they spoke. Throughout Ez. 18, Ezekiel labours the point that they were not say any more that the children were suffering for the fathers' sins. This was not to be stated any more (Ez. 18:3). Not saying it any more was to be part of being in the new covenant- Jer. 31:29 had specifically stated this, contemporary with Ezekiel. Ezekiel is so labouring the point in Ez. 18, because he wants them to accept the new covenant in exile, and to live and speak according to it. And yet Jeremiah himself seems to say that God has in fact punished the children for their fathers' sins (Lam. 5:7). He was contradicting his own message in Jer. 31:29. We would therefore have in this an example of a man who in depression says things which are wrong, struggling with God, as Job did; and yet still finally accepted. Although this unjust complaint against God contributes towards the sense of unsatisfactory conclusion which we are left with in this final chapter, leaving

us wondering whether Jeremiah's faith did in fact remain intact at the very end. This is one of many cases of self-justification in Lamentations (Lam. 1:2,19; Lam. 2:14; 4:13; 5:7), which contradicts the prophetic position, whereby blame is placed upon Judah, whereas now Jeremiah laments the situation as if Judah is being hard done by.

Lamentations 5:8 Servants rule over us: there is none to deliver us out of their hand- The servants who ruled over them on behalf of Babylon were the likes of "Tobiah the servant" (Neh. 2:10,19). It seems that they made the remaining Jews work for them as slaves and day labourers (:13). But this was exactly the abuse which they tolerated in their society even during the siege of Jerusalem; and it was exactly because they refused to release their servants and stop abusing them, that they became abused labourers and slaves (Jer. 34:17). So there was in fact a potential deliverer "out of their hand"; but that depended upon repentance, which is a theme Jeremiah is so loath to raise.

Lamentations 5:9 We get our bread at the peril of our lives, because of the sword of the wilderness- A reference to marauding Arab Bedouin bands. See on :4.

Lamentations 5:10 Our skin is black like an oven, because of the burning heat of famine- After the siege was over, Jerusalem was burnt and the survivors almost perished of hunger. But famine was a punishment for sin and breaking the covenant. The prophecies of judgment implied at times that none would survive. The fact some came out of the fiery oven of Jerusalem, albeit with blackened skin, was to be seen as a sign of God's grace- and yet Jeremiah laments it.

Lamentations 5:11 They ravished the women in Zion, the virgins in the cities of Judah- "Virgins" can mean simply 'young women'. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea have all presented Judah as a prostitute and unfaithful lover. She had made covenants of unique loyalty with the nations, undertaking to worship their gods. And then they discovered that she had made such covenants with multiple nations, and her temple in Jerusalem was full of the gods of her various lovers. She is therefore presented as a suffering the judgment of a prostitute, being burnt by fire; after having her skirts pulled above her head and being gang raped beforehand for good measure (Jer. 13:22,26 etc.). This is the shocking picture of her judgment which we find in the prophets. But Jeremiah so takes the side of his people that he presents this as meaning that she as an innocent, upright woman who was raped by some heartless beast.

Lamentations 5:12 Princes were hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured- The judgment of the royal family and elders was a major part of Jeremiah's message. And yet he seems to lament that they were not more respected by their conquerors. On one hand, his almost fanatical taking of Israel's side, totally identifying with their feelings, represents the passionate love and pity of God for His condemned people. And yet on the other hand, Jeremiah appears to be out of step with God's own perspective on the princes and elders as expressed in His own word through Jeremiah. Perhaps in this we see Jeremiah revealing to us the deep tension within God Himself when it came to judging His people; see on Hos. 11:8.

Lamentations 5:13 The young men were made to grind at the mill; the children stumbled under the wood- Jer. 52:11 LXX says that the captive Zedekiah was put "in the mill", as if he was in hard labour, now blinded, exactly like Samson (Jud. 16:21),

and as the young men were made to (Lam. 5:13). And the similarities continued, in that it seems Zedekiah likewise did finally repent. Perhaps the young men did likewise.

It seems that they made the remaining Jews work for them as slaves and day labourers (:8). But this was exactly the abuse which they tolerated in their society even during the siege of Jerusalem; and it was exactly because they refused to release their servants and stop abusing them, that they became abused labourers and slaves (Jer. 34:17). So there was in fact a potential deliverer "out of their hand"; but that depended upon repentance, which is a theme Jeremiah is so loath to raise.

Lamentations 5:14 The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music- But there was great corruption in "the gate"; and the music of the young men was a reflection of their rejection of God. These young men and elders were those condemned in Am. 6:1-7: "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion... Those who put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; who lie on beds of ivory, and stretch themselves on their couches... who strum on the strings of a harp; who invent for themselves instruments of music, like David did; who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the best oils; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore they will now go into captivity with the first who go captive; and the feasting and lounging will end". So again we see Jeremiah in depression focusing just upon the immediate experience, without wishing to recall the wider context.

Lamentations 5:15 The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning- That their joy should cease was specifically prophesied for their disobedience, in these very Hebrew words (Is. 24:8; Hos. 2:11). And yet Jeremiah laments it. But he surely saw the connection with these prophecies, and that his feelings of lamentation were in fact their fulfilment; and so this leads him to the obvious conclusion: that the real problem is Judah's sin, and they need to repent. As he lamented that the girls were no longer dancing but mourning, his thoughts were led to his own earlier words of Jer. 31:4,13- that a restored, repentant Israel would again dance, and when David repented, his mourning was turned into dancing (s.w. Ps. 30:11). And thus we come to the climax of the book, in the unreserved, unqualified repentance of the next five verses.

Lamentations 5:16 The crown is fallen from our head: woe to us! For we have sinned- As noted on Lam. 1:1; 3:40, Lam. 5:16-21 is the climax of the book of Lamentations. And the point is that we have here a total confession of sin, and appeal for God to turn them to Himself (:21) and restore His relationship and Kingdom with Judah as before (:21). The book of Lamentations begins with Jeremiah bitterly complaining that God is as good as dead (see on Lam. 1:1), with him looking solely at the tragedy before his eyes, and progresses to a climax of unconditional repentance in Lam. 5:16-21. But the progression is a jagged graph. There have been points at which he does recognize that the sufferings are directly due to Judah's sins, he increasingly sees that there is a future hope and the God of judgment is also a God of grace. And he vaguely implies that repentance is needed, but always quickly returns to accusing God of unreasonable behaviour; and as noted on Lam. 3:40-42, the appeals for repentance are very qualified and still accuse God of injustice. But now in these verses he does speak clearly of the need for repentance, without excuses, justification, reservation or qualification. The path of Jeremiah was intended by God and himself to be that of Israel; for he had so intensely identified with them throughout the Lamentations.

It was because of this that "the crown" had fallen and the royal family had been ended (s.w. Jer. 13:18; Ez. 21:26). This may appear obvious to us, but in depression

and focus upon the immediate tragedy, it was not so obvious to Jeremiah. But now he grasps it.

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, and often in Ezekiel, I have made the point that so much hinged upon whether Judah repented after Jerusalem fell. If they did, then the new covenant would have been accepted by them, and the promises of the restored Kingdom would have come true. They generally did not repent, but it was Jeremiah's heartfelt desire that they did, following his own example. And so he wished them to identify with his feelings of anger with God, his struggle with God, his confusion... and thereby to be led to this conclusion of the matter in repentance and desperate appeal for restoration. But it seems Judah got caught up in the early stages of grief, never moved on from them, and failed to follow through to this confession of sin and appeal for restoration which we have in Lam. 5. The last verse of the book (Lam. 5:22) appears starkly out of context with the immediately preceding verses, with their appeal for restoration and confession of sin: "But You have utterly rejected us; You are very angry against us". I suggest this is purposeful, because this is as it were Judah's response to the book and the appeal to repent and appeal for restoration. They remained caught up in their grief and refused to repent and return to God because they considered He had removed Himself too far from them. And so the great prophetic potentials for a repentant Judah, described in such detail in the book of Jeremiah, didn't then come about; although the prophecies are reapplied and rescheduled to fulfilment in the last days.

Cities with battlements were seen as crowned, as the wall and battlements were like a crown around the head, with the head being the temple / palace. But throughout the exile, Yahweh had the walls of Zion on His palm (Is. 49:16), and in Is. 62:3 He actually has the crown in His hand, and He will place it upon her head. Or, upon His own head. The exiles were bitterly aware that in the destruction of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, "the crown is fallen from our head" (Lam. 5:16). That crown had in fact been placed upon God's people when they entered the covenant with Him at Sinai. He put "a beautiful crown on your head" (Ez. 16:12). That had been destroyed by the Babylonians; hence the significance of Is. 62:3 saying that Zion shall now have a crown of glory. The curse for disobedience, in all forms, would now be taken away. The exiles refused that, but it has been offered in a more essential sense to all God's new people now.

Lamentations 5:17 For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim- The stress is upon "for this"- their sins (:16). Jeremiah's faint heart (Lam. 1:13 s.w.) was *our* heart; his sudden realization of sinfulness and repentance was to be a pattern for them. It was because of their sin that dimness had come upon them, and they could not see their way; specifically because they had not given glory to Yahweh in repentance (Jer. 13:16 cp. Josh. 7:19). And therefore repentance would give glory to Yahweh, and lift the dimness upon their hearts and eyes.

Lamentations 5:18 for the mountain of Zion, which is desolate: the foxes walk on it- Now he recognizes that the tragic desolation of Zion, with unclean animals wandering around it, was not so much due to God nor the Babylonians, as Jeremiah has previously lamented; but was essentially due to their sins (:16). The sanctuary would be "desolate" because of their sins (s.w. Lev. 26:31). And after a period of desolation there would be repentance and restoration (Lev. 26:35,43 s.w.). And so- 'let us repent right now if we want to see that restoration'. That was the glaringly obvious conclusion, and now

Jeremiah grasps it. The unclean foxes wandered upon Zion because her prophets had been as foxes (s.w. Ez. 13:4).

Lamentations 5:19 You, Yahweh, remain forever; Your throne is from generation to generation- If God's rulership would be "forever", then He must rule or be king over someone. He must therefore always have a people; and so Jeremiah reasons that God should not forsake His people "forever". See on :20. Solomon had imagined that Yahweh would "remain forever" in the temple (s.w. 1 Kings 8:13). The temple was now in ruins, and so Jeremiah was driven to the conclusion that because Yahweh Himself would "remain forever", therefore He must indwell not a sacred space, but a group of people in whom He would dwell by His Spirit. And so He asks God in :20,21 not to delay, but to revive that people spiritually so that He might dwell in them. God's eternity was therefore of itself an implication that He would revive Zion (Ps. 102:12,13). Zion, however it might be redefined, would "remain forever" as God Himself would (Ps. 125:1). Jeremiah himself had taught earlier that if Zion repented, then like her God, her people would "remain forever" (Jer. 17:25; 25:5, also Ez. 37:25). But this remaining forever was related to entering the new covenant, and that required repentance; and it required an acceptance of a Messianic seed of David, whose throne like Yahweh's would be from generation to generation (Ps. 89:4 s.w.).

Lamentations 5:20 Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us so long time?- As explained on :19, this is more of a rhetorical question. Because Yahweh was to remain forever, and forever have a people; therefore He would not forget and forsake His people forever. The period between the fall of Jerusalem and this lamentation was hardly a "long time". Perhaps that was how Jeremiah felt, as every moment of desolation appeared to drag eternally. Jeremiah was urging God not to forsake and forget the people, but to take the initiative in spiritually reviving them (:21). Yet perhaps Jeremiah was inspired to use this term "so long time" because his words and feelings here were to be the template and prototype for Judah's final repentance, whenever that would be, perhaps a "long time" in the future.

Lamentations 5:21 Turn us to Yourself, Yahweh, and we shall be turned. Renew our days as of old- This is the climax of the Lamentations. The appeal is not just for Judah to repent as Jeremiah, their representative, had done. Recognizing how critical is repentance in the return and restoration, it is asking God to take the initiative and give the people repentance. There is again the play on the word *shub*; returning / repenting would be the basis for God's returning and restoring of His people. The new covenant involved an offer of God's direct working upon the heart of His people, turning them so that they repented (see on Jer. 31:19). Repentance itself [not just forgiveness] is therefore a gift (Acts 3:26; 11:18)- to those who want it, or for those who have the likes of Jeremiah praying for them to receive it. And those who accept the new covenant today experience this same gift of the Spirit. And now Jeremiah begs for this gift of the new covenant to be given to his people, so that the restoration of the kingdom as in the "days of old" can begin. "Renew" is also translated 'rebuild', and is used of the rebuilding at the restoration (s.w. Is. 61:4).

Lamentations 5:22 But You have utterly rejected us; You are very angry against us- This could be read as by the LXX in the past tense: "For thou hast indeed rejected us; thou hast been very wroth against us", as if it is yet another statement that God's judgments of them were just. But as explained on :16, it may be an intended

juxtaposition with the preceding impassioned statement of repentance and begging for restoration; and the point would be that because they did not repent, God's rejection of them continued. Jeremiah's prophecies of gracious restoration were known by the exiles; but many passages in Isaiah, the Psalms (e.g. Ps. 137:7-9) and Lamentations indicate that the exiles had little conviction they would be fulfilled, considering Judah as "utterly rejected" by God, and just getting on with their lives in Babylon without any real hope in God's salvation. Considering the prosperity of their lives there, this was an all too convenient conclusion for them to draw. Once again we see that false interpretation of Scripture invariably has a moral subtext to it. And the belief that God is so angry with our sins that we have no real chance of revival... is attractive because it enables us to remain in our status quo, no matter how miserable it is. The conservatism of human nature makes this sadly so attractive to many people, as it was to Judah.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: EZEKIEL

EZEKIEL

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 1

Ezekiel 1:1 *Now it happened*- The intention may be to connect with the previous prophe*cy*, Jeremiah, which had concluded with Jeremiah sending a message to the captives urging them to accept their situation and not expect an immediate return from exile (Jer. 51:59 cp. Jer. 29:1-32). Ezekiel was therefore encouraging the exiles that despite no immediate restoration, they could be sure of a huge activity of God for them which would bring about the restoration in due course.

In the thirtieth year in the fourth month in the fifth of the month- This could refer to Ezekiel as a priest starting ministry at age 30 (:3). He was the priest of the "little sanctuary" in exile (Ez. 11:16 "yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary"), a sanctuary that didn't require a temple.

As I was among the captives by the river Chebar- The mention of the river was to connect with the description sitting by the rivers of Babylon weeping in depression (Ps. 137:1).

That the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God- Ezekiel's opening vision of the cherubim was surely to encourage the captives in Babylon that above them was an awesome Angelic system, that was able to carry them with it back to the land- if they were workers together with God. Although it seemed that they were sitting still, nothing was happening, they were just passing time by the rivers of Babylon, above them there was an intensely active system of Angels working for their good. Asaph, writing Psalms in the captivity, perceived this when [surely referring to Ezekiel's recent vision] he speaks of how the God who dwells between the cherubim is in fact actively leading Judah somewhere (Ps. 80:1). And yet the common phrase "Lord of Hosts" / Angels never once occurs in Ezekiel or Daniel. This outstanding omission is surely reflective of the sad fact that the Angel-cherubim withdrew from the land during the captivity- the land where the Angelic eyes of the Lord had run to and fro previously. See on:20. Or it could be argued that Ezekiel's point was that although Yahweh's presence had withdrawn from the temple, He was still the King of Israel and still hugely active for His people through direct personal relationship with them as individuals.

Ezekiel 1:2 *In the fifth of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity*- At this time a year before, the false prophets of Judah were prophesying the overthrow of Babylon and the return of Jeconiah within two years (Jer. 28:3). Ezekiel's message was intended to help them reject these fanciful ideas of immediate salvation and to demonstrate that the things of God's glory are far weightier and eternal than that. In the third or fourth year of Jehoiakim, father of Jehoiachin, the first carrying away of Jewish captives to Babylon took place (including Daniel). It seems that Ezekiel was in the second wave of captives.

Ezekiel 1:3 *The word of Yahweh came specifically to Ezekiel the priest the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of Yahweh was there on him*- As noted on :1, he became a priest at 30 and was intended to be the priest of the "little sanctuary" in exile (Ez. 11:16). If Chebar is the same as Chabor or Habor, then this was the place where the ten tribes had been transported by Tiglath Pileser and Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:6; 1 Chron. 5:26). They had now been joined by the early exiles from Judah. So there was the potential for Israel and Judah to be united, as envisioned under the new covenant; and if they accepted the Spirit, to return together and united to Zion to restore the Kingdom.

I have discussed on Ps. 137 how Jews sat by the rivers / canals of Babylon like the Ulai and Chebar, and some like that Psalmist were caught up in bitterness, endlessly playing the tape of their own experiences and the bitter words spoken to them. Failing to accept that Ezekiel by the Chebar and Daniel by the Ulai had seen visions of restoration and victory over their oppressors. Those canals were dug by slave labour, including the Jewish exiles. But at those very places there was given the hope of glory in the midst of their workaday lives and experience.

Ezekiel 1:4 *I looked, and behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with flashing lightning and a brightness around it; and out of its midst as it were glowing metal out of the midst of the fire*- The primary potential fulfilment of Ezekiel was in the restoration from Babylon. The great emphasis on the Angel-cherubim shows the importance of the Angels in it. The Cherubim of chapter 1 "came out of the north". "The North" in the prophets often refers to "the north country" of Babylon. Is the whole vision primarily describing the Angels coming from Babylon, with the wheels "upon the earth" (:15) representing natural Israel under Angelic control? Thus "when the living creatures (Angels) went, the wheels went by them" (:19), due to the Angelic inspiration of the Jews and their touching the hearts of men like Cyrus, Ezra and Nehemiah "according to the good hand (Angel) of… God upon" them; "the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels" (:20). Had the exiles accepted the new covenant, they would have received the Spirit and returned from exile. Remember that the Angels are the vehicles of God's Spirit. The visions of the glory progressively removing from the temple show the Angel

departing from Jerusalem, and then in chapters 40-48 the glory Angel returns to a re-built Jerusalem. Recall how the Angel in Ex. 33 and 34 is also described as the "glory". The idea is that as the depressed captives sat by the rivers of Babylon in "the north", they were to be aware that a huge, powerful, glorious system of Divine operation was hanging over them. If they identified with it, then this would ultimately return them to Zion.

And yet the cherubim vision also spoke of an invasion from Babylon unless there was repentance amongst the exiles and those still in the land. Ezekiel was taken captive in the second wave of deportations; but the temple had still not been sacked nor Jerusalem taken. Hence the cherubim vision had a double application. It could speak of a further invasion from the north, or of the return of the exiles. All alike would work out God's glory.

Ezekiel 1:5 *Out of its midst came the likeness of four living creatures. This was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man*- The overall silhouette upon them was of a man. This is impossible to visually represent. All attempts at visual representation rather fail here. The cherubim were the heavenly representation of men, both the exiles and also perhaps the invading Babylonian armies. So there was something human about all this majesty of God's glory. His care for man is paramount to His glory and personality. Ultimately this came to full term in His glorious manifestation in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

Ezekiel was prophesying against the background of the Assyrians and Babylonians. Their sculptures reveal winged bulls and lions with human heads. The cherubim alluded to them in that one aspect of meaning is that they could represent the invaders from the north which God would bring upon His people. But the "living creatures" were alive, not dead like the Babylonian ones. They were not quadrupeds, like the Assyrian and Babylonian forms. They were more human, and stood erect, having feet and hands as men have.

Ezekiel 1:6 *Each one had four faces, and each one of them had four wings*- In Rev. 4:7 the four heads are distributed, one to each of the "living creatures", while here each has four faces. This is to highlight the sense of humanity, and of God's awareness of every angle of human situation. That was the lesson so required by Judah in their depression by the rivers of Babylon.

Ezekiel 1:7 *Their feet were straight feet*- The return of the exiles led by Ezra made the journey by a "right way" from Babylon to Zion (Ezra 8:21). Yet this is the very word used about the "straight" feet of the Cherubim Angels here (also :23). The Hebrew word for "straight" is quite common and is used nearly always for righteousness, moral

straightness. The idea is that the new covenant, if accepted, would mean the Spirit entering the exiles and propelling them in the paths of righteousness back to the land. Their *shub*, repentance / return, would be in that they repented and therefore returned. The vast picture of Divine working is to give some material impression of how great is His working in the hearts of men. If they want it. The return from Babylon involved following in the path of the Angels, walking in step with them. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:9 spoke of how the returnees would walk "in a straight way" (s.w.) "by the rivers of waters"- and surely Ezra consciously alluded to this when by the river Ahava he fasted for the exiles to return in a "right / straight way". He knew that these prophecies of restoration would not just automatically come true- they had to be fulfilled by much prayer, fasting and stepping out in faith. But so very few perceived that. And the challenge remains for us today- to walk in the way which God's Angels have potentially prepared for us, with prayer and boldness. I feel this is especially true in the matter of latter day witnessing. Rev. 14:6 describes the great latter fulfilment of the great preaching commission in terms of an Angel flying in Heaven with the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached to all nations and languages. Surely the implication is that the latter day preachers of the Gospel are walking on earth in league with an Angelic system above them, empowering and enabling them.

And the soles of their feet were like the soles of a calf's feet; and they gleamed like burnished brass- If the cherubim speak also of God's people, as well as the Angelic hosts and the hosts of Babylon, then perhaps the message was simply that God was awesomely involved- as awesome as the cherubim vision- with His people on earth. The same Angelic system that brought the hosts of Babylon upon Judah also went with Judah into captivity, and would return from there with them- if they still wished to be part of that Angelic system. And yet most of Judah opted out of it, and remained in Babylon, just as we can opt out and remain in Babylon today. In this context it's interesting that the vision of Jesus as the Son of Man in Rev. 1 has similarities with the cherubim vision of Ez. 1 (feet like brass, Ez. 1:7 = Rev. 1:15; shining face, Ez. 1:13 = Rev. 1:16; voice like many waters, Ez. 1:24= Rev. 1:15). Perhaps this suggests that Israel's failure to identify with the cherubim led to a refulfilment of the prophecy in the person of the Lord Jesus, who was in person all that God intended Israel to have been. Thus the prophecies of Israel as "the servant of Yahweh", given in the context of the restoration, could have been fulfilled in the people of Israel, but were reapplied and fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus.

The captives would have been led into exile barefoot. This was part of the shame of captivity. Is. 20:4 speaks of captives led "naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered". But the soles of their feet would return in glory, energized by their connection with the huge cherubic system above them.

Ezekiel 1:8 *They had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and the four of them had their faces and their wings like this*- See on :10. As noted on :5 and :6, one theme of the visions of glory was God's humanity and how the function and direction of the huge system of Divine activity is influenced by and in a sense dependent upon man. This is why Ezekiel sees the hands of a woman under the wings on every side of them. This presence of human hands is so emphasized; each of them, on all four sides, had this image of human hands as it were supporting them. Because God's work is responsive to human freewill, God is in a sense "in need of man", as Abraham Heschel put it. Or we could see this as all encouraging us to understand that God is a person, we are made in His image, He is thereby closer to us than we imagine. And hence the vision concludes with the vision of God Himself, presented as a human-like Being.

Ezekiel 1:9 *Their wings were joined one to another; they didn't turn when they went; each one went straight forward*- This is an intentional paradox; wings can hardly be joined to each other if they are used for flying. Likewise the wheels within wheels, with no gears meshing them together, somehow travelling in all directions. But this is the paradox and contradiction, as viewed from earth, of God's glorious progress and activity for His people. The whole system would not be diverted- that is twice emphasized in saying that they didn't turn, but went straight forward. The life led by the Spirit is likewise forward motion only. What appears to be a backward step is in fact forwards towards God's Kingdom. We think of the 3 x 40 year periods in Moses' life. See on :7. An alternative is to understand that they each moved with two wings upward and two always down (:11,24), and it was the two upward wings which touched each other and therefore appeared to be "joined". The word speaks of joining in fellowship. This huge system was united, for the ultimate good of God's people and to restore Zion. Hence Jerusalem would be built as a city compacted or "joined" together (Ps. 122:3 s.w.).

Ezekiel 1:10 *As for the likeness of their faces, they each had the face of a man; and the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; the four of them also had the face of an eagle*- There are evident similarities between Ezekiel's cherubim, and the four living creatures of Rev. 4. They are both described as "full of eyes" (Ez. 1:18 = Rev. 4:6), with four very similar faces (lion, calf, man, eagle in Rev. 4:7 = lion, ox, man, eagle in Ez. 1:10); and both have wings (Rev. 4:8 = Ez. 1:8). Yet the living creatures of Revelation speak of being redeemed by the blood of Christ and made king-priests in God's Kingdom (Rev. 5:8-10)- as if they are the redeemed people of God. The four faces are likely to be connected with the four standards of the tribes of Israel (Lion = Judah, Man = Reuben, Ox = Ephraim, Eagle = Dan). Each of those tribes had two other tribes assigned to them in the encampment procedures of Num. 2. There is extra-Biblical tradition that the cherubim in Solomon's temple had the same four

faces which Ezekiel saw on the cherubim- lion, ox, man and eagle (John Thomas, *Eureka* (West Beach: Logos, 1984 ed.) Vol. 2 Ch. 4 sec. 4.2). Those to whom Ezekiel related his vision would have immediately understood the point- that the earthly sanctuary was a reflection of the Heavenly, and that above that was a huge Angelic system operating, which also represented God's people- them. But that huge system was to remove to Babylon, and then the final visions of Ezekiel show that glory returning. Ezekiel, as the representative "son of man" as he's so often styled, was caught up within that system and transported at ease between Babylon and Jerusalem- and those who wanted to opt in with God and His Angels could likewise be taken to Babylon and returned. Those who chose to remain in Babylon were therefore resisting being part of an awesome system of God manifestation and Angelic operation. We have that same choice in things great and small today.

Ezekiel 1:11 *Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; two wings of each one touched another, and two covered their bodies*- See on :9. Heb. 'were parted from above'. The impression is of unity in diversity. What appeared to the exiles to be contradictory was in fact working together in unity towards God's purpose.

Wings are a picture of protection. The first reference to cherubim is in the context of preservation (Gen. 3:24). The vision therefore promised protection to these spiritually depressed exiles, possibly fearing for their lives. And there is also the sense of salvation, they kept the way to the tree of life. Hab. 3:8 brings this out: "You rode on your horses, your chariots of salvation". But the cherubim are also a chariot, with wheels. The idea is of transport. "He [Yhwh] mounted upon a cherub and flew; he swooped on the wings of the wind" (Ps. 18:11). So the exiles were being shown that God could transport them back to Zion, and protect them. These two things met their worries- of how ever they could possibly experience restoration to Zion.

Ezekiel 1:12 *Each one went straight forward*- Literally, 'in front of their faces'. Their faces were set and they didn't flinch. The same idea was to be applied to Ezekiel in Ez. 3:9. He was to identify with God's way and the cherubim, and would be strengthened to follow in the one way if that was what he chose.

Where the spirit was to go, they went; they didn't turn when they went- The cherubim, this massive system of Divine operation, was direct by God's Spirit. The feature of not turning during their movement is a major feature (Ez. 1:9,12,17; 10:11,16). The impression was given of God's unchanging massive help towards the realization of His purpose with His people. This idea is alluded to when we are told that we who have accepted the new covenant, who have received the Spirit, are to "walk in step with the

Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). Likewise in all the commands to "walk not after the flesh, but after[following after] the Spirit... walk in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 5:16).

Ezekiel 1:13 *As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches. The fire went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning*- See on :7. The visual impression was of perpetual, churning activity and the cycling of power. This was a necessary encouragement for the exiles sitting in depression by the rivers of Babylon. God had not forgotten. His apparent silence only masked a hugely active and powerful system of operation. Whilst on one hand the descriptions here beg to be visualized, and some have made valiant attempts to do so, I'm unsure if that is the intention. The point is that the whole scene as described *cannot* be visualized. The cherubim on the tabernacle curtains were two dimensional, but here we have 3-D. The overall impression is of a huge, intricate, dynamic system of working which is in fact beyond our conception and visualization. It is beyond the visual. The 'end stress' of the vision is that the whole system is overarched by a rainbow, with the message of the end of Divine judgment and salvation by grace.

Ezekiel 1:14 *The living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning*- Perhaps the idea was that they ran and returned between Jerusalem and the exiles' camp in Babylon. The return from exile could be achieved in a flash, and likewise the Jews still in Judah could be taken to Babylon in a flash. "Ran and returned" suggests this was continually happening. Similar visions speak of how “they rest not day or night” (Rev. 4:8; Zech. 4:10). God takes no time out from His purpose to restore and save us. The exiles who thought God had forgotten them are being reminded of His incessant, constant activity to restore them. God doesn't just act now and again in our lives. Because He only comes to our minds "now and again", we are wrongly inclined to think that this is how He relates to us. But in fact His interaction and activity is constant, and we should seek towards a similar constant awareness of Him. This is surely the greatest aspect of salvation, to come to that point of total spiritual awareness and interaction with and for Him.

Ezekiel 1:15 *Now as I saw the living creatures, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, for each of the four faces of it*- The wheels make the living creatures appear as on a chariot, connecting with "the chariot of the cherubim" (1 Chron. 28:18). The firm grounding of this heavenly vision of power "on the earth" indicates that God's glory and activity were not simply in Heaven but active upon earth, both to transport a repentant Judah back to the land, and also to bring forth chariots of enemies to further destroy the land and temple. The difficulty of a wheel having four "faces" or sides is

intentional. Likewise the idea that the four wheels "went in their four directions" or "on their four sides" (:17). Again, the idea is that we can't visualize this system. Tempting as it is- just as it is to try to fully understand our own lives.

Ezekiel 1:16 *The appearance of the wheels and their work was like a beryl: and the four of them had one likeness; and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within a wheel*- The wheels imply they were chariots, or mounted on chariots; indeed this is a root meaning of the Hebrew word translated "cherub". Zechariah sees the same Angel chariots emerging from between two bronze mountains (Zech. 1:7-11), perhaps designed to recall the bronze pillars of the temple (1 Kings 7:15-22). The rebuilt temple was intended to be the point from which the Angel chariots would go forth; but that didn't happen at the very limited restoration from Babylon, and so the first four seals of Rev. 6 are full of allusion to this Zechariah vision- it was not left unfulfilled because of Israel's indolence, but rather was reapplied to the latter day events of which Revelation speaks.

The wheel within a wheel, each revolving as a gyroscope, deepens the impression of movement in contrary directions and yet all within the same direction. The confusion and contradictions which the exiles struggled with, as we do, were all somehow moving in the same direction, led by God's Spirit. Daniel was contemporary with Ezekiel, and so the mention of the beryl would connect with his description of the future Messiah figure as having a body of beryl, also replete with torches of fire and lightning just as seen in the cherubim vision (Dan. 10:6). As mentioned above, the final manifestation of God's glory, Spirit, judgment and salvation was to be in the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 1:17 *When they went, they went in their four directions. They didn't turn when they went*- Like a complex series of gyroscopes within each other, so that the movement might be without turning to wherever they advanced. Thus each wheel was composed of two circles, cutting one another at right angles, "one" only of which appeared to touch the ground ("upon the earth" :15), according to the direction the cherubim desired to move in. The idea was that what might appear to be contradictory direction was in fact all seamlessly part of movement in the same direction. And again this has so much meaning for our lives, as it did for the exiles by the river Chebar. What appears useless, taking us away from our intended direction, is being used by God in His bigger direction of our lives towards His Kingdom and restoration.

Ezekiel 1:18 *As for their rims, they were high and dreadful; and the four of them had their rims full of eyes all around*- See on :10. The abundance of eyes gave the impression of God's awareness and intense gaze upon His people. The captives were tempted to think that God was no longer looking at them, unaware of their struggles, their losses, their

history. But the vision impressed upon them that He was intensely aware. Likewise the same idea of many eyes is used to encourage the exiles to the same effect in Zech. 3:9; 4:10. And again, as noted on :16, Zechariah's stone full of eyes looked forward to the Lord Jesus, the Messiah figure who was to be the quintessence and personalization of all this Spirit, power and glory. The rims full of eyes may refer to eye-shaped gem stones, giving the idea of total knowledge of their situation and His power to transform it. Although the word "cherubim" doesn't occur in Ez. 1, the similar vision in Ez. 10 uses the term. The Hebrew word comes from the Assyrian *karabu*, "to be near". But Gesenius defines it as meaning 'to be gracious'. This awesome display of physical glory and power was to show the depressed exiles that God knew all about them, was powerful to save by grace, and was in fact very near to them.

Ezekiel 1:19 *When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up*- The wheels would speak of God's active engagement with things upon the earth. And there were times when the whole chariot was lifted up above the earth. Potentially, the exiles could have been restored to Zion- through God's gracious work through the cherubim. The intricacy of the vision is beyond exact understanding, and that's the point- that God's working is indeed impossible to depict as a visual or even verbal expression. Zechariah's visions of the restoration include chariots, wheels, horses, the winds / spirit, eyes on a stone, "the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth" (Zech. 4:10) etc. Those visions are in places hard to understand because they are describing what could potentially have happened to the exiles. But he is alluding all the time to Ezekiel's visions of the cherubim, to explain how the restoration could be accomplished.

Ezekiel 1:20 *Wherever the spirit was to go, they went under the spirit's control*- The wheels, it appears, represented God's people Israel on earth. If they had kept in step with the Spirit-Angel, following Him both to Babylon and back to Judah at His bidding, they would have been in step with God's plan for them, and all would have prospered. This passage appears to be behind Paul's appeal to us to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Ezekiel himself was the great example of this, for he was "lifted up" by the Spirit just as the wheels were lifted up, and went wherever he was taken, backwards and forwards between Babylon and Judah (Ez. 8:3; 11:1). He became part of the Cherubic system. See on Ez. 10:2,8. Ezekiel is introduced as being "among" the exiles camped by the Chebar. They could share his experience.

And the wheels were lifted up beside them, for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels- The spirit of the living creatures in the Heavens was the same spirit in the wheels, God's people who operationalize God's will here on earth. That vision was then

immediately demonstrated in practice when the Spirit of God entered into Ezekiel and he was sent to preach; just as the Spirit of the living creatures had been in the wheels, and they were sent to and fro in the earth (Ez. 2:2). And thus Ezekiel sees the hand of a man coming to *him*, just as he had seen it associated with the cherubim in the vision (Ez. 1:8 = Ez. 2:9). And surely Ezekiel is addressed as “son of man” in this context because the living creatures have the “likeness of a man” (Ez. 1:5); Ezekiel, God’s man on earth, alone and separate from his brethren, was merged with the huge Heavenly system above him, because God’s Spirit was in him, and he was willing to do God’s will. He was "amongst" the exiles by Chebar; they could have had his experience. Just as the cherub “stretched forth his hand” to direct another Angel, so God’s hand was stretched forth [s.w.] upon Ezekiel and he likewise was sent to do God’s will (Ez. 2:9; 8:3; 10:7 "the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet…behold, an hand was sent unto me…he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem.. "). Knowing that we are part of this huge Heavenly system of working, identified with the Angels and the very cherubim of glory above, can eclipse to a large extent our human feelings of loneliness.

The LXX gives "spirit of life". As will be explained in Ez. 20 and also was explicit in Jer. 31, the returning exiles were offered a new covenant which involved being enlivened with a new spirit, the Spirit which was to bring the dry bones of scattered Judah back to life and restoration to the land in Ez. 37. This was taught here right at the beginning of Ezekiel's vision. See on :21.

Ezekiel 1:21 *When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels*- Later, Ez. 37:14 alludes directly back to this vision of the Angel-cherubim's spirit being placed in the "wheels" of natural Israel: "I (the Angel) shall put My spirit in you, and ye shall live". The cherubim therefore can be interpreted in different ways. This was the Angelic system working with and for Israel, and repentant Judah were bidden become part of it. We who have accepted the new covenant and the gift of the Spirit can likewise be assured of the same huge activity of Spirit over our heads and within us.

Ezekiel 1:22 *Over the head of the living creature there was the likeness of an expanse, like an awesome crystal to look on, stretched forth over their heads above*- Continually we encounter the word and idea of "likeness". Ezekiel is seeing a vision of God's operations with His people, and we are unwise to try to attach meaning to every detail. The overall impression is of hugely powerful and active operation of God through His Spirit. The "expanse" seems to be a kind of crystal platform for God Himself who presided over the workings of this great system.

Ezekiel 1:23 *Under the expanse were their wings straight, the one toward the other: each one had two which covered their bodies on this side, and each one had two which covered their bodies on that side*- For "straight" see on :7. The cherubim are not so much pictured as supporting God but covering themselves in bowed reverence beneath Him.

Ezekiel 1:24 *When they went, I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a noise of tumult like the noise of an army. When they stood, they let down their wings*- See on :7. This great army was the Lord of hosts, of armies, of Angels. The cherubim also speak of God's people. The noise is that of the LXX in Ez. 3:12, which has "the voice as of a great earthquake". Later, Ezekiel hears the "noise" of "shaking" or earthquake as the bones of Israel in exile come together by the spirit / Angelic operation of Yahweh, thereby forming a great army (Ez. 37:7). The Spirit came from four places (Ez. 37:9)- just as there were four cherubim. As the sound of the cherubim was as of a great army, so revived Israel stood up as a great army (Ez. 37:10). Those who accept the new covenant have the same promise and even current experience of life in and with the Spirit. The Angel cherubim would work with God's disillusioned and broken people, to revive them, so that they would become like the guardian Angels of Israel above them. The point was that the Angel cherubim system which Ezekiel had seen at work amongst the captives was able to gather them together, and give life to the nation. And yet that didn't happen to those exiles- because they didn't walk in step with the spirit.

Ezekiel 1:25 *There was a voice above the expanse that was over their heads when they stood and let down their wings*- It was God's word which was paramount, and even more powerful than this huge system of Angelic power. And it was that word which Ezekiel was to speak to Israel.

Ezekiel 1:26 *Above the expanse that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and on the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man on it above*- The repeated sense of "likeness" is because here we have an impression of God Himself. We are made in God's image; not mentally, because we need to develop that image within us. Therefore it seems that we are somehow in His literal image. Whatever word we use about God- corporeal, material, tangible etc.- seems somehow inappropriate. But the fact is that God is real, He exists in an actual personal form, we pray to Him as children in His image, and we can form personal relationship with Him. He is not a puff of smoke out in the cosmos, nor a mere abstraction, but a personal being who had a begotten Son.

The statement that God was enthroned over Israel had huge [potential] significance for the exiles- who had just lost their human king. As Hosea had shown, the people had rejected Yahweh as their king, and 'king' is understood by him as a metaphor for 'husband'. But despite their rejection of Him, God wanted to as it were force through the relationship, to make it work, and says that He will be their king anyway. And now in all His glory He is presented as actually reigning over them. The plan had been as in Hos. 3:4 "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king" and then they would seek Him. But God presents Himself already as their King, so eager is He for their return to Him in relationship. In anger Yahweh had said in Hos. 11:5 "the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return". But His 'repentings were kindled together, and Hos. 13:10 shows God wanting to in any case be their King: "I will be thy king". Although His earthly throne in Jerusalem was to be destroyed, He was in fact still their King enthroned above them. The vision of Ez. 1 is before the fall of Jerusalem, and was to teach that the earthly "throne" was being removed [He was "enthroned in Zion… Yahweh will reign forever; your God, O Zion, to all generations", Ps. 9:11; 146:10], so that His people would perceive more clearly that He was indeed enthroned above them anyway- and that is of the essence, rather than any earthly symbol of His kingship.

Zion, the temple mount, had been understood as God's location, the place of His glory, from where He shone forth: "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth… Mount Zion, in which You have lived… His tabernacle is also in Salem; His dwelling place in Zion… Yahweh has built up Zion; He has appeared in His glory… Blessed be Yahweh from Zion, He who dwells at Jerusalem" (Ps. 50:2; 74:2; 76:2; 102:16; 135:21). Ezekiel's vision shows the cherubim shining forth in glory, and dwelling, within His people individually- even the depressed exiles by the river Chebar in Babylon. This message was so much needed, because the Jews had the wrong perception that "Mount Zion [was that] which can't be moved but remains forever" (Ps. 125:1). The destruction of Zion was therefore a tragedy: "Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest… Yahweh has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; He has stretched out the line, He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying; He has made the rampart and wall to lament; they languish together… He has kindled a fire in Zion, which has devoured its foundations" (Jer. 26:18; Lam. 2:8; 4:11). The cherubic glory would indeed leave Zion: "From the daughter of Zion all her majesty is departed" (Lam. 1:6). The prophets did predict a time when Yahweh would again be present in the physical Zion: "Yahweh of Armies will reign on Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem… Yahweh of Armies will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its mount… Yahweh's ransomed ones will return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy will be on their heads" (Is. 24:23; 31:4; 35:10), the "good news to Zion" of Is. 40:9, but the essence was unchanged- even now, He was reigning in all His cherubic glory over His people. If they

would accept His Kingship. And so "Zion" became used not for the physical temple mount, but for God's people in exile, e.g. Zech. 2:7 "Come, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon". Ezekiel's visions of the cherubim showed God even then reigning over the exiles. Not from Zion but from Heaven itself. The essence was not any geographical location, but relationship between Yahweh and His people. The tragedy is that the next chapter will state that for all this potential, God's people would not listen to Ezekiel, they would not see beyond what was immediately before their eyes. They would nurse their own miserable narratives, their victim mentality, and not see the wonderful reality of God's relationship with them. This is the tragedy. The vision of the cherubim had to be believed- but it was not. And that is the challenge for us.

Ezekiel 1:27 *I saw as it were glowing metal, as the appearance of fire within it all around, from the appearance of his waist and upward. From the appearance of his waist and downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him*- The idea is of the maximum heat known to people at that time- metal which was molten. The Babylonian worship of fire and the gods of fire was being deconstructed; Israel's God was the ultimate fire greater than all others. And yet that intense heat was ameliorated by the grace and promise of the rainbow that appeared silhouetted over it (:28).

Ezekiel 1:28 *As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke*- When Paul writes of our being transformed into “the image of Christ” (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: “The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord”. “The glory” in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul’s big point is that we each with unveiled face have beheld the Lord’s glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord’s glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord’s service, whatever it may be.

The appearance of the rainbow overarching all this power and glory was surely allusive to the first rainbow. It was a sign that judgment had passed and God's intention is now to save and not to destroy. We can too easily assume that the colour of "the brightness of glory" was white or golden light- because that is how it is illustrated by artists. But here we have the definition of that brightness of glory as being the rainbow. The vision of the heavenly throne room in Rev. 5 gives the same impression. God's glory is in His saving grace, not white light of itself. And it is in this sense that we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ- His grace, the promise of no more condemnation, His

salvation, the rainbow. Not a white, very bright light. What you see as you imagine looking into the face of the Lord Jesus is not bright light, but grace, an end of judgment, grace, a desire to save. And as 2 cor. 3:18,19 explain, that in due course is by stages, from glory to glory, reflected from our faces. By the work of the Spirit.

Presumably Ezekiel was intended to share his vision of the cherubim with the exiles. Representations of the cherubim were located on the ark, and in between them there was the shekinah glory of God, His very presence. It has been observed: "The only time Aaron and his successor high priests were admitted into the sacred space of the Holy of Holies was on the Day of Atonement; but also in that day “he shall place the incense upon the fire, before the Lord, so that the cloud of the incense shall envelop the ark cover that is over the tablets of Testimony, so that he shall not die” (Lev. 16:13). This means that, in order “not to die” because “man shall not see Me and live” [Exod. 33:20], even the high priest legally entering in the sacred space had to carefully make a smoke screen between himself and the ark so that he could not see the cherubim nor the space between them". So to see the cherubim was as it were to see God's presence. The implication may be that the atonement had been made, somehow. An ordinary priest like Ezekiel could now see the glory. And he was to share that with the exiles; but this vision had to be believed, which Ez. 2 suggests the exiles didn't. Far above their immediate suffering and depression, they were to see that God wanted them in His very presence. "Their faces were inward" in 2 Chron. 3:13, but here they are visible and looking outward. God as it were wanted to share His very presence with all Israel.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 2

Ezekiel 2:1 *He said to me, son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you*- We have just read of the cherubim sounding like a great army, and have noted on Ez. 1:20,21 some connections with the prophecy of Ez. 37, of a great army of Israel who were to stand upon their feet once the Spirit had revived them in captivity. Ezekiel perhaps represents the faithful remnant; he is asked to stand upon his feet, and yet in :2 it is the Spirit which stands him upon his feet. His willingness to be obedient was confirmed by the direct action of the Spirit, just as happens today. See on Ez. 3:2.

Ezekiel 2:2 *The spirit entered into me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me*- see on Ez. 1:20; 2:1. Ezekiel represents the remnant of the captives who were intended to be filled with the Spirit and stand upon their feet as a great army (Ez. 37:10).

Ezekiel 2:3 *He said to me, Son of man, I send you to the children of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against Me. They and their fathers have transgressed against*

Me even to this very day- In Ez. 18, the captives seem to reason that they are unjustly suffering because of their fathers' sins. But here it is made clear that they were sinning themselves "to this very day". Most of Israel and Judah didn't want to leave the lands of their exile and return to the land of Judah. They were rebellious against all God's gracious plans for them, just as Israel had 'rebelled' by refusing to enter the land of promise in Num. 14:9 (s.w.). Jehoiakim had 'rebelled' against the king of Babylon, resulting in the earlier Babylonian invasion; and finally Zedekiah also rebelled, leading to the taking of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple (2 Kings 24:1,20; 2 Chron. 36:13; Ez. 17:15 s.w.). Judah are portrayed as most miserable; in rebellion against Yahweh, and also against the king of Babylon. They were unhappy, rebels without a cause; just as are those today who will not totally surrender to God. God's plan at the restoration was to purge out the rebels and save the remnant (Ez. 20:38 s.w.), and Ezekiel was to play a part in this.

Ezekiel 2:4 *The children are impudent and stiff-hearted. I am sending you to them; and you shall tell them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh'*- It was a tough ministry- to be sent to people who he was told from the beginning would not be responsive. Ministry work is easy enough when crowds are responding, but not when we know from the start we are working with hard hearts- because the God who alone knows the hearts has told us that they are stuff hearted.

Ezekiel 2:5 *They, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear (for they are a rebellious house), will at least know that there has been a prophet among them*- As noted on :4, it's a hard ministry to keep witnessing to people whom God has revealed as hard hearted. We might think that they would only realize Ezekiel was a prophet when his predictions began to come true. And yet the return from exile was decades future. So they "knew" that he was a prophet in their consciences. Even those who reject the word and seem hard hearted to it- still have a conscience. And their aggression to us is often exactly because in their conscience, they know the truth of the word preached to them.

Ezekiel 2:6 *You, son of man, don't be afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with you, and you do dwell among scorpions*- There was active opposition to Ezekiel's witness to the exiles- they persecuted him as with "briars and thorns", behaving as scorpions to him. See on Ez. 3:25. His face had to be hardened against their faces (Ez. 3:8). This was in the very early days of the exile. Jewish tradition has it that Ezekiel was murdered at the command of senior Jews in Babylon (See *The Lives And Deaths Of The Prophets* in J.H. Charlesworth, ed., Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1985). The same book claims that Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh, and Jeremiah was stoned to death by the Jews). By the time of

Isaiah 66, we see that even well after the restoration had happened, there was still major persecution of the faithful remnant and their prophets.

Don't be afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house- Jeremiah speaks of how he came to see Israel for who they were: "The Lord made it known to me and I knew; then thou didst show me their evil deeds" (Jer. 11:8). Ezekiel was shown "what the house of Israel is doing in the dark" (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must've been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would've been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and "iron pillar" to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn't be "dismayed at [the] looks" of those who watched them with anger and consternation (Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

The allusion is to Dt. 1:17, where the judges of Israel were not to be afraid at the looks or faces (s.w.) of men, "because the judgment is God's".

Ezekiel 2:7 *You shall speak My words to them, whether they will hear, or whether they will refuse to hear; for they are most rebellious*- Sharing God's word should be done whether or not there is response. Ezekiel was obviously tempted not to speak God's words to them because they weren't listening, but still he is encouraged to continue. This is a timeless principle for all ministry.

Ezekiel 2:8 *But you, son of man, hear what I tell you; don't be rebellious like that rebellious house: open your mouth, and eat that which I give you*- By refusing to preach to the rebellious, Ezekiel himself would become like them- "rebellious". We have here a parade example of a sin of omission. It is such sins which are likely our problem rather than cold blooded sins of commission. For how many times have we not shared God's word when we ought to have done, fearing how people might look at us (:6). But the sin of omission particularly in view here would have been refusing to eat the scroll- refusing to take God's word for others deeply and personally within ourselves.

Ezekiel 2:9 *When I looked, behold, a hand was put forth to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was therein*- Whether Ezekiel read the words and then later repeated them is unlikely, because the opening rubric for the visions implies he had God's word coming to him, and then spoke it out. The hand was perhaps "put forth" from the cherubim

vision. That enormous Spirit activity was in response to God's word, which Ezekiel was to now preach.

Ezekiel 2:10 *He spread it before me. It was written within and without; and there were written therein lamentations and mourning and woe*- These were the woes to come still upon Jerusalem. Remember Ezekiel went into captivity with the second batch of exiles, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was yet to come. The purpose of sharing this "woe" with the captives in Babylon and perhaps also the Jews left in the land was surely so that they might repent. Just as Jonah announced Nineveh's coming doom in forty days' time... with no mention of repentance. But the very existence of the prophecy elicited repentance, and so the judgment didn't come.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 3

Ezekiel 3:1 *He said to me, Son of man, eat that which you find. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel*- Eating the scroll spoke of the need at the beginning of his ministry to absorb the message personally into himself. Our preaching is not to be a mere forwarding of information to others, a sharing of fact in a mechanical way, a passive invitation to attend church social events. Rather is the reality of judgment to come and the real possibility of participating in the coming restored Kingdom of God to be part of our very core being. Only when we personally identify with it will our personal witness become compelling.

Ezekiel 3:2 *So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat the scroll*- Ezekiel was told to eat the scroll (:1), and when he expressed willingness to do so, he was made to eat the scroll- which otherwise, in a literal sense, would have been impossible. We recall how on Ez. 2:1 we noted that he was told to stand on his feet, and when willing to do so, the Spirit made him stand on his feet (Ez. 2:2). And this is how God works with us today. See on :11.

Ezekiel 3:3 *He said to me, Son of man, cause your belly to eat, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you. Then I ate it; and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth*- As explained on :1, Ezekiel like all preachers had to internalize God's word before preaching it. To eat a literal scroll would have seemed impossible; but he was willing, and so the Spirit - Angel empowered him to do so (:2). What he instinctively imagined to be bitter and impossible to digest- turned out as sweet as honey. But note: "In *my* mouth". The hope of the message was sweet to him, and to all who would accept it. But the content was "woe" to Jerusalem (Ez. 2:10). That bitter judgment could be turned to sweet honey- for those who chose true spirituality. The same figure is used in Rev. 10:9. There is indeed a silver lining to all suffering caused as a result of Divine judgment. But it's not immediate; it is the hope of the Kingdom and personal salvation for God's true people. But the reality was that the word would not be sweet for those judged by it; hence in Rev. 10:9 the scroll was sweet as honey in the mouth, but then bitter in his stomach. This may be reflected here by Ezekiel subsequently feeling "bitterness" (:14). Bitterness is the experience of the condemned,

and the prophets so identified with their message and audience that like the Lord Jesus, they felt the bitterness of condemnation within themselves, whilst personally being innocent and experiencing the word and purpose of God as sweet as honey.

Ezekiel 3:4 *He said to me, Son of man, go to the house of Israel, and speak My words to them*- "Son of man" is of course the common title for the Lord Jesus, who Ezekiel pointed forward to. But the phrase can simply mean 'a human one'. It was Ezekiel's humanity which was to be the basis of appeal to the audience, as ours should be likewise.

Ezekiel 3:5 *For you are not sent to a people of a foreign speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel*- see on Jer. 23:18,22. The foreign, hard language is surely that of Assyria and Babylon (Is. 28:11; 33:19).

Ezekiel 3:6 *Not to many peoples of a foreign speech and of a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you*- The fact Gentiles would have responded in a given situation is often held up as an extra reason for Israel's condemnation. The God who knows all possible futures sees this more clearly then we do; if he or she or they had been given what *we* have been, they would have responded far better. See on Mt. 11:21.

We may well wonder why Ezekiel was sent to the first deportees in Babylon, to announce to them the sins of the Jews still in Judah and the impending destruction of the temple because of their idolatries. Why wasn't he sent to tell this to the Jews in Judah, so that *they* might repent? Perhaps the implication was that if the Jews in exile, that first group taken captive, had repented, then *their* repentance would have been enough to forestall the planned judgment upon those back in Judah. But it didn't work out like that. The tragedy was, according to Ez. 3:6, that had Ezekiel preached his message in the Babylonian language to the Babylonians, they would've repented. In this we have an insight into the pain of God, knowing as He does all possible futures, all potential outcomes. Truly the hardness of heart of the exiles was something amazing. And God likewise looks down upon our lives today, seeing all possibilities, and how unbelievers would respond so much more to Him than His own dear people. It's the pain of the parent, knowing that other children would respond so much more to their love than their own beloved offspring. The Lord Jesus had something of this when He commented that Tyre and Sidon would've repented had they had His message preached to them; but Israel would not (Mt. 11:21). See on Ez. 10:2,7.

Ezekiel 3:7 *But the house of Israel will not listen to you; for they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are obstinate and hard-hearted*- God told Ezekiel that Israel would not hear his preaching; and yet Ezekiel repeatedly prefaced his preaching addresses with an appeal to *please hear* God's word (Ez. 6:3; 13:2; 18:25; 20:47; 34:7; 36:1,4). He was hoping against hope; his preaching work was asking him to attempt the impossible. To make a nation hear who would not hear. Jeremiah likewise was told that Israel wouldn't hear him (Jer. 7:27), but still he pleaded with them to hear (Jer. 9:20; 10:1; 11:6; 16:12; 17:24; 38:15).

Ezekiel 3:8 *Behold, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads*- The idea is that he was face to face up against the Jews. The hardness of their foreheads was a reflection of how stiff hearted they were, as earlier lamented (:7). The heart effectively means the mind. Ezekiel was to

have the Spirit work upon his heart, confirming him in the path and mental positions he had chosen; just as God had apparently confirmed Judah in their hard mindedness. There is an "evil spirit from the Lord" such as plagued Saul, and also the holy Spirit from Him. He confirms men in the mental path they choose. "Hard" is the word translated "obstinate" in :7. They both were confirmed or hardened in the mental attitudes they adopted.

Ezekiel 3:9 *As an adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead. Don't be afraid of them, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house*- The hearts of the captives were to be described with the same word, "adamant" (Zech. 7:12). God can harden us in the way of either spirituality or hardness of heart. This psychological strengthening was necessary for Ezekiel as he engaged with Jews hardened by the experience of captivity. The command not to be dismayed is exactly that spoken to Israel as they first entered the promised land (Dt. 1:21; 31:8; Josh. 1:9; 8:1; 10:25). Ezekiel and the repentant remnant could likewise leave Babylon (cp. Egypt) and enter and possess the land, against all apparent obstacles. The same word is used in Is. 51:7, where the faithful at the time of the captivity are urged not to be dismayed because of opposition from apostate Jews. Jeremiah had been given the same encouragement (Jer. 1:17). Circumstances repeat between the lives of God's children. We are not alone. No situation is totally unprecedented. This is the value of empathetic Bible reading, as well as of fellowship with others within God's people; for through them we also realize that we are not alone.

Ezekiel 3:10 *Moreover He said to me, Son of man, all My words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears*- This appeal had been materially symbolized by the eating of the scroll with those words upon it. Ezekiel is several times encouraged not to be a mere purveyor or forwarder of information, but to internalize the message. This is even now what makes for credible, compelling witness.

Ezekiel 3:11 *Go to them of the captivity, to the children of your people, and speak to them, and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh;' whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear*- Ezekiel was told to "go to them", he was willing, and was confirmed by the Spirit lifting him up and transporting him there in a moment. We have earlier seen this confirmation by the Spirit of his willingness; see on Ez. 2:2; 3:1,2.

Ezekiel 3:12 *Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of Yahweh from His place*- As noted on :11, this was the Spirit's confirmation of Ezekiel himself being willing to make the journey and "go". The Angels are involved with the Cherubim. Yet in Ezekiel's context, the language of chariots inevitably suggests the approach of enemy armies (Ez. 26:10). Thus the cherubim chariots represented not only the Angels, but also the chariots of God's enemies; for the Lord of the Angelic hosts was manifested on earth in the Babylonian hosts. The word for the "rushing" noise of the cherubim wheels is used elsewhere about the noise of the chariots of Israel's enemies and the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 10:22; 47:3; Nah. 3:2). The Angelic armies of Heaven were therefore revealed on earth in the chariots of Babylon; it was both Babylon and the Angelic cherubim behind them who took Judah captive, and who could also return them to their land. Hence the stress in Ezekiel's vision that the wheels of the cherubim were

on the earth / land. Clearly enough, the things that go on in our lives, even those things which appear as brutal and tragic as the Babylonian chariots were to Judah, are not random machinations of men; they are, in some unfathomable way, under the direct control of a God of love, who only means to do us good at our latter end.

Yet the cherubim also speak of God's people. The LXX here has "the voice as of a great earthquake". Later, he hears the "noise" of "shaking" or earthquake as the bones of Israel in exile come together by the spirit / Angelic operation of Yahweh (Ez. 37:7). The Spirit came from four places (Ez. 37:9)- just as there were four cherubim. As the sound of the cherubim was as of a great army (Ez. 1:24), so revived Israel stood up as a great army (Ez. 37:10).The Angel cherubim would work with God's disillusioned and broken people, to revive them, so that they would become like the guardian Angels of Israel above them. The point was that the Angel cherubim system which Ezekiel had seen at work amongst the captives was able to gather them together, and give life to the nation. And yet that didn't happen to those exiles- because they didn't walk in step with the spirit.

Ezekiel 3:13 *I heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, even the noise of a great rushing*- The four Angels or groups of Angels that comprised them had wings which "kissed one another" (A.V. mg.) and moved with a soft, smooth sound, despite all four being distinct in some ways. Thus the loving co-operation of the Angels in their work is emphasized. See on Gen. 1:26. The wings made a noise, but apparently didn't turn or move as they "went" (Ez. 1:9). This again is the paradox of God's working- motion without movement, winged beings moving without moving their wings. And so it seemed to the exiles; the apparent lack of Divine movement was in fact movement. And this likewise explains the apparent silence of God in our human lives.

Ezekiel 3:14 *So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away*- This was in confirmation of his own desire to "go" there in obedience (:11).

And I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; and the hand of Yahweh was strong on me- The bitterness is explained on :3. The word of judgment was sweet as honey in Ezekiel's mouth, but when John ate a similar scroll, it was sweet as honey in his mouth but then bitter in his stomach (Rev. 10:9). This is the bitterness spoken of here. Ezekiel had absorbed the word into himself, so that he felt the bitterness for those who would be judged by it. See on :15.

Ezekiel 3:15 *Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel Abib, by the river Chebar, and to where they lived; and I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days*- He sat astonished and silent among the captives for seven days when he arrived to them with his message of judgment. The connection with Job's friends is obvious and intended. Ezekiel, the one whom Israel hated and rejected as they did all the prophets, beating some and killing some, felt their grief and sat with them, deeply sympathizing, just as Job's friends initially did. The Hebrew translated "astonished" is usually translated "destroyed", "desolate" or "wasted". All that had happened to Israel for their sins, Ezekiel felt had happened to him, such was his identification with sinners. Two closely related words occur in Ez. 3:14,26 [*marah* cp. *maree*]: "I went in *bitterness*… they are a *rebellious* house". Why was Ezekiel bitter / rebellious of spirit when he went to preach to his people; even though he personally *was* willing to preach to them? Surely it was because he shared their spirit with them; he so entered into their spirit that he reflected their feelings within himself, even though he was not ultimately

rebellious personally as they were. Because Israel's heart would melt and be feeble "Because of the tidings" which Ezekiel taught, therefore *his* heart sighed and broke because he identified with how they would later feel when his words came true (Ez. 21:6,7).

Ezekiel 3:16 *It happened at the end of seven days, that the word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- The seven days of Ezekiel's silence could be interpreted as disobedience to the command to speak. Hence he needed encouragement. He perhaps feared their looks, perceiving they were men hardened by the traumas of captivity and exile. He was therefore temporarily disobedient, or hesitant to obey, the commands not to fear their looks.

Ezekiel 3:17 *Son of man, I have made you a watchman to the house of Israel: therefore hear the word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me*- As suggested on :16, this can be read as a rebuke of Ezekiel's seven days silence. If Ezekiel personally was Israel's watchman, then he is the watchman in view in Ez. 33:2,6,7.

Ezekiel was prepared for his ministry by being told to eat and absorb the roll containing the words he was to preach. He was then picked up the spirit-wind, and transported to his audience (Ez. 3:12,13). The noise of the wind in the wings of the cherubim is elsewhere interpreted as the sound of God's word (Ez. 10:5). Yet Ezekiel 3 goes on to warn Ezekiel that if he doesn't preach the word to his audience, their blood will be upon his head (Ez. 3:17-21). This warning was given after Ezekiel had been transported to the people but sat silent with them for 7 days (Ez. 3:16). I understand from all this was that God's intention was that His message was not to be merely parroted out by Ezekiel, but that it was to be fundamentally part of him; and the message of God's word, symbolized by the awesome wind-spirit generated by the movement of the cherubim's wings, was to propel him forward to make his witness to hard faced men and women. This is the ideal. And yet Ezekiel even when he failed to live to up it, was still propelled forward in the mission. And many a missionary knows the truth of this. I take the way that Ezekiel was told to go preach to the captives, and yet was then taken up and transported there, to suggest a reluctance on his part. Perhaps being struck dumb until the fulfilment of the prophecies (Ez. 3:26; 24:27) suggests this was a punishment of Ezekiel for a lack of faith- for this is exactly the judgment upon Zacharias for faithlessness (Lk. 1:20).

Many times we read of how those who hold God's word are to shine it out to others. The Old Testament tends to use a Hebrew word translated "warn" in speaking of how prophets like Ezekiel were to warn-out, or shine out, God's word to others (Ez. 3:17,18 etc.). Yet the same word occurs in Dan. 12:3 about how the preachers of God's word will "shine" eternally in His Kingdom. The connection is clear- how we shine forth God's word now, is how we will eternally shine it forth. Thus in the practice of preaching today, we are working out who and how we shall eternally be. The very concept of preaching is therefore partly designed by God for our benefit, to develop us into the persons we shall eternally be, by His grace. When we read that God will 'require the blood' of those to whom we fail to preach His word (Ez. 3:18), we may here have another reference to a 'going through' of our deeds at the day of judgment. There, perhaps, we will have to give an account, an explanation, of why our neighbours and workfellows lie eternally dead- because we were too shy, too weakly convinced of the eternal realities we knew, to tell them. For the Hebrew word

translated "require" implies some kind of inquisition / explanation. Here we see the vital importance of witness.

Ezekiel 3:18 *When I tell the wicked, You shall surely die*- The same phrase used in Genesis for the condemnation of Adam. Adam is everyman.

And you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand- We may reason that if we fail to upbuild a brother, or preach, then God will somehow do it anyway. But this doesn't seem to be the spirit of Ez. 3:18. We are to appeal to men and women with the message that there is no third road; that it truly is a case of believe or perish. There is no example of apologetics in their preaching, but rather an utter confidence that they were holding out to men the words that gave eternal life. Their words, lives and body language reflected their deep sense of the peril of those outside of Christ. By preaching, they were freed from the blood of men (20:26); evidently alluding to how the watchman must die if he didn't warn the people of their impending fate. In line with this, "*necessity* is laid upon me…woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). Not talking to folks is perhaps the easiest and commonest sin of omission in our lives.

Ezekiel 3:19 *Yet if you warn the wicked, and he doesn't turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have saved your own life*- The "you" in view is primarily Ezekiel, the watchman. By sitting there with the captives, scared of their hard, sceptical looks and saying nothing... Ezekiel was risking his eternal salvation. By warning them, he was saving his life. We note that the captives were in a "wicked way"; and yet in Ez. 18 they apparently reasoned that they were innocent and unfairly suffering because of their fathers' sins. "Turn" is the word commonly used for repentance and also for the 'return' from Babylon to the land. If the captives repented, then the return and restoration would have happened. This was the significance and deep weight of Ezekiel's ministry.

Ezekiel 3:20 *Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at your hand*- If a person turns to sin, God confirms them in that way by laying a stumbling block before them. We are not to do this; but God can. He confirms us in the way we choose to go. The idea of righteous deeds being remembered struck a chord with Nehemiah, who would have been aware of this prophecy; he asks for his good deeds to be "remembered" (Neh. 13:14,31). This was not, therefore, a works reliant attitude. Nehemiah was citing Ezekiel's words. We are saved by grace, the penny a day of the parable which all receive (Mt. 20:2); and yet the nature of our eternity will be a reflection of the works we do in this life. All we do for God will have its eternal moment and significance. Our lives therefore should be devoted to such good works. For we are thereby shaping our eternal experience.

Ezekiel 3:21 *Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man, that the righteous not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and you have saved your own life*- The allusion is to Elisha warning (s.w.) the king of Israel, and the king thereby saving his life from the Syrians (2 Kings 6:10). And the leadership of

God's people were again being warned by a prophet, and could save their lives from the potential invasion by Babylon. The sword was coming upon Judah, and Ezekiel as the watchman was warning them, so that they could save their lives and avert the invasion planned by God (Ez. 33:3-9 s.w.). This was the tragedy of the final Babylonian invasion which destroyed the temple and sacked Jerusalem. It was avoidable, if Ezekiel's message had been heeded.

Ezekiel 3:22 *The hand of Yahweh was there on me; and He said to me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with you*- Just as the Lord Jesus heard God's word in private and then revealed it to Israel, so with Ezekiel. "Plain" here could as well be translated "valley" as it is in Ez. 37:1,2. "The valley of dry bones" may have been the same valley in view as here.

Ezekiel 3:23 *Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and behold, the glory of Yahweh stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face*- The point to note is that God's glory was as much in that plain / valley, perhaps in the Jerusalem area, as it was by the Chebar in Babylonia. Stephen was to later point out that "the God of glory" likewise appeared to Abraham when he was outside of the promised land. He was not limited by geography nor nationality. The cherubim of glory are described as the Lord being “there”, and yet they move away to Babylon. Israel were being asked to follow their Angel, as they had followed the Angel in the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness. But they refused, generally, and therefore the great things the Angels had potentially made possible were not realized. Our following of the Angel is just as real, and just as much a matter of daily freewill choice, as it was for the exiles. See on Ez. 35:10.

Ezekiel 3:24 *Then the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet*- As noted on :22, the "plain" is the same Hebrew word translated "valley" in the valley of dry bones prophecy (Ez. 37:1,2). And the connection continues, and that the Spirit enters Ezekiel and he stands on his feet- the very same words used of the dry bones in Ez. 37:10. Ezekiel was representative of what could have happened to all the dry bones of Israel in captivity.

And He spoke with me, and said to me, Go, shut yourself inside your house- The wonderful vision given was to strengthen him for the pain of the abuse he was about to suffer. They Jews bound him and placed him under house arrest; but before that happened, he himself was to shut himself inside his house, representing how God had for the time being closed His house to the Jews. Psychologically this was also powerful, in that what they wanted to do to Ezekiel he had effectively already done to himself. They bond him with shackles (:25) but then God does this to Ezekiel in Ez. 4::8. God was in control even of their own apparently freely chosen hatred of Ezekiel, and worked through it to further His appeal for repentance.

Ezekiel 3:25 *But you, son of man, behold, they shall lay shackles on you and shall bind you with them*- This suggests Ezekiel was actually tied up by the Jewish captives he prophesied to by the river Chebar; they set their foreheads hard against hearing the prophecies of hope (Ez. 3:9). See on Ez. 2:6. In Ez. 4:8 it is God who puts shackles (s.w.) upon Ezekiel so that he lives out an acted parable of captivity. But perhaps this refers to Him working through the angry Jews who bound Ezekiel with these shackles.

And you shall not go out among them- The same words are used of how Jeremiah had gone out among the people preaching his message, and was then imprisoned (Jer. 37:4). Jeremiah was experiencing this about the same time as Ezekiel. Their lives were in parallel, just as through fellowship with other believers we too learn that we are not alone nor are our experiences as terribly unique and unprecedented as we may feel without that fellowship.

Ezekiel 3:26 *I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth, that you shall be mute, and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house*- This may not have been permanent, because we twice read of Ezekiel's mouth being opened to prophecy (Ez. 24:27, four years later; and Ez. 29:21). The idea may be that their rejection of him and his message meant that there was no more word from Yahweh to the people. But it could be that he was dumb literally. This would have been a powerful acted parable. They likely would have liked to imagine that being struck dumb was judgment from God as in Lk. 1:22. But the more perceptive would have realized it was in fact God's silence toward them, and Ezekiel was a living embodiment of the word he preached. For he had internalized the word preached, represented by eating the scroll of the words, and therefore he was the word made flesh to his audience, as we should be.

Ezekiel 3:27 *But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall tell them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: He who hears, let him hear; and he who forbears, let him forbear;' for they are a rebellious house*- These words are quoted by the Lord Jesus when He invites those who have ears to hear, to hear (Mt. 11:15; 13:9). He was the One whose mouth Yahweh had opened supremely. The LXX "He who is disobedient, let him disobedient" is quoted in Rev. 22:11. Clearly Ezekiel's preaching to the captives is no mere historical record, but is set up by way of NT allusion as representative of all who hear the Gospel of the restored Kingdom and the call to repent in view of that.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 4

Ezekiel 4:1 *You also, son of man, take a tile, and lay it before yourself, and portray on it the city - Jerusalem*- Such engraven tiles with cities upon them were common in Babylon. Again we see God working to appeal to people in local terms. And our witness of His word must be likewise. It's unclear where Ezekiel was imprisoned in Ez. 3, with the captives in Babylonia or in Jerusalem. His message in the acted parable which follows is clearly to the effect that Babylon would come a third time against Jerusalem and destroy it (:16). The message of judgment was of course an appeal to "turn" in repentance, for that was the aim of Ezekiel's witness as Ez. 3 has made clear. If this parable was acted out by the Chebar, then there was the possibility that the repentance of those already in captivity could have saved Jerusalem from the threatened destruction. For it was God's intention that Judah repent and Jerusalem not be destroyed.

Ezekiel 4:2 *Lay siege against it, and build forts against it, and cast up a mound against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around*- Presumably this was done by drawing these things upon the tile. But it was as if by doing so, a siege was actually laid against Jerusalem- so certain was this prophetic

word of fulfilment. Presumably Ezekiel was still dumb at this time (Ez. 3:26). Hence the acted parable, the still small voice of lived example which was and is more powerful than the spoken word.

Ezekiel 4:3 *Take for yourself an iron pan and set it for a wall of iron between yourself and the city: and set your face toward it, and it shall be besieged, and you shall lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel*- The setting of Ezekiel's face represented the setting of God's face against Jerusalem (Jer. 21:10; Ez. 15:7). Jeremiah's message in Jerusalem was being repeated by Ezekiel to the captives in Babylon. The iron pan speaks of the "northern iron" of Babylon (Jer. 15:12; 28:13- again we note similarities between Jeremiah and Ezekiel, prophesying at about the same time and delivering the same message, Jeremiah in Judah and Ezekiel to the captives already in Babylon). Later Ezekiel would liken the defences of Jerusalem to a weak "wall" of clay bricks that toppled easily (Ez. 13:12,14). But Ezekiel represented God, and the iron wall spoke of the barrier between Jerusalem and God through which their desperate prayers would not penetrate. It was a "sign" in that "the house of Israel" were to realize this is how it would be, and repent so it didn't happen. There is a gap between the Divine pronouncement and its realization, in which we can repent and change that pronouncement. We also live in such a gap, and have repented and changed the verdict of eternal death for us. "The house of Israel" is a term used repeatedly in Ezekiel. And yet the captives he was among were apparently from Judah. But it was God's plan that at the restoration, both the ten tribes and Judah would together repent and return to the land. Perhaps there were also members of the ten tribes in captivity in Babylon, or Ezekiel's prophecies were to be taken to them, as they were apparently taken to the Jews still in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 4:4 *Moreover lie on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; according to the number of the days that you shall lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity*- Again we see the "son of man" Ezekiel looking forward to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate bearer of Israel's sins. Ezekiel was to "lie" on his side, but the Hebrew is often used for sleeping. Whilst sleeping he was to bear their sin and when he awoke from the final sleep, their sin would have been carried; again looking forward to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Samaria, the capital of the ten tribe kingdom, is described by Ezekiel as being on the left side (Ez. 16:46). To 'bear iniquity' meant 'to bear the punishment for iniquity' (Ex. 28:43; Num. 18:1 etc.). They were as it were to sleep and then arise at the restoration.

Ezekiel 4:5 *For I have appointed the years of their iniquity to be to you a number of days, even three hundred and ninety days. So you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel*- Perhaps some restoration could have happened to the ten tribes after 390 years, if the right conditions had been fulfilled by them; although there's no sign it ever did. See on :6. Perhaps God was willing to accept Ezekiel as the sin bearer for them, whether or not they repented; but they didn't even accept that. The start of the 390 day-years may have begun some time earlier for Israel, the ten tribes. We note that 390 + 40 gives 430, which was the number of years Israel were in Egypt (Ex. 12:40). The LXX reads 190, not 390. If we take the beginning of Israel's punishment as the deportations under the reign of Pekah in BC 736, this brings us to BC546. If Judah's punishment began with the destruction of Jerusalem in BC586, forty years from that comes to the same date, BC546.

Ezekiel 4:6 *Again, when you have accomplished these, you shall lie on your right side, and shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for a year, have I appointed it to you*- Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years. Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. See on Ez. 6:8.

Ezekiel 4:7 *You shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm uncovered; and you shall prophesy against it*- Ezekiel was representing God, whose arm was uncovered in His active judgment of Jerusalem. He was ready for action, and only desperate repentance would change this. But the same phrase "arm uncovered" is found only in Is. 52:10, which speaks of how God's arm was uncovered in preparing to destroy the nations abusing Israel through the revelation of Messiah. There is always a silver lining in God's judgments. The judgment of His people was to presage the destruction of Babylon and the establishment of His restored kingdom in Israel at the restoration, replete with a Messiah figure. But His people precluded this possibility by their disobedience.

Ezekiel 4:8 *Behold, I lay shackles on you, and you shall not turn yourself from one side to the other, until you have accomplished the days of your siege*- "Shackles" is the same word used of how the Jews bound Ezekiel with shackles in Ez. 3:25. Perhaps this refers to Him working through the angry Jews who bound Ezekiel with these shackles. Our apparent limitations are used by God and even placed by Him, even through the hands of evil people; in order that we might be a witness to them and lead them to repentance.

Ezekiel 4:9 *Take for yourself also wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, and put them in one vessel and make bread of it; according to the number of the days that you shall lie on your side, even three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat of it*- The idea was that whilst sleeping in captivity, Israel and Judah would eat only very basic food without meat. But the book of Esther reveals that this isn't what happened in the longer term; many of Judah ended up prosperous. Again we have here a potential scenario which was precluded by the utter refusal of the Jews generally to repent. See on :16.

Ezekiel 4:10 *Your food which you shall eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time you shall eat it*- The way Peter was given a vision and asked to eat what he had previously thought unclean has many similarities with Ezekiel going through a similar experience (Ez. 4:10-14 cp. Acts 10:14). Peter was intended to have made the connection, which he apparently didn't do. We too find points of contact between our experiences and those of Biblical characters. This is where familiarity with the basic text of scripture can open up the meaning of our lives to us.

Ezekiel 4:11 *You shall drink water by measure, the sixth part of a hin: from time to time you shall drink*- Not much less than a pint of water / day, less than what today would be considered a necessary fluid intake in a hot climate (1 Kings 22:27; Is. 30:20). Ezekiel was effectively imprisoned at this time, as explained at the end of Ez. 3; the idea was that his captors would in turn suffer like this.

Ezekiel 4:12 *You shall eat it as barley cakes, and you shall bake it in their sight with dung that comes out of man*- This suggests a very stark existence without even firewood. But as noted on :9, God punished His people far less than He planned, less their iniquities deserved, as Ezra observed to the captives who returned (Ezra 9:13). Here we see how God's statements may not come true because His mercy and pity is stronger than His judgment of sin. But that grace is not automatic, and is given depth and meaning the more we consider the reality of the statements of judgment made in His anger. See on :16; Ez. 5:2.

Ezekiel 4:13 *Yahweh said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will drive them*- They were to be purposefully defiled, made to eat unclean food (Hos. 9:3), driven to realize that they existed as unclean in God's eyes, their situation precluding perfect obedience to Divine law. And thereby they were to be driven to appreciate His grace. Again, there was purpose and intention behind all God's judgments for sin.

Ezekiel 4:14 *Then I said, Ah Lord Yahweh! Behold, my soul has not been polluted; for from my youth up even until now have I not eaten of that which dies of itself, or is torn of animals; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth*- The implication might be that given such a lack of meat in the diet, the captives like Ezekiel would be driven to eat unclean meat. We wonder whether Ezekiel was in fact so totally technically obedient; his words recall that of the older brother who claimed total obedience to his father.

Ezekiel 4:15 *Then He said to me, Behold, I have given you cow's dung for man's dung, and you shall prepare your bread thereon*- This was a concession to Ezekiel, showing how God is open to dialogue with man. However, the use of any dung would still have made the food ritually unclean; so the essential lesson of :13 was still to be learnt.

Ezekiel 4:16 *Moreover He said to me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight, and with fearfulness; and they shall drink water by measure, and in dismay*- The situation acted out by Ezekiel was however to go on many years, not just during the siege of Jerusalem. The idea was

that the deprivations of the siege were to continue throughout their captivity. But in wrath God remembered mercy and this didn't in fact happen; see on :9,12.

Ezekiel 4:17 *That they may want bread and water, and be dismayed one with another, and pine away in their iniquity*- This pining away was that of Lev. 26:39, the judgment for breaking covenant. But we must recall that they had just witnessed Ezekiel bearing their iniquity, in the spirit of the Christ. Their pining away, sitting depressed by the rivers of Babylon pining away in their sins, could have been resolved by realizing that Ezekiel had carried the punishment for their iniquity. He really was set up as their representative, "son of man" saviour. But as later with the Lord Jesus, they refused to accept that. See on Ez. 5:3.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 5

Ezekiel 5:1 *You, son of man, take a sharp sword. You shall use it like a barber's razor on yourself, and shall cause it to pass on your head and on your beard. Then take balances to weigh, and divide the hair*- This was presumably to be done during the period Ezekiel was laying bound in Ez. 4. Ezekiel represented God, as made clear throughout the acted parable of Ez. 4. God like Ezekiel was taking the sword of the Babylonians into His own hand and as it were cutting off His own glory, represented by Ezekiel's hair (1 Cor. 11:15). Ezekiel may well have been a Nazirite with long hair. The eating of unclean food would have meant the end of his vow, and the need to shave his hair. The use of balances spoke of God's judgment of His glory, His hair, His people. They in all their sinfulness, like us, were intended to be His glory. God was not therefore left without personal suffering and loss through the sword He was bringing upon His people.

Ezekiel 5:2 *A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled; and you shall take a third part, and strike with the sword around it; and a third part you shall scatter to the wind - and I will draw out a sword after them*- We would expect from this that the exiles would be persecuted and slain in captivity, and this surely was God's intended judgment. But in Esther we find the exiles in prosperity, in positions of power, and respected by their captors; and Jeremiah concludes his long prophecy with the information that Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled King, was exalted " above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon" and he was given special favour and honour by the King of Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). I can only understand these things as pure grace; see on :9. God showed tenderness and favour to His people in captivity, far above what He had intended or what they deserved; they were punished less than their sins deserved at this time (Ezra 9:13; see on Ez. 4:12). And He does the same with us- He gives us so much more than we deserve. And yet most of Judah abused that grace; they were so taken up with the good life God gave them in captivity that they chose to remain there and not participate in the restoration. And we *so* easily can end up abusing His grace likewise.

The judgment of the people of Jerusalem by thirds becomes the basis for some of the visions of Revelation; and it is the same subject in view there, the latter day judgment upon the people of God in their land and city.

Ezekiel 5:3 *You shall take of it a few in number, and bind them in your skirts*- A tiny remnant would survive, but even they would be reduced to a tiny remnant. Only a remnant of a remnant would survive, and these were intended to be the repentant

group who would bring about the restored kingdom of God in Israel. But in His grace, God didn't destroy on such a scale as here envisaged; and no repentant remnant therefore emerged. The "skirts" are s.w. "wings" in the cherubim visions (Ez. 1:9,11,23 etc.). Ezekiel was representing God; he could have been for the salvation of the remnant; see on Ez. 4:17. He was identified with the cherubim, as Judah also could have been. They too could have been transported with ease back to Jerusalem. But instead they imprisoned Ezekiel at the Chebar river.

Ezekiel 5:4 *Of these again you shall take, and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; from it shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel*- Perhaps the idea is that the destruction of the tiny minority of faithful ones by the persecution of the Jews themselves was what would bring the fire of judgment upon all Israel. The latter chapters of Isaiah speak of the persecution of this remnant by the Jews; Jeremiah was imprisoned and almost killed, as was Ezekiel. And Jewish tradition says that both those prophets were finally murdered by the Jews. Jerusalem killed the prophets, as the Lord lamented. The LXX however links this with :5 to imply that it was the burning of the house of Israel which would lead to the fire of judgment spreading from Jerusalem to the surrounding peoples who had participated in it.

Ezekiel 5:5 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the peoples and countries which are around her*- Jerusalem ought to have been the spiritual light of the world around her, but she was not. She was the city set on a hill for all to see. But she failed in this, and so the Lord reapplied that idea to every individual believer in Him (Mt. 5:14,15).

Ezekiel 5:6 *She has rebelled against My ordinances in doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are around her; for they have rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they have not walked in them*- The Jews of course insisted that they were compliant with the law and covenant; but God perceived that in essence they were totally disobedient, and instead of being a moral light to the nations (see on :5), they were worse than the nations. The AV implies that Judah "changed" God's laws into wickedness.

Ezekiel 5:7 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you are rebellious more than the nations that are around you and have not walked in My statutes, neither have kept My ordinances, neither have done after the ordinances of the nations that are around you*- God was disappointed that His people had not only been disobedient to *Him*, but they had not even been obedient to their conquerors. He so values obedience, and had an attitude that sought to see if they would show it to at least someone, even if they had rejected *Him*. He analyzes every facet of human life, disobedience and obedience, and this highlights the depth of His grace.

Ezekiel 5:8 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I, even I, am against you; and I will execute judgments in the midst of you in the sight of the nations*- Jerusalem and the temple was the location "in the midst of you", and the nations would view this in that their mercenaries were all part of the Babylonian army which sacked Jerusalem. But just as all the surrounding nations had been drawn against Zion to destroy it, so at the restoration it was God's intention that they would be gathered together there again in repentant worship (Jer. 3:17).

Ezekiel 5:9 *I will do in you that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all your abominations*- Again, this threat was ameliorated by God's grace. For the time of final unprecedented trouble for Jacob is yet future (Dan. 12:1,2; 1 Thess.2:16). It could have come in the Babylonian invasion, but God's grace didn't let it happen; see on :2. But the essence will come true, the prophetic word is not falsified by this grace; it will come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 5:10 *Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of you, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments on you; and the whole remnant of you will I scatter to all the winds*- This again repeats to the exiles in Babylon the words which Jeremiah had told to those in the land (Jer. 19:9). These things did indeed happen (Lam. 2:20; 4:10), in fulfilment of the curses for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:29; Dt. 28:53). But as Solomon's prayer made clear, once those things had happened, then Israel were to look to Zion in repentance from the lands of their exile. And it was to this end that Ezekiel was amongst them. The scattering to the winds is again an allusion to the cherubim vision; the sound of wind is associated with them. They who could have saved Israel and returned them from captivity would further scatter them to the winds- and also, if the exiles were willing, return them. The Hebrew for "scatter" is literally to winnow, and again repeats Jeremiah's message to those in the land (Jer. 15:7 s.w.). But the idea of winnowing is that the grain falls to the earth, and this again was the idea- that out of the scattering throughout the provinces of Babylon, a remnant would fall to the earth / land from where they were winnowed, namely to Zion.

However, the scattering was not at all to the extent that God had envisaged here and in other prophecies. In wrath He remembered mercy, or perhaps the intercession and repentance of a minority led Him to ameliorate His judgments for their sakes. The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, didn't practice mass deportations. They removed the leadership of subjected peoples, and appointed locals as the leaders under their control. This is what they did to Judah, taking the royal family and priesthood into captivity, and establishing Gedaliah as puppet governor (Jer. 40: 7; 2 Kings 25:2) along with some local Jewish "elders" (Lam. 5:12), with Mizpeh rather than Jerusalem as the capital. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. Presumably the altar had been destroyed, hence no animal sacrifices are mentioned. It has been suggested that the book of Lamentations was written as part of a temple ritual or at least material to be recited at the site of the temple.

Ezekiel 5:11 *Therefore as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations-* "Defiled" is the word used in Ez. 4:14 of how Judah were to be defiled, to be ritually unclean, in their exile; but this is what they themselves had done by defiling or polluting the temple with the idols they placed within it, as Ezekiel will later reveal. So their judgment was as ever, appropriate to their sin. Their condemnation to defilement was in fact only a continuation of what they themselves had done.

Therefore will I also diminish you- They would likewise be "diminished" just as they had "diminished" God's laws and requirements (Dt. 12:32), minimizing and practicing reductionism to the point that they had done away with His law. We too can tend towards reductionism, reasoning towards the lowest common denominator rather than to the highest.

Neither shall My eye spare, and I also will have no pity- But the wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment.

Ezekiel 5:12 *A third part of you shall die with the plague and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of you; and a third part shall fall by the sword around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds-* It seems doubtful whether two thirds of Jerusalem died during the Babylonian siege. Rather it seems that God's grace was such that He didn't carry out His threats to the full extent; as Ezra perceived about the situation, they were punished less than their iniquities deserved (Ezra 9:13; see on Ez. 4:12). Jer. 40:7-12 is clear that a number of Jews did remain in the land immediately after the final Babylonian invasion.

And will draw out a sword after them- See on :2.

Ezekiel 5:13 *Thus shall My anger be accomplished-* These are the very words used about God's intention to utterly destroy Israel at the time of Ex. 32:10,12. But thanks to the intercession of Moses, this didn't happen. Moses later uses the term in reflecting how God's anger had been accomplished upon Israel, but not in the form of totally destroying them as He had first planned (Ps. 90:7). The implication of course was that a Moses-like figure could arise in intercession, God had been open to change the outworking of His anger, and so by implication He was likewise open at Ezekiel's time. And it seems He did relent, because as noted on :12, God did not totally destroy Jerusalem's population to the extent He had threatened. And yet just as Moses perceived that His anger was still accomplished, although without the total destruction of Israel, so Jeremiah uses this phrase in reflecting how in fact God's anger was accomplished in the Babylonian destruction (Lam. 4:11). Ezekiel himself will later note this too (Ez. 20:8,21).

And I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, and I shall be comforted- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He

also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

They shall know that I, Yahweh, have spoken in My zeal, when I have accomplished My wrath on them- As noted on :12, God's words in wrath were not actually totally fulfilled. The Hebrew here is phrased in such a way as to imply that when the wrath was accomplished, they would realize that these threats were spoken in anger and had not been totally fulfilled; although it seems they will be finally in the holocaust of the last days.

Ezekiel 5:14 *Moreover I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the peoples that are around you, in the sight of all that pass by*- Again Ezekiel is repeating to the captives in Babylon the same message which Jeremiah was giving to the Jews in Judah (Jer. 19:8). This was the punishment for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:13). But as shown on :12, God's threatened judgments were not executed to the degree He had originally planned; in wrath He remembered mercy. For there is evidence that Jerusalem was broken down but not completely desolate, some lived there, and even operated some limited temple services after the Babylonian destruction.

Ezekiel 5:15 *So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment, to the peoples that are around you, when I shall execute judgments on you in anger and in wrath and in furious rebukes. I, Yahweh, have spoken it*- God's fury was in order to rebuke. It was unlike human fury poured out upon the weak by the stronger. See on :13.

Ezekiel 5:16 *They shall see, when I shall send on them the evil arrows of famine that are for destruction, which I will send to destroy you: when I will increase the famine on you, and will break your staff of bread*- The arrows of famine may refer to the stabs of pain felt in extreme hunger, hence GNB "You will feel the pains of hunger like sharp arrows sent to destroy you". "Evil arrows" were thought to be cast by displeased gods; but here Yahweh insists that there is no supernatural evil, and He is going to be the one who fires such arrows. His omnipotence meant that there was no place left for any understanding of "evil" as coming from some cosmic evil being, such as the "satan" of modern theology.

Ezekiel 5:17 *I will send on you famine and wild animals, and they shall bereave you; and pestilence and blood shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword on you: I,*

Yahweh, have spoken it- see on 1 Kings 22:22. The wild animals may be literal (as Dt. 32:23,24). In 2 Kings 17:25 literal lions were sent by God to punish people. However there is no record of this happening; again, as explained on :12, in wrath God remembered mercy. But the reference could be figurative, to Babylon as the "lion" with "eagle's wings" (Dan. 7:4). But this would then be an awkward repetition of "the sword" coming upon them.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 6

Ezekiel 6:1 The word of Yahweh came to me, saying- This phrase is used multiple times in Jeremiah and Ezekiel; but very rarely elsewhere. It is never once used in Isaiah. The fact it occurs so often in Jeremiah and Ezekiel supports the impression that they were giving very similar messages, often using the same words; Jeremiah to the Jews still in Judah, and Ezekiel to the Jews taken into captivity in the first and second invasions. Ezekiel was bidding the exiles to repent in order to avert the catastrophe which was otherwise to come upon the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. This shows how much the spirituality of third parties can really affect people.

Ezekiel 6:2 Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy to them- We wonder why Ezekiel in Babylon would usefully prophecy against or towards the mountains of Israel. I suggest as on :1 that the repentance of the minority in Babylon could have affected the outcomes for the Jews still in Judah.

Ezekiel 6:3 And say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord Yahweh: Thus says the Lord Yahweh to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword on you- God told Ezekiel that Israel would not hear his preaching (Ez. 3:7); and yet Ezekiel repeatedly prefaced his preaching addresses with an appeal to *please hear* God's word (Ez. 6:3; 13:2; 18:25; 20:47; 34:7; 36:1,4). He was hoping against hope; his preaching work was asking him to attempt the impossible. To make a nation hear who would not hear. Jeremiah likewise was told that Israel wouldn't hear him (Jer. 7:27), but still he pleaded with them to hear (Jer. 9:20; 10:1; 11:6; 16:12; 17:24; 38:15). The "mountains" are put by metonymy for the people sacrificing to idols upon them; just as the altar is addressed in 1 Kings 13:2, when the people sacrificing upon it are in view.

And I will destroy your high places- Quoting from Lev. 26:30; this was the result of having broken the covenant.

Ezekiel 6:4 Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken; and I will cast down your slain men before your idols- "Incense altars" is literally 'sun images'. But they had supposedly been destroyed in Josiah's reformations (2 Chron. 34:4). This point is made so many times- that leaders destroyed idolatry but the people continued it. And it tends to be the same with so much apparent reform we may make in our lives. The corpses of the worshippers would be placed before their idols, because by worshipping them, the worshippers had effectively prostrated their lives before them. Again, the judgment was appropriate to the sin. They had effectively condemned themselves, and this will be true for all who are condemned at the last day.

Ezekiel 6:5 I will lay the dead bodies of the children of Israel before their idols; and I

will scatter your bones around your altars- See on :4. The valley of dry bones vision in Ez. 37 depicted Israel in captivity as bones waiting to come together and return to the land as a great army. Jer. 8:1 and other passages earlier in Ezekiel (Ez. 6:5; 24:4) had described both Judah and Israel as dry bones. The feeling of those bones was that "our bones are dried and our hope is lost" (Ez. 37:11). Judah in captivity felt that they had no "hope", that God had cast them off, and that they were unable to have a full relationship with Him outside the land. However, it seems that this was a rather convenient piece of theology for them- they were doing well in Babylon, and despite the opportunity to return to the land, they largely chose to remain in Babylon.

Ezekiel 6:6 In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be abolished- Here the idols are called the works of their hands. And here we see the essential relevance for us today, living in an age where physical idols don't exist. The idols were attractive because they were the works of the hands of the worshippers. This is what is so relevant to us. What we have made in our lives and by our own device, a business, a self built home... so easily thereby become our idols.

Ezekiel 6:7 The slain shall fall in the midst of you, and you shall know that I am Yahweh- The "midst" of the mountains may refer specifically to Jerusalem. They would know "I am Yahweh" in that they would all too late come to recognize Him. This is the tragedy of the Biblical pictures of condemnation; that all too late, the condemned come to realize the essence of Yahweh.

Ezekiel 6:8 Yet will I leave a remnant: you shall have some that escape the sword among the peoples, when you shall be scattered through the nations- This "remnant" were intended to return in repentance and be the basis of the restored kingdom of God. The same word is used in Jer. 43:5: "Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces took all the remnant of Judah, who were returned from all the nations where they had been driven, to live in the land of Judah". But this remnant didn't respond; having returned, they then began worshipping the sun again and went to Egypt, against God's specific pleading with them through Jeremiah. The time spent in exile could have been far shorter than the 70 years of Jeremiah; there were various time frames potentially possible, as noted on Ez. 4:6.

Ezekiel 6:9 Those of you that escape shall remember Me among the nations where they shall be carried captive because I have been broken with their lewd heart which has departed from Me- When God said that "I have been broken with their whorish heart" (Ez. 6:9 RV), He meant it. Sinful Israel broke the heart of Almighty God. The tone of God's speeches in Jeremiah varies wildly, moving abruptly from outraged cries of pain to warm entreaties of love, and then to desperate pleas for a new start. He is responding like a jilted lover, who gained His Israel by wooing them in the wilderness. He felt the pain of Israel's rejection, and went through very human-like reactions to this. The book of Hosea shows all this lived out in a real human life. Hosea was representative of God, and yet he married a slut called Gomer, and in their life together they portrayed graphically the pain of God's relationship with His people. The image of God as the wounded lover which we meet in Hosea and Jeremiah ought to deeply impress us. The God who created all of existence subjects Himself to such humiliation from His creation. One is almost haunted by the reality of

a God who lets our response to Him count that much. God says that the remnant of His people would "remember" what they had done to Him. But they didn't, and that is the abiding tragedy.

And with their eyes, which play the prostitute after their idols- As an alcoholic's eyes dart immediately to the alcohol on display in a supermarket, so their eyes had a natural inclination and attraction towards idols. And the glance of their eyes, their mental predisposition toward idolatry, was prostitution in God's eyes. We see powerfully portrayed the sensitivity of God toward our deepest psychology and the core yearning of our hearts. May that be ever toward Him alone.

They shall loathe themselves in their own sight for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations- But they didn't. Ez. 18 explains how they considered they were suffering unjustly for the sins of their fathers, and sat depressed by the rivers of Babylon, still looking towards their idols. "They shall..." do this was the Divine hope of the unrequited lover for the beloved. Or at best it was command rather than prediction.

Ezekiel 6:10 They shall know that I am Yahweh: I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them- There was the tendency to think that Ezekiel was just another prophet groaning on about evil to come from Yahweh. By considering that God's word is somehow not precisely, personally relevant to ourselves, we consider it to be "vain", no matter what high view of Divine inspiration of the scriptures we may hold. "They shall..." as noted on :9 was God's desperate hope for them.

"In vain" is literally "without cause". Ezekiel is very clear that God's judgments upon His people were not at all "without cause" (Ez. 6:10; 14:23). But just as He gave them a bill of divorce and then destroyed it as if the reasons didn't exist any more (Is. 50:1,2), so the "cause" of the judgments was taken away. They were "oppressed without cause", God says, as He seeks to persuade the exiles of how totally He has dealt with their sin (Is. 52:3).

Ezekiel 6:11 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Strike with your hand and stamp with your foot and say, Alas!- These things were an expression of anger. The intense wrath of God was appropriate considering the deep love He had for them, and the way they were breaking His heart by their adultery against Him; see on :9. "Alas!" is really a calling to mourning, and in that word there may be also a calling to repentance, so that this tragedy need not happen.

Because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, they shall fall by the sword, by the famine and by the plague- "Evil" would come upon them (:10) because they had been evil. Their condemnation through the experience of "evil" was therefore really a reflection of the evil they themselves had wrought. By doing evil they were therefore living out their own condemnation.

Ezekiel 6:12 He who is far off shall die of the plague; and he who is near shall fall by the sword; and he who remains and is besieged shall die by the famine- The differentiation between those "far off" and those "near" is important. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were saying the same things, but Jeremiah to those still 'remaining' in Judah, and Ezekiel to the captives "far off"; that phrase is used of how Judah were to be exiled "far off" in Babylon. The captives to whom he ministered, and who at this time had placed him under house arrest, would "die of the plague". Their repentance was required, lest they face yet further suffering.

Thus will I accomplish My wrath on them- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 6:13 You shall know that I am Yahweh, when their slain men shall be among their idols around their altars on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains and under every green tree and under every thick oak- Judah were indeed slain and their corpses mockingly placed next to their idols. But they did not "know that I am Yahweh". For "you shall...", see on :9. To know Yahweh was not so much to know *about* Him theologically, but to have a relationship with Him; for that is the Hebraic sense of 'to know'.

The places where they offered pleasant aroma to all their idols- "Pleasant aroma" is the phrase often used for the "pleasant aroma" of sacrifices to Yahweh- three times in Exodus, seventeen in Leviticus, seventeen in Numbers. As a priest, Ezekiel would have been aware of this. But instead, they offered this to the idols. The Divine hope (see on :9), the desperate hope of the unrequited lover for the beloved, was that a repentant remnant would realize this and then offer "pleasant aroma" again to Him alone (Ez. 20:41). But they didn't.

Ezekiel 6:14 I will stretch out My hand on them, and make the land desolate and waste- This was the judgment to come upon Babylon (Jer. 51:26). Babylon was to be punished as they had punished Judah. This is the great theme of Revelation; the seals of judgment poured upon Israel in the last days are related to the vials of judgment poured upon those who perform that judgment.

From the wilderness toward Diblah, throughout all their habitations- This is the equivalent of "From Dan [the north] to Beersheba [the south]". The "wilderness" is usually applied to the nomad region south of Palestine, and this would lead us to look for Diblah in the north. The two Hebrew letters for 'd' and 'r' are easily confused. Riblah may therefore be the place in view, and the LXX has "Diblah" whereas the AV and Masoretic Text has "Riblah" in 2 Kings 23:33; 25:6. Riblah was a fortified town on the north road from Palestine to Babylon. Hamath, in the same region, is given as the northern boundary in Ez. 47:16.

They shall know that I am Yahweh- See on :9.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 7

Ezekiel 7:1 Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying- See on Ez. 6:1.

Ezekiel 7:2 You, son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh to the land of Israel, An end: the end has come- The language of "the end... an end" sounds as if this was intended to be the actual end of Judah. But it wasn't; the judgments threatened didn't work out in the totality they were described. More survived than envisaged in the judgment prophecies. And it was not the final end. This could be simply because God in His grace remembered mercy, and did not punish Judah as their iniquities deserved at this time, as Ezra notes (Ezra 9:13). But it could also be that Ezekiel's prophetic ministry did in fact persuade a tiny minority to repent, and because of that, the judgments were ameliorated and the total end of Judah didn't happen. The situation is analogous to how God had threatened to totally destroy Israel and make a new nation from Moses; but He was open to persuasion by the intercession of one faithful man, and this didn't in fact happen.

On the four corners of the land- "Corners" is the same word translated "wings", which throughout Ezekiel usually refers to or alludes to the wings of the cherubim. The land had been under the protection of the cherubim wings, and even in judgment, they would be the channel through which that judgment was brought.

Ezekiel 7:3 Now is the end on you, and I will send My anger on you, and will judge you according to your ways; and I will bring on you all your abominations- "Abominations" is a reference to their idols, and is put by metonymy for 'sin with your abominations'. The thing sinned with, the channel of the sin, is thus out for the sinful actions of people. This suggests that God views sinners as their idol. Those who create idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8). It's a question of identity. If our deepest heart and passion is upon anything other than God, then the object of that passion becomes 'us'. We identify with that which we worship, and all human beings have this tendency to focus upon something to worship. In this lies the challenge of the fact there is only one God; from that it psychologically follows that we serve Him with our whole strength and heart. Therefore believing there is only one God and rejecting a Trinity is not of itself a 'belief in one God'; for true belief will mean a total service of Him with all the heart and mind. And we can hold true theology whilst not doing this.

Ezekiel 7:4 My eye shall not spare you, neither will I have pity; but I will bring your ways on you, and your abominations shall be in the midst of you- See on 2 Kings 17:23. The wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment.

You shall know that I am Yahweh- See on Ez. 6:9.

Ezekiel 7:5 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: An evil, a one-time evil; behold, it comes- As noted on :2, this sounds as if the projected evil would never be repeated. But the time of Jacob's direst trouble is to be only in the last days (Dan. 12:1,2). This means that the threatened 'final evil' didn't come, either because God's mercy overwhelmed His

wrath; or because of at least some intercession or repentance which meant it was delayed. But the essence of the prophetic word shall be fulfilled in the last days, when the final evil shall come upon Israel.

Ezekiel 7:6 An end has come, the end has come; it awakes against you; behold, it comes- The continual expression of the idea that 'It is starting to come, it's nearly here...' ["it awakes against you"] is reflective of the 'gap' there is with God. He pronounces certain judgment, as He did upon Nineveh, but in the gap between the statement and its execution, His mind can be changed by repentance. Hence the urgency of 'it is really and truly about to come'; for this implies the window of repentance was still just about open.

Ezekiel 7:7 Your doom has come to you, inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near, a day of tumult, and not of mere echoing on the mountains- So many times the threats of judgment had not been carried out, perhaps because God was simply gracious, or because of His sensitivity to human intercession and the repentance of a remnant. But this had created the impression that the mountains were merely echoing with threats and the threats were not the real thing, mere echoes. The previous prophecy in Ez. 6 had specifically concerned the mountains of Israel. But judgment was real and would really come.

Ezekiel 7:8 Now will I shortly- See on Ez. 5:13. "Shortly" presents the same idea as noted on :6; the judgment was about to come, and so the window of opportunity to repent was only just about still open.

Pour out My wrath on you and accomplish My anger against you, and will judge you according to your ways; and I will bring on you all your abominations- These are the very words used about God's intention to utterly destroy Israel at the time of Ex. 32:10,12. But thanks to the intercession of Moses, this didn't happen. Moses later uses the term in reflecting how God's anger had been accomplished upon Israel, but not in the form of totally destroying them as He had first planned (Ps. 90:7). The implication of course was that a Moses-like figure could arise in intercession, God had been open to change the outworking of His anger, and so by implication He was likewise open at Ezekiel's time. And it seems He did relent, because as noted on Ez. 5:12, God did not totally destroy Jerusalem's population to the extent He had threatened. And yet just as Moses perceived that His anger was still accomplished, although without the total destruction of Israel, so Jeremiah uses this phrase in reflecting how in fact God's anger was accomplished in the Babylonian destruction (Lam. 4:11). Ezekiel himself will later note this too (Ez. 20:8,21).

Ezekiel 7:9 My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity. I will bring on you according to your ways; and your abominations shall be in the midst of you; and you shall know that I, Yahweh, do strike- See on :4. They would realize that it was God who was striking them, that He was working through the Babylonians, and their suffering was not simply due to the local geopolitics of a neighbouring empire attacking a smaller neighbouring state. But did they "know" this? "You shall know..." could be command more than prediction (see on Ez. 6:9). "Strike" is the word used of God's destruction of the *eretz* promised to Abraham at the flood (Gen. 8:21). This was the scale of total destruction envisaged, although in reality, God's grace was such that there was not absolutely total destruction. The amelioration of the judgments was

maybe just because of God's grace; or His response to intercession and repentance from a minority. See on Zeph. 1:2,3.

Ezekiel 7:10 Behold, the day, behold, it comes: your doom is gone forth- See on :6. The pronouncement of doom had gone forth from the court of heaven, but in the gap between the statement and its realization, there was still the possibility for repentance. We too live in that same gap.

The rod has blossomed, pride has budded- The message may simply be that above all their many sins, Juda were to be punished because their pride had come to full fruition- in judgment. But "the rod" may refer to Babylon, as rods represent nations and leaders (2 Kings 18:21), and Assyria is described in just the same way, as the rod for Judah's correction (Is. 10:5). The budding rod is a parody of Aaron's budding rod. But the buds were those of pride, which God saw as Babylon's lead characteristic. We might have characterized Babylon in other ways, perhaps alluding to their idolatry. But typical of the prophets, God through Ezekiel focuses upon pride as the worst and fundamental characteristic of Babylon. The rod of Babylon's pride was prepared to execute the final judgment.

Ezekiel 7:11 Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness- The Hebrew words for "violence" and "wickedness" are often used by the prophets about Israel, translated things like 'unjust gain'. The rod has been defined in :10 as that of the Babylonian invaders. But Israel's oppression of each other had grown up into a rod of wickedness. Here we have the metaphor of 'making a rod for your own back'. Their sins grew into a rod of punishment, the rod of the proud Babylonians, whose pride had grown parallel with the violence of the Jews against each other.

None of them shall remain, neither of their multitude, nor of their wealth. There shall be nothing of value among them- As noted on Zeph. 1:2,3, it was God's intention to destroy Judah as He did the *eretz* at the time of the flood. None would remain. But in fact many did. The amelioration of the judgments was maybe just because of God's grace; or His response to intercession and repentance from a minority. The destruction of the people is paralleled with the destruction of their wealth; because like many today, they identified with their wealth. It was their self-identity. Their wealth is mentioned in the context of their oppression of each other for "unjust gain" (NEV "violence") in the preceding sentence. See on :19.

Ezekiel 7:12 The time has come, the day draws near: don't let the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn; for wrath is upon all its multitude- The situation would be so desperate that people would sell anything they had for very low sums. But the end for them all was so near that the purchaser would have no time to rejoice over his good deal, nor the seller to lament how cheaply they had sold.

Ezekiel 7:13 For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, even if they be still alive- The idea as explained on :12 is that the seller would be taken into captivity; the buyer, the manipulative wealthy spoken of in :11, would be killed and so the purchased things would be left for the former owner to just come and take back. But the impoverished seller would not be able to, because they would be taken into captivity.

The vision is touching the whole multitude of it, none shall return- AV "the multitude therefore which shall not return". The majority are pictured as dying; only a

minority would return. Remember that Ezekiel is speaking to the captives in Babylon. They were to see themselves as the minority who had survived by grace. They were therefore to repent. But at this time they had placed Ezekiel under house arrest and refused to accept his appeals.

Neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life- The context is of their materialism (:11,12) and the loss of the things they bought and sold. This materialism was the sin of their soul, and they would be unable to continue [NEV "strengthen"] that addictive way of life.

Ezekiel 7:14 They have blown the trumpet, and have made all ready, but none goes to the battle; for My wrath is on all its multitude- The men of Judah blew the trumpet to call their soldiers, but Ezekiel and Jeremiah were blowing God's trumpet of repentance (Jer. 6:1; Ez. 33:3,6). There was a total mismatch between God and His people. Again it is emphasized that God's wrath was upon "all", but in fact a larger group than here envisaged survived; by God's way of remembering mercy in wrath, and His extreme sensitivity to the repentance and intercession of a minority.

Ezekiel 7:15 The sword is outside, and the pestilence and the famine within. He who is in the field shall die with the sword; and he who is in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him- As I have continually noted, the death by famine, sword and plague did not destroy as many as here envisaged. I suggested why on :14. But another factor to be considered is that in Jer. 34:8-10 we read that there was some repentance amongst the Jerusalem Jews; at the beginning of the Sabbath year on 29 September 588 BC they released their slaves and stopped abusing them. In response to this, the siege was lifted by God- for the Babylonians temporarily lifted the siege due to the approach of the Egyptian army. Between that October and 29 April 587 BC they were concerned with fighting the Egyptians until they defeated them (Jer. 34:22; Ez. 30:20,21). In that time, many Jews took their slaves back (Jer. 34:11-22; 37:15,16). So from May 587 BC the siege resumed until the walls were breached, Zedekiah was captured and the city sacked on 29 July 587 BC (2 Kings 25:2-4; Jer. 39:2; 52:7; Ez. 33:21). Perhaps it was in response to this repentance, even though many didn't follow through with it, that God rescheduled and ameliorated His plans of total destruction. Perhaps some did permanently release their slaves and stop abusing others, and God took notice of this.

Ezekiel 7:16 But those of the ones who escape shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, every one in his iniquity- The idea was that the remnant who were saved by grace would flee to the mountains, the place of their previous apostasy (Ez. 6:2), and repent. They fled, and yet most didn't repent. They "shall / should" do this may be command rather than prediction, and again a reflection of God's intense hope, the hope of unrequited love.

Ezekiel 7:17 All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak as water- This again is Ezekiel repeating the message Jeremiah was preaching to the Jews in Judah (Jer. 6:24). There would be a psychological paralysis- evidence that God can work directly on the mind of people, positively [through the "holy spirit"] and negatively [an "evil spirit from the Lord"].

Ezekiel 7:18 They shall also clothe themselves with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be on all faces, and baldness on all their heads- The mourning

was intended to be for their sins; their "shame" was to be for their sins. This was the Divine intention of the invasion; the remnant would repent. But this didn't really happen. We too can have repentance set up for us by God, but still not make it.

Ezekiel 7:19 They shall throw their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be as an unclean thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of Yahweh. They shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their stomachs; because it has been the stumbling block of their iniquity- We noted on :11-13 that the materialism of the Jews was a major reason for their sins. Their unjust abuse of each other noted there was to the end that they might accumulate more wealth. This love of wealth was their stumbling block, that which made them fall headlong into sin. We would perhaps rather have focused upon their worship of idols within the holy place of the temple. But the prophets always look to the essence. Even their idolatry was perhaps rooted in this desire for wealth, believing some kind of primitive prosperity Gospel, whereby worship of the gods would bring them wealth. This endless pursuit of wealth would not "satisfy". Their subconscious assumption was that of many today- that wealth can buy anything, even salvation from the day of God's wrath. In one form or another, that is the same underlying assumption made by many religions and Christian groups, from Catholicism to Pentecostalism. But in that day of final judgment they like Judas would throw down their silver and gold in the streets, realizing it could not save them.

Ezekiel 7:20 As for the beauty of His ornament, He set it in majesty; but they made the images of their abominations and their detestable things therein; therefore have I made it to them as an unclean thing- Ezekiel will later be shown awful idolatry and images being used within the temple. "Therein" therefore refers to the temple, the crowning ornament of beauty set in majesty. Just as their wealth was to be declared "unclean" (:19), so the temple would be. I suggested on :19 that the connection is in the fact that they thought that by worshipping those abominable images in Yahweh's temple, they would get wealth. For many of the idol cults, Baal especially, were fertility cults, promising good harvests and wealth in return for worship. God would desecrate the temple, making it unclean; but this, as with all His judgments, was only a confirmation of what they themselves had done.

Ezekiel 7:21 I will give it into the hands of the gentiles for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil; and they shall profane it- The Gentiles would "profane" the temple, but God would do so (:20). The tribal gods of the nations were thought to always be on the side of the tribe, fighting for them and ever protecting the sanctity of their own holy places. Yahweh was uniquely different; He could fight against His people and desecrate even His own holy place. This is the essence of the "problem of suffering"; that the one true God doesn't act as we all subconsciously expect a God to.

Ezekiel 7:22 My face will I turn also from them, and they shall profane My secret place; and robbers shall enter into it, and profane it- As noted on :20,21, it was God who would do this, working with those blasphemous soldiers who actually profaned it, the Babylonian "robbers" who took His holy vessels into captivity. We note that only then, in the final desecration of the temple, would God turn away His face or presence from Israel. Right up until then, His face was still towards them, eager for their repentance. See on :6. Jeremiah had used the same word for "robbers" in lamenting that the Jews had turned the temple into a "den of robbers" (Jer. 7:11).

Again, the judgment brought upon them was an appropriate extension of what they themselves had done, and not the Almighty lashing out in anger. Sin is its own condemnation.

Ezekiel 7:23 Make the chain; for the land is full of bloodshed, and the city is full of violence- The chain spoke of their captivity in chains, but the word is only elsewhere used of the golden chains in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:21). Those chains of gold which they so coveted were as it were to become chains of captivity. This continues the theme of :11-13 and what is stated explicitly in :19- that their love of gold and wealth was the essential reason for their stumbling into sin and now into captivity. We would likely have thought the essential reason was their idolatry, but that idolatry was essentially fuelled by a desire for wealth, which they thought their idolatry would bring them. We note that the land and the city of Jerusalem are placed in parallel. The bloodshed of the invasion was related to the "violence" ['unjust gain'] they had done to each other. The prophets, like the Lord Jesus, saw to the essence. A lack of love towards our brethren is effectively violence and bloodshed, and this was to be reflected in the bloodshed they were to suffer from the Babylonians.

Ezekiel 7:24 Therefore I will bring the worst of the nations- "Worst" is "evil"; the same words are used to lament how Israel had done worse evil than the Gentile nations (2 Kings 21:9). Again, the judgment brought was appropriate to what Israel themselves had done.

And they shall possess their houses. I will also make the pride of the strong to cease; and their holy places shall be profaned- Again the theme of materialism continues; the wealthy houses they had built on the backs of unjust gain would be destroyed, just as happened at the invasion; and the destruction of their personal houses would be reflected in the destruction of God's house.

Ezekiel 7:25 Destruction comes; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none- "Peace" often refers to peace with God. "Seeking peace" is a quotation from Ps. 34:14; now is the time to seek peace with God, and not all too late as the condemnation process begins. The logic is powerful. All those responsible to God shall come to desperately seek their peace with Him, either in this life, or all too late at judgment day. This theme of desperately searching for God all too late is continued in :26. But the idea may also be that all too late they would seek a peace treaty with the Babylonians which would not be accepted.

Ezekiel 7:26 Mischief shall come on mischief, and rumour shall be on rumour; and they shall seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders- This is the scenario of :26; the condemned desperately seeking God's word and being unable to find it, like the rejected virgins of the parable rushing to buy oil and finding it all too late. The function of the priest was to teach God's law and His word as revealed to the prophets. But no word would be given, and the priests would perish. Ezekiel at this time was a prophet-priest under house arrest. Instead of receiving revelations of God's word, instead they would receive message after message of bad news concerning the Babylonian advance: "One disaster will follow another, and a steady stream of bad news will pour in" (GNB); "There shall be woe upon woe, and there shall be message upon message" (LXX).

Ezekiel 7:27 The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation,

and the hands of the people of the land shall be troubled- Jeremiah had given Zedekiah a way of escape, but he feared his image. So he was to be stripped of his royal robes and clothed with shame. We note the parallel between the leadership and the ordinary "people of the land". The masses didn't suffer because of the failures of the leadership, and neither did the leadership suffer because of the sins of the masses. Quite apart from democracy, it is a simple fact of human sociology that a population get the leadership they essentially want. Because leadership seeks to please the masses. And so the prophets often make the point that the masses as well as the leadership were equally guilty.

I will do to them after their way, and according to their own judgments will I judge them- As so often noted, their judgments would be a continuation of their own actions. They were self condemned. See on :22; Ez. 8:6.

And they shall know that I am Yahweh- See on Ez. 9:13.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 8

Ezekiel 8:1 *In the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house and the elders of Judah sat before me, the hand of the Lord Yahweh fell there on me*- This was one year and one month from the opening vision of Ez. 1, once the days lying on his side were completed (Ez. 4:5,6). These "elders" may have been visitors from Judah rather than the elders of the community of captives in Babylon. Jeremiah had sent a letter through Elasah, warning against the false prophets competing with Ezekiel, who were claiming that Jerusalem wouldn't fall (Jer. 29:1-3,9,25). The prophecies which Ezekiel now begun seem to continue until Ez. 13:23, concluding with a threat of destruction upon the false prophets. These elders may have come in order to seek Ezekiel's explanation of himself in the light of the false prophecies being made of immediate salvation. The eldership of Judah are roundly condemned at this time. So we can assume that they had not come humbly seeking God's word. And therefore this chapter reveals how Ezekiel had a vision convicting them of the idolatry going on in Jerusalem, perhaps contrary to the impression of righteousness which they were giving.

Ezekiel 8:2 *Then I saw, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of fire; from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, as the appearance of brightness, as it were glowing metal*- As earlier in Ezekiel, this burning, molten metal speaks of God's intense anger. See on Ez. 1:27. The person appears without the cherubim. To be picked up by this person (:3) must have been a frightening experience. God's wrath was because of the awful idolatry and blasphemy which Ezekiel was now to behold. The elders of Judah had come to Ezekiel (:1) and said nothing of the true state of affairs in Jerusalem. Ezekiel was being shown that God's burning anger was in reality upon the people, whatever veneer of spirituality the elders had.

Ezekiel 8:3 *He put forth the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the sky and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the gate of the inner court that looks toward the north*- This was the upper or higher gate (Ez. 9:2), the gate where Jeremiah was put in the stocks (Jer. 20:2). The false prophets were assuring Jerusalem of safety as Yahweh's

special city. Perhaps the elders had come with this message (:1). So Ezekiel is now going to testify what is really going on there.

Where there was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy- "Image" translates an unusual word which appears to refer specifically to the worship of the asherah or groves (2 Chron. 33:7,15). There would have been a distinctly sexual aspect to the worship. It was in this area that there were "houses of the Sodomites" (2 Kings 23:7). The adultery of Israel against their God was both literal and spiritual, as demonstrated by Hosea's experience with Gomer. This is why the image provoked God to jealousy, because it was the scene of His peoples' literal and spiritual adultery against Him. Josiah's reformation, like so much attempted spiritual reformation, was short-lived. The images were soon replaced.

Ezekiel 8:4 *The glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the appearance that I saw in the plain*- There is a purposeful juxtaposition between Yahweh's glory and the awful idolatry going on. We too live in the shadow of His glory and all idolatry in whatever form ought to instinctively feel utterly inappropriate. It is worth considering whether the visions Ezekiel had of the progressive departure of "the glory of the God of Israel" (Ez. 8:4) from the temple to the East of Jerusalem and then further away are describing the literal departure of the Angel from His dwelling place over the ark in the temple. Similarly "the glory" Angel departed (1 Sam. 4:21) when the ark over which He dwelt was taken by the Philistines. See on Ps. 78:60.

Ezekiel 8:5 *Then He said to me, Son of man, lift up your eyes now to the road that leads toward the north. So I lifted up my eyes toward the northern road, and behold, northward of the gate of the altar this image of jealousy was in the entry*- The northward aspect is perhaps because the Jews were looking and worshipping towards the north, Babylon. To worship the idols of their enemies may seem incredible, but it is psychologically likely as it reflects the perversity and deep contradiction within unrestrained human nature. It was by that same northern road that the Jews would be led away captive.

Ezekiel 8:6 *He said to me, Son of man, do you see what they do, even the great abominations that the house of Israel do commit here, so that I should go far away from My sanctuary? But you shall again see other, greater abominations*- "Do you see...?" could imply that Ezekiel was struggling to allow himself to realize what was going on. As he had not long been in captivity himself and was a priest familiar with the temple, we may enquire why he needed to be shown these things. Perhaps he had earlier been aware of them but not perceived their full import. See on :7. Or perhaps these things had only started going on in the temple area since he had gone into captivity. As the Babylonian threat increased, so the people increasingly turned to their idols. This is a paradox and yet psychologically credible given the perversity of the human mind when it comes to matters of faith. The Divine 'going far away' was in the form of the cherubim of glory departing from the sanctuary, effectively driven out by Israel's abominations. They had set up idols within the temple; effectively they were pushing God out rather than Him departing from them. They thereby had chosen the path of their condemnation. Hence "I will do to them after their way, and according to their own judgments will I judge them″ (Ez. 7:27).

Ezekiel 8:7 *He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a*

hole in the wall- The hole was there but apparently needed to be dug through in order for Ezekiel to see clearly. I discussed on :6 the possibility that Ezekiel was vaguely aware of abuses in the temple from his time there before his captivity. This corresponds to the hole in the wall; but he had to make some effort to now see through to what was actually going on, and accept it.

Ezekiel 8:8 *Then He said to me, Son of man, dig now through the wall; and when I had dug through the wall, behold, a door*- See on :7. The worship was going on "in the dark... in rooms of images" (:12). The darkness could mean this was the most holy place, lit only by the candlestick; although 70 men would hardly have fitted in there (:11). But the reference may be to the priestly chambers which surrounded the court; the priests had their images there. This would explain the huge emphasis in Ez. 40-48 upon the chambers. Much detail is given about them. The idea is that the previous abominations performed in them were not to be done in the new temple which the exiles were to build and operate.

Ezekiel 8:9 *He said to me, Go in, and see the wicked abominations that they do here*- It seems Ezekiel needed to be urged to 'see' it, hinting at some reluctance in him to recognize the real state of affairs in Jerusalem and Judah.

Ezekiel 8:10 *So I went in and saw; and behold, every form of creeping thing and abominable animals and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed around on the wall*- We know from Jer. 44 and Zech. 5 that many Jews had accepted the idols of their Babylonian conquerors, rather like Ahaz did after his defeat by Assyria (2 Kings 16:10). The spirit of exposing the idolatry of Babylon whilst living in it, waiting the call to leave, is so relevant to modern Christians working, living and waiting in latter day Babylon. However the animal worship implied here is more Egyptian than Babylonian. Egypt were the great hope of Israel rather than Yahweh; perhaps they thought that by worshipping Egyptian gods, Egypt would come and save them. And it did for a few months appear that way; for the Babylonian siege was lifted in order to fight the Egyptian army (Jer. 34:22; Ez. 30:20,21). They were made to eat unclean animals in captivity (Ez. 4:13; Hos. 9:3), but this was really a reflection of the choices they themselves had made- to worship them. This worship of that which we are externally and religiously separate from remains a big temptation for us all.

Ezekiel 8:11 *There stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel; and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, every man with his censer in his hand; and the odour of the cloud of incense went up*- These 70 were the forerunners of the Sanhedrin, based upon the 70 elders with Moses. Ezekiel as a type of the Lord Jesus exposed their evil. These elders were not priests, and yet here they offer incense; this was exclusively the work of the priests. Shaphan was the scribe who had read the discovered law of God to Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-12), leading to his reforms; now his son was a leader of this apostasy. Clearly enough, the cases of both Josiah and Shaphan demonstrate that spirituality cannot be passed on in any blood line nor by upbringing alone. There has to be a genuine desire for God in every individual heart.

Ezekiel 8:12 *Then He said to me, Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, every man in his rooms of images?*- See on Ez. 2:6. Jeremiah speaks of how he came to see Israel for who they were: “The Lord

made it known to me and I knew; then thou didst show me their evil deeds" (Jer. 11:8). Ezekiel was shown "what the house of Israel is doing in the dark" (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must've been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would've been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and "iron pillar" to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn't be "dismayed at [the] looks" of those who watched them with anger and consternation (Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

They say, 'Yahweh doesn't see us; Yahweh has forsaken the land'- They likely didn't say this in so many words. But as the Lord Jesus taught clearly, the thought is counted by God as if it is a spoken word. Ezekiel was up against the idea amongst the captives that Yahweh had forsaken the land. Hence his visions of God's cherubim-angels, present both in the land as well as amongst the captives by Chebar in Babylon (Ez. 10:20). It was the same message as the lesson of Jonah- who likewise thought that Yahweh somehow only operated within the land of Israel. The amazing truth was that Yahweh only forsook the land when the Jews left it. He was there with them right up until the end.

Ezekiel 8:13 *He said also to me, You shall again see more, greater abominations which they do*- The great abominations being done are those referred to in Ez. 18:12,13,24, where Ezekiel encourages them with the reality that a man may do great abominations all his life, but then repent at the end and be saved.

Ezekiel 8:14 *Then He brought me to the door of the gate of Yahweh's house which was toward the north; and see, there sat the women weeping for Tammuz*- Tammuz was the equivalent of Adonis in Greek mythology. But *adon*, "Lord", is typically used of the Lord God. They had replaced Yahweh as "Lord" with Tammuz. But there is only one Lord, the God of Israel. Having any other Lord was therefore a denial of Yahweh, just as it is today. The weeping for "Tammuz" was the ritual weeping for the death of the young handsome Adonis by Aphrodite, whose role the women played in the worship, and then became ecstatic with joy in the worship ritual when Adonis resurrected. Tammuz / Adonis was therefore a false Messiah.

Ezekiel 8:15 *Then He said to me, Have you seen this, son of man? You shall again see greater abominations than these*- The repeated questions imply Ezekiel struggled to perceive and see the import of the apostacy; see on :6.

Ezekiel 8:16 *He brought me into the inner court of Yahweh's house; and there, at the door of Yahweh's temple, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men*- Perhaps in imitation of the 24 orders of priests in 1 Chron. 24. They are likely the 25 princes of the people of Ez. 11:1, who were located where only the priests should have been. It was at this very point between the porch and altar that Joel envisaged the repentant priesthood earnestly begging God for a change in plan, pouring out their repentance to avoid destruction (Joel 2:17). Instead, the leaders of Israel were worshipping the sun.

With their backs toward Yahweh's temple, and their faces toward the east; and they were worshipping the sun toward the east- Jeremiah had said that Judah had gone backward from Yahweh (Jer. 7:24; 2 Chron. 29:6), and this was symbolized by turning their backs upon the temple. God's turning His back upon Israel was therefore only what they themselves had done to Him. Again, "I will do to them after their way, and according to their own judgments will I judge them″ (Ez. 7:27).

Ezekiel 8:17 *Then He said to me, Have you seen this, son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here?*- The same word for "trivial" is used in Ez. 22:7 for how these people had a "light" attitude to their parents. This lighthearted, not serious view of life affected all their relationships, with God as well as family. And we live in an age where as never before, nothing is taken seriously.

For they have filled the land with violence- The sins of the temple cult had spread to the whole land. The idea could be that the violence engulfing the land was their fault. But "violence" also carries the idea of unjust gain. It may refer to how what God took as 'violence' was done by the Jews to each other as a result of the example set in Jerusalem.

And have turned again to provoke Me to anger- "Turned again" is literally 'returned'. Perhaps some of the community of captives had returned to Judah, as there was some contact between them and Judah (see on :1). But they had returned only to commit abominations, rather than in repentance.

And behold, they put the branch to their nose- The allusion is to the Persian ritual of the Avesta. When men prayed to the sun, they held in their left hands a bouquet of palm, pomegranate, and tamarisk twigs, while the priests for the same purpose held a veil before their mouth, so that the bright rays of the sun might not be polluted by human breath. Judah went into captivity in Babylon which was then taken over by Persia. Again, they got what they essentially wanted. They had loved the Persian gods and culture, and so they were taken there to be dominated by it.

Ezekiel 8:18 *Therefore will I also deal with them in anger; My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them*- The wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 9

Ezekiel 9:1 *Then He cried in my ears with a loud voice saying, Cause those who are in charge of the city to draw near, every man with his destroying weapon in his hand*- It was Ezekiel who caused the Angels of judgment to go in to Jerusalem and slay her elders (Ez. 9:1-4). *How* Ezekiel did this was simply by teaching his prophecies to the captives in Babylon. If they had responded, then the judgment could have been averted. *So* much power and eternal consequence lies in the message we preach, and in the invitation we give men to repent. See on Ez. 10:2. Those "in charge of the city" were Angels; along with Ezekiel, the "writer" of :2, this made seven in total. The Jewish leadership weren't really "in charge". The Angels along with their human agent, Ezekiel, who was effectively under house arrest in a prison camp by the

Chebar river, were those really in control. We too have far more influence in world geopolitics than we realize; for "all things are for your sakes". A new group of faithful men were to 'have charge' over the temple in the rebuilt Zion (Ez. 44:11 s.w.) who would likewise be in step with the Angel cherubim.

Ezekiel 9:2 *Behold, six men came from the way of the upper gate which looks toward the north, every man with his slaughter weapon in his hand*- The men, representing Angels, came from the north. They had charge of the city (:1) but were also on the side of the Babylonians, who approached from the north. The tribal gods of the nations were thought to always be on the side of the tribe, fighting for them and ever protecting the sanctity of their own holy places. Yahweh was uniquely different; He could fight against His people and desecrate even His own holy place. This is the essence of the "problem of suffering"; that the one true God doesn't act as we all subconsciously expect a God to.

And one man in their midst clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side. They went in, and stood beside the bronze altar- This man was Ezekiel the prophet, who presumably also wrote down the words he saw in vision. He was "in their midst". Ezekiel was alone in a prison camp in Babylon effectively under house arrest. But he was in the midst of the Angels. They came to the bronze altar, the altar where the burnt offerings were made, as if to offer a sacrifice. The destruction of Jerusalem by fire was to be an offering to God.

Ezekiel 9:3 *The glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub upon which it rested, to the threshold of the house: and He called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writer's inkhorn by his side*- The departure of the cherubic glory from the temple was the sign of God's leaving Jerusalem. And the massive cherubim system went to Babylon. That was where God now intended to work with the remnant whom He hoped would repent. The way the cherubim of glory had "gone up" and removed to the threshold shows that now God's departure was imminent.

Ezekiel 9:4 *Yahweh said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry over all the abominations that are done in its midst*- The faithful in Ezekiel's time sighed and groaned over all the abominations committed in Jerusalem. Likewise the bleeding hearts of Jeremiah and Moses were actually for the ecclesia. David's eyes wept "streams of tears" because Israel didn't keep the Law (Ps. 119:136); Paul spoke "even with tears" about those in the ecclesia who lived as enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), exhorting the Corinthians to mourn for those they had to disfellowship (1 Cor. 5:2; 2 Cor. 12:21); Ezra wept for the sins of his people (Ezra 10:1). Is this attitude seen amongst us? We lament in a gossipy way the weaknesses of the brotherhood; but is there this bleeding heart for the cases we mention? Perhaps we should never think of disfellowshipping anybody unless the decision has been come to through a process of such prayerful mourning for them first. The mark was placed upon the foreheads because it was the mental attitude of the faithful which was of paramount importance, as it is today. Those marked off were to be preserved. Presumably they were not a large enough minority for God to avert the destruction of the majority for their sakes.

Ezekiel 9:5 *To the others He said in my hearing, Go through the city after him, and*

strike. Don't let your eye spare, neither have pity- These men were a manifestation of God; as their eye was not to pity, so God would not (:10; see note there). The situation recalls the Passover night, where those marked with the blood of the lamb were saved and the rest destroyed. We also think of Lot, who like these faithful ones, bemoaned the apostacy of Sodom and was spared. The implication is that the Angels followed Ezekiel; it was totally within his power as to who was preserved. Perhaps he personally knew all the few faithful in Jerusalem. In vision, he did this, and we imagine him marking Jeremiah.

Ezekiel 9:6 *Kill utterly the old man, the young man and the virgin, and little children and women; but don't come near any man on whom is the mark. Begin at My sanctuary. Then they began at the old men that were before the house*- These men were not necessarily old, but the elders. We notice that the little children were to be killed too. They were not marked. This raises the impossible question as to the death of little children. We are humbled and tested by the whole issue to accept by faith alone that the judge of all the earth judges rightly. He knew their futures, as He knows all possible futures. And on top of that there is the fact that we suffer the consequences of others' sins, and there is no Divine mechanism which stops children from not suffering the results of their parents' sins and positions.

Ezekiel 9:7 *He said to them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the dead. Go forth! They went forth, and struck in the city*- Judah had already defiled the temple, God's house (Jer. 7:30; 32:34; Ez. 5:11). This judgment, as all God's judgments of men, was simply confirming them in what they had themselves done in their time of opportunity. They were judged according to their own judgments. "According to their own judgments will I judge them" (Ez. 7:27).

Ezekiel 9:8 *It happened, while they were smiting, and I was left*- Jeremiah was asked to do likewise and he found nobody in the city to as it were "mark" (Jer. 5:1). It seems that Ezekiel too knew nobody whom he could mark. He was the only one left of the priests 'in the sanctuary'.

That I fell on my face and cried, and said, Ah Lord Yahweh!- This was to intercede for his people as Moses and Aaron "fell upon their faces" to intercede for the people in Num. 16:22. God does hear intercession, but by grace. And not always.

Will You destroy all who remain of Israel in Your pouring out of Your wrath on Jerusalem?- Ezekiel hadn't marked anyone, because he didn't know any of his former acquaintances who truly lamented the abominations. But he believed that surely there must be a remnant apart from him. He had learnt the lesson from Elijah's arrogance, who considered himself the only one faithful in Israel because he was unaware of the remnant. He was seeing in vision absolutely everyone destroyed apart from himself. He was sure there must be more spirituality, a remnant at least somewhere. And there wasn't. The implication was that all in Jerusalem and Judah were to be destroyed apart from himself. There was no righteous remnant. Although God apparently responds negatively in :9, He doesn't say He will not hear Ezekiel. And the reality was that not literally all of the unmarked people were slain. Ezekiel's intercession worked. Just as if Abraham had reduced his numbers in reasoning with God to the point that if there were one faithful found in Sodom it wouldn't have been destroyed... it seems it wouldn't have been. This is the 'power of one'. It's an endlessly powerful challenge. The intercession of just one can save lives, even eternally. And we see this come to its ultimate term in the work of the Lord Jesus for us.

Ezekiel 9:9 *Then He said to me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great*- Although only Judah is in view, it seems the sins of Israel, the ten tribes, were being also visited. And probably there were many of the ten tribes who had fled to Judah from the Assyrians and were living there with them. The restoration prophets envisaged a uniting of Israel and Judah at the restoration on the basis of their common experience of the new covenant, repentance and grace meaning that all personal divisions would end. That ought therefore to be true of all under the same new covenant today.

And the land is full of blood, and the city full of perversion; for they say, Yahweh has forsaken the land, and Yahweh doesn't see- They considered that Yahweh existed but was somehow distant from them, and therefore they had turned to other gods and even placed their images in the sanctuary of Yahweh. We too can have a sense that God is so distant that it leads us to turn to other gods and assume that He is not watching our thoughts and actions. But if God seems distant, then it is we who have moved and not Him. I suggest on :8 that God did in fact take notice of Ezekiel's intercession. But He doesn't mention that here, because He simply wishes to emphasize that the volume of judgment inflicted would never exceed their sin.

Ezekiel 9:10 *As for Me also, My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will bring their behaviour on their heads*- The wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment. This apparent change was due to Ezekiel's intercession; see on :8.

Ezekiel 9:11 *Behold, the man clothed in linen, who had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as You have commanded me*- In the AVmg. we read that "the man clothed with linen"- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- "returned the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me". The word 'returned' in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren't. This idiom is also found in Is. 55:11. Ezekiel alone was obedient to God's word. For all his concerns about the justice of God and the 'problem of suffering', he was personally obedient. These whole issues exist as a test for us, a help in our attaining of the humility which is so important to God.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 10

Ezekiel 10:1 *Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the head of the cherubim there appeared above them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne*- Ezekiel has pretty much a vision of the silhouette of God Himself. This was to encourage and inspire him for the very difficult ministry he now had to perform in :2, whereby he was going to be presented as the one who actually brought about Jerusalem's destruction. He who at that time was under house arrest at the hands of his own apostate brethren in a prison camp at the Chebar river in Babylon, apparently a nobody with his chips down on every front. This man... saw one of the closest visions of God personally granted to any man.

Ezekiel 10:2 *He spoke to the man clothed in linen and said, Go in between the whirling wheels, even under the cherub, and fill both your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city. He went in as I watched*- That Ezekiel's prophecies were not simple predictions but effectively an appeal for repentance is shown by the way in which he saw himself in vision as the prophet who put his hand in to the cherubim vision, and took out from it the coals of fire which would kindle the fire of judgment upon Jerusalem (Ez. 10:2,7). He would have recalled how his opening vision of the cherubim had the strange feature of a man's hand under their wings (Ez. 1:8; 10:21). This hand, he now understood, was *his* hand, the hand of the prophet. In Hebrew thought, the hand symbolizes power and control. Thus Ezekiel was taught an awesome truth- that the entire Angelic-Cherubic system was under the control of his word- in the sense that if Israel responded to his message, then the Cherubim would act accordingly. Likewise we read that it was Ezekiel who caused the Angels of judgment to go in to Jerusalem and slay her elders (Ez. 9:1-4). *How* Ezekiel did this was simply by teaching his prophecies to the captives in Babylon. If they had responded, then the judgment could have been averted. *So* much power and eternal consequence lies in the message we preach, and in the invitation we give men to repent. See on Ez. 3:6.

The "coals" are the same word used about the coals used in the sanctification of the tabernacle after the gross apostasy of Aaron's two sons (Lev. 16:12). The coals were used to burn incense which formed a cloud which covered the most holy place and made atonement for the desecration of the tabernacle (Lev. 16:13,17). The situation is clearly that of Ez. 10, where Ezekiel takes the coals and then the cloud of God's glory fills first the most holy, then the holy and then the entire temple. The cleansing ritual is then symbolized as complete by a live goat having the sins of the house of Israel placed upon it, and sent by a willing [AV "fit"] man into the desert far away. This willing man represented Ezekiel, sent by the Lord into the desert and thence to Babylon along with the captives. The word is also used in Ez. 24:11 concerning how there would be "coals" of fire in Jerusalem, upon which the cauldron of Jerusalem would be burnt and judged. This action was a direct result of Ezekiel taking the coals of fire from the cherubim in Ez. 10:2 and scattering them upon the city. This was therefore a direct result of the action of the cherubim, God's massively powerful Angelic way of working, in cooperation with Ezekiel. The whole arrangement shows God's eagerness to work with people. The coals of fire therefore don't solely and simply speak of the burning of Jerusalem by fire at the hands of the Babylonians. That burning was part of the cleansing of the temple from its apostasy, and the exile into Babylon along with Ezekiel, the willing man of Lev. 16:21, was in fact the bearing away of Israel's sin. There is always a silver lining to God's judgments. They are not simply Him lashing out in the offended anger of an omnipotent deity. They were and are designed to propel forward His purpose of saving by grace whilst at the same time judging sin and sinners.

Ezekiel 10:3 *Now the cherubim stood on the right side of the house when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court*- This cloud was that of God's glory but also of the incense; see on :2,4. The cherubim now removed to the right side, presumably the north, connecting with the Babylonian judgment to come from there. If to the south, then we have the picture of the cherubim as it were retreating as the northern invaders entered from the north. We note the perfect concert of action between the movement of Ezekiel, "the man", "the son of man", the cherubim and the

cloud. This was and is how seamlessly God can work with man. And in this sense, "God is in need of man", as Abraham Heschel put it.

Ezekiel 10:4 *Then the glory of Yahweh was lifted up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of Yahweh's glory*- As explained on :2, the cloud of glory alludes to the cloud of incense. That intercession of Ezekiel and God's cleansing of His people's desecration of the temple was in fact all of His glory; for this cloud is the cloud of the opening vision in Ez. 1:4. This was and remains the challenge to faith- to see things like the Babylonian siege as all a development of God's glory.

Ezekiel 10:5 *The sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of God Almighty when He speaks*- There seems to be a strong implication that the Angels were involved with writing the Bible through their inspiration of men. It was Angels who gave God's word to many of the prophets. So close is the connection between the word of God and of Angels that "the sound of the (Angel) cherubim... was heard as the voice of God Almighty God when He speaks". Zechariah stresses that the prophecies of the restoration were given by an Angel (Zech. 1:9-14; 4:1,5; 5:5,10; 6:4,5). The true prophet is one who "has stood in the council of the Lord to perceive and hear His word" (Jer. 23:18,22); and yet these are exactly the words used of how the Angels stand in the council of Heaven and hear Yahweh's word (1 Kings 22; Ps. 103:18-22). The Angels are therefore reflective of the situation on earth; as they stood before the Father's throne to hear the word in the council of Heaven, they were representative of the prophet on earth whom they were used to inspire. As the prophets were gathered together before the thrones of the Kings of Israel and Judah, they were reflecting how the Angels in Heaven were assembled before the throne of Yahweh, on whose throne the human kings were ruling (1 Kings 22:10). The lying spirit / Angel which appeared before Yahweh's throne would therefore have been reflected in Micaiah (1 Kings 22:15). What we have here is the court of Heaven being reflected in the situation upon earth, seeing that each of the prophets was represented by an Angel in Heaven.

Ezekiel 10:6 *It came to pass, when He commanded the man clothed in linen saying, Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim, that he went in and stood beside a wheel*- This "man" was Ezekiel. It must have been a scary thing, to go in to that vision and stand beside one of the mighty wheels. Ezekiel's obedience is recorded as it was indeed quite something. The more we sense the vastness of God's working, portrayed visually here in the cherubim visions, the more utterly awesome is the idea that we as men can have a hand in it, quite literally in Ezekiel's case. The fire of judgment had to be scattered by a man, rather than God merely doing this as direct punishment. Ezekiel as a priest was "son of man", representing the Lord Jesus. It was Ezekiel's humanity which gave legitimacy to God's judgment and also out of this the final salvation of His people which that judgment portended. See on :2.

Ezekiel 10:7 *The cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim and took of it, and put it into the hands of him who was clothed in linen, who took it and went out*- The opening vision of the cherubim had a man's hand silhouetted against the most internal working of the cherubim system. This was now to be understood as Ezekiel's hand. But the cherubim also had a hand. His hand and that of "the man", Ezekiel the "son of man" were united in

working out this whole scheme of judgment and yet salvation which was to be brought about through that fire (see on :2).

Ezekiel 10:8 *There appeared in the cherubim the form of a man's hand under their wings*- Ezekiel had to put his hand under the wings of the cherubim; and then there appeared permanently in the Cherubim visions "the form of a man's hand [i.e. Ezekiel's] under their wings" (Ezekiel 10:2,8). I take this to be indicative of how humanity can be so deeply a part of God's work; we are identified with Him and His Angels. The visions involved the whole system held up as it were upon a human hand; and God in the image of a man crowning it all in the Heavens. Truly God isn't far from any of us; and in a sense, as the great Rabbi Abraham Heschel put it, "God is in need of man". Note how when the cherubim lifted up, so was Ezekiel lifted up (Ez. 11:22-24). Judah should have left Jerusalem when the Spirit told them to; and they should have upped and left Babylon when the Spirit told them to. But they were out of step with the Spirit, despite Ezekiel's acted parable of literally being lifted up and going where the Cherubim went. The equivalent of this for us is surely our sense of doing all for God's glory, of having this as the final deciding factor in all our decisions. See on Ez. 1:1,20.

In Ez. 40:5, the measuring reed or rod is defined as being 6 cubits plus 6 handbreadths. This recall this presence of a man's hand, Ezekiel's, within the cherubim visions. That represented the human part of the whole wondrous vision; God requires human response, but would work powerfully with it. This may explain the otherwise strange measuring unit which mixed a human hand with the cubit measure.

Ezekiel 10:9 *I looked and behold, four wheels were beside the cherubim, one wheel beside one cherub, and another wheel beside another cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like a beryl stone*- Ezekiel now sees the cherubim portrayed as a chariot. Pure beryl stone is transparent, and extremely hard and enduring. The wheels imply they were chariots, or mounted on chariots; indeed this is a root meaning of the Hebrew word translated "cherub". The wheels make the living creatures appear as on a chariot, connecting with "the chariot of the cherubim" (1 Chron. 28:18). The firm grounding of this heavenly vision of power "on the earth" indicates that God's glory and activity were not simply in Heaven but active upon earth, both to transport a repentant Judah back to the land, and also to bring forth chariots of enemies to further destroy the land and temple.

Daniel was contemporary with Ezekiel, and so the mention of the beryl would connect with his description of the future Messiah figure as having a body of beryl, also replete with torches of fire and lightning just as seen in the cherubim vision (Dan. 10:6). As mentioned on Ez. 1, the final manifestation of God's glory, Spirit, judgment and salvation was to be in the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 10:10 *As for their appearance, the four of them had one likeness, like a wheel within a wheel*- The wheel within a wheel, each revolving as a gyroscope, deepens the impression of movement in contrary directions and yet all within the same direction. The confusion and contradictions which the exiles struggled with, as we do, were all somehow moving in the same direction, led by God's Spirit.

Ezekiel 10:11 *When they went, they went in their four directions. They didn't turn as they went, but to the place where the head looked they followed it; they didn't turn as*

they went- Like a complex series of gyroscopes within each other, so that the movement might be without turning to wherever they advanced. Thus each wheel was composed of two circles, cutting one another at right angles, "one" only of which appeared to touch the ground ("upon the earth" Ez. 1:15), according to the direction the cherubim desired to move in. The idea was that what might appear to be contradictory direction was in fact all seamlessly part of movement in the same direction. And again this has so much meaning for our lives, as it did for the exiles by the river Chebar. What appears useless, taking us away from our intended direction, is being used by God in His bigger direction of our lives towards His Kingdom and restoration

Ezekiel 10:12 *Their whole body and their backs and their hands and their wings and the wheels were full of eyes all around, even the wheels that the four of them had*- "Body" is literally "flesh". The idea is that this hugely powerful system of Divine operation was essentially connected to people. The huge number of eyes speaks of God's intense awareness- in response to Israel's attitude that God saw somehow distant and unaware of their situation and also of their sins. He was incredibly aware. And we need to have the essence of this vision with us too.

Ezekiel 10:13 *As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, 'the whirling wheels'*- Or, "the chariot". Although the vision appeared to be stationary, the wheels were whirling, God was in intricate movement. And this was the lesson to an Israel who considered God to be passive, distant and inactive. Even His apparent silence and lack of visible, proactive movement is not to say that He is not moving at a huge speed and complexity.

Ezekiel 10:14 *Each one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third face the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle*- The first face is that of an ox in Ez. 1:10. From this some have concluded that the cherubim had the appearance of an ox in some ways.

There are evident similarities between Ezekiel's cherubim, and the four living creatures of Rev. 4. They are both described as "full of eyes" (Ez. 1:18 = Rev. 4:6), with four very similar faces (lion, calf, man, eagle in Rev. 4:7 = lion, ox, man, eagle in Ez. 1:10); and both have wings (Rev. 4:8 = Ez. 1:8). Yet the living creatures of Revelation speak of being redeemed by the blood of Christ and made king-priests in God's Kingdom (Rev. 5:8-10)- as if they are the redeemed people of God. The four faces are likely to be connected with the four standards of the tribes of Israel (Lion = Judah, Man = Reuben, Ox = Ephraim, Eagle = Dan). Each of those tribes had two other tribes assigned to them in the encampment procedures of Num. 2. There is extra-Biblical tradition that the cherubim in Solomon's temple had the same four faces which Ezekiel saw on the cherubim- lion, ox, man and eagle (John Thomas, *Eureka* (West Beach: Logos, 1984 ed.) Vol. 2 Ch. 4 sec. 4.2). Those to whom Ezekiel related his vision would have immediately understood the point- that the earthly sanctuary was a reflection of the Heavenly, and that above that was a huge Angelic system operating, which also represented God's people- them. But that huge system was to remove to Babylon, and then the final visions of Ezekiel show that glory returning. Ezekiel, as the representative "son of man" as he's so often styled, was caught up within that system and transported at ease between Babylon and Jerusalem- and those who wanted to opt in with God and His Angels could likewise be taken to Babylon and returned. Those who chose to remain in Babylon were therefore resisting being

part of an awesome system of God manifestation and Angelic operation. We have that same choice in things great and small today.

Ezekiel 10:15 *The cherubim mounted up: this is the living creature that I saw by the river Chebar*- The same glorious activity of God seen in the Jerusalem temple was equally present amongst the group of depressed Jews who sat by the rivers of Babylon weeping. No longer was God to be perceived as tied to sacred space. His presence and glory were everywhere and in any situation, geographically, mentally or spiritually; just as today.

Ezekiel 10:16 *When the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels also didn't turn from beside them*- The cherubim, this massive system of Divine operation, was direct by God's Spirit. The feature of not turning during their movement is a major feature (Ez. 1:9,12,17; 10:11,16). The impression was given of God's unchanging, massive help towards the realization of His purpose with His people.

Ezekiel 10:17 *When they stood, these stood; and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them; for the spirit of the living creature was in them*- The heavy stress upon 'mounting up' (:15,17,19) uses a word which means "exalted" (s.w. Job 24:24). Even in the judgment of sinners, God was to be exalted and glorified. And the Hebrew idea of 'glory' is literally 'that which is lifted up'.

Ezekiel 10:18 *The glory of Yahweh went forth from over the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim*- The withdrawal of God's glory and cherubic presence from the temple is described in fine detail, as if it were painfully slow in progressing. It could have been described in just a sentence- 'The glory of God departed from the temple'. The various stages described are perhaps because at each point, there was still the opportunity of repentance. It's as if God left reluctantly.

Ezekiel 10:19 *The cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight when they went forth, and the wheels beside them. They stood at the door of the east gate of Yahweh's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above*- See on :18. The cherubim would finally return through the east gate if Israel were repentant and built and operated the temple system of Ez. 40-48. It was from here that they left. But in the whole process of the presence of God being withdrawn from that place, the earth was alight with His glory. Just as happens today when we face situations which defy our understanding.

Ezekiel 10:20 *This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim*- Ezekiel was up against the idea amongst the captives that Yahweh had forsaken the land (Ez. 8:12). Hence his visions of God's cherubim-angels, present both in the land as well as amongst the captives by Chebar in Babylon (Ez. 10:20). It was the same message as the lesson of Jonah- who likewise thought that Yahweh somehow only operated within the land of Israel. But again we see how God's judgments are appropriate to human actions and positions. They acted as if God had forsaken the land (Ez. 8:12), as if His presence was not really actual for them. And so in response, He did forsake the land and temple.

Ezekiel 10:21 *Every one had four faces, and every one four wings; and the likeness of*

the hands of a man was under their wings- This silhouette of a human hand is repeatedly emphasized. In Rev. 4:7 the four heads are distributed, one to each of the "living creatures", while here each has four faces. This is to highlight the sense of humanity, and of God's awareness of every angle of human situation. That was the lesson so required by Judah in their depression by the rivers of Babylon. See on :6,8.

Ezekiel 10:22 *As for the likeness of their faces, they were the faces which I saw by the river Chebar, their appearances and themselves; they went each one straight forward*- Again there is emphasis upon the fact that the same cherubim of glory were now by the rivers of Babylon amongst the captives as had been in the Jerusalem temple. The whole system would not be diverted- that is strongly emphasized in saying that they didn't turn, but went straight forward. See on Ez. 1:7.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 11

Ezekiel 11:1 *Moreover the Spirit lifted me up*- As the cherubim lifted up at the end of Ez. 10, so did Ezekiel. He as a mere tiny man was part of this amazing vision of Heavenly glory and activity. Just as we can be.

And brought me to the east gate of Yahweh's house which looks eastward- From here the cherubim of glory departed, and to here the glory would return (Ez. 43:4) if Israel returned repentant from captivity and rebuilt the temple.

At the door of the gate were twenty-five men- The same 25 sun worshippers of Ez. 8:16. The glory of the east gate is emphasized in the visions of the restored temple (Ez. 40:6,22,23 etc., in all a total of 12 references to it in Ez. 40-48). The idea was that in the restored temple, this kind of desecration was not to occur.

And I saw in their midst Jaazaniah the son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people- There is an irony in the meaning of these names. Jaazaniah ("God hearkens") the son of Azzur ("The Helper"), Pelatiah ("God rescues") the son of Benaiah ("God builds"). Azzur was the father of the false prophet Hananiah (Jer. 28:1). God was willing and eager to hear and save His people and to help them rebuild the temple. But instead they advised the people to build their own houses (:3) because the promised destruction would not come.

Ezekiel 11:2 *He said to me, Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked advice in this city*- They were teaching directly against Ezekiel's prophecies (:3). But this began with 'devising iniquity', and the phrase is only elsewhere used of devising iniquity privately "on your beds" (Ps. 36:4; Mic. 2:1). Typical of the prophets, the root of false teaching and sin is seen as the human heart.

Ezekiel 11:3 *Who say, The time is not near to build houses*- The idea may be that destruction would not come, so they should instead focus upon their own houses. But the Hebrew can also mean 'Not at hand is the building of houses'. This would then be an allusion to Jeremiah's recent letter to the captives in Babylon where he had urged them to build houses because a return from captivity was not going to happen soon, contrary to the message of the false prophets (Jer. 29:5).

This is the cauldron, and we are the meat- This would have been a sneering at Jeremiah's prophecy that Jerusalem would be boiled in the fire of Babylonian judgment- Jer. 1:13 "I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north".

Their idea was that the holy city was as a cauldron which would defend them from the fire of judgment. But this is deconstructed by Ezekiel in Ez. 24:3. The cauldron would refuse to respond to the purging of the fire and they would all in fact be destroyed. Their concept of sacred space would not save them. And in reality, the walls of Jerusalem were so weak they could be dug through by hand; seeon Ez. 12:7.

Ezekiel 11:4 *Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, son of man*- As noted on :13, Ezekiel seems to have needed encouragement in his ministry as he may not have perceived the depth of Israel's sin.

Ezekiel 11:5 *The Spirit of Yahweh fell on me*- As if to say that this was a very heavy level of inspiration, God really wanted to say this.

And He said to me, Speak, Thus says Yahweh: 'Thus you have said, house of Israel; for I know the things that come into your mind- The words of Israel are paralleled with their inner thoughts. The Lord emphasizes this in His teaching too. God knew, and knows, the inner thoughts and mental words of every person, especially those of His people.

Ezekiel 11:6 *You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain*- The slain bodies of those to be killed by the Babylonians were their fault; they had slain them. But as noted on :5, the prophets have the same attitude to human behaviour as the Lord later did. To hate your brother and abuse him was to murder him. The slain bodies were what they had in essence already done. But the same language is used of what was to happen to Babylon (Jer. 51:4). What Babylon did to Judah was to be done to them, and that is the reason for the structure of the book of Revelation. The seals describe what is to be done to Israel in the last days, and the vials what is to then be done in return to her abusers.

Ezekiel 11:7 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Your slain whom you have laid in its midst, they are indeed the meat, and this is the cauldron; but you shall be brought out of its midst*- Again the blame for the deaths is placed upon the Jews themselves. The cauldron of Jerusalem was not going to save them, God was going to end all concept of sacred space, and instead dwell in the hearts of repentant people. "You shall be brought out..." is amazing grace. A remnant would be preserved in order to give them the chance of repentance.

Ezekiel 11:8 *You have feared the sword; and I will bring the sword on you, says the Lord Yahweh*- Part of Divine judgment is to bring upon men their worst fears. And He did so with Job, not because he had sinned, but to teach him further (Job 3:25). Job is indeed set up as a representative of Judah at this time, but he personally hadn't sinned. This isn't God being cruel; it is to force us to psychologically discard all clever plans to somehow thwart the worst, all insurance policies are voided by God. In order to bring us to totally cast ourselves upon His grace.

Ezekiel 11:9 *I will bring you out of its midst*- They had reasoned that Jerusalem would be the cauldron which would protect them from the fire of Babylonian judgment. But they were to be brought out from that apparent position of safety.

And deliver you into the hands of foreigners, and will execute judgments among you- "Deliver you" also carries the hint of salvation. It was a deliverance to the sword

in many cases, but also with the hint of fuller deliverance, at least nationally, and also individually if they would heed the message of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and repent.

Ezekiel 11:10 *You shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and you shall know that I am Yahweh*- Perhaps God had in view some kind of extermination camp on the border between Israel and Babylon. It was at Riblah in Hamath, on the border, where the King of Babylon executed judgment on Zedekiah, his sons, and the chief officers and priests, and 60 men of the city (Jer. 52:9-11, 24-27; and 2 Kings 25:19-21 cp. 1 Kings 8:65, where "the entering in of Hamath" implies Hamath, where Riblah was situated, was the entering or border of the land). But note that Ezekiel defines the border of Israel as including Damascus (Ez. 47:18). Mal. 1:5 says that Yahweh would be glorified at "the border of Israel". Perhaps in their final moments they repented and glorified God; they 'knew that I am Yahweh' (:12). Or maybe the idea is that the condemnation of the wicked was still a glorification of Yahweh.

Ezekiel 11:11 *This shall not be your cauldron, neither shall you be the meat in its midst; I will judge you in the border of Israel*- See on :10 and :3. The city of Jerusalem and the temple "in its midst" was not going to be the cauldron which would preserve them from the fire of Babylonian judgment.

Ezekiel 11:12 *And you shall know that I am Yahweh*- The idea may not have to be that they personally would know Yahweh through the condemnation process (see on :10). "Yahweh is known by the judgments He executes" (Ps. 9:16). The 'making known' would therefore have been through advertisement to the world of His ways and essential character.

For you have not walked in My statutes, neither have you executed My ordinances, but have behaved like the nations that are around you'- They had specifically disobeyed Dt. 12:30,31. God saw the tendency to be like those around us and warned them specifically against it.

Ezekiel 11:13 *It happened, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then fell I down on my face and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord Yahweh! will you make a full end of those remaining of Israel?*- Ezekiel seems shocked at the severity of God's judgments, just as the disciples still felt that the Pharisees were more righteous than they were. Ezekiel's falling on his face was in intercession for Israel, and as explained on Ez. 9:8, it seems that God did respond. "Pelatiah" means either 'God's remnant' or 'Whom Yah delivers'. Ezekiel therefore saw in his death the destruction of the remnant which he had assumed God would preserve. But the remnant were not going to be righteous. We too can assume that there is more spirituality in the community we know than there actually is.

Ezekiel 11:14 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- Ezekiel's overly high impression of Pelatiah (:13) was now going to be further challenged by news that there was far more unspirituality in his people than he had assumed.

Ezekiel 11:15 *Son of man, the people who live in Jerusalem are talking about you and those of your nation who are with you in exile. They say, The exiles are too far away to worship Yahweh. He has given us possession of the land*- The poor masses left in

the land had to pay taxes and render service to the new administration (Lam. 5:12-14), typical of Babylonian policy in conquered lands; see on Ez. 5:10. The land taken from the exiled ruling classes was then redistributed to the rural poor who remained in the subjected states. This policy has been described as giving the land of the previously wealthy to "the sub-proletariat of the city and the country" (A. J. Soggin, *A History of Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984) p. 252). This is what was done by the Babylonians in Judah (Jer. 39:10; 2 Kings 25:12; Jer. 52:16 cp. Ez. 33:21-27). These poor peasant farmer masses, who were likely 90% of the population, were rejoicing at their new prosperity [relative to what they had before] and considered that God had justified them against their abusive masters, whom the Babylonians had stripped of their land and taken into captivity. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). So those who remained were arrogantly assuming that those formerly wealthy Jews in captivity could not acceptably worship Yahweh outside of the land, but they could; and they were claiming that God "has given us possession of the land". They didn't want the wealthy exiles to return and reclaim the land. But in fact it was through the repentance of the humbled wealthy and powerful that God intended to rebuild His Kingdom; and that may be a lesson for many today.

Ezekiel 11:16 *Therefore say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Whereas I have removed them far off among the nations, and whereas I have scattered them among the countries*- Judah had removed their heart far from God (s.w. Is. 29:13; Jer. 2:5). Their scattering far off was but a reflection of what they in their hearts had chosen. And this is what condemnation will be- giving people that which is where their heart really is. See on :21.

Yet will I be to them a sanctuary for a little while in the countries where they have come- God promised to "be to them [the Jews in captivity] a sanctuary for a little while in the countries [the 127 provinces of Babylon] where they are come". His intention was that they should be there, preserved by Him even in their punishment, for the "little while" of 70 years. Then they would return, and their sanctuary there in exile would become the new sanctuary which would come to the restored Zion (Ez. 37:26,28). And yet they preferred to remain there in Babylon. As noted on Ez. 1:1, Ezekiel was the priest of this "little sanctuary" in exile, a sanctuary that didn't require a temple. This was God's answer to the sneering of those who remained in the land that outside of the land, the exiles couldn't worship Yahweh as well as they could (:15). As explained on :15 and Ez. 5:10, it was the rich leadership who were taken into exile. It may seem that God has no place much for the wealthier parts of society. But His plan was to humble those wealthy exiles, having stripped them of their land and dignity, and to use them as the basis for a returned, repentant Israel who would rebuild the Kingdom.

There is some archaeological evidence for this "little sanctuary". "The fate of some exiles is now documented by a group of cuneiform contract tablets stemming mainly from two localities in the region of Nippur, one of them called "city of Judah/of the Judeans" (Al Yahudu/Yahudayu), the Babylonian name of Jerusalem. As the majority of the people appearing in the documents bear West Semitic and Judean

names, it seems certain that this new Jerusalem in Babylonia had been founded by recent exiles".

Mal. 1:11 could be speaking of sanctuaries like Ezekiel's. The returned exiles, who were not worshipping properly, were reminded: "For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering: for My name is great among the nations, says Yahweh of Armies". Those present tenses could lead us to read this as speaking of the Jews and Israelites who had not returned to the land. They were offering acceptable incense without the temple, throughout the Persian empire. And this was acceptable, whereas the offerings made at the temple weren't. We recall how Ezekiel had established a "little sanctuary" in exile and there likely were others. There are records of Jewish sacrifices being made in the Elephantine colony in Egypt, in Babylonia, and at the Jewish temple in Leontopolis in Lower Egypt. These and other sanctuaries may have been the referent of how "in every place" [the Hebrew often refers to a holy place] amongst the Gentiles in the territory of the land promised to Abraham, incense was being offered acceptably to Yahweh.

Ezekiel 11:17 *Therefore say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel*- Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfil His original intentions for them.

Ezekiel 11:18 *They shall return, and they shall take away all the detestable things of it and all its abominations*- The exiles returned, but as Zechariah 5 and Malachi make clear, they continued in idolatry. Jer. 41:5 suggests that there was still some kind of sanctuary operating on the site of the temple even during the exile; but this too became full of idolatry which the returned exiles would need to purge.

Ezekiel 11:19 *I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh*- Israel were to return from captivity, destroy all the Gentile abominations and idols from their land, and then receive a new heart and a new covenant (Ezekiel 36 develops this more). Sitting there in captivity, God offered His people a new covenant (Ez. 11:19,20,25 cp. Heb. 10:16); they could have one mind between each other, and a heart of flesh. But Israel would not, and it was only accepted by those who turned to Jesus Christ. Their being of “one heart” after baptism (Acts 4:32) was a direct result of their acceptance of this same new covenant which Judah had rejected. In the hearing of offer of the new covenant, we are essentially in the position of those of the captivity, hearing Ezekiel’s words, and deciding whether or not to remain in cushy Babylon, or make a painful and humanly uncertain *aliyah* to Zion.

The promise here is that of the new covenant, to be repeated in Ez. 20 and Jer. 31. We now are in that covenant, and it has promise of psychological transformation, a

new spirit, a new worldview; a heart of flesh, open and soft toward God rather than hardened towards spiritual things. If we are intended to achieve spirituality solely by Bible reading and study, then there would be no place for such promises of a new heart and spirit.

Ezekiel 11:20 *That they may walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God*- The new spirit given in the new covenant of :19 involved an inclination and proclivity towards obedience to God's ways. God doesn't simply leave man with His laws and waits for our obedience. He is eager to grant a spirit which desires to be obedient. This is why repentance as well as forgiveness is a gift of the Spirit (Acts 3:25,26; 11:18).

Ezekiel 11:21 *But as for those whose heart walks after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their way on their own heads, says the Lord Yahweh*- As noted on :16, Divine condemnation is a giving people that which is where their heart really is. The walk of their heart is here paralleled with their 'way' in practical life. We walk as our heart walks. Thee is a huge emphasis in the prophets upon being spiritually minded, and the parallel between thoughts and words / actions.

Ezekiel 11:22 *Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the wheels were beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above*- As the cherubim lifted up their wings, so Ezekiel was lifted up (:24); he was at one with the huge, awesome system of Divine working, as Israel could also have been.

Ezekiel 11:23 *The glory of Yahweh went up from the midst of the city, and stood on the mountain which is on the east side of the city*- The mount of Olives, from where the glory was intended to return to the city in Ez. 43:2. It never did, but it will do when the Lord Jesus returns to that mount (Acts 1:9-11) and it cleaves in half as Zech. 14:4 envisages.

Ezekiel 11:24 *The Spirit lifted me up, and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me*- Note how when the cherubim lifted up, so was Ezekiel lifted up (:22). Judah should have left Jerusalem when the Spirit told them to; and they should have upped and left Babylon when the Spirit told them to. But they were out of step with the Spirit, despite Ezekiel's acted parable of literally being lifted up and going where the Cherubim went. The equivalent of this for us is surely our sense of doing all for God's glory, of having this as the final deciding factor in all our decisions. See on Ez. 1:1,20; 10:8. We note in this context that it was an Angel who described to Ezekiel the nature of the temple which the exiles were intended to build; and we even read in Ezekiel 40:14 that "He made…" [e.g. the posts of the temple]. The Angels had potentially built that temple; it was for Israel to build according to the pattern of it.

Ezekiel 11:25 *Then I repeated to those of the captivity all the things that Yahweh had shown me*- Probably Ezekiel was still under house arrest amongst the captives. He was imploring them to repent and see the possibilities there were for them. It would have required a lot of humility to release him and respond.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 12

Ezekiel 12:1 *The word of Yahweh also came to me saying*- "Came" is also translated "came to pass". God's word is so certain of fulfilment that when it 'comes', it effectively 'comes to pass'.

Ezekiel 12:2 Son of man, you dwell in the midst of the rebellious people, who have eyes to see, and don't see, who have ears to hear, and don't hear; for they are rebellious people- Ezekiel was living amongst the captives in Babylon. They had the potential to respond to his message as intended, and to become the repentant remnant who would restore the Kingdom of God in Israel. But they would not respond. Because of this, there would be a further captivity of the people of Jerusalem (:3). It wasn't that the people still in Judah were being punished for the sins of those in exile; it was that the sinners in Judah could have been spared further punishment by the repentance of those in exile. So much can depend upon the spirituality of third parties; see on Mk. 2:5. The same was true of the Jews in Judah- they too had eyes to see but chose not to (Jer. 5:21).

They were "rebellious" in that they refused to mentally respond to Ezekiel's message. Their rebellion, like ours so often, was a case of a sin of omission rather than commission. Those taken into captivity were the royal family and the leadership, and so the allusion would have been to Saul and his family being rejected as kings of Israel because of his 'rebellion' against God's word through Samuel (1 Sam. 15:23 s.w.).

Ezekiel 12:3 Therefore, you son of man, prepare what you need for a journey into exile and move by day in their sight. You shall move from your place to another place in their sight- As explained on :2, the rebellion of the captives meant that they were not going to be able to spare those still in Judah from further invasion and captivity. And Ezekiel as "son of man" was representative not only of God but also of the sinful people of God, again typifying the work of the Lord Jesus. Ezekiel's acted parable was to make them "consider". They had already gone on the journey into exile; the message was that they could really avert this happening for others. And they were apparently unmoved by the possibilities they had for others.

Perhaps they will consider, though they are rebellious people- God had told Ezekiel at the start that his audience would not respond. But here we see the essential hopefulness of God for human response- "perhaps" they would respond. When we do respond, we thrill the heart of the God who must be so often disappointed. "Consider" is the common Hebrew word for 'to see'. Ezekiel was to act his parable "in their sight", in the hope they would "see". We have here the two kinds of sight, alluded to several times in John's Gospel. We are to 'see' spiritually the lessons behind what we 'see' with our natural vision.

Ezekiel 12:4 You shall bring forth your belongings by day in their sight, as belongings for exile; and you shall go forth at evening in their sight, as when men go forth into exile- This was to typify Zedekiah and the remnants of the Jerusalem leadership fleeing Jerusalem by night (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Zedekiah was to be punished for his sins by the attempt to flee, his capture and judgment by the Babylonians; but the full effect of his sins could have been lightened by the repentance of the exiles. And this principle is still true; the judgment of some people can be ameliorated by the spirituality of third parties.

Ezekiel 12:5 Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out that way- Although Zedekiah and his family fled through "the gate between the two walls", we can assume that all the main gates of Jerusalem were being watched by the Babylonian besiegers, and so this "gate" would have been dug specially for them to flee by (Jer. 39:4; 52:7).

Ezekiel 12:6 In their sight you shall carry it on your shoulder, and carry it forth in the twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you don't see the land; for I have set you for a sign to the house of Israel- The disguise was to represent how Zedekiah and the remnants of the royal family would have tried to disguise themselves as they fled (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). See on :10. It was deep humiliation for Zedekiah; he himself had to carry his few belongings on his own shoulder rather than have servants carry them. It was all part of God's attempt to bring him down, that He might exalt him in due time.

Ezekiel 12:7 I did as I was commanded: I brought forth my belongings by day, as if for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my hand; I brought it forth in the dark, and carried it on my shoulder in their sight- Ezekiel was representing Zedekiah (:10). Perhaps he himself frantically dug through the wall with his own hands. If the wall could be dug through with hands, we see how flimsy were the defences of Jerusalem against the Babylonians. And yet the Jews had argued that Jerusalem was as strong as an iron cauldron, and the fire of Babylonian judgment could therefore never reach them; see on Ez. 11:3. In Ez. 13:14, the strength of Jerusalem is spoken of as a wall built with bad morter that was very weak. This had a connection with the literally weak wall of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 12:8 In the morning came the word of Yahweh to me, saying- "In the morning" after Zedekiah fled Jerusalem he was arrested. The morning after Ezekiel's symbolic exile from the house of his arrest, the observing Jews ought to have figured that now, he was as it were in captivity. They ought to have figured that he represented Zedekiah. And so this was now to be stated explicitly.

Ezekiel 12:9 Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?'- This was the intention of the acted parable; to elicit this question, even though in their consciences the answer was surely clear. As in Ez. 24:19, the question "What are you doing? / What do you mean?" was elicited; but this was followed by the direct revelation of God's word. And so it is in our witness; our lives elicit questions and pique interest from those around us, as a springboard toward the declaration of God's word to them.

Ezekiel 12:10 Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem, and all the people of Israel who are in it'- Josephus (*Antiquities* 10:7) claims that Ezekiel sent a copy of this prophecy to Zedekiah. As Jeremiah had sent a letter to the captives at the Chebar, so it would be understandable if Ezekiel sent a message to Jerusalem confirming the warnings of Jeremiah.

Ezekiel 12:11 Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall go into exile, into captivity- This was not merely prediction. The group of exiles had power over the outcome; if they had repented, the implication is that this need not have happened. Therefore we have the otherwise awkward change of

pronouns from "I am *your* sign" to "so shall it be done *to them*". Ezekiel was a sign to those observing him in Babylon; and they were to respond to that sign by repentance, so that the outcome for "them" could be different.

Ezekiel 12:12 The prince who is among them shall carry his belongings on his shoulder in the dark, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby- The "them" and "they" rather than "you" remind us that Ezekiel is saying this in captivity in Babylon. See on :11.

He shall cover his face, because he shall not see the land with his eyes- This looked ahead to how Zedekiah's eyes were put out (2 Kings 25:7). The way Zedekiah is described as "the prince" lays the basis for the later prophecies about "the prince" in Ez. 40-48. Had the exiles returned and rebuilt and operated the temple system as required there, another individual called "the prince" would have arisen. Perhaps the blind, repentant Zedekiah could have returned from exile and become the prince figure; this would then solve the otherwise strange prophecy of Is. 42:19, that the restored community would have had a blind leader. Likewise the exiles could have lived under the shadow of a great leader in exile (Lam. 4:20), fulfilling the prophecies of Messiah as a great tree. But none of those involved lived up to their potential.

Ezekiel 12:13 My net also will I spread on him, and he shall be taken in My snare- The Babylonian army is likened to a net in Hab. 1:14-16.

And I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there- "O Zedekiah… Thou shalt not die by the sword: but thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers… so shall they burn odours for thee" (Jer. 34:5) mentions no conditions. But consider the words of Ez. 12:13 about the same man; he would die in Babylon and he would be made blind before arrival. The surrounding verses give an accurate prophecy of how Zedekiah was captured whilst fleeing from Jerusalem. And the same is said in Jer. 32:4; 38:17. It surely has to be recognized that the 'prophecy' that Zedekiah would die in peace was conditional upon his obedience to the word of Jeremiah- even though those conditions aren't recorded (although they are implicit surely).

Ezekiel 12:14 I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his armies; and I will draw out the sword after them- His personal bodyguard would scatter from him, and Zedekiah would be captured alone. This was the ultimate humiliation for a leader. And this is the nature of condemnation- intensely personal, when absolutely all human strength has been taken away. And Zedekiah fleeing from Jerusalem towards Jericho is picked up in the parable of the good Samaritan. We are all Zedekiah, beaten and injured because of our sins, but saved by the grace of the Samaritan.

Ezekiel 12:15 They shall know that I am Yahweh, when I disperse them among the nations, and scatter them through the countries- The curse for breaking the covenant was to be 'dispersed' to the Gentile world, where they would serve other gods as a punishment for having done so in Israel (Dt. 28:64 s.w.). But it seems God ammended this judgment- He envisaged they would be 'dispersed' and there would know or recognize Him as God alone. But there is ample evidence that the exiles did worship idols for the next few generations. So the original curse of serving idols in captivity was the path Israel allowed to happen. But God had provided an alternative potential.

Ezekiel 12:16 But I will preserve a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they come; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- The righteous remnant were actually persecuted by the other Jews in Babylon, according to the testimony of the later parts of Isaiah. One significant problem which they had right from the start was that they insisted that the captivity was unfair, it was not their fault, they were righteous and were being unfairly punished for the sins of their fathers. Ezekiel 18 addresses this at length with them. God's intention was that His exiled people would "declare all their abominations among the nations whither they come", i.e. the 127 provinces of Babylon (Ez. 12:16). The intention was that they would admit to all how they had sinned. Note how confession of personal failure and testimony to God's forgiveness is actually a powerful witness to unbelievers. But instead, Ezekiel had to reason against the Jews' insistence that they had not sinned, and were being unfairly punished for their fathers' sins by an unjust God (Ez. 18). And so likewise it happens with us all too often that the potential witness which we could make simply isn't made.

Ezekiel 12:17 Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying- See on :1.

Ezekiel 12:18 Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and with fearfulness- The geography of Jerusalem meant that there was always a problem with water whenever the city was besieged. The "trembling and fear" refer to the psychological breakdown related to the paranoia about condemnation which was part of the curse for disobedience. But such paranoia was ultimately the fault of those who had chosen the way to condemnation. Ezekiel, the righteous, was here to feel and act like the condemned sinners. This was what it meant to be "son of man"; and the Lord Jesus as our representative felt the feelings of sinners and the condemned, whilst being holy, harmless and separate from sinners.

Ezekiel 12:19 And tell the people of the land- The reference is to the Jews in "the land" of Babylon. They are addressed because their repentance could have affected the outcomes for the Jews in "the land" of Judah.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with fearfulness, and drink their water in dismay, that her land may be desolate, and all that is therein, because of the violence of all those who dwell therein- The "violence" as in their unloving attitudes to their brethren (Ps. 107:34). In the restored Zion, the princes were to not practice "violence" but instead justice, and make no demands ["exactions"] upon others (Ez. 45:9). It is this human tendency to demand of others, often through not forgiving them (Mt. 18:28), which is seen by God as violence. And it was this which led them to the "fear" and "dismay" which were part of the psychological breakdown which they were given; see on :18. "Dismay" translates the word usually translated 'desolation' with respect to the desolation of the land by the Babylonians (Lev. 26:22,31,32,34,35,43). The land would be desolated just as they as persons would be left desolated. Ezekiel as the representative of sinful Israel had sat 'desolate' by the rivers of Babylon (Ez. 3:15 s.w.). See on :18.

Ezekiel 12:20 The cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be a desolation; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- The reference is to the cities still

left habitable after the earlier Babylonian incursions. But again, in wrath God remembered mercy. Not all the cities of Judah were destroyed; Jeremiah records how Mizpah was made the new capital under a Babylonian puppet ruler. As explained on Ez. 5:10; 11:15, probably only about 10% of the population were deported, agricultural activity continued and grain offerings were still brought to the site of the temple by men from Shiloh and Shechem (Jer. 41:5). This amelioration of the planned judgments may have been because of the intercession of Ezekiel and / or the repentance of a remnant.

Ezekiel 12:21 The word of Yahweh came to me, saying- See on :1.

Ezekiel 12:22 Son of man, what is this proverb that you have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every prophetic vision fails?- God knows every bit of small talk and the phrases people use in mockery. It was God's grace which had meant that the threatened judgments had not come. But they mocked at it, to the point of joking that prophecies of judgment never come true. The Jews in the land of Israel joked like this (also in Jer. 17:15; Zeph. 1:12), and those in captivity did likewise. It is common amongst people of all ages to assume that God's apparent slowness to act means that He never will do (2 Pet. 3:3,4). Just as the exiles thought that day by day had passed without Ezekiel's words coming true.

Ezekiel 12:23 Tell them therefore, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but tell them, The days are at hand, and the fulfilment of every prophetic vision- "Days" was really literal; any day, the news would come of Jerusalem's fall and the destruction of the temple. The false prophets had been falsely claiming that the captivity would end within two years (Jer. 28:3). The "every... vision" in view may refer to all of Ezekiel's visions so far recorded. Or the idea may be that the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon was envisaged as the final and total fulfilment of the prophetic word of God so far given; but by grace, there was to be a restoration, and when this potential failed, then further destructions of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 12:24 For there shall be no more any false vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel- As noted on :23, there was the potential for the prophetic program to come to a finality in the destruction and restoration of Jerusalem under a Messianic king. This would have meant that literally, there would never again be false prophets in Israel. But the reality was different. That potential restoration didn't happen; and false prophets did continue within Israel. They will only finally be destroyed in the last days, when all these prophecies will come to their final term.

There were many false prophets at the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; when in fact the true word of prophecy could have 'turned away' the captivity, if the exiles and the people left in Judah had responded to it (Lam. 2:14). Indeed it could have been that Zedekiah returned as "the prince" of the restored kingdom; see on Ez. 12:12. Ezekiel prophesied to the exiles in Babylon of what was going to happen to the Jews still in the land, exactly so that the exiles' repentance might avert those in the land suffering further. An ameliorated program of judgment and events would have been possible if they had repented.

Ezekiel 12:25 For I am Yahweh. I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall be performed. It shall be no more deferred; for in your days, rebellious house, will I

speak the word, and will perform it, says the Lord Yahweh- There seems to be the suggestion that God ‘speaks’ a word / plan / intention; and when He decides to operationalize it, then He speaks it again- presumably in the court of Heaven. "Deferred" is the word used by Nehemiah in thanking God for his 'forbearance' (Neh. 9:30). Tragically, this forbearance of God was what led some to take the impression that He was not serious about judgment and was a God somewhat distant and disinterested. See on :28.

Ezekiel 12:26 Again the word of Yahweh came to me saying- See on :1.

Ezekiel 12:27 Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he sees is for many days to come, and he prophesies of times that are far off- They now apparently accepted that Ezekiel was a prophet, but comforted themselves that it would not come true in their times. We see here a classic case of how misinterpretation of God's word has a psychological and spiritual basis. Rather than accept the plain meaning of Ezekiel's message, that destruction in Jerusalem was imminent, they decided that the visions spoke of the far distant future.

Ezekiel 12:28 Therefore tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: None of My words shall be deferred any more, but the word which I shall speak shall be performed, says the Lord Yahweh- See on :25. The word was to be "performed" or literally 'done'. The same phrase is to be found in the lament that Israel would not perform or do God's word (Ez. 33:31,32). If we do not perform God's word, then He will perform it in our condemnation. The idea is that His word is so utterly certain of fulfilment (see on :1). It is for us to as it were be on His wide by performing it ourselves, seeing He will surely perform it one way or the other.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 13

Ezekiel 13:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- See on Ez. 12:1.

Ezekiel 13:2 *Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, Hear the word of Yahweh*- "Their own heart" is here parallel with "their own spirit" (:2). The spirit is the heart or mind. It is far too simplistic to claim that 'spirit = power'. See on :17.

Ezekiel 13:3 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit, though they have seen nothing!*- See on :2. This is an alliteration, because the words for "foolish" and "prophet" are so similar: the *nabiim* are also the *n’balim*. This kind of device is often used in the Bible because the vast majority of people encountering God's word were illiterate, and therefore we find many such aids to memorization of the text.

Ezekiel 13:4 *Israel, your prophets have been like foxes in the desert places*- This would imply that the men intended and inspired to be prophets actually became false prophets (:6). Hence they are likened to foxes, characterized by deceit. Their false prophecy, when they knew God's *true* word, was therefore the more culpable and awful.

Ezekiel 13:5 *You have not gone up into the gaps, neither built up the wall for the house of Israel, to stand in the battle in the day of Yahweh*- By speaking the true prophetic word of God, the gaps in the weak wall of Israel could have been filled in. "The day of Yahweh" would have come, but the walls of Jerusalem would have been able "to stand" rather than being breached and then burnt by the Babylonians. The false prophets had wrongly taught that Jerusalem was as strong as an iron cauldron and would preserve its people from the fire of Babylonian judgment (see on Ez. 11:3,7). The idea of filling in the gaps can be taken as a metaphor for intercession. Thus Moses "stood before Him in the breach" (Ps. 106:23) and caused God to alter His plan to totally destroy all Israel. Such language of utter desolation and destruction is likewise found in the earlier parts of Ezekiel, but it seems Ezekiel's own intercession changed some outcomes. But other prophets ought to have done this; instead they became false prophets and didn't go up into the gaps.

Ezekiel 13:6 *They have seen falsehood and lying divination, they who say, Yahweh says; but Yahweh has not sent them; and they have made men to hope that the word would be confirmed*- Heb. as RVmg. "they hope to confirm their word". By deceiving others, they came to deceive themselves, and were really expecting a fulfilment. This is the trouble with any form of lying; the liar comes to believe it is true. The true "hope of Israel" was the restoration from captivity after repentance; but this was being changed into a false hope, a kind of prosperity gospel, the Kingdom right now, without the need for humility and repentance.

Ezekiel 13:7 *Haven't you seen a false vision, and haven't you spoken a lying divination in that you say, Yahweh says; but I have not spoken?*- The very form of the question seeks for an answer. The purpose of it was therefore to elicit repentance. and apparently the question was met by silence, leading to the following woe upon the false prophets. "False", AV "vain", is a word often associated with the "vanities" of the idols. Their messages were inspired by the idols they worshipped (Zech. 10:2). These "lying divinations" are specifically defined as the "untempered morter" with which the wall of Israel, its supposed defence, had been built (Ez. 22:28 s.w.).

Ezekiel 13:8 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have spoken falsehood and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, says the Lord Yahweh*- This is yet another example of Ezekiel telling the captives the same message as Jeremiah was at the same time telling the Jews still in Judah; "I am against you" is the threat of Jer. 21:5. They had 'seen' lies in their minds; they 'saw' what they wanted to see. And in this sense the psychology of the false prophets is a warning to us all.

Ezekiel 13:9 *My hand shall be against the prophets who see false visions, and who preach lies. They shall not be in the council of My people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel*- We learn in Ezra 2:63 and Neh. 7:65 that it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ez. 13:9: "neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. These were two engraven stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zechariah 3:9

prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraven stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfil Ez. 42:13, which says that then the priests would eat the holy things. In a restoration context, Is. 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD". This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zech. 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and 'bearing the glory', i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was *conditional* on Joshua's obedience: "This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey" (6:15). Because Joshua failed, he didn't have urim and thummim, therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the 'Kingdom' prophecy of Ez. 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration feature "the servant"- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Isa 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there". His obedience would enable the peoples' establishment as the Kingdom.

Neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh- Ezekiel told the captives during the early stages of their captivity that the false prophets and "rebels" amongst them would receive the condemnation and judgment of not returning to the land (Ez. 13:9; 20:38). And yet when the command came to return to the land, most of the people chose to remain in Babylon- and therefore they chose their own condemnation. They were a "rebellious house" (Ez. 2:3). For they were aware from Ezekiel's words that not returning to the land was God's condemnation. Those who will not be in the Kingdom will be those who chose not to be there- all who truly love the Lord's appearing will be accepted. The fact Ezekiel tells the false prophets amongst the captives that they would not return to the land of Israel implies that they could have done, and that that generation could have returned. This meant that the 70 years captivity period was open to negotiation; it could have been reduced, if the first groups of exiles had repented.

When Moses asked to be removed from God's book or register, he was apparently not heard. But in reality, he was not allowed to "enter into the land of Israel". That was punishment for his personal sin, but whenever his sin and punishment is mentioned, he says that it was for Israel's sake. And so the punishment of not entering the land was not solely a punishment for his personal sin; it was used as a way of Moses bearing their condemnation, in line with his request to have his name blotted out from God's register. And here we have this thought confirmed- because not entering the land is paralleled with not being written in God's book / register.

Ezekiel 13:10 *Because, even because they have seduced My people, saying, Peace; and there is no peace; and when one builds up a wall, behold, they plaster it with whitewash*- "Peace" is usually 'peace with God'. But the idea may also be that they were predicting a peace agreement with Babylon. The false prophecies of peace at this time (Jer. 6:14; 23:17) are paralleled with idols speaking peace through the false prophets (Zech. 10:2). This is another indication that there was idolatry amongst the exiles, as predicted in Dt. 28:64. Israel's rejection of idolatry after the exile didn't

come for a few generations. See on :18. The whitewash plaster was the false prophecy of peace (Ez. 22:28).

Ezekiel 13:11 *Tell those who plaster it with whitewash, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing storm; and on you great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear it*- The physical wall of Jerusalem was so flimsy that a man could dig through it with his bare hands (Ez. 12:7), and this reflected how weak was the wall which the false prophets were symbolically building. The language of the storm causing the fall of the wall is that of the Lord's second coming (Mt. 7:24,25). These prophecies had a limited application in what happened to Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. But the full extent of what was envisaged didn't fully happen. The final fulfilment is rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord's second coming.

Ezekiel 13:12 *Behold, when the wall has fallen, shall it not be said to you, Where is the plaster with which you have plastered it?*- The wall would fall when Zedekiah himself dug through it to escape the siege. Later, the walls were breached by the Babylonians; and then the "plaster" of the false prophecies was apparent for what it was. The same word is used of the plastering of a leprous house (Lev. 14:42,48); and the temple and house of Israel was indeed leprous, but there was no real plaster applied by the priests. Instead the leprous state was covered up, in a bodge job.

Ezekiel 13:13 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will even tear it with a stormy wind in My wrath; and there shall be an overflowing storm in My anger, and great hailstones in wrath to consume it*- "Tear" is the same word used for the 'breaking up' of the city by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:4). The stormy wind connects with the rushing sound of the cherubim in the opening vision; the Angel cherubim were going to move the Babylon army from Babylon to Jerusalem just as easily as they could move the captives both to and from Babylon, back to Zion. "Stormy wind" is s.w. "whirlwind" in Ez. 1:4; "overflowing storm" is s.w. "the day of rain" in Ez. 1:28. If they chose to like Ezekiel identify with God's massive system of movement and operation. See on Ez. 26:10. The same words are used of the storm and hailstones [literally, 'hail of God'] to be cast upon Gog; what is done to Israel shall be done to her invaders (Ez. 38:22).

Ezekiel 13:14 *So will I break down the wall that you have plastered with whitewash*- "Whitewash" of "untempered morter" (AV) is the word used of the "foolish things" seen by the false prophets at that time (Lam. 2:14). The whitewash represented the false prophecies, as in Ez. 22:28.

And bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation shall be uncovered- The word "foundation" is often used of the foundation or bottom of the altar. This was presumably removed to the foundation, so that in Jer. 41:5 those who remained in the land could only come there to offer grain offerings and not animal sacrifice. It was the Edomite mercenaries who urged this destruction to the foundation (Ps. 137:7 s.w.).

And it shall fall, and you shall be consumed in its midst: and you shall know that I am Yahweh- In reality, Zedekiah with his own hands dug through the very weak wall of Jerusalem; see on Ez. 12:7. That was how weak it was. God broke down the wall through the Babylonians, but in reality, the Jewish leadership broke it through with their own hands. And the wall rebuilt by Nehemiah and the Jews, which apparently fixed up every breach in it, was likewise overturned by Antiochus. But the wall of

Babylon was to be broken down in the same way (Jer. 50:15 s.w.); what was done to Israel would be done to her invaders.

Ezekiel 13:15 *Thus will I accomplish My anger on the wall, and on those who have plastered it with whitewash; and I will tell you, The wall is no more, neither those who plastered it*- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 13:16 *Namely, the prophets of Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace, says the Lord Yahweh*- There were false prophets both in Judah as the Babylonians approached, and also amongst those of them already in exile (Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Ez. 13:16). They were assuring the sinful people that in fact they were at peace with God, and that contrary to the prophetic message of desolation at the hand of the Babylonians, they would instead have "peace". This is described in Jeremiah as "lightly" healing the great wound or illness of Judah. That wound is described ambiguously; it was a wound or breach in themselves caused by God's smiting of them in the earlier Babylonian incursions (Jer. 14:19), but also caused by them to God Almighty. "Lightly" carries with it the idea of not serious, light hearted, superficial, trifling. And we must likewise beware of this kind of religion that is pedaled in the name of Christianity; not facing our personal issues, and using a few Bible words from here and there to superficially cover over the most fundamental issues of our eternal destiny. And this was and is so attractive. But sin and its consequences are far deeper than any superficial, light hearted covering. It requires nothing less than the blood and word of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 13:17 *You, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy against them*- So often it is the state of the human heart which is presented as of paramount interest to God. There is in all of us the tendency to blur the crucial boundary between the word of God and that of men. Ezekiel was to prophecy as it were the words of *God's* heart, whereas these women prophesied from *their own* heart. The heart is the Spirit; it is in this

sense that the true word of God is 'inspired', those words reflect the spirit of God, His very heart, rather than the mind / heart / spirit of men.

Ezekiel 13:18 *And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the women who sew magic wristbands for people and make magic scarves for everyone to wear on their heads, so that they can have power over other people's lives. You want to possess the power of life and death over My people and to use it for your own gain*- The ornamentation sounds like the "divining garments" of Cassandra, and the "garlands" or "fillets" of the Pythian priestesses. As noted on :10, there was idolatry going on amongst the exiles. Israel's rejection of idolatry after the exile didn't come for a few generations. This pagan headgear was later absorbed into Jewish religion in the exile, becoming the phylacteries and tallith of later Judaism.

Ezekiel 13:19 *You have profaned Me among My people in order to get handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to kill the people who should not die, and to save the people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies*- These priestesses were paid in small amounts of bread and barley, appropriate to the poverty of the Jews at the time. It could be that they even practiced witchcraft to the extent of actually slaying the righteous. Or the idea may be that if the true word of prophecy had been preached, then the repentant would not have died. Instead, the false message of peace with God for sinners without repentance and reconciliation meant that those who otherwise would not have died, would die.

Ezekiel 13:20 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: I hate the wristbands that you use in your attempt to control life and death. I will rip them off your arms and set free the people that you were controlling*- The bands on the arms were associated with pagan worship (see on :10) and became the tallith of later Judaism (see on :18). "Set free" or AV "to make them fly" implies the false prophetesses had caught the other Jews as birds in the snare of a fowler. Once the people were freed from this trap, they could as it were fly, and return to the land. The language of setting free the people from the hand of these people is that of the deliverance from Egypt, after which the people could begin their journey to the promised land (Ex. 5:23; 18:10).

Ezekiel 13:21 *I will rip off your scarves and let My people escape from your power once and for all; and you shall know that I am Yahweh*- As in primitive societies today, these fortune tellers and false prophets had real psychological power over people, even over "the righteous" (:22). In illiterate societies, it's far easier to get this kind of power. "Once and for all" is another of many implications that the envisaged judgment and restoration of the Kingdom was to be final and unprecedented. But in fact this didn't happen, and the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to our last days. And so there were many periods after the exile when again, the Jews fell under the power of such false teachers and sorcerers (Acts 8:9; 19:14).

Ezekiel 13:22 *Because with lies you have grieved the heart of the righteous, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, and be saved alive*- This is the language of Ez. 3:21; 18:9,17; the false prophetesses were stopping the repentance of the people in exile, and thereby stopping the fulfilment of all the great potentials. There was clearly a group called "the righteous" with Ezekiel in captivity, who had been duped by the false prophetesses. These "righteous" were heart broken ["sad"] at the supposed words

of prophecy coming from the false prophets. They ought to have had the wisdom to discern them as false prophets, but they aren't rebuked for that. Rather the false prophets are condemned for breaking the hearts of the righteous. Perhaps the breaking of their hearts was in causing them to spiritually stumble.

Ezekiel 13:23 *Therefore you shall no more see false visions, nor practice fortune telling. I will deliver My people out of your hand; and you shall know that I am Yahweh*- The condemnation of "fortune telling" was because with the Babylonians poised to attack, the false prophets and prophetesses were telling people what they wanted to hear- that actually the desolation predicted by God through Ezekiel wouldn't happen. These false prophets were to "know that I am Yahweh". This could mean that they recognized His truth all too late; or that the knowledge of God's Name was to be proclaimed through their destruction.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 14

Ezekiel 14:1 *Then came certain of the elders of Israel to me, and sat before me*- They could have been the elders from Judah sent at the time of Jer. 51:59; but probably they were the elders of the Jewish community with Ezekiel in captivity. They are called "the elders of Judah" in Ez. 8:1; 20:1. But Ezekiel seems to intentionally use the terms Judah and Israel interchangeably, because it was the prophetic intention that the restoration from exile would finally end the division between them. They were to be bound together, as we should be, by the wonder of a common experience of repentance, entry to the new covenant, the gift of the Spirit, and participation jointly in the things of grace resulting in the restored Kingdom of God. These elders apparently came to ask things from God through Ezekiel (:3); they had recently placed Ezekiel under house arrest and bound him. But now they come seeking God's word from him. This is typical human behaviour; acting aggressively toward those whom we in another part of our lives recognize to be genuine servants of God.

Ezekiel 14:2 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- This was in response to the 'coming' of the elders in :1.

Ezekiel 14:3 *Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their heart, and put the stumbling block of their wickedness before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?*- As mentioned earlier, it is incorrect to assume that the Jews quit idolatry in Babylon. They did not; it took a few generations after the restoration for them to do so. The Jews in Babylon with Ezekiel had "their idols", and yet God perceived that the essence of their idolatry was in their heart, their mental attitude. They, like many today, would never make spiritual progress because those attitudes were a stumblingblock to them, and before their face in their mental vision was their idolatry. God would not be inquired of by those who psychologically were focused elsewhere, despite their apparent desire to hear His word. And this is why so many complain that the Bible 'does nothing' for them and they find God somewhat unresponsive and distant. Indeed He will be, if our mental focus is upon other gods.

Ezekiel 14:4 *Therefore speak to them, and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh:*

Every man of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his wickedness before his face, and comes to the prophet; I Yahweh will answer him according to the multitude of his idols- God would not be inquired of by these people (:3) but instead would allow their core beliefs and psychological focus be their answers. They were to lay stumblingblocks before themselves; but the contemporary Jer. 6:21 along with Ez. 3:21 says that *God* would lay the stumblingblocks before them. He confirmed them in the path they chose. Ez. 7:19 defines the stumblingblock as being specifically their love of wealth. Ez. 44:12 says that it was the priests who caused the people to stumble upon the stumblingblocks of idols just prior to the exile. Putting this information together, we can conclude that the underlying mental, spiritual reason for their idolatry was because they thought the fertility gods would give them immediate wealth, and the avaricious priesthood encouraged the people in this. For they too stood to benefit materially from it. Although physical idols may not be our temptation in these days, the spiritual essence of idolatry as portrayed here remains; for our society is focused upon wealth, and this is the stumblingblock which blocks mental vision, it is 'before his face', it is the idol of the majority of hearts.

Ezekiel 14:5 *That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from Me through their idols*- Israel had not become atheists nor had they formally rejected Yahweh. The elders had come to Ezekiel in order to hear God's word. But the essence of their literal idolatry was a mental attitude by which they were estranged from God. "Estranged" means literally to become as a stranger or Gentile; and they had done this through giving themselves to strange gods (Jer. 3:13 s.w.) and therefore they were to be taken into an estranged or strange, Gentile land (Jer. 5:19). By doing so they had estranged themselves from Yahweh by as it were marrying other gods (Ez. 16:32 s.w.).

Ezekiel 14:6 *Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Return and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations*- Quitting the literal idols is paralleled with no longer having the psychological idols before their faces, as they had in :4. If they 'returned' from those idols they had in Babylon, then they would be returned to Zion. They were restored, by grace, even though they didn't return from those idols. But they refused to respond even to that initiative. The question is what we turn our faces towards, the overall direction of our lives, the passion of our hearts- rather than individuals acts of obedience or disobedience, spiritual success or failure.

Ezekiel 14:7 *For each one of the house of Israel or of the foreigners who live in Israel*- To "live in Israel" can as well be translated "who sojourn among Israel". The context refers to Jews in Babylonian captivity, and perhaps there some Gentiles had come to 'sojourn among' them. Perhaps they were Gentiles placed in the same camps by the Chebar river.

Who separates himself from Me, and takes his idols into his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet to inquire for himself of Me; I Yahweh will answer him by myself- There was to be no response from Ezekiel; God would answer these people directly by condemning them. The words of the 'answer' in :8 are in fact quotations from the law of Moses about the punishment for idolatry, so the idea may be that God will not give any fresh answer as He has already answered in His word. But the LXX has "I the Lord will answer him,

according to the things wherein he is entangled". The answer would be from their idols, and they would follow that answer to their condemnation. Their 'inquiry', coming to a prophet like Ezekiel, was at variance with the fact they had separated themselves from God by their mental fixation upon other gods. They 'came to' God externally, when they had gone away from Him and separated themselves from Him. Such contradictions are common amongst those who are solely religious and not spiritual.

Ezekiel 14:8 *I will set My face against that man, and will make him an astonishment, for a sign and a proverb*- This is a quotation from Lev. 20:3,6 about what should be done to those in Israel who worshipped idols. Clearly literal idolatry was going on amongst the exiles, although the essence of idolatry is within the mind, as the preceding verses made clear. See on :7.

And I will cut him off from the midst of My people; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- Being cut off from God's people is a common threat in the law of Moses. It could mean premature death by direct Divine intervention, or at least having no descendants; or that God would remove the person from the book of life; or it may solely refer to condemnation at the last day. We note from the Leviticus passages which speak about this that it is always God who removes members from His people; and not some disciplinary process amongst the person's brethren and fellow believers. This sets an important precedent for the church today, who have no power to excommunicate anybody from the body of true believers.

Ezekiel 14:9 *If the prophet is deceived when he speaks a word, I, Yahweh, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand on him, and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel*- Angels can give those who are closing their minds to the clear truth of the word the temptation to believe wrong things, in a similar way to which God through the Angels hardened Pharaoh's heart as a result of his own already hardened heart, and also were a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets in 1 Kings 22. Jeremiah says that "O LORD Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived (mg. 'enticed')" (Jer. 20:7); although Jeremiah was not actually deceived in the prophecy he was given, it seems that he sensed there was a possibility that he had been, which is backed up by the Ezekiel reference. In 1 Kings 22:22, the Angels made the false prophets of Ahab to prophesy falsely. This fact is picked up in the New Testament by Paul saying it was possible for an Angel from Heaven to preach a wrong Gospel to them (Gal. 1:8). If it was fundamentally impossible for an Angel to do this, why does Paul say it? See on 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 4:1; Is. 19:13,14; Ez. 20; 1 Jn. 4:1.

Ezekiel 14:10 *They shall bear their wickedness*- To carry sin means to bear and experience condemnation for sin. In this sense the Lord Jesus carried our sins; His death was a representative death for all those in Him. And thereby the punishment for our sins, death, was carried by Him in His death "for us". Unique amongst men, the Lord did not sin, and therefore was raised from that death, and thereby becomes the path to death and resurrection for all who in faith are baptized into Him and abide in the spirit of His death and resurrection.

The wickedness of the prophet shall be even as the wickedness of him who seeks him- It was not simply that the people were innocent and had been misled by the false prophets. There was an unconscious mutuality between people and false prophet; for

the prophet said what he knew the people wanted to hear, and they came to him for confirmation in their evil way. Therefore all sectors of society were punished.

Ezekiel 14:11 *That the house of Israel may go no more astray from Me, neither defile themselves any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be My people, and I may be their God, says the Lord Yahweh*- The Divine intention was that Israel would never again go astray because the false prophets and influences were to be destroyed. But they did; the intended restoration and reestablishment of God's Kingdom in Israel didn't happen as it could have done. Being God's people and His being their God is the language of covenant relationship; a new covenant was offered to the exiles, but for the most part they refused it.

Ezekiel 14:12 *The word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- See on Ez. 12:1.

Ezekiel 14:13 *Son of man, when a land sins against Me by committing a trespass and I stretch out My hand on it, and break the staff of its bread and send famine on it and cut off from it man and animal*- This is one of a series of allusions in this section to the curses for breaking the covenant in Lev. 26. The connections are: "trespass" = Lev. 26:40; 'breaking the staff of bread' = Lev. 26:26; "wild animals" (:15) = Lev. 26:22; animals depopulating the land (:15) = Lev. 26:22; cutting off man and animal (:13,17,19) = Lev. 26:22; the land desolate (:16) = Lev. 26:33; a sword upon the land (:17) = Lev. 26:25; the sword passing through the land (:17) = Lev. 26:6; the plague (:19) = Lev. 26:25; the four judgments of :21 = Lev. 26:21,22. The old covenant was broken, by Israel; and this paves the way for God's offer of a totally new covenant to them in Ez. 20 and elsewhere. Had they built and operated the temple system as commanded in Ez. 40-48, they would thereby have accepted the terms of that new covenant; which was markedly different to the law of Moses.

Ezekiel 14:14 *Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord Yahweh*- For the sake of our prayers, in some cases sins of others can be forgiven when otherwise they wouldn't be; see on Mk. 2:5 For the sake of our conversion of our erring brethren, they can be saved from eternal death and have their sins covered. The Lord's prayer says as much- we ask God to forgive us *our* sins; not 'me my sins'. Likewise only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them (Jer. 7:16 cp. 11:14). Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his "cry" was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same- Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel up to a certain point, but they were *so* hardened in sin at Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which otherwise, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. If we have any grain of love in us, we will likewise dedicate ourselves to fervent prayer for our brethren, seeing it does have effect and validity within certain boundaries.

Daniel was contemporary with Ezekiel and would have been known for his deliverance of his friends. But he is not named chronologically last. The order of mention is therefore significant. Noah saved his three sons and their wives; Daniel saved somewhat fewer, just his three friends; but Job could not save his own sons and daughters.

In Ez. 14:14, Ezekiel [already in exile] mentions Noah, Daniel and Job as well known righteous men who saved others. The prophecy in chapter 14 was in the sixth

year of Jehoiachin's exile (Ez. 8:1) and before the capture of Jerusalem five years later (Ez. 14:21). Daniel went into exile in the third year of Jehoiakim's 11-year reign (Dan. 1:1), which was followed three months later by the beginning of Jehoiachin's exile (2 Kings 23:34). This would mean that Ezekiel mentions Daniel after Daniel had been in Babylon for 14 years. His example as a young man soon became legendary amongst the exiles; although the book of Daniel doesn't mention this.

Ezekiel 14:15 *If I cause evil animals to pass through the land and they ravage it and it be made desolate, so that no man may pass through because of the animals*- See on :13. The *"If* I cause..." suggests that the judgments in mind were still potential; they could have been averted by the repentance of the exiles.

Ezekiel 14:16 *Though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only should be delivered, but the land should be desolate*- The emphasis perhaps is upon those three men being "in it", within the land. The idea seems to be that even if such righteous men were found within the land of Judah, they could not avert the judgments planned- but the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel could do so. This would be in line with the implications of this noted so far throughout the prophecy. This was why Ezekiel was telling the captives in Babylon in such detail about the fate of Jerusalem and the Jews still in the land. The exiles could affect the potential outcomes for that group by their repentance.

Ezekiel 14:17 *Or if I bring a sword on that land and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off from it man and animal*- See on :13. As noted on :15, the "If..." suggests that this level of destruction was still not concretely decided upon. And indeed it seems that God did to some extent relent. For not all men and animals were cut off. There is archaeological evidence that agricultural activity continued in Palestine after the sacking of Jerusalem. Indeed, the inhabitants brought grain offerings to the site of the temple (Jer. 41:5).

Ezekiel 14:18 *Though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only should be delivered themselves*- I suggested on :16 that the emphasis perhaps is upon those three men being "in it", within the land. The idea seems to be that even if such righteous men were found within the land of Judah, they could not avert the judgments planned- but the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel could do so.

Ezekiel 14:19 *Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out My anger on it in blood, to cut off from it man and animal*- See on :13. As noted on :15, the "If..." suggests that this level of destruction was still not concretely decided upon. And indeed it seems that God did to some extent relent. For not all men and animals were cut off. There is archaeological evidence that agricultural activity continued in Palestine after the sacking of Jerusalem. Indeed, the inhabitants brought grain offerings to the site of the temple (Jer. 41:5).

Ezekiel 14:20 *Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they would save neither son nor daughter; they would save only their own lives by their righteousness*- I suggested on :16 that the emphasis perhaps is upon those three men being "in it", within the land. The idea seems to be that even if such

righteous men were found within the land of Judah, they could not avert the judgments planned- but the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel could do so. It is worth noting that Ezekiel spells "Daniel" slightly differently to how the word occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Some have suggested a reference to the king Daniel mentioned in Ugaritic texts who was famed for his wisdom. But the context of saving others by personal righteousness seems to point to the Biblical Daniel.

Ezekiel 14:21 *For thus says the Lord Yahweh: How much more when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and savage animals, and the plague, to cut off from it man and animal!*- See on :13. These are four similar judgements to those ministered by the four living creatures in Rev. 6 and by the four Angel chariots of Zech. 6. There is reason to think that these creatures and chariots represent Angels; so it is worth speculating that whenever a group of four judgements are mentioned, there is a reference to the four cherubim Angels bringing them. Ezek. 6:15,17 mentions the same four judgements as 14:21, and describes them as "the evil arrows" sent by God- His "Angels of evil" (Ps. 78:49)? The context in Ez. 14 is God saying that even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in the land, they would not stop the judgements coming (v. 14,20). This seems to be directly referring to the Angels deciding to bring their judgements on Sodom (which typifies Jerusalem- Is. 1:10) despite a handful of righteous being there (Gen. 18:24). It is even possible that the "noisome beasts" of Ez. 14:15 which were to spoil the land in judgement are the four beasts/ living creatures of Dan. 7 controlling the various nations used to execute these judgements.

Ezekiel 14:22 *Yet, behold, therein shall be left a few who shall be carried forth, both sons and daughters. They shall come forth to you, and you shall see their way and their doings; and you shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought on Jerusalem, even concerning all that I have brought on it*- The prophetic message to the exiles was "Comfort My people!" (Is. 40:1). Yet this comfort is that spoken of here in Ez. 14:22,23, where we read that the exiles would be comforted when they recognized the evil of Judah's ways and recognized that the judgment upon her had been just. But Is. 40 appears to be a message of unconditional comfort to the exiles- without specifically demanding their repentance. But even then, they still failed to accept it and respond; they preferred to stay in Babylon.

Ezekiel 14:23 *They shall comfort you, when you see their way and their doings; and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, says the Lord Yahweh*- The arrival of the final group of exiles was intended to elicit repentance in the group who were already there. They were intended to quit their position that the land and people of God were suffering unjustly, and to be provoked thereby to repentance. And yet they didn't. God has so many potential plans and hopes for us His people which don't come about. This is the greatest tragedy of the cosmos; and yet we who do seek to respond, albeit in weakness, are therefore His special joy.

Ezekiel is very clear that God's judgments upon His people were not at all "without cause" (Ez. 6:10; 14:23). But just as He gave them a bill of divorce and then destroyed it as if the reasons didn't exist any more (Is. 50:1,2), so the "cause" of the judgments was taken away. They were "oppressed without cause", God says, as He seeks to persuade the exiles of how totally He has dealt with their sin (Is. 52:3).

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 15

Ezekiel 15:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- See on Ez. 12:1.

Ezekiel 15:2 *Son of man, what is the vine plant more than any tree, the vine-branch which is among the trees of the forest?*- The false prophets, who are the subject of the previous chapter, had argued that Jerusalem was somehow inviolate, it would be a cauldron protecting them from the fire of Babylonian judgment; and Judah were God's special people whom He would not allow to be totally destroyed. The same misplaced argument is used by some Christians today who seem to think that Israel is indestructible and ultimately inviolate. But the prophetic words of judgment for sin and disbelief did and will come true. The vine, clearly a symbol of Israel, was not of itself better than any of the other Gentile nations, "the trees of the forest". They were chosen by grace alone, and not because of their goodness or peculiar ability to do work for God (:3).

Ezekiel 15:3 *Shall wood be taken of it to make any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?*- Rom. 3:12 speaks of how there is “none that does good”- the Greek word essentially means profitable, useful. The contrast is with how we are all become “unprofitable”- none is profitable to God. It’s not that nobody ever does any good deed; rather the idea is that we are like the vine tree, not useful of ourselves to God (Ez. 15:2-6) unless He justifies us and makes us useful in His service. The word for "pin" is often used of the pins or nails which held the tabernacle together. Ezra uses the same word for "pin" to describe how the returned exiles were only a "pin" in the sanctuary by utter grace alone (Ezra 9:8). Vine wood of itself is not strong nor reliable. And so we are within God's purpose, His sanctuary. Only by grace and Divine patience are we used, as parents may delegate a task to very small children who likely will not perform it as required.

Ezekiel 15:4 *See, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire has devoured both its ends, and its midst is burned. Is it profitable for any work?*- The fire of final Babylonian judgment had not yet fully come. The ends of the vine wood nail had been burnt by the previous invasions, and now "its midst", Jerusalem and the temple, were to be burnt. But the judgment had as good as come, so sure is God's word of fulfilment. Vines are not profitable for "work"; only for fruit. And that fruit of the spirit was lacking.

Ezekiel 15:5 *Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work. How much less, when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned, shall it yet be of any use!*- There in Babylon they the one time dwellers in Jerusalem (:6) were as the vine tree, burned up and fit for no work; and yet, still used to perform God’s work, by grace alone. And these men were truly types of us, saved by grace and not works. It would seem impossible that a charred piece of vine wood could be useful for anything; but this was God's purpose, to use the apparently useless to reestablish His Kingdom in the land. The allusion is to God's manifestation in the burning bush, similar wood to that of the vine tree; and the bush was burnt but not "devoured" (Ex. 3:2 s.w.).

Ezekiel 15:6 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: As the vine plant among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of*

Jerusalem- The vine wood nail is described as already burnt in :4, so certain was God's word of fulfilment; but here, that final burning is yet future. We need to give due weight to the fact that God's words of judgment are as good as done. The prophetic word in Jeremiah's mouth was like fire, and it was the people who were to be "devoured" by it (Ez. 15:5; s.w. Jer. 5:14; 17:27; 21:14). The amazing grace explained in Ez. 15 was in the fact that the 'devoured by fire' vine twig would be refined in Babylon and still used by God to reestablish His Kingdom.

Ezekiel 15:7 *I will set My face against them; they shall go forth from the fire, but the fire shall devour them; and you shall know that I am Yahweh, when I set My face against them*- A vine twig or nail would be easily burnt up. The preservation of this charred twig was by grace alone; see on :3. But perhaps the idea is as in the Lord's parable of the vine in Jn. 15. Some fruitless branches were cut off by the vinedresser so that better fruit would be brought forth on other branches. The hope was that the cutting off of Jerusalem would bring forth spiritual fruit in the exiles already in Babylon. But this didn't happen, and so the Lord in Jn. 15 reapplies that figure to all believers in Him who shall bring forth the required fruit.

Ezekiel 15:8 *I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, says the Lord Yahweh*- And yet by grace, the land was not totally desolated. See on Ez. 5:10; 11:15.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 16

Ezekiel 16:1 Again the word of Yahweh came to me saying- See on Ez. 12:1.

Ezekiel 16:2 Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations- Perhaps Ezekiel gave some of his prophecies in Jerusalem and others to the community of captives in Babylon, being transported between them by the cherubim. Or maybe the prophecies were taken to Jerusalem and read there. But Zech. 2:7 addresses the exiled community as "Zion who dwells in Babylon" (Zech. 2:7). They were the daughter of Zion, and should have returned there and had Zion in their hearts rather than Babylon. As Ez. 18 makes clear, the captives considered they had done nothing wrong, and God was judging Judah too harshly. So they needed the conviction of sin which powerfully follows in this prophecy.

Ezekiel 16:3 And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh to Jerusalem: Your birthplace is in the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was your father, and your mother was a Hittite- The idea seems to be that the Jews were [and are] quite wrong to claim that they were ethnically different from the surrounding nations, and thereby enjoyed Yahweh's special protection and interest. The Jews were not ethnically pure; Ephraim and Manasseh were half Egyptian, and they had a long history of intermarriage. They were chosen as God's special people by grace, beloved for their fathers' sakes, and not because God for some reason took a liking to their genetic structure. And morally they had acted no better than the Canaanite tribes, indeed they had done worse. They shared the same low moral culture; they were as Amorites and Hittites. And they were cast out of the land for their wickedness (Gen. 15:16). Judah now could expect the same. Jerusalem or Jebus was originally a Canaanite city; for this prophecy is specifically about Jerusalem. She was born as an Israelite city out of Canaan, as it

were, and her subsequent immorality showed that she continued the similarities. She had not been reborn of the Spirit as God had intended.

The Jews would immediately have been provoked by Ezekiel's claim that their parents were not Abraham and Sarah, but a nameless Amorite and a Hittite woman, one of the "daughters of Heth" so spiritually despised by Rebekah. This was how they had acted; they lacked the faith of Abraham and Sarah and so were not their children. The Lord used a similar approach in claiming that the Jews were not the true seed of Abraham because they refused to accept his seed.

Ezekiel 16:4 As for your birth, in the day you were born your navel was not tied neither were you washed in water to cleanse you; you weren't salted at all, nor swaddled at all- Ezekiel defines Jerusalem's "birth" as of Canaan, whereas the Jews would naturally have considered it more appropriate to trace their origins of birth to Abraham. But they lacked Abraham's faith and spirituality and therefore they were likened to the Canaanites rather than Abraham when it came to origin and characteristic. This kind of intentionally shocking language and reasoning is to continue throughout this chapter. The lack of care for the newborn Israel suggests that those who ought to have cared for her, did not. And their lack of care was shocking. This speaks of how the priestly classes had not cared for Israel. It was God who had Himself cared for them.

Ezekiel 16:5 No eye pitied you to do any of these things to you, to have compassion on you; but you were cast out in the open desert, because your existence was despised in the day that you were born- Moses is set up as example and representative of his people Israel. Israel is likened in Ez. 16:5 to a child rejected at birth, but miraculously found and cared for, and brought up with every pampered blessing. Just as Moses was. Stephen described the 'putting out' of Moses with the same word used in the LXX for what happened to Israel in Ezekiel 16 (Acts 7:21; Ex. 2:3 LXX). But the casting out of the unwanted child into the "open desert" recalls Hagar and Ishmael. As noted on :3, there was no reason to think that Israel were better than Ishmael. The seed was "called" in Isaac, but that was by grace alone; for Ishmael was as much the seed of Abraham as was Isaac, according to the flesh.

The LXX suggests that the reason why the parents of this sad baby weren't interested in it was because it was born deformed. It was usual to cast away a clearly deformed child: "Thou wast cast out on the face of the field, because of the deformity of thy person, in the day wherein thou wast born".

Ezekiel 16:6 When I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you, Though you are in your blood, live; yes, I said to you, Though you are in your blood, live- The newborn deformed child (:5 LXX) was wallowing or 'squirming' in its birth blood, apparently choking to death in it- cast out to die. And God had mercy when nobody else would, and saved it. God had the power to give life to that dying, deformed child. And He could breathe His Spirit into the dead bones of the exiles and likewise make them "live", as described in Ez. 36. He can bring beauty and usefulness to Him out of nothing, just as explained in the story of the charred vine wood in Ez. 15. He shows a grace nobody else would show, not even a mother to her newborn child. That perhaps is why at times we have trouble understanding and believing it- because it is beyond our human experience. Our greatest experience of love was that of our mother at birth. But God's love is here portrayed as far exceeding that.

Ezekiel 16:7 I caused you to multiply as that which grows in the field, and you increased and grew great, and you attained to excellent beauty; your breasts were fashioned, and your hair was grown; yet you were naked and bare- God never forgot their pathetic beginnings, and He wished them never to forget them either. Jacob entered Egypt with 70 people, but multiplied very rapidly there. If we ask what it was that was attractive about Israel, it was her religion. For the items of beautification mentioned are all allusive to the tabernacle. This deformed at birth woman was made strangely beautiful by God, so much so that He married her.

Ezekiel 16:8 Now when I passed by you and looked at you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread My skirt over you, and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore to you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord Yahweh, and you became Mine- This was the covenant at Sinai which was originally offered to them in Egypt (Ez. 20:5). Time and again God's love made Him re-think and alter His plans. Ez. 20:9,10 explains that God intended to destroy Israel in Egypt because of their idolatry, and so He decided to bring them out into the wilderness and destroy them there so as not to do it in Egypt and give the Egyptians a reason to mock Him. And yet according to Jeremiah and Ez. 16:5-10, it was in the wilderness that God fell in love with Israel and gave them His covenant. He is attracted to us so easily; hence His anger when we abuse this and disappoint Him. To spread the garment over was a sign of betrothal and care, as done by Boaz to Ruth.

The covenant is described as being made in Egypt (Ez. 20:5) to heighten the similarity with the exiles now in Babylon, who were being offered a new covenant, and then the possibility of leaving Babylon / Egypt and entering the land again.

Ezekiel 16:9 Then washed I you with water; yes, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil- This suggests the anointing of the priests. Perhaps the group known as "Jerusalem" here particularly refers to the priesthood, who along with the royal family were to be taken into captivity and judged so severely for their failures towards God's people. But there may also be an allusion to marital rites involving washing and anointing with oil such as in Ruth 3:3; the day before the wedding is described in the Ur Excavation Texts 5.636 as a "day of bathing". The washing away of blood would then refer to menstrual blood, or perhaps the bleeding after the first act of intercourse. But what the bride usually did to herself, God did to her, in this metaphor. All through, we see God taking the initiative, ever seeking to force through His love for the bride whilst she was at least vaguely willing to go through with it. And this God is our God, not passively waiting for us to jump various bars or reach certain levels before He shows any interest in us. Israel were commanded to wash their clothes before entering the covenant at Sinai, but here we read that God in fact washed them. We wonder if they were actually obedient to that commandment; but God as it were did it for them.

Ezekiel 16:10 I clothed you also with embroidered work, gave you shoes of sealskin, dressed you with fine linen, and covered you with silk- This is all the language of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:36; 27:16; 28:39; 35:35; 36:37; 38:18); "sealskins" are only spoken of in that context. Again the focus of the criticism is upon the priesthood and the abuse of the sanctuary for idolatry. Following on from the marriage or engagement allusion in :9, the idea was that the entire tabernacle system was in order to enable Israel to be the wife of God Himself. It was far from mere ritual for the sake of it.

The rabbis make the point that :10-19 list 13 things God gave Israel. Ex. 25:4-7 list 13 things He asked for in response, in order to build the tabernacle. They gave to Him and He used those things to make them spiritually beautiful before Him.

Ezekiel 16:11 I beautified you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a chain on your neck- The girl had been born deformed, so badly so that her mother cast her out into the scrub to die from choking on her own birth blood (:5 LXX). She therefore had to be beautified, rather than being natural beautiful from birth. It was God who beautified her. And as noted on Ez. 15, there was no place for Israel to think that they were somehow born pleasing to God, that they had some genetic inheritance which He found so attractive. Their beauty to Him is presented as being of His own creation and device, rather than arising from Israel independently by nature. All this speaks of how righteousness is imputed to us in Christ, we are clothed upon with it as in the parable of the wedding garment, having nothing of ourselves but dirty rags.

Ezekiel 16:12 I put a jewel on your forehead, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head- This recalls the high priestly attire. The Jerusalem temple was beautiful to God, the desire of His eyes (Ez. 7:20; 24:16). She was crowned... the queen of God Almighty. That she should turn to adultery and prostitution is to this day an unthinkable tragedy.

Ezekiel 16:13 Thus you were decked with gold and silver; and your clothing was of fine linen, and silk, and embroidered work; you ate fine flour, honey and oil; and you were exceedingly beautiful, and you prospered to become a kingdom- The language so far has alluded to the tabernacle and the priesthood. It was God's intention that all Israel should become a nation or kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:5,6). A husband's duty was to provide his wife with food; and God did this excellently for His priesthood. For it was they who ate the fine flour, honey and oil of the sacrifices. Ezekiel as a priest would have been keenly touched by this condemnation of the priesthood.

Ezekiel 16:14 Your renown went forth among the nations for your beauty; for it was perfect on account of My majesty which I had put on you, says the Lord Yahweh- The high priestly clothes were for glory and beauty (Ex. 28:2). God as it were made them righteous and beautiful; He clothed them with His imputed majesty. The reference is to how the fame of Israel spread even to the queen of Sheba in Solomon's time.

Ezekiel 16:15 But you trusted in your beauty and played the prostitute because of your renown, and poured out your prostitution on everyone who passed by; his it was- The beauty which they had been given was only in God's eyes. They trusted in it in that they assumed that with such love and acceptance by God as their husband, they were free to do as they wished. This was the mentality of the false prophets of Ez. 14- they were confident that whatever they did, God would not suffer Jerusalem to fall and the temple to be destroyed. The logic of the argument and metaphor here seems to suggest that the nations were attracted to Jerusalem because of her beauty, the beauty placed upon her by God, and she slept with them in worshipping their idols. Perhaps indeed the religion of Israel was attractive and fascinating to the pagan nations; it certainly was intended to be, for Israel were to be the light of the Gentile world. But instead of showing them the light, those people were welcomed into the temple and taught Israel their ways, resulting in idol worship within Yahweh's temple.

Ezekiel 16:16 You took of your garments and made for yourselves high places decorated with various colours, and played the prostitute on them: such things shall not come, neither shall it be so- The "high places" were likened to prostitutes' tents built from the garments given by God to Israel. They mixed pagan idolatry with the things connected with Yahweh worship. For those garments given alluded to the priestly garments.

Ezekiel 16:17 You also took your beautiful jewels of My gold and of My silver which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men and played the prostitute with them- "Images of men" is literally, phallic symbols. They took the jewels associated with the breastplate of Yahweh's glory and turned them into models of a penis and worshipped them. Within God's temple. This was perhaps an insight into things Ezekiel himself was unaware of, but it was part of the program of convicting Jerusalem of her sin (:2).

Ezekiel 16:18 And you took your embroidered garments and put them on the images, and set My oil and My incense before them- The intimate gifts which were to be part of the private commitment between husband and wife were used by this wife in order to get other men to sleep with her. This speaks of how Israel, at the hands of the priesthood, mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry. They sacrificed what was to be sacrificed to Him, to the phallic symbols and idols of :17. Again we note it was the priests who offered the incense; it is they who are particularly addressed here. It is appropriate that the appeal was made by a priest, Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 16:19 My bread also which I gave you- The sacrifices are called God's bread or food, and were given to the priesthood.

Fine flour, and oil, and honey, with which I fed you, you even set it before them for a pleasant aroma; and thus it was, says the Lord Yahweh- The fine flour, oil etc. was what was to be offered upon Yahweh's table, His altar. But the meal they provided there for God was actually given to them by God; He fed them with it. So the point was made that all we offer to God is only giving back to Him what He has given us (1 Chron. 29:14)- a powerful reason for generosity to Him.

"Pleasant aroma" is the phrase often used for the "pleasant aroma" of sacrifices to Yahweh- three times in Exodus, seventeen in Leviticus, seventeen in Numbers. As a priest, Ezekiel would have been aware of this. But instead, they offered this to the idols (Ez. 6:13). The Divine hope (see on Ez. 6:9), the desperate hope of the unrequited lover for the beloved, was that a repentant remnant would realize this and then offer "pleasant aroma" again to Him alone (Ez. 20:41). But they didn't.

Ezekiel 16:20 Moreover you have taken your sons and your daughters whom you have borne to Me, and you have sacrificed these to them to be devoured. Was your prostitution a small matter- It was the priesthood who actually performed the sacrifices. "Your sons..." become in :21 "*My* children". Our children are His children, and we must ever remember that. The Jews became so obsessed with idol worship that they sacrificed their baby children to the idols; when Yahweh had instead taken such pity upon them, when they were an abandoned newborn baby. The devouring of their babies was to be reflected in the devouring of their land by the invaders. The intention of this gripping passage in Ez. 16 was to convict Jerusalem of her sins (:2); because they considered their spiritual and literal prostitution "a small matter". The

same word is used in accusing the priesthood of considering it "a small matter" for the flock to have been ruined by them (Ez. 34:18). This was the problem, as it is today- the real implications of attitudes and behaviour are not taken seriously. We fail to perceive how deeply we affect both God and man. Society makes us feel insignificant cogs, but we are not like that to God. This was the problem with Ezekiel's audience; they had a light hearted approach to eternal issues. To them, sin was a light thing (Ez. 8:17; 22:7). This was the role of the prophets, to convict people of the gravity of their sins and positions, and the consequences to come.

Ezekiel 16:21 That you have slain My children and delivered them up, in causing them to pass through the fire to them?- "My children" may be a reference to circumcision, the sign of the covenant. Excavations of the Elephantine community reveal that the exiled Jews mixed Yahweh and Baal worship to such an extent that they believed that Yahweh , like Baal, had a consort called Anat. Inscriptions from Quntillet Ajrud show the names Yahweh and Baal mixed together, including one which appears to speak of "Yahweh and his asherah". Ez. 16:21 and Ez. 23:39 are quite specific about this anyway- Israel offered sacrifice to idols in Yahweh's own temple.

Ezekiel 16:22 In all your abominations and your prostitution you have not remembered the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, and were wallowing in your blood- To remember the days of our spiritual youth is critical; if we forget our cleansing from past sins then we lose all spiritual focus (see on 2 Pet. 1:9).They had forgotten that they once were newborn, disabled children, abandoned to death but saved by grace. And that lack of awareness of their own frailty led them to lose all conscience in how they treated others.

Ezekiel 16:23 It has happened after all your wickedness (woe, woe to you! says the Lord Yahweh)- All the other sins were nothing compared to the climax of their sin which :24 describes.

Ezekiel 16:24 That you have built for yourselves a vaulted place, and have made yourselves a high place in every street- The vaulted place refers to rooms for prostitution. These were in "every street", shrines for idol worship; but the supreme "vaulted place" was the temple, which had been turned into a centre of literal and spiritual prostitution. This "vaulted place" was to be 'thrown down' (:39), so it clearly speaks of the temple. Ezekiel had been shown the elders worshipping the sun and idols within the temple, so it could really be that the temple had been turned into a huge brothel, all the worse for it being done in the name of Yahweh worship. Ezekiel uses this term "vaulted place" for the altar (Ez. 43:13 s.w.). Prostitution was often carried out before an altar; so it could be that it was being practiced actually around the altar in the temple.

Ezekiel 16:25 You have built your lofty place at the head of every street, and have made your beauty an abomination, and have opened your feet to everyone who passed by and multiplied your prostitution- "Opening the feet" is an allusion to a lewd gesture of a prostitute in spreading her legs wide. The crudeness is shocking to us, and it must have been far more so to the far more conservative society of Ezekiel's time. These shock tactics were to achieve the aim expressed in :2, of getting Jerusalem [as

well as the exiles already in Babylon, the primary audience] to appreciate the seriousness of what was going on.

Ezekiel 16:26 You have also committed sexual immorality with the Egyptians your lustful neighbours, and have multiplied your prostitution, to provoke Me to anger- Those mentioned as her partners were those with whom Jerusalem sought political alliances, rather than depending upon Yahweh. Those alliances may have been made with the agreement to worship the gods of the protecting power, as Ahaz did with the Assyrians. And those worship systems may have involved literal prostitution with women from those nations. The attempted alliance with Egypt is spoken of in Jer. 2:18,36.

Ezekiel 16:27 See therefore, I have stretched out My hand over you and have diminished your allotted portion of food, and delivered you to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who are ashamed of your lewd way- We would expect God to have immediately destroyed Judah for such abominations; but He firstly just diminished their food, through the famines and lack of food that arose after the first Babylonian incursions. This "allotted portion of food" is the duty the husband had to provide food for his wife, and he was not to "diminish" it if he took another wife (s.w. Ex. 21:10). But God did diminish it; He can do what we cannot, because He is not bound by His laws in a legalistic sense.

Ezekiel 16:28 You have played the prostitute also with the Assyrians because you were insatiable; yes, you have played the prostitute with them, and yet you weren't satisfied- None of the political / military alliances provided Judah with what she wanted; safety from the Babylonians and confident freedom. That was only possible from Yahweh Himself. Being unsatisfied was one of the psychological curses for disobedience to the covenant (Lev. 26:26); whereas eating bread "to the full", being 'satisfied' [s.w.], was the blessing of obedience to it (Dt. 6:11 and often). The life of satisfying the flesh ends in dissatisfaction, at the end of a life spent ever more desperately seeking that satisfaction and never finding it. That is the great paradox. Only going God's way leads to satisfaction.

Ezekiel 16:29 You have moreover multiplied your prostitution to the land of merchants, to Chaldea; and yet you weren't satisfied with this- They had been dishonest with the Babylonians, making agreements with them, accepting their gods and pretending sole loyalty to them, whilst doing just the same with the Egyptians and Philistines; and whilst claiming they were solely devoted to Yahweh as the one and only God. As noted on :28, this in essence is the sad way of life chosen by many today.

Ezekiel 16:30 How weak is your heart, says the Lord Yahweh, since you do all these things, the work of an impudent prostitute- Typical of the prophets, the essence is correctly perceived as the heart, the mind. The worst idolatry and prostitution is only a reflection of the state of the heart. "Weak" translates the word usually translated "languish"; the people and land were to languish physically because that was the state of their hearts (Is. 24:4; 33:9; Jer. 14:2). But this is where the power of God's Spirit can transform human behaviour in practice; because the heart or spirit is of the essence.

Ezekiel 16:31 In that you build your vaulted place at the head of every street, and make your high place in every street, and have not been as a prostitute, in that you scorn pay- Like drug addicts, what began for personal pleasure ended up a mad obsession. Instead of being paid by her paramours, she paid them. The same degeneration into sexual addiction is portrayed in Hosea, where Gomer's behaviour is that of Israel.

Ezekiel 16:32 A wife who commits adultery! Who takes strangers instead of her husband!- "Strangers" is literally 'Gentiles'. And the tragedy was that she had the best of all husbands- God Himself. The simple shock and disgust of it is shouted out in these simple words. And that is true of us if we turn to the many idols of this world, remembering the earlier observation that the idols are essentially in our hearts.

Ezekiel 16:33 They give gifts to all prostitutes; but you give your gifts to all your lovers and bribe them that they may come to you on every side for your prostitution- As suggested on :34, this payment was finally in the form of allowing the nations to have their idols in the Jerusalem temple. This was the "bribe" paid for them to offer military and political protection. And so the harlotry was not simply from the lust of the flesh; but like all sin, the essential reason was lack of faith in God.

Ezekiel 16:34 You are different from other women in your prostitution, in that no one follows you to play the prostitute; and whereas you give hire, and no hire is given to you, therefore you are different- The idols of Judah are described with this same word, "pay", which refers specifically to the hire of a harlot (Mic. 1:7). It seems the "hire" Judah paid was in allowing the idols of the nations into the temple of Yahweh.

Ezekiel 16:35 Therefore, prostitute, hear the word of Yahweh- The prostitute was to be judged. This is the language of court proceedings.

Ezekiel 16:36 Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your prostitution with your lovers; and because of all the idols of your abominations, and for the blood of your children that you gave to them- This repeats the complaint of Jer. 2:34: "In thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents". God had saved the infant Israel when she was in her blood; but she had poured out the blood of her children to the idols, totally refusing to remember God's saving grace toward her in infanthood. We note here again the parallel between idolatry and prostitution. There was a literal connection, in that idolatry required sleeping with the cult prostitutes; but clearly the prostitution was of the heart. The open 'uncovering' of her prostitution is in the context of this section being the court proceedings against the prostitute (see on :35). "Uncovered" is the word usually used for going into exile, as the captives were initially marched off in a state of undress. But this was to be only a reflection of what they themselves had done to themselves.

Ezekiel 16:37 Therefore see, I will gather all your lovers, with whom you have taken pleasure, and all those who you have loved, with all those who you have hated; I will even gather them against you on every side, and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness- The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be

stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (Ez. 23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (Ez. 16:7,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (Ez. 16:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (Ez. 23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are modern readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word… realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism.

Ezekiel 16:38 I will judge you, as women who break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy- Such women were destroyed by stoning, and the Babylonians catapulted stones at Jerusalem, and the burnt her with fire as a whore was to be destroyed. Let's remember that God's own law was pretty clear about adultery. The adulterous woman was to be punished with death- for one act of adultery. Even if she repented. And in any case, it was a defiling abomination [according to the Mosaic Law] to remarry a divorced wife. But Hosea doesn't keep the law. He lets his wife commit multiple acts of adultery, and he still loves her and pleads with her- even though he was a man in love with God's law. And this reflects the turmoil of God in dealing with human sin, and His sinful people. Hosea outlines his plan in Hosea 2. He will hamper her movements so she can't find her lovers; if she does find them, he will take away her food and clothing, so she appreciates his generosity to her; and if she still doesn't return, he will expose her naked and shamed in front of her lovers. But there's no evidence Hosea ever did that. He just… loved her, was angry with her as an expression of that love, loved her yet more, yet more… And this perhaps too reflects God's mind- devising and declaring judgments for Israel, which are themselves far less than what He has earlier stated in His own law, and yet the power of His love means He somehow keeps bearing with His people. Even in the context of speaking of His marriage to Israel, God says that He will punish them "as women that break wedlock are judged" (Ez. 26:38; 23:45). And yet, He didn't. His love was too great, His passion for them too strong; and He even shamed Himself by doing what His own law forbad, the remarriage to a divorced and defiled wife. Perhaps all love involves a degree of paradox and self-contradiction; and a jealous, Almighty God in love was no different. This, to me, is why some Bible verses indicate God has forsaken Israel; and others imply He hasn't and never will.

Somehow, even right now, the Jews you meet… are loved still by their God. And he still fantasizes, in a way, over their return to Him. Imagine His utter joy when even one of them does in fact turn to Him! That alone motivates me to preach to Israel today.

Ezekiel 16:39 I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your vaulted place, and break down your lofty places- As noted on :24, the temple had become a fornication chamber, both literally and spiritually, in that idols were worshipped there. This was to be done by the very lovers whom she had given gifts to- the Babylonians.

And they shall strip you of your clothes, and take your beautiful jewels; and they shall leave you naked and bare- The connection is with how the infant Israel as a disabled child had been thrown out unwanted, naked and bare to die in the wasteland (:4-6). Now she was to return to that state. The symbols of her religion were to be taken away from her; she had broken the covenant with her God, and He was going to ensure that the symbols of that covenant were taken away. Hence the ark disappeared at that time. And yet as at the first, God was going to take pity upon her, in that there was the hope of restoration to beauty for the naked, bare and bleeding exiled community. A new covenant was being prepared to replace the one that was now broken. But yet again, they despised and abused that grace.

Ezekiel 16:40 They shall also bring up a company against you- The same words for "bring up a company against you" are used of how Babylon shall be destroyed (Jer. 50:9). What was done to Israel by Babylon would be done to Babylon, as we find in Revelation.

And they shall stone you with stones and thrust you through with their swords- Prostitutes were to be slain by stoning, and here we are reading the legal judgment against a prostitute (see on :35). But thrusting through with the sword was not stipulated in the law of Moses. This reflects the anger of the nations against Judah. That anger was surely because she had promised sole loyalty to each of them, and instead they found she was saying the same to others too, and her temple was full of various idols and not only theirs. This would explain their particular wrath against the temple.

Ezekiel 16:41 They shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will cause you to cease from playing the prostitute, and you shall also give no hire any more- We expect to read that the prostitute has been stoned to death. But although that was to be the case, we have the implication in these words that somehow the prostitute still lives, but she will not again be a prostitute or hire lovers. This was God's hope for the remnant of His people; and they would never again leave Him, the covenant they would enter with Him was to be "eternal" in that they would never break it and neither therefore would He. But this was not to be, and finally God has to take another wife, the Gentiles, and start over. After so much effort to make it work with Israel. See on :43.

Ezekiel 16:42 So will I cause My wrath toward you to rest, and My jealousy shall depart from you, and I will be quiet and will be no more angry- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20;

24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 16:43 Because you have not remembered the days of your youth- This is a repeated criticism of them. They had not remembered the utter grace shown to them, the abandoned, disabled newborn child (see on :5). It is a clear reminder to ourselves never to forget God's grace to us and to ever be awed by it.

But have raged against Me in all these things- The real sense of the Hebrew is that they had made God rage by "all these things"; and the word means to shake with rage. The God of such love and grace is going to have another pole to that grace; and His anger is fearsome. Yet they treated their sins lightly; see on :20. But that lighthearted attitude produced quaking in rage within Almighty God. This is how sensitive He is. It's not that He is so far distant that the behaviour of a few bags of water and dust on this planet cannot really touch Him. He *is* touched, both positively and negatively, to the very core of His almighty being.

Therefore, behold, I also will bring your way on your head, says the Lord Yahweh: and you shall not commit this lewdness with all your abominations- As noted on :41, it was not that they would simply be punished by death. There was the hope within God that somehow a phoenix would arise, the dead bones would come together again, and they would not in future commit this lewdness.

Ezekiel 16:44 Behold, everyone who uses proverbs shall use this proverb against you, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter- The Jews proudly considered themselves the children of Sarah (Is. 51:2). But as explained on :3, God had purposefully subverted that idea by saying that their behaviour displayed the characteristics of their Hittite mother. Clearly even at this stage, fleshly descent meant nothing to God; His people were defined by spiritual characteristics and not those of the flesh.

Ezekiel 16:45 You are the daughter of your mother, who loathes her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children: your mother was a Hittite, and your father an Amorite- The implication could be that as Jerusalem hated Yahweh her husband, so the Hittites and Amorites had. Perhaps they too had had the opportunity of relationship with God and yet had

turned away from it to their gods. And Jerusalem had now turned to the same gods from the same one true God. They would never said that they hated or loathed God nor their children; but the prophets see to the essence of what is implied by our attitudes and positions. Their sacrifice of their children to the idols was likely done with pangs of sorrow rather than loathing of those children; but God read it as loathing their own children. None of us are merely caught up the flow of life and situations, victims of circumstantial ethics. We can make some concrete election.

Ezekiel 16:46 Your elder sister is Samaria, who dwells at your left hand, she and her daughters- "Daughters" may refer to the towns around (as Num. 21:25 Heb.).

And your younger sister, who dwells at your right hand, is Sodom and her daughters- Sodom is seen as Judah's sister in that Lot's children, Moab and Ammon, were born near Sodom and were thus identified with it. The Orientals faced the East in marking the directions of the sky; thus, the North was "left," the South "right".

Ezekiel 16:47 Yet have you not walked in their ways, nor done after their abominations- This could be quoting the words of the false prophets. The claim is to be utterly deconstructed.

But, as if that were a very little thing, you were more corrupt than they in all your ways- As noted on :20, they considered their sins to be little things; and yet they made God tremble with rage (see on :43). We too can so easily shrug off sin as mere surface level behaviour, when in fact it touches the heart of God Himself. Judah was more corrupt than Israel (Samaria, the ten tribes), and yet they went into captivity well before Judah did. This of itself reflects God's special grace, and yet that grace was so abused by them to self-righteously consider Israel to be so far worse than themselves.

Ezekiel 16:48 As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, Sodom your sister has not done, she nor her daughters, as you have done, you and your daughters- "As I live" is a strong term; God is insistent that the sins of Judah were worse than those of Sodom. The sexual perversions of Sodom were nothing compared to those of Judah, both literally and in the sense that Judah were so unfaithful to God. The children of Sodom could refer to Moab and Ammon (:49) or to the cities around her. But God's grace in being patient with Judah had been so far greater. The connection with Sodom may imply that there was also the possibility of the salvation of Jerusalem for the sake of the intercession of a tiny minority.

Ezekiel 16:49 Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and prosperous ease was in her and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy- I suggested that "Sodom" is put for Moab and Ammon the sons of Lot who were born near there, and who were therefore as it were the brothers of the seed of Abraham. They too were proud (Is. 16:6; Jer. 49:4) and refused to help the needy (Is. 16:3,4; Jer. 48:27). The "fullness of bread" in Sodom was due to the fertile land there (Gen. 13:10). The obvious sin of Sodom was sexual sin, but this singular "iniquity" was seen through by the Divine analysis to its core- which was pride, prosperity, self-focus and laziness. Rome and other societies have likewise been led by these things into gross sexual sin, just as western society has been today.

Ezekiel 16:50 They were proud and committed sexual abomination before Me: therefore I took them away as I saw good- "Before Me" recalls the comment that the

men of Sodom were "sinners before the Lord" (Gen. 13:13). "As I saw good" refers to how God "saw" their sin and responded appropriately to it (Gen. 18:21).

Ezekiel 16:51 Neither has Samaria committed half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all your abominations which you have done- This quotes Jer. 3:11. The sinful ten tribes were even made to appear righteous, justified, by the gross sins of Judah. Again this is an example of how the Bible describes things as they might appear from a human perspective; for Samaria was not righteous. God had a special love and grace for Judah; for they were not destroyed until well after Samaria. And they abused that grace.

Ezekiel 16:52 You also bear you your own shame, in that you have given judgment for your sisters; through your sins that you have committed more abominable than they- Judah judged Samaria and Sodom in judging them as sinners, thinking they had therefore been punished. So often we see this- sinners are wont to harshly condemn other sinners. This is because they unconsciously transfer their conscience of their sins to others, and punish them with the punishment they realize subconsciously that they also deserve.

They are more righteous than you: yes, be also confounded, and bear your shame, in that you have justified your sisters- This is typical of how the Bible presents things as they seem to secular man; she was not righteous, but appeared that way. Yet the fact she was not actually righteous but just seemed so is not footnoted, just as there is no footnote attached to the usage of the language of demons in the NT.

Ezekiel 16:53 I will turn again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of your captives in their midst- The vision was that the daughters of Sodom, which I suggested above were Moab and Ammon, along with the ten tribes, would return from captivity along with Judah. They had all been taken captive by Assyria or Babylon, and the prophetic vision was that the Gentiles would return with a repentant Judah and Israel; all racial and interpersonal divisions would be overcome by a common experience of grace, forgiveness and the bonds of the new covenant. But instead of repenting, the restored exiles of Judah became arrogant and exclusive towards others.

Ezekiel 16:54 That you may bear your own shame, and may be ashamed because of all that you have done- Shame for sin is a major theme with Ezekiel. The days of shame would come to an end (Ez. 16:54; 34:29; 36:15; 39:26)- if Jerusalem accepted shame for her sins. But Ez. 44:13 says that the sins of the Jerusalem priesthood were such that in the restored temple, they would bear their shame in that they would never again minister in it. Likewise the Jewish priesthood who persecuted Jeremiah at this time were to bear a shame that would last for ever (Jer. 20:11). And yet the hope of Israel was that they would eternally be unashamed, world without end (Is. 45:17). The resolution of this may be in God's willingness to count them totally righteous by grace, upon their repentance. And Ezra "blushed" [s.w. "ashamed"] because of Israel's sins (Ezra 9:6), and Jeremiah at this time cast himself down in shame because of them (Jer. 3:25). This representative intercession for Judah had some effect. Just as the Lord Jesus bore the shame of Israel and all sinners on the cross (Is. 50:6), and yet because of that He would not be ashamed eternally (Is. 50:7). He was to become

representative of the repentant Israel of God; for the same words are used of how they too would have unashamed faces eternally (Is. 54:4). But the Jerusalem priesthood refused to take shame, they were unashamed of their whoredoms (Jer. 3:3; 8:12). Ezekiel's appeal in Ez. 16 was so that they would recognize their sins, and be ashamed (Ez. 16:2). There was time for them to do so right up until they were led captive, in the final attempt to make them realize their shame. For when they went into captivity, then God intended that they would be "ashamed" (Jer. 22:22). The final vision of Ezekiel, of the potential that was possible in a restored Zion, was in order to make the exiles ashamed of their sins when they realized the possibilities they had wasted and yet which were still possible by grace (Ez. 43:10,11). But they didn't respond to that vision, they refused to build and operate such a temple system; because they refused to be ashamed in exile, although it was God's intention that they should be. And so it is for us as a new Israel to be ashamed for our sins, and identify with the Messiah figure who would bear Israel's shame and thereby emerge eternally unashamed.

In that you are a comfort to them- The Hebrew for "comfort" is that usually used for repentance. The idea may simply be that they would all repent together; see on :55.

Ezekiel 16:55 Your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate; and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate; and you and your daughters shall return to your former estate- This implies that both Samaria [the 10 tribes] and Judah would 'return to their former estate' at one and the same time. And this passage is clearly in a restoration context. It was potentially possible for the 10 tribes to have returned at the same time as Judah. But somehow, that potential was never made possible by them. The message as heard by the inhabitants of Judah wouldn't have been that attractive- that their only hope of restoration was together with Samaria and the children of Sodom whom they despised.

Ezekiel 16:56 For your sister Sodom was a byword to you in the day of your pride- The sin of the Jerusalem priesthood, which is whom Ezekiel is specifically addressing here, was compounded by their spiritual arrogance. They used proverbs which mocked the wickedness of Sodom (Moab and Ammon) and the ten tribes (Samaria), thereby exalting themselves spiritually in their own eyes. We note that God is aware of and sensitive to our throwaway expressions and words.

Ezekiel 16:57 Before your wickedness was uncovered, as at the time of the reproach of the daughters of Syria, and of all who are around her, the daughters of the Philistines, who do despite to you all around- The GNB helps with "Now you are just like her- a joke to the Edomites, the Philistines, and your other neighbors who hate you". As the Jerusalem priesthood had mocked Sodom and Samaria, now they were mocked- by the very ones whose idols they had accepted, as "hire" or payment for having military protection from those peoples. The uncovering or exposure of Jerusalem was when the various nations she had made alliances with in return for sole devotion to their gods realized that they were being two timed. And worse. It became known that the Jerusalem temple was a house of all manner of gods, the symbol of her relationship with multiple nations, all of whom she had promised total allegiance to in return for their military and political help. Hence the anger and mockery of all of them, when their mercenaries confederated with Babylon to totally destroy that temple.

Ezekiel 16:58 You have borne your lewdness and your abominations, says Yahweh- To carry sin is a metaphor for carrying the punishment for that sin. That punishment was still future (:59) and yet the secret was out, the nations knew they had been deceived, and now there was only a very narrow window of opportunity for Jerusalem to repent. Their only way out was to throw themselves solely upon their only true defence, Yahweh. But they refused.

Ezekiel 16:59 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant- See on Zech. 11:10,11. As explained on :57, they had broken not only their covenant of exclusive loyalty to Yahweh, but their covenants with multiple nations and their gods. As noted on :28 and often, they had broken the covenant which Yahweh made with them at Sinai. And the curses for disobedience to it were now to come.

Ezekiel 16:60 Nevertheless I will remember My covenant made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish to you an everlasting covenant- Here is amazing grace. They had broken the covenant (:59), but God would still be faithful to that covenant. Yet it was a broken covenant; and so He would make a new and everlasting one with them. That covenant was "everlasting" in that God hoped and envisioned that they would never again break it. See on :41,43. This was His hope, the hope of the desperate lover, but it was not to come true. Zechariah some time later was to speak of God breaking the covenant with His people. And so He has made the new covenant with us, a new Israel.

Ezekiel 16:61 Then you shall remember your ways, and be ashamed, when you shall receive your sisters, your elder sisters and your younger; and I will give them to you for daughters, but not by your covenant- This implies a new covenant would be made with the exiles, as explained in Jer. 31, Ez. 36 etc. That new covenant involved acceptance of the ten tribes on an equal footing with themselves, as well as with the people of Sodom, whom I have suggested refer to the children of Lot born near there, Moab and Ammon- in other words, the reconcilliation of all the seed of Abraham. Given their spiritual pride and elitism, that was perhaps not a great prospect for the Jerusalem leadership at Ezekiel's time. And after the restoration, their elitism continued, despising the Samaritans and indeed all Gentiles, rather than welcoming them into the covenant of grace. Acceptance of the new covenant, then as now, required reconcilliation with God to be reflected in reconcilliation with our brethren. They preferred the old covenant at Sinai; but they had broken that, and this acceptance of their apparently spiritually weaker brethren was to be "not by your covenant", the covenant made exclusively with Israel at Sinai, but by the new covenant. The way the Jews tenaciously held on to that old covenant merely reflected their refusal of this new way, this new covenant of grace. Whilst that covenant was fully ended by the Lord's death on the cross, in effect it had ended at Ezekiel's time; for here it is pronounced broken, and a new covenant offered- which they refused to enter. So from now onwards, their covenant relationship with God was effectively over.

Ezekiel 16:62 I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- They would "know" Him through the utter grace of this new covenant. They

deserved death, the death of a whore, to be eternally forgotten after how they had treated their husband- the God of all grace and patience.

Ezekiel 16:63 That you may remember, and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more because of your shame, when I have forgiven you all that you have done, says the Lord Yahweh- The not opening their mouth again could refer to not using the language of spiritual superiority against others referenced in :56. But we can also read it as meaning that they will be so ashamed that they will feel as if they are dumb; and yet they will speak, but only of God's grace, and with a deep humility.

In the future, God will use a repentant Israel to achieve great things in terms of converting this world unto Himself; but that was possible for the captives in Babylon who could have converted the world of their time to the God of Israel. They will walk up and down in His Name, witnessing to Him as He had originally intended them to (Zech. 10:12); men will cling to their skirts in order to find the knowledge of their God (Zech. 8:23). “In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee (Israel) the opening of the mouth in the midst of them (the surrounding nations, see context); and *they* shall know that I am the LORD”, in that Israel will preach to them from their own experience of having recently come to know Yahweh (Ez. 29:21). But at the time of the Lord’s return, when Israel repent and enter the new covenant with Him, they will remember all their past sins “and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame... for all that thou hast done” (Ez. 16:63). They will be so ashamed that they *will feel as if* they can never open their mouth. But Yahweh will open their mouth, and they will witness. In some anticipation of this, Ezekiel as the “son of man” prophet, a representative of his people just as the Lord was to be, had his mouth shut in dumbness, and he only had his mouth opened when Israel came to know [to some degree] that “I am the LORD” (Ez. 24:27). In all these evident connections something marvellous presents itself. Those who feel as if they just cannot open their mouths in witness are the very ones whom the Father will use; He will open their mouths and use them exactly because they are ashamed of their sins! And so it should be with us.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 17

Ezekiel 17:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 17:2 *Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel*- A "riddle" is Heb. 'that which is sharp'. This was now painless riddle, but as the crude language of Ez. 16 was intended to grab their attention and elicit repentance, so this parable was intended to be "sharp". And indeed it is so- that a parable, a story expressing a challenge, can be sharper than bald statements.

Ezekiel 17:3 *And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: A great eagle with great wings and long feathers, full of feathers of various colours*- Literally, *the* great eagle, a symbol of Babylon (Jer. 48:40; 49:22), perhaps alluding to their god Nisroch, the eagle. The great wings spoke of his armies, the long wings / feathers of the extent of his empire. The feathers of various colours refer to the nations confederate with her.

Came to Lebanon- Eusebius says that the temple at Jerusalem was called 'Lebanon' by the Jews, because its woodwork was of cedars of Lebanon.

And took off the top of the cedar- King Jeconiah, then only 18 years old, and many of the leaders with him (2 Kings 24:8, 12-16). They were taken as hostages to Babylon, whilst Zedekiah became the puppet king under covenant with Babylon.

Ezekiel 17:4 *He cropped off the highest of its young twigs and carried it to a land of commerce where he set it in a city of merchants*- Babylon was famous for its transport traffic on the Tigris and Euphrates; also, by its connection with the Persian Gulf, it traded even with India.

Ezekiel 17:5 *He also took the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful soil. He placed it beside many waters and set it as a willow tree*- We must remember that Ezekiel was teaching this parable to the depressed exiles as they sat by the rivers / waters of Babylon by the Chebar river. What seemed a hopeless, dead end situation was in fact fruitful soil for their spiritual growth and the development of God's purpose. The "seed of the land" were the royal family. The implication is that the kingly line would revive; "the prince" of Ez. 40-48 could have been literally in the line of David, and Zerubbabel was just such a candidate, although it seems he didn't live up to the potential. "Willow" can be "vine", which would connect with the parable of the destroyed, useless vine of Ez. 15. Those charred, useless branches were to be enabled by the spiritually fruitful soil of Babylon to miraculously revive. If we insist upon "willow", then we see the connection with Ps. 137:2, where the depressed captives sit by the waters of Babylon under willow trees. But they were to realize that their apparently hopeless situation was in fact upon spiritually fruitful soil. And we can perceive dead end situations in life the same way. Indeed it could be that the willow tree, symbol of their mourning in Babylon, became a vine.

Ezekiel 17:6 *It grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and its roots were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and young shoots*- It "became a vine" in that it was planted a willow tree; see on :6. This speaks of the power of the Spirit to transform the most depressive situations into spiritual fruitfulness. The "low stature" may refer to the humility there would be in the revived community. But it was deformed, just as Israel had been at their birth (see on Ez. 16:5)- its branches turned inwards, and the roots did not spread far out, accounting for its low height. This vine would be humble. Or we can read the "him" as referring to the eagle of Babylon. Zedekiah and the royal seed of the land (:5) were to be loyal to Babylon. His roots were under "him", Babylon.

Ezekiel 17:7 *There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers. This vine bent its roots toward him, and shot forth its branches toward him, from the beds of its plantation, that he might water it*- This is interpreted later in that chapter as Egypt (:15). The partially revived vine looked to Egypt for help to throw off the Babylonians; we see here how in their hearts, God's people always yearned toward Egypt. It could be that it was from exile in Babylon that the royal seed sought to reach out to Egypt and make a covenant with them to throw off the Babylonian yoke. They refused to accept Ezekiel's message, that exile there was required and was part of their spiritual reformation. The reference is to the Nile being made to water the fields by means of small canals or AV "furrows;" these waters are the figure of the auxiliary forces wherewith Egypt tried to help Judah.

Ezekiel 17:8 *It was planted in a good soil by many waters that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine*- This laments how it was really possible that the exile in Babylon could have quite quickly brought forth spiritual fruit to God. The apparently bad situation was ideally suited to their becoming "a goodly vine". Fruit bearing is what God seeks of us; contrary to what we often think, He places us in situations which are optimal for our spiritual development. And yet by seeking a better material situation we can ruin all that potential.

Ezekiel 17:9 *Say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Shall it prosper?*- Spiritually, the vine would not prosper, just as we will not spiritually prosper if we refuse to accept the situations God places us in for our spiritual good. Nehemiah uses this same word "prosper", as if he realized that the exiles had not prospered as intended, but he wished to put that right at the restoration (Neh. 1:11; 2:20). The plan of God didn't ultimately prosper at that time, but it will in the hands of the messiah Jesus, the fulfilment of the twig which becomes a cedar later in the chapter (Is. 53:10). Jeremiah's parable of the girdle demonstrated that the Jews would not "prosper" (Jer. 13:7,10) even when taken into captivity at the Euphrates (i.e. Babylon), using the same word as in the parable of the vine in Ez. 17:9. Babylon, according to Ez. 17:8, was potentially fruitful soil for their spiritual revival. But they would not "prosper", Jeremiah says, because of their deep seated love of idolatry and lack of true repentance. The parable of the vine has just stated that the burnt and charred vine tree is not "suitable for any work", using the same word translated here "prosper" (Ez. 15:4). Only Divine grace could make it prosper and be useful to Him.

Shall he not pull up its roots, and cut off its fruit, that it may wither; that all its fresh springing leaves may wither? and not by a strong arm or many people can it be raised from its roots- Even a small Babylonian army could do the job of destroying Judah (Jer. 37:10). The withering of the fruit is emphasized because the whole idea was that the vine could have brought forth spiritual fruit in the early days of the exile, even whilst Zedekiah was still puppet king in Jerusalem. But that was all to be destroyed by the uprooting.

Ezekiel 17:10 *Yes, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? Shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind touches it? It shall wither in the beds where it grew*- For "prosper", see on :9. The focus is not so much upon the physical destruction, but upon the withering of the fruit and the tragedy of the loss of potential spiritual fruit. Babylon is likened to the east wind, coming from the north east to destroy that which had been planted.

Ezekiel 17:11 *Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- The apparent gap between the riddle and the interpretation was to encourage them to work it out for themselves.

Ezekiel 17:12 *Say now to the rebellious people, Don't you know what these things mean? Tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took its king, and its princes, and brought them to him to Babylon*- The parable is not hard to interpret. They surely saw the point. But apparently they acted dumb, as if it was all a mystery; and so the obvious interpretation is given. This shows that apparent

intellectual failure to understand God's word, or at least His moral demands, has a moral basis. They refused to understand the parable because they were a "rebellious people", not because of some purely intellectual block.

Ezekiel 17:13 *He took of the seed royal, and made a covenant with him. He also brought him under an oath, and took away the mighty of the land*- These were the very people who were with Ezekiel in captivity in Babylon. The parable was highly relevant to them. "The seed royal" were as it were hostages in Babylon.

Ezekiel 17:14 *That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand*- The idea may be that it was God's plan that through keeping the covenant, the royal family and leadership would be humbled, and this would bring about God's favourite paradox- the brought down could then be exalted, "that... it might stand". See on :24. But they refused to repent, to be humbled, to be ashamed, and instead sought to wriggle out of the covenant by making agreements with Egypt to attack the Babylonian forces, liberate Jerusalem and perhaps later themselves from Babylon itself. Yet all these things had been explicitly promised to Judah; God would do all these things, if they repented. But instead of doing so, they sought by all manner of desperate means to bring about this liberation in the strength of Egypt. This is so typical of human behaviour. It is for us to learn the lesson.

Ezekiel 17:15 *But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors to Egypt that they might give him horses and many people. Shall he prosper?*- For "prosper", see on :9. We wonder whether it was yet public knowledge in Babylon that Zedekiah and the royal family had sent these ambassadors and had these plans. If not, Ezekiel's message would have been tantamount to a betrayal of serious secrets which would have directly led to the Babylonian invasion and fury with the royal family who were already with Ezekiel in captivity in Babylon. It would have been a very hard message for Ezekiel to deliver, and would have made him hated and at risk for his life amongst the captives.

Shall he who does such things escape? Shall he break the covenant, and yet escape?- This is the language of Judah breaking covenant with God, just used in Ez. 16:59. God had designed the covenant between Zedekiah and the Babylonians, for the spiritual growth and repentance of the Jews. To break it was therefore to effectively break covenant with God. Or we could instead perceive that covenant breaking with God is reflected in covenant breaking with men. Our attitude to God becomes our attitude to men.

Ezekiel 17:16 *As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die*- The very opposite would happen to that which Zedekiah hoped. He is presented in Jeremiah as wanting to do the right thing before God, earnestly seeking God's word, yet fearing the opinion of his princes. But here Ezekiel sees to the essence; that fear of the opinion of others was effectively a despising of covenant relationship with God.

Ezekiel 17:17 *Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company help him in the war, when they cast up mounds and build forts, to cut off many people*- The "they" appears to be the Babylonians. No amount of human might could alter the

purpose of God, which required repentant trust in Him rather than hope in the human strength of Egypt. The Egyptian forces were destroyed and had to return to Egypt (Jer. 37:7; 44:30).

Ezekiel 17:18 *For he has despised the oath by breaking the covenant; and behold, he had given his hand, and yet has done all these things; he shall not escape*- To give the hand was a metaphor for making a covenant agreement. Jeremiah appears to justify the way Judah had done this by saying that they did it "for bread" (Lam. 5:6), as if the famine sent by God to bring about their repentance was so severe that the alliances were not just for political and military protection, but for basic food. This was how low the one time beautiful prostitute of Ez. 16 had fallen; just "for bread" she made the agreements which meant that she had to have the idols of these people in the Jerusalem temple. Clearly these 'givings of the hand' were wrong, and yet Jeremiah laments as if they were somehow justifiable. But Ez. 17 clearly condemns them as immoral acts. For God as Judah's husband would surely provide her with bread. The lack of it was to bring her back to Him, but instead she responded by madly making more spiritually adulterous covenants. We too can respond to God's chastening hand either by total repentance and casting ourselves upon Him, or by madly seeking to get around His chastisement by yet further sin and unfaithfulness.

Ezekiel 17:19 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely My oath that he has despised, and My covenant that he has broken, I will even bring it on his own head*- This is the language of Judah breaking covenant with God, just used in Ez. 16:59. God had designed the covenant between Zedekiah and the Babylonians, for the spiritual growth and repentance of the Jews. To break it was therefore to effectively break covenant with God. Or we could instead perceive that covenant breaking with God is reflected in covenant breaking with men. Our attitude to God becomes our attitude to men. Judah were light hearted in their attitude to everything; they "gave the hand" in :18 in order just to get "bread" (Lam. 5:6). They were in need, and instead of turning to God in repentance, they madly made promises of total loyalty to various peoples and their gods. It is this light hearted, not serious attitude, seeking for the immediate for the total sacrifice of principle, which dominates our age today.

Ezekiel 17:20 *I will spread My net on him, and he shall be taken in My snare, and I will bring him to Babylon and will enter into judgment with him there for his sins that he has committed against Me*- Zedekiah was to be taken by the net of the Babylonian armies. We marvel that he was not immediately slain by God. But there in Babylon God says in the AV that "I will plead with him there". In his blindness, God appealed to him. We marvel at God's continual effort to save this man; it is the loving initiative of the shepherd who searches for the lost with the attitude that He will search until He finds it. God doesn't give up with people, and neither should we.

Ezekiel 17:21 *All his fugitives in all his bands shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered toward every wind: and you shall know that I, Yahweh, have spoken it*- The prophecy would be written down, and would be later seen to have fulfilled exactly. Zedekiah's accompanying soldiers were slain, but his life was preserved. This would surely have been reflected upon by him; it was part of God's special pleading with that man to realize His grace (see on :20).

Ezekiel 17:22 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar, and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain*- When Zedekiah was taken into captivity (Ez. 17:20), it was prophesied that "a tender one" (Messiah- Is. 11:1; 53:2) would be planted "upon an high mountain", and grow into a tree in whose shadows all animals would live (Ez. 17:21,22). This is clearly the Messianic Kingdom (Lk. 13:19). This young twig at the time of the captivity [when Zedekiah was taken into captivity, :20] was surely Zerubbabel, and the "high mountain" upon which his Kingdom could have been established is surely the "high mountain" of Ez. 40:2 where the temple could have been built. Yet the prophecy had to suffer a massive deferment until its fulfilment in Christ. See on Zech. 6:12.

Ezekiel 17:23 *In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell*- The parable opened by describing the various nations within the Babylonian empire as wings and feathers (:3). The potential was that the Babylonian empire would be converted to Yahweh by the repentant exiles, and would come to dwell under the shadow of the reestablished Messianic kingdom of God in Israel. So much potential was wasted by Zerubbabel and the exiles.

Ez. 17:22,23 had spoken of how at the restoration, Babylon would fall and a "tender one" arise, who would grow into a tree under whose branches all the birds would find shelter. This is the very language of the Kingdom of Jesus in Mt. 13:32. The Kingdom of Babylon- also likened in Daniel to a tree with birds beneath it- could have been replaced with God's Kingdom when it fell soon after the restoration of Judah. But no Messiah figure arose (see on Ez. 37:25- Zerubbabel could have fulfilled it), and so the prophecy had a changed fulfilment- the tree that was abased and then lifted up could have been Israel, but it was re-applied to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate "servant" of Yahweh. Ezekiel 19:13,14 help us perceive this more clearly- Judah in Babylon were as it were "planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground". She had "no [Messianic] strong rod to be a sceptre to rule", and this was "for a lamentation". But the prophecy was fulfilled in another way- for the Lord Jesus was the root out of a dry ground who sprang up and *did* fulfil God's intention (Is. 53:1).

Ezekiel 17:24 *All the trees of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it*- In the first context, the high tree was that of Babylon. The low tree was the deformed vine of :6 (see note there). This humiliated kingdom could have arisen to eclipse the Babylonian empire. As explained on Dan. 2, the vision of the image can be understood as a sequence of kings rather than kingdoms which could have been destroyed by the little stone of restored Judah under a Messianic ruler. But this was precluded by Judah's lack of repentance and spiritual vision, and so the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus. He was to be the root out of a dry ground who through the humiliation of the cross was to establish the Divine kingdom of :23.

It was God's plan that through keeping the covenant, the royal family and leadership would be humbled, and this would bring about God's favourite paradox- the brought down could then be exalted, "that... it might stand" (see on :14).

This lack of humility led to the prophecy being reapplied to the Lord Jesus. And His mother seems to have perceived this. The humility of Mary was the pattern for the Lord's self-humiliation in the cross. Here above all we see the influence of Mary upon Jesus, an influence that would lead Him to and through the cross. Her idea of putting down the high and exalting the lowly (Lk. 1:52) is picking up Ez. 17:24: "I have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish". And yet these very words of Ezekiel were quoted by the Lord in His time of dying. With reverence, we can follow where we are being led in our exploration and knowing of the mind of Christ. His dear mum had gone around the house singing her Magnificat. He realized that she felt the lowly who had been exalted [and perhaps in some unrecorded incident before her conception she had been recently humbled?]. And Jesus had realized her quotation of Ez. 17:24. And He had perceived His linkage and connection with her, and how she saw all that was true of Him as in some way true of her, and vice versa. And now, in His final crisis, He takes comfort from the fact that like His dear mother, He the one who was now humbled, would be exalted. How many other trains of thought have been sparked in men's minds by the childhood instructions of their mothers…?

The Lord's words as He carried the cross "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel…? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 18

Ezekiel 18:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me again, saying*- The righteous remnant were actually persecuted by the other Jews in Babylon, according to the testimony of the later parts of Isaiah. One significant problem which they had right from the start was that they insisted that the captivity was unfair, it was not their fault, they were righteous and were being unfairly punished for the sins of their fathers. Ezekiel 18 addresses this at length with them. God's intention was that His exiled people would "declare all their abominations among the nations whither they come", i.e. the 127 provinces of Babylon (Ez. 12:16). Note how confession of personal failure and testimony to God's forgiveness is actually a powerful witness to unbelievers. But instead, Ezekiel had to reason against the Jews' insistence that they had *not* sinned, and were being unfairly punished for their fathers' sins by an unjust God (Ez. 18). And so likewise it happens with us all too often that the potential witness which we could make simply isn't made. 1 Kings 8:47-50 had predicted that God would give the exiles compassion in captivity *if* they repented. They

didn't repent, as passages like Ez. 18 make clear (they blamed everything on their fathers and protested their personal innocence)- and yet still God gave them compassion in the eyes of their captors, through the amazing decrees of Cyrus enabling them to return to their land and rebuild the temple at his expense.

Ezekiel 18:2 *What do you mean, that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?-* Note that God is aware of even the throwaway language and phrases used by us.

It's apparent that Judah in captivity weren't repentant; and yet God granted them His forgiveness so that they might repent. Indeed, the Jews were bitter with God. They claimed that they were suffering unfairly as a result of their fathers' sins, and that Yahweh was unfair (Ez. 18:25)- when He was showing them a grace so wonderful that all that is within us fights against perceiving it! The lack of perception of God's grace was terrible- and yet many of us have lived for decades doing just the same! Some of the comments of the Jewish religious leaders during the captivity are preserved for us in the Babylonian Talmud. It's interesting to see the development of their commentaries upon the prophets (See H. Freedman, *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo'ed* (London: Soncino Press, 1938). Hosea clearly taught that he represented God, and Israel were likened to a prostitute, unfaithful to Him. Time and again, Hosea appeals for Israel to "return", the same Hebrew word being used about 'returning' to the land of Judah. But Israel would not. And they obviously found Hosea hard to grapple with. And so the Talmud condemns Hosea for marrying a promiscuous woman (See *Peshitta 87b* in the Babylonian Talmud; and H.L. Ginsberg, 'Hosea, Book of' in G. Roth and C. Wigoder, eds, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Macmillan, 1971) Vol. 18 col. 1011). By so doing they were refusing to let the prophetic word bite as it was intended to; their interpretations, like many false exposition today, was intended to justify them. And thereby they effectively condemned the God who loved them so freely. Even those who did return were impenitent. The sins of those who returned are styled "the transgression of those that had been carried away" (Ezra 9:4). Yet those who returned to the land weren't mainly the generation who had been carried away. The intended confusion is surely to suggest that those who returned committed the same sins as had led Judah into captivity a generation earlier. And Ezra comments on this fact in his subsequent prayer (Ezra 9:7).

The exiles blamed the exile on their fathers, but Ezekiel seeks to show them that they are acting just like their fathers. And they need to repent of that. Psalm 68 is not a prayer; rather is it an appeal to the exiles in the spirit of Ezekiel to make a clean break from their fathers' attitudes. And to perceive God's grace all through their history, and to trust in it. The exiles "used this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?" (Ez. 18:2). They were asked to stop saying that, and accept their situation was because they were sinning themselves. These same people who were blaming everything on their fathers' sins were

asked: "Cast away from you all your transgressions in which you have transgressed; and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit" (Ez. 18:31). This is the new covenant. It was a requirement of the new covenant that they would stop thinking like this: "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer. 31:29). The appeal of many scriptures such as Ps. 78 is to get the exiles to a point where they would "say no more" that they were suffering unfairly, for the sake of their fathers' sins.

Ezekiel 18:3 *As I live says the Lord Yahweh, you shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel*- In Ez. 16:56,63 we noted that God wished to stop Israel using certain proverbs. He paid attention to their sayings, their language, their throwaway expressions. All language is significant to God, and He aimed to reform even the kind of language they spoke. This is part of being in the new covenant- Jer. 31:29 had specifically stated this, contemporary with Ezekiel. So Ezekiel is so labouring the point in Ez. 18, because he wants them to accept the new covenant in exile, and to live and speak according to it. And yet Jeremiah himself seems to say that God has in fact punished the children for their fathers' sins (Lam. 5:7). He was contradicting his own message in Jer. 31:29. We would therefore have in this an example of a man who in depression says things which are wrong, struggling with God, as Job did; and yet still finally accepted.

Ezekiel 18:4 *Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine*- The idea may be that God created all people and therefore He will judge each individually. But the allusion is surely to Lev. 20:26: "You [all Israel] shall be Mine", out of all the families of the earth. All Israel were indeed God's people, but this did not mean that the person ["soul"] who sinned would not be punished with death. For the contrast is with the righteous who would "live" (:19) and in that sense, not die. And perhaps specifically the reference is again to the priesthood, who appear to be the subject of much of Ezekiel's criticisms; for it was they and the royal family who were taken into captivity rather than the common masses. For "the Levites shall be Mine" (Lev. 3:12; Num. 8:14). This would explain the male reference, to "the son"; for the priesthood was male. The phrase is used again in Mal. 3:17, of the repentant remnant amongst the exiles. But even amongst them, those who sinned would die.

The soul who sins, he shall die- Proof enough that "the soul" simply means 'the person' and is not immortal. The death in view is death at the hands of the Babylonians, in the context. For some souls / people implicitly didn't commit the sin which led to death. It is judicial death which is in view, rather than the death which is common to all men.

Ezekiel 18:5 *But if a man is just, and does that which is lawful and right*- The things listed as exemplifications of this are all from the second table of the ten commandments.

Doing justice and right was the characteristic of Abraham's true seed (s.w. Gen. 18:19). Those who did not do so were therefore not the true Israel of God. Again, the Jewish assumption of salvation from the Babylonians on account of their fleshly descent is being deconstructed.

Ezekiel 18:6 *And has not eaten on the mountains, neither has lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither has defiled his neighbour's wife, neither has come near to a woman in her impurity*- The sexual immorality is bracketed together with the idolatry, because as made clear in Ez. 16, the two went together. The sexual aspect of idolatry was not solely in sleeping with the cult prostitutes but with other women who had come to worship, even your neighbour's wife. The idol cults apparently had no restrictions regarding sleeping with menstrous women. And so at the very time when her husband could not sleep with her due to the Mosaic prohibitions about this, she could go to the idol worship and sleep with her neighbour's husband. Thus the inability of compromise between God's law and idolatry is emphasized, whereas the priests were teaching that the idolatry was being performed as part of Yahweh worship.

Ezekiel 18:7 *And has not wronged any but has restored to the debtor his pledge, has taken nothing by robbery, has given his bread to the hungry and has covered the naked with a garment*- Such sensitivity and generosity to the poor is not a mere optional extra in the spiritual life; it is in fact part of being basically "just" and committed to social justice (:5), part of 'dealing truly' (:9).

Ezekiel 18:8 *He who has not given forth on interest neither has taken any increase, who has withdrawn his hand from iniquity, has executed true justice between man and man*- These issues suggest that the person addressed is in a position of power; to lend to others, and to judge between persons. This strengthens the impression that Ezekiel is addressing specifically the leadership; it was the priests and ruling classes who had been taken into exile at that time, and they were his audience. 'Executing true justice' was appealed for again by Zechariah after the restoration (Zech. 7:9 s.w.). Clearly the community addressed by Ezekiel were still failing in this as they had before the exile, and continued to do so after the restoration. The captivity didn't produce the reformation intended. But by grace, God still restored them, in the hope that this further outpouring of grace would motivate them to repentance; and yet it didn't.

Ezekiel 18:9 *Has walked in My statutes, and has kept My commandments, to deal truly: he is just*- See on :7. Dealing truly is a phrase often used of keeping covenant promises. By not doing these things, Israel had ended their covenant with God.

He shall surely live, says the Lord Yahweh- "Surely live" isn't necessarily an offer of eternal life; it could refer to how those who repented in Jerusalem would be spared the destruction and death which would otherwise come.

Ezekiel 18:10 *If he fathers a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, and who does any one of these things*- These were all things going on at the time of Ezekiel. The exiles needed to repent of these things. Perhaps he is viewing coveting as theft, and hatred of brethren as murder. But there is strong reason to suspect that these actual things had been practiced by the ruling classes who were now in exile with Ezekiel. The same word is used to express how the Jerusalem temple had been turned by the priests into a "den of robbers" (Jer. 7:11). Again we have the impression that Ezekiel as a priest is addressing the leaders of the priests and their children who had been taken into captivity. One reason Judah was destroyed was because Manasseh was a 'shedder of blood' (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4). Perhaps this was being focused upon by the exiles, complaining that God was unfairly punishing them for Manasseh's sins. But the reality was that in essence, his descendants and wider family had done the same as he had done. For they too had been involved in the shedding of the innocent blood of their own children to the idol cults (Ps. 106:38). Indeed Jer. 7:6 says that this innocent blood was shed in the temple; it was there that the idols were worshipped and child sacrifice made. This is in proximity to the description of that temple as a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11), which is the same word used here in Ez. 18:10.

Ezekiel 18:11 *And who does not any of those obligations*- The idea of "obligations" may be that the theft and shedding innocent blood in child sacrifices (:10) were performed as part of their religious obligations to the idols of the surrounding nations whom they had contracted to worship, in return for material and political help.

But even has eaten on the mountains and defiled his neighbour's wife- There was perhaps the idea amongst some of the exiles that they had not performed child sacrifice nor theft in the Jerusalem temple (:10), and were therefore acceptable. But they had eaten idol sacrifices elsewhere, and in that context slept with their neighbour's wife; see on :6 for the connection.

Ezekiel 18:12 *Has wronged the poor and needy, has taken by robbery, has not restored the pledge and has lifted up his eyes to the idols, has committed abomination*- Lifting up the eyes can be understood as meaning to trust in, to look towards for help. Judah's leadership, whose children were now in exile and formed Ezekiel's first audience, had made deals with other nations, trusting in their gods to help them against the Babylonians; instead of looking to Yahweh.

Ezekiel 18:13 *Has given forth on interest, and has taken increase: shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations. He shall surely die; his blood shall be on him*- Nehemiah makes it clear that this lending to brethren on interest was going on amongst the restored exiles, and clearly they were just continuing to live how they had done in exile. For those whom Ezekiel is addressing in captivity were apparently doing this, just as they had done before their exile. The experience of restoration by grace had not affected their behaviour. We too must allow ourselves to be challenged by this.

The prohibition of taking interest was so that "your brother shall live by / with you" (Lev. 25:36). By having done so, those now in exile were separated from their poorer brethren. They had placed personal material gain before the unity of God's people. Again, that is a timeless warning. This taking of interest specifically happened in the temple, according to Ez. 22:12; suggesting the priesthood had become a financial racket which exploited the poor. It is the priesthood and ruling classes whom Ezekiel addresses, for they were those in exile with him.

"He shall surely die" sounds like a legal pronunciation of death at judgment. "He shall not die… live" is an allusion to the words of the serpent, who had taught that God's people would not "surely die" for their sins. The Jews faced the same test, from false teachers acting as the serpent in Eden, the sanctuary of God at that time.

Ezekiel 18:14 *Now, behold, if he fathers a son, who sees all his father's sins which he has done, and sees, and does not such like*- Ezekiel was especially addressing the children of the priesthood, royal family and ruling classes. He was inviting them to repent. Those young people were the ones who could have brought about the repentance required to trigger God's amazing plan of restoring His Kingdom in Israel. So often young people have great potential in God's plan. But we get the impression that Daniel and his friends were the only truly faithful young men amongst the exiles.

Ezekiel 18:15 *Who has not eaten on the mountains, neither has lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, has not defiled his neighbour's wife*- The idols are described specifically as belonging to "the house of Israel". The reference may be to the temple, where Ezekiel had seen the idols being worshipped. Or perhaps the sense is also that it took a strong individual to refuse to worship the idols of his house / family. The gods of the nations were now those of the people of Israel.

Ezekiel 18:16 *Neither has wronged any, has not taken anything to pledge, neither has taken by robbery, but has given his bread to the hungry and has clothed the naked*- The times of the exiles were those of famine, as God tried to bring Judah to repentance.

Bread was to be removed from them (Ez. 4:17; 5:16). For the righteous to share their bread with those lacking bread was therefore tantamount to saying that they would pity sinners in their judgment, and not simply leave them to their sufferings because they had brought those sufferings upon their own heads. If a man digs a pit and falls into it, he is still in the pit and deserves our compassion. This is at the heart of God's compassion towards His sinning people.

Ezekiel 18:17 *Who has not oppressed the poor, who has not received interest nor increase, has kept My commandments, has walked in My statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live*- The 'death' in view here is the judicial death threatened at the hands of the Babylonians; see on :4. 'Living' means being spared those judgments. These warnings take on especial relevance if indeed Ezekiel was preaching the message to the literal, exiled sons of those who had oppressed the poor in Judah. "Not oppressed [the poor]" in Ez. 18:17 is literally 'to turn back the hand from'. God did not turn His hand back from destroying Jerusalem (Lam. 2:8 s.w.) because the people of Judah and those already in exile had not responded to Ezekiel's call to 'turn back their hand' from oppressing the poor. Their attitude to their poor brethren was to become God's attitude to them. And that is taught by the Lord Jesus in His parables as being the principle by which we too shall be judged.

Ezekiel 18:18 *As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother, and did that which is not good among his people, see, he shall die in his iniquity*- "Robbed" is 'plundered', exactly as Jerusalem and the temple was to be plundered, along with the houses of the wealthy. How they treated their brother was how they were to be judged; they were plundered because they plundered their brother. And that is the principle upon which we too shall be judged.

Ezekiel 18:19 *Yet you say, Why doesn't the son bear the iniquity of the father?*- The Hebrew is ambiguous, maybe purposefully so. It could be read as a complaint about they the children bearing the result of their father's sins, as AV: "Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father?". Or it could be read as a statement that they the children who had gone into exile were bearing the punishment of their father's sins, and therefore, their fathers shouldn't suffer any more. Even though their fathers continued sinning.

When the son has done that which is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes, and has done them, he shall surely live- The emphasis upon "When…" would suggest that the sons, the young people in exile, were not doing what was lawful and right. If they did, then they would "live", be spared the judgment which was threatened to come upon

them even in Babylon. But they were powerless to alter the outcomes for their parents, unless their parents personally repented.

Ezekiel 18:20 *The soul who sins, he shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him*- As noted on :19, this bearing sin, or the punishment for sin, was thought to work in that a sinful son could have his punishment carried by the suffering of his father, and vice versa. God doesn't operate such a substitutionary system of atonement. The Lord Jesus bore the punishment for our sins in that He was representative of those who are willingly "in" Him and identify with Him in order to seek forgiveness of their sins which they fully acknowledge. This is different to substitutionary atonement.

Ezekiel 18:21 *But if the wicked turn from all his sins that he has committed, and keep all My statutes and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die*- "Turn" is the word also used for the 'return' of the exiles. Their repentance would lead to their return. They didn't repent, yet by grace God took the initiative and returned them anyway. Yet most didn't want to return and preferred the soft life in Babylon / Persia, and those who did, as the later prophets make clear, didn't repent.

Ezekiel 18:22 *None of his transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him: in his righteousness that he has done he shall live*- "Remembered" is one of a series of Bible verses which could imply that there will be a 'going through' of the sins of the rejected at judgment day, and a 'going through' of the good deeds of the righteous, the water and clothing provided as it were to the Lord Jesus. "Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord" (Eph. 6:8)- at judgment day. Not in this life, when the righteous often suffer for their goodness. *Every* good deed will then have its recognition; but their sins have been dealt with, and these will not be 'gone through' with them.

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked (at the second coming): for there is a time there for *every* purpose and for *every* work…for God shall bring *every* work into judgment, with *every* secret thing, whether it be good or bad" (Ecc. 3:17; 12:14). Note the emphasis on "*every*". Even what we have spoken in the ear will be shouted out (Lk. 12:3) -implying others will somehow observe our judgment, cp. Mt. 12:41. If the judgment is merely a yes/no statement which has been worked out taking our whole life into consideration, then this emphasis on every work having a time for consideration and judgment "there" is pointless. God will "require" the flock at the hand of the pastors (Ez. 34:10), or, as the NT puts it, the ecclesial elders must give an account at judgment day for their flock. The Hebrew word translated "require" in the above passages has the

sense of to search / enquire- which suggests a process of discussion during the judgment process. Paul prayed that the fact the brethren in Rome hadn't stood with him in his court case "may not be laid to their charge" (2 Tim. 4:16). This sounds as if he expected their behaviour in this specific matter to be something which could be brought up with them in the last day and possibly be the cause of their rejection.

"I will never forget any of their works" (Am. 8:7) was God's judgment against the wicked in Israel. Their works would be mentioned to them again at judgment day. Nehemiah several times asks God to "remember unto me" the good deeds he had done for Judah (Neh. 5:19 RV), and to likewise "remember" the bad works of the wicked (Neh. 6:14 RV). He clearly perceived judgment day as featuring the good deeds of the righteous being as it were listed, and the sins of the wicked being likewise recounted. Perhaps his prayer was heard in that in a restoration context, Mal. 3:16 comments that a book of remembrance was written by God to record the good deeds of the faithful at that time.

For those who suffer persecution, prison etc. for the Lord's sake, "it shall turn to you for a testimony" (Lk. 21:13). When? How? Surely in that these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness. At judgment God "shall bring forth thy righteousness (good deeds) as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day" (Ps. 37:6). The sins of the rejected and the good deeds of the righteous will be publicly declared at the judgment, even if they are concealed from men in this life (1 Tim. 5:24,25). This is how men will receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rom. 2:29). The wicked will see the generous deeds of the righteous rehearsed before them; and will gnash their teeth and melt away into condemnation (Ps. 112:9,10).

Ezekiel 18:23 *Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? says the Lord Yahweh; and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?*- The desire of God for repentance is stronger than His need to punish sin. Hence LXX "Shall I at all desire the death of the sinner, saith the Lord, as I desire that he should turn from his evil way, and live?". This is why He hangs on so long with sinful people, and Israel are the parade example. His desire for repentance, His passion for human reformation, is active and huge. It's not that He has set a bar which must be jumped over, and is passive toward us until that is achieved.

Ezekiel 18:24 *But when the righteous turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? None of his righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die*- As explained on :22, the good deeds of the righteous will be 'gone through' at judgment day. But if they turn away, then those good deeds will not be remembered or gone through, but rather his sins.

Ezekiel 18:25 *Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. Hear now, house of Israel: Is My way not fair? Aren't your ways unfair?*- Is. 40:3, which is quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25). We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25).

Ezekiel 18:26 *When the righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and dies therein; in his iniquity that he has done shall he die*- This was perhaps a warning to the righteous remnant who had so far repented in exile; they were liable to be dragged back into sin by the other exiles and the depressive situation they found themselves in.

Ezekiel 18:27 *Again, when the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he has committed and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive*- "Save his soul alive" implies that judgment is about to come, the death penalty already passed, but his repentance just about averts this at the last moment. It is the term used in Gen. 19:19 of how Lot was just about saved by grace out of Sodom, which was a symbol of Jerusalem under judgment, as Ez. 16 has made clear. This was the desperate urgency of Ezekiel's appeal; and yet he was seen at best as a singer of fairy tales or old time love songs (Ez. 33:32).

Ezekiel 18:28 *Because he considers and turns away from all his transgressions that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die*- "Considers" is literally 'see'. Part of our spiritual blindness is in refusing to see that our current path will lead to death and not life. They were to 'see' their situation and turn back, literally, 'return'. Their return from captivity was to be associated with their return from sin. But God took the initiative and returned them anyway, despite their impenitence. And even that initiative of grace was refused by the majority. The same words are used of Ezekiel being bidden both to 'consider [see]' and to 'turn' (Ez. 8:6,13,15;47:6). He was set up as their pattern, as the parade example of how the remnant ought to be.

Ezekiel 18:29 *Yet the house of Israel says, The way of the Lord is not fair. House of Israel, aren't My ways fair? Aren't your ways unfair?*- The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon were intended to admit that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was

the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them. The complaint that God is unfair is answered by reminding them that they have sinned. And this finally is one aspect of the answer to 'the problem of suffering'.

Ezekiel 18:30 *Therefore I will judge you, house of Israel, each one according to his ways, says the Lord Yahweh. Return, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin*- Time and again the prophets judged Israel according to their "ways", rather than according to their theological or academic knowledge. "Each one" was a reminder to the exiles that not one of them were mere victims of some group judgment whilst being personally innocent. They had sinned, but the appeal was not to allow that iniquity to be their "stumblingblock", which is how the Hebrew for "ruin" is usually translated. We all sin, but we are not to allow that sin to become a stumblingblock which plunges us headlong into further sin. And that involves a conscious attempt to turn themselves. God lay a stumblingblock before those who had sinned (Ez. 3:20) in that He psychologically confirmed them in the way they chose to go. He confirmed them in how they had laid the stumblingblock themselves before their own faces (Ez. 14:3,4), blocking their mental vision with a desire to do wrong, specifically to attain or retain personal wealth (Ez. 7:19). All these passages use the same word for "ruin" as here, but translated "stumblingblock". This again is the urgency of our situation; we have sinned, but we must urgently repent. Otherwise, that sin becomes entrenched in our mental vision, and will stumble us into the mire of sinful being and thinking.

Ezekiel 18:31 *Cast away from you all your transgressions in which you have transgressed; and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit: for why will you die, house of Israel?*- Elsewhere in Ezekiel, God promises to give them a new heart and spirit (Ez. 11:19; 36:26). This was part of the new covenant God was offering the exiles, seeing they had broken the old covenant. On one hand, God can give the new psychology, the new pair of eyes, the heart of the Spirit… just like that. But to simply do so regardless of human volition would be to turn man into a mere puppet of an almighty psychological controller. There must be a desire for that new heart and spirit, and then God will confirm it. This offer of a new spirit due to the work of God's spirit on human hearts is just as much part of the same new covenant which God has given to all who accept it in Christ today.

Ezekiel 18:32 *For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the Lord Yahweh: therefore turn yourselves, and live*- God is not passive to human repentance. He wants us to repent and wills us to do so. Those who refuse to turn or repent will die, and He

has no satisfaction or pleasure or will for that to happen. The exiles could have repented, both individually and collectively ["turn yourselves" in Hebrew carries that collective implication], and averted the death which was otherwise planned for them and their brethren back in Judah at the hand of the Babylonians. Peter alludes to these words in saying that for all time, God is not willing ["pleasure" in Hebrew can mean 'will'] that any should perish but that all should repent (2 Pet. 3:9). His work of judging insistent sinners is in this sense for Him a "strange act… a strange work" (Is. 28:21). His passion is for our repentance and salvation, not our condemnation.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 19

Ezekiel 19:1 *Moreover, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel*- Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 19:2 *And say, What was your mother? A lioness: she couched among lions, in the midst of the young lions she nourished her cubs*- The lions represent the leaders or princes; the lioness is the state of Judah or perhaps the Jerusalem leadership specifically (Lam. 1:1; Gal. 4:25), who "couched among [the other] lions" of the nations, one with them through making alliances with them. And she raised her cubs, the princes of Judah, amongst the lions of the surrounding nations, with their mentality. Babylon and Assyria are both likened to lions; although Jerusalem was "the lion of God" in Is. 29:1 (also Gen. 49:9; Num. 23:24; 24:9). But she was to 'couch among' the good pastures of Israel as a repentant sheep rather than as a lion once she had repented (Ez. 34:14,15; Zeph. 3:13). The mother however may refer to Hamutal, the literal mother of the princes mentioned, and whose unGodly ambitions for her sons led them to tragic ends.

Ezekiel 19:3 *She brought up one of her cubs: he became a young lion, and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men*- The reference is to Jehoahaz, son of Josiah [called Shallum in Jer. 22:11], taken captive from Riblah to Egypt (:4) by Pharaoh-necho (2 Kings 23:33). His devouring others must refer to an aggressive kind of behaviour simply called doing evil in the Lord's eyes (2 Kings 23:32),just like his father. He was raised in this way and continued; and Ezekiel was appealing to the young people of the royal family and Jerusalem leadership to not go in the way of their fathers.

Ezekiel 19:4 *The nations also heard of him; he was caught in their pit; and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt*- The aggression of Jehoiachin was to such an extent that he was seen as a threat and somehow entrapped by the Egyptians.

Ezekiel 19:5 *Now when she saw that she had waited and her hope was lost, then she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion*- This could refer to Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:15), although it could also be Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:6,7); both were taken to Babylon (:9). The stress on the same mother (:2,3,5) would then highlight how the mother of Jehoahaz and Zedekiah had raised them in such a way that led both of them to make dishonest alliances as part of a crazy bid for power, which ended both of them in captivity.

Ezekiel 19:6 *He went up and down among the lions; he became a young lion and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men*- He didn't learn from the mistakes and judgment of Jehoahaz. Sometimes parallel people are brought into our lives from whom we are intended to learn, and avoid the path they took.

Ezekiel 19:7 *He knew their palaces*- This is s.w. "widows", hence RVmg. and Keil "he knew, i.e. outraged, the widows of Israel". He knew (i.e. eyed with satisfaction) his palaces" from which he had ejected their former owners (Jer. 22:15). If we stay with "palaces", then the idea would be that he visited the palaces of the local rulers of

the nations. But he hardly "laid waste their cities". Perhaps his plan to do so was counted as having been as good as done, which is why the nations saw him as a threat.

And laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and its fullness, because of the noise of his roaring- The idea may be that the land was made desolate because of his singular failures, just as was to happen with Zedekiah (see on :14). But the idea may be that he wasted the land for his own benefit, and therefore the land was to be desolated by the invaders.

Ezekiel 19:8 *Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces; and they spread their net over him; he was caught in their pit*- He was seen as a dangerous lion, a potential threat, and caught. The nations are called "the provinces" to stress that Babylon was the empire to which they all belonged. They used their own limited autonomy in order to depose the aggressive princes of Judah.

Ezekiel 19:9 *They put him in a cage with hooks and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into strongholds, that his voice should no more be heard on the mountains of Israel*- And Ezekiel in captivity in Babylon was prophesying to him and his family.

Ezekiel 19:10 *Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard planted by the waters. It was fruitful and full of branches because of the many waters*- This is the language already used in Ez. 17. It uses the prophetic perfect tense, talking of that which was yet to happen as if it has happened. They had wasted all the potential to become a fruitful vine by seeking to establish the kingdom in their own strength. The chapter at least from :here onwards is a funeral dirge (:17). It could have been for Hamutal the mother of Zedekiah who died in Babylon (Jer. 29:2), or perhaps for Zedekiah himself. Part of the reason her sons made the alliances they did was due to her ambitions, which were clearly not based upon faith in God.

Ezekiel 19:11 *It had strong rods for the sceptres of those who bore rule, and their height was exalted among the thick boughs, and they were seen in their height with the multitude of their branches*- We perhaps have an intensive plural here, referring to Zedekiah; or perhaps all 22 of the kings of Judah from David to Zedekiah are in view. And yet if the reference is to Zedekiah, we note that he appears to have been weak and under the control of Babylon, and finally his sons were slain before his eyes. The strength therefore refers to the potential strength and possibility there was to become the rulers of God's revived Kingdom- if they had totally repented.

Ezekiel 19:12 *But it was plucked up in fury, it was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit. Its strong rods were broken off and withered; the fire consumed them*- The vine was not completely destroyed; only its branches were. It was plucked up by the Babylonians, but replanted in Babylon. The imagery reflects God's grace in not totally destroying the vine. The east wind refers to the Babylonian invasion from the north east, and how the royal family withered to nothing in Babylon.

Ezekiel 19:13 *Now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land*- The "dry ground" is Babylon, and the new "planting" indicates the deportation of Jehoiachin and the chief men of Judah. It was out of this dry ground that a Messianic figure could

have arisen, as predicted in Is. 53. But Zerubbabel and others failed in this, and so the predictions were reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 19:14 *Fire is gone out of the rods of its branches, it has devoured its fruit, so that there is in it no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule*- This is the same figure as in Jud. 9:15; Zedekiah's refusal to repent at Jeremiah's preaching brought forth the fire of destruction upon the entire vine. Just one man's repentance could have averted so much damage.

Ez. 17:22,23 had spoken of how at the restoration, Babylon would fall and a "tender one" arise, who would grow into a tree under whose branches all the birds would find shelter. This is the very language of the Kingdom of Jesus in Mt. 13:32. The Kingdom of Babylon- also likened in Daniel to a tree with birds beneath it- could have been replaced with God's Kingdom when it fell soon after the restoration of Judah. But no Messiah figure arose (see on Ez. 37:25- Zerubbabel could have fulfilled it), and so the prophecy had a changed fulfilment- the tree that was abased and then lifted up could have been Israel, but it was re-applied to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate "servant" of Yahweh. Ezekiel 19:13,14 help us perceive this more clearly- Judah in Babylon were as it were "planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground". She had "no [Messianic] strong rod to be a sceptre to rule", and this was "for a lamentation". But the prophecy was fulfilled in another way- for the Lord Jesus was the root out of a dry ground who sprang up and *did* fulfil God's intention (Is. 53:1).

This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation- The chapter at least from :10 onwards is therefore a funeral dirge. It could have been for the literal mother of Zedekiah who died in Babylon (Jer. 29:2), or perhaps for Zedekiah himself. Part of the reason her sons made the alliances they did was due to her ambitions, which were clearly not based upon faith in God.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 20

Ezekiel 20:1 *It happened in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that some of the elders of Israel came to inquire of Yahweh and they sat before me*- At this time, Zedekiah was planning to revolt from the king of Babylon and under the influence of his mother (see Ez. 19) was planning to gain independent power through making alliances with other nations. The elders who come to Ezekiel may have been from within the community of Jewish captives already in Babylon, or from Jerusalem. The enquiry may have been because they wanted to know Ezekiel's take on how long they would have to remain in captivity, considering how the false prophets were speaking of an immediate return and victory against Babylon. It seems they came to Ezekiel wanting to hear this message, which is why God would not be inquired of by them (:3,31).

Ezekiel 20:2 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 20:3 *Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Is it to inquire of Me that you have come? As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I will not be inquired of by you*- The allusion may be to Dt. 4:29, where the

same word for "inquire" is used. Israel would find God if they "seek" or "inquire" for Him "with your whole heart". And their apparent interest in God's word was not wholehearted but like many today, they came to His word with their own already decided agenda as to what they wanted the answer to be. The word is also used of seeking other gods (Dt. 12:30; Jer. 8:2 and especially see on Ez. 14:3,7,10). Idolatry was clearly a problem amongst them; if they were 'seeking to' other gods then they could not expect a response from Yahweh, if they treated Him as just one of many options available. The elders who came to Ezekiel are in the same category as those in Judah who did not seek / inquire of Yahweh, although they did externally (Jer. 10:21). We can pray and come to God's word, when in reality we are not doing so from our whole heart and are doing this simply on the level of religious interest rather than wholehearted devotion. They would only 'find' God is they 'sought' with their whole heart (Jer. 29:13).

Ezekiel 20:4 *Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers*- Judgment is here paralleled with being caused to know the sins of their fathers which they were in denial of, and which they apparently were continuing in. For Ez. 18 had appealed for them to repent of the sins of their fathers. This is the purpose of judgment; to elicit in men an acknowledgment of their sins and thus coming to 'know Yahweh'.

Ezekiel 20:5 *And tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the day when I chose Israel, and swore to the seed of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them saying, I am Yahweh your God*- "Swore" is 'to lift up the hand' as AV. It is fitting that the Lord Jesus Christ died with hands and arms lifted up above his head, rather than spread out in a crucifix form, seeing that uplifted hands is a symbol of God's promises being confirmed (Ez. 20:5,6,15; 36:7; 47:14), as well as intense prayer (Lam. 2:19; 1 Tim. 2:8; 2 Chron. 6:12,13; Ps. 28:2), which Christ was engaged in on the cross (Heb. 5:7). The covenant is described as being made in Egypt (Ez. 20:5) to heighten the similarity with the exiles now in Babylon, who were being offered a new covenant, and then the possibility of leaving Babylon / Egypt and entering the land again. Judah are also being reminded that the covenant was made with all Israel, the seed of Jacob, and not just Judah. For it was God's intention to regather them to the land together with Judah.

But although God had chosen Israel as His unique people, they had chosen other gods (Jud. 5:8), and at Ezekiel's time they were doing this in order to get political and military protection from those various gods and nations whom they were choosing. God's choosing of Israel is associated with God placing them in their own land (Is. 14:1; 41:8,9). At the restoration they would therefore be as it were chosen again (Is. 49:7). Yet by grace God restored them, even though they had not uniquely chosen Him again. And they still didn't respond to that grace.

Ezekiel 20:6 *In that day I swore to them, to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands*- Likewise our place in God's Kingdom will have been carefully prepared for us. Just as God "searched out" Canaan for His people. And yet the spies sent to search out Canaan were not in step with God's searching out of the land. Indeed instead of trusting that He had searched out Canaan, they insisted on sending their own spies to do so, and stumbled because of this.

Ezekiel 20:7 *I said to them, Throw away every man the abominations of his eyes, and don't defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God*- This was apparently a condition of God saving them from Egypt (:8). Later when in the wilderness the command was required again because they had brought the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea, as Am. 5:26 states clearly. We too can smuggle the idols of the world through the waters of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2). The parallel was with the exiles in Babylon, who were to quit idolatry before they could enter the land in restoration. Yet it seems God restored them anyway, so eager was He to restore them. The idols were abominations of their eyes in the sense of Ez. 14- they had placed their idols before their eyes and faces, they were a mental block to them, because the essence of idolatry is within the worldview and mind of people.

Ezekiel 20:8 *But they rebelled against Me, and would not listen to Me; they didn't throw away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt*- And yet all the same God led them out of Egypt and He again led them from Babylon at the restoration despite the spiritual preconditions not being met. Ezekiel is told from the start that the exiles were 'rebellious', just as Israel from the start had been rebellious by not casting away their idols. The idols of Egypt may refer to the literal idols, and the abominations of their eyes to their mental blockage and obsession with these things; see on :7.

Then I said I would pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 20:9 *But I worked for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among which they were, in whose sight I made Myself known to them in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt*- Time and again God's love made Him re-think and alter His plans. Ez. 20:9,10 explains that God intended to destroy Israel in Egypt because of their idolatry, and so He decided to bring them out into the wilderness and destroy them there so as not to do it in Egypt and give the Egyptians a reason to mock Him. And yet according to Jeremiah and Ez. 16:5-10, it was in the

wilderness that God fell in love with Israel and gave them His covenant. He is attracted to us so easily; hence His anger when we abuse this and disappoint Him.

God's salvation of Israel from Egypt and Babylon was very public, in the sight of the nations. Our baptism and deliverance from this world is likewise intended to be a public declaration, intended to encourage others to come with us.

Ezekiel 20:10 *So I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness*- This 'causing' to go forth was by grace, because they had not met the required spiritual preconditions- in that they had not in fact cast away their idols (see on Ez. 20:6-8). And it was to be the same in the exodus from Babylon. This Divine 'causing to go forth' was by the Spirit, for those who left captivity did so because their minds were stirred up by the Spirit to do so, even though they were not spiritually qualified for the restoration (Ezra 1:5). They had been commanded to "go forth" from Babylon (Is. 52:11 s.w.) but it was God who caused them to do this by the grace of His Spirit's operation on their hearts. The same is true of our exodus from this world through the water of baptism. It is all of grace and confirmation of the smallest desire to do so; and so this causing to go forth was by God's "mighty hand" (Ez. 20:34 s.w.).

Ezekiel 20:11 *I gave them My statutes and showed them My ordinances, which if a man does, he shall live in them*- The context here has been of God entering a covenant with Israel by grace. They had not quit the idols of Egypt, which was a condition of the covenant. So the gift of God's statutes and the revealing to them of His ordinances was far from a burden placed upon them, but rather a parade example of Divine grace in entering further into a relationship with a people who were not prepared or worthy of it.

Ezekiel 20:12 *Moreover also I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies them*- The Sabbath was specifically "a sign between them (Israel) and Me (God), that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them" (Ez. 20:12). As such, it has never been intended to be binding on Gentiles (non-Jews). "... the Lord has given *you* [not all mankind] the Sabbath (Ex. 16:29); "... You [God] made known to them [Israel] Your holy Sabbath" (Neh. 9:14).

As noted on :11, this law was not a burden but a gift of grace, to remind them that they had been sanctified by grace, not on the basis of their works, but by God's grace. For He had entered a covenant with them despite their refusal to meet the vital precondition of having quit the idols of Egypt. This resting from their own works was intended to teach them that they were sanctified, counted righteous and able to enter covenant with God, by grace and quite apart from their works.

Ezekiel 20:13 *But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness*- Ezekiel's ministry began with the revelation that the house of Israel of Ezekiel's time were still a rebellious house.

They didn't walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, which if a man keep, he shall live in them; and My Sabbaths they greatly profaned- The refusal to accept justification by grace and not by works was a great profanation. Keeping God's commandments is intended to elicit a way of life. They are designed and structured to be lived in. There was no promise here of eternal life in return for obedience, but

rather the point is that the commandments were given in order to provoke an upward spiral of spirituality, life lived within them. When Divine commandments are singled out and analyzed alone, with tokenistic obedience to them demanded, then they will not achieve that which they are designed for. The sum of Divine commandments were intended together to produce a life lived within them. This is why partial obedience or obedience only in the letter was not going to be helpful.

Then I said I would pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to consume them- This surely refers to the time of the golden calf incident when God says He would destroy Israel and make of Moses a great nation to replace them (Ex. 32:10).

Ezekiel 20:14 *But I worked for My name's sake that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them out*- This gives an insight into God's internal struggles. His grace as it were worked against His judgment. His mercy rejoiced against His judgment. But that struggle was motivated by the appeal of Moses for Him not to consume Israel. And that same struggle was ongoing over the question of whether to totally destroy Judah in captivity. Perhaps there is the implication that He would have done were it not for the intercession of a Moses like figure- perhaps Ezekiel and / or Jeremiah. God "worked" so that His Name would not be further profaned amongst the nations. It was His people who profaned that Name. But He worked through His Spirit to preserve them from further profaning His Name.

Ezekiel 20:15 *Moreover also I swore to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands*- The swearing of a covenant now becomes swearing to destroy them by not bringing them into the land which potentially had been given to them. And so the exiles in Babylon were in a similar situation. Whilst their idolatry continued, they could not hope to be 'brought into the land', which is what the elders were presumably asking for (:2,3).

Ezekiel 20:16 *Because they rejected My ordinances, and didn't walk in My statutes, and profaned My Sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols*- Typical of the prophets, the essential reason for disobedience is perceived as being that their heart, their mind, was elsewhere rather than with God. The phrase 'the heart going after...' is used by the contemporary Jeremiah of the heart going after its own imaginations and also of the heart going after idols; their heart walked after their own imaginations [literally, their own images] and also after Baalim (Jer. 3:17; 9:14; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12). The essential reason for their literal idolatry was in their lack of spiritual mindedness, their following of the mental images they allowed themselves to internally worship. And this is why the essence of idolatry is so relevant to us today, we who live as never before in an age of visual images and mental pictures and all consuming perceptions. Judah's heart went after their own covetousness (Ez. 33:31), and that was why effectively their heart went after idols which promised them material blessings and fertility, and political and military support from those nations identified with those idols.

Ezekiel 20:17 *Nevertheless My eye spared them and I didn't destroy them, neither did I make a full end of them in the wilderness*- see on Ez. 7:14; 9:1; Ex. 34:9. There are passages which speak of how God's eye would not spare at Ezekiel's time, and also of how His eye would spare. This is not the meandering of an unstable God; rather is this God in passion, His pity and mercy struggling against the pole of judgment which is

also within His same personality. He had gone through the same feelings with Israel in the desert.

The idea of two Angels being present with Israel is found here in Ez. 20:17,22; God's "eye", which is definitely Angelic language, spared them from being destroyed- by the destroyer Angel. And therefore God "withdrew mine hand", also Angelic language, in order not to destroy them. The "eye" Angel limited the action of the "hand of destruction" Angel, just as on Passover night. Note too how it is the Angelic "eye of the Lord" which is paralleled with God's mercy in Ps. 33:18,22.

Ezekiel 20:18 *I said to their children in the wilderness, Don't walk in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols*- This call to radically break from their fathers' example was exactly that being made to the younger exiles who first heard Ezekiel's words. This is why this description of God's appeal to the young people in the wilderness is not a verbatim quote from anywhere in the Pentateuch; it is expressed in terms which are appropriate to Ezekiel's audience. We note that the historical record gives little clue that idolatry was such a major problem with the Hebrews; God's record is so gracious. For in Ez. 16 He says that He fell in love with these people- despite all their idolatry.

Ezekiel 20:19 *I am Yahweh your God. Walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them*- The conflict is between walking in the statutes of their human fathers (:18) and those of their Heavenly Father. And there was a radical difference. It was so difficult for people in such strongly family-based societies to reject their human fathers for another. But this was the call of God to that generation in the wilderness; and now the royal family and priesthood were in exile in Babylon, it was equally necessary that their children likewise broke from their fathers' ways.

Ezekiel 20:20 *And make My Sabbaths holy; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am Yahweh your God*- It was not that the Sabbath wasn't being kept. The issue was that the significance of it was being lost. The sabbath was to remind them that they had been sanctified by grace, not on the basis of their works, but by God's grace. For He had entered a covenant with them despite their refusal to meet the vital precondition of having quit the idols of Egypt. This resting from their own works was intended to teach them that they were sanctified, counted righteous and able to enter covenant with God, by grace and quite apart from their works. But the Jews in exile as well as those in Judah were madly scheming by their own works and device as to how to overcome the Babylonian threat and achieve a kingdom on their own terms rather than God's.

Ezekiel 20:21 *But the children rebelled against Me; they didn't walk in My statutes, neither kept My ordinances to do them, which if a man do, he shall live in them: they profaned My Sabbaths*- The younger generation on the wilderness journey were assured that they would enter the land / Kingdom, although the older generation would die in the wilderness. Despite that wonderful assurance, and seeing the carcasses of their parents falling in the desert... they still refused to be obedient. Just as the younger generation of Ezekiel's audience were a rebellious house, despite all and every evidence and reason to live differently to their fathers.

Then I said that I would pour out My wrath upon them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness- See on :8.

Ezekiel 20:22 *Nevertheless I withdrew My hand*- The idea could be that as Abraham withdrew his hand from sacrificing Isaac, so God relented. But "swore" in Ez. 20 is literally 'to lift up the hand', so to withdraw the hand could mean that God rescinded the oath which was the basis of the covenant relationship with Israel- because they themselves had broken the covenant.

And worked for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them forth- God had said He would destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation. But He relented of that, and here in Ez. 20:22 we see the picture of His internal struggle, working for His Name's sake, for the sake of the principles incorporated within His Name. So it is an intrinsic part of His Name and essential personality that He changes His judgments from pity. When the Psalmist of Ps. 109:21 asks for God's grace, He asks God to "do" or "work" for the sake of His Name, and not bring about a threatened judgment. Jeremiah likewise understood this and asks God to still be gracious to Israel despite their lack of repentance- through working for His Name's sake (Jer. 14:7). To save by grace was therefore working or doing according to His Name's sake, rather than according to human merit (Ez. 36:22). Thus by working for His Name's sake, the repentant exiles would come to 'know Yahweh' (Ez. 20:44), they would come to see who He essentially is. And He is revealed as the very opposite of a stone faced, unchanging, insensitive God, which was then the standard conception of a deity.

We enquire why it was that God refused to destroy Israel for the sake of His Name, lest that Name be profaned and misunderstood. His Name included both gracious salvation and also judgment for sin. But there was a struggle within His very self, as a result of which the pole of saving grace came out as dominant. to simply destroy Israel would therefore have resulted in a misrepresentation of Him, as being merely a God of judgment. And for that reason, rather than Israel's repentance, He chose to not destroy them. The decision was for the sake of His Name, and we could say it was for the sake of His love and grace which are finally the dominant pole of that Name. Their salvation is therefore repeatedly presented as for the sake of His Name rather than anything on their side.

Ezekiel 20:23 *Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations, and disperse them through the countries*- The reference may be to this threat at the end of the wilderness journey (Dt. 28:64). But more likely it alludes to an unrecorded curse made during the journey. However, if indeed it does refer to Dt. 28:64, this was stated just prior to their entry into Canaan, on the last day of Moses' life. And yet despite this curse of being scattered, they then soon afterwards entered the land of promise. This grace would then have special relevance to Ezekiel's exiles, who were located spiritually although not geographically "in the wilderness", and whom God intended to restore to the land by grace even though they were unworthy of it.

Ezekiel 20:24 *Because they had not executed My ordinances but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols*- This is a sad commentary upon the real state of the Israelites in the wilderness. Truly they were saved and brought into the land by grace. And the restoration from Babylon was to feature a similar grace. The wilderness generation who entered Canaan were not as faithful as some think; if indeed the reference of :23 is to Dt. 28:64, then they

entered Canaan still worshipping the Egyptian idols which their parents had worshipped in Egypt. They took them across the Jordan as their fathers took them across the Red Sea. And the law of Moses and Sabbath regulations were not observed by them in the wilderness. And we know that circumcision was also not practiced by them- thus they despised the covenant (Josh. 5:5).

Ezekiel 20:25 *Moreover also I gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances in which they should not live*- In the Hebrew Bible, God is often said *to do*, what He only *permits* to be done. So it is here; He allowed them to be given bad laws from their religious leaders, which led them further into sin. God confirms people in the path they choose; this is the work of the holy Spirit positively, and negatively, an "evil spirit from the Lord" (1 Sam. 16:14) confirms sinners in the path they choose. It is God who is the dynamic in both these scenarios; there is no place for a superhuman, cosmic being called Satan.

Ezekiel 20:26 *And I polluted them in their own gifts, because they caused their children to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate; to the end that they might know that I am Yahweh*- We marvel at how God does not turn away from sin but instead seeks to work through it, so that even through the horror of child sacrifice, people were intended to come to know Yahweh through their repentance. They desolated themselves by offering their children to their idols, the fire and smoke of the burning bodies supposedly transporting those children to the gods in heaven. But God worked through that to desolate them. He only did to them what they had done to themselves. "Their children" is as AV "all that openeth the womb", the firstborn, which were intended to be Yahweh's in memorial of how He had saved the firstborn at the Passover. They were willfully ignorant of their past salvation and the implications that should have had upon them for all time. We too can forget our spiritual past, and the grace shown to us then.

Ezekiel 20:27 *Therefore son of man speak to the house of Israel and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In this, moreover, have your fathers blasphemed Me, in that they have committed a trespass against Me*- Ezekiel now moves on as it were to a new subsection in this description of Israel's historical sins. They had sinned in the wilderness and now the history moves on to how they continued sinning once they entered Canaan. This surely gives us reason to reevaluate the idea that the generation who entered Canaan were the most faithful of all Israel's generations- an idea taught by Rabbis to this day. We note however the present tenses- the fathers "have committed a trespass...", as if to make the audience of Ezekiel realize that the essence of those historical sins was continuing in their literal fathers and in their own generation.

Ezekiel 20:28 *For when I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every thick tree, and they offered there their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there also they made their pleasant aroma, and they poured out there their drink offerings*- Such apostasy apparently happened as soon as they entered Canaan. The great victories given to the people under Joshua were therefore given to a people who also worshipped idols.

Ezekiel 20:29 *Then I said to them, What does the high place where you go mean? So*

its name is called Bamah to this day- The implication is that they should have renamed such places. But "to this day" they called their high places "Bamah" just as the Canaanites had. "Bamah" appears to be a Canaanite term for the high places; it is the term found for them on the Moabite stone. They ought to have immediately destroyed the Canaanite high places (Dt. 12:1-5) but instead they eagerly used them for worship, and still did. All the recorded reforms of the faithful kings of Judah had not therefore been that far reaching.

Ezekiel 20:30 *Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Do you pollute yourselves in the way of your fathers? and do you play the prostitute after their abominations?*- The emphasis is upon the word "you". Now the recounting of history ends, and the rhetorical question is asked- 'Are you really any better than your fathers?'. Ez. 16 and Ez. 23 clearly state that Judah were right then prostituting themselves to other gods- even the exiles with Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 20:31 *When you offer your gifts, when you make your sons to pass through the fire, do you pollute yourselves with all your idols to this day?*- "To this day" means that the exiles in captivity were offering their children to Moloch. And yet they came asking for Yahweh's word to be revealed to them. No wonder God refused to sympathetically respond.

Shall I be inquired of by you, house of Israel? As I live says the Lord Yahweh, I will not be inquired of by you- This is not so much God refusing to respond, but a function of their lack of 'inquiry'. The elders who came to Ezekiel are in the same category as those in Judah who did not seek / inquire of Yahweh, although they did externally (Jer. 10:21). We can pray and come to God's word, when in reality we are not doing so from our whole heart and are doing this simply on the level of religious interest rather than wholehearted devotion. They would only 'find' God is they 'sought' with their whole heart (Jer. 29:13). See on :3.

Ezekiel 20:32 *And that which comes into your mind shall not be at all, in that you say, We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone*- Their attitude was that they would leave Yahweh worship and be as the nations who worshipped idols. This was the thought which God perceived in them, even though they likely had not articulated this in so many words. For after all, they had come before Yahweh to hear His word (:31). But God wouldn't let His beloved leave Him so easily. Despite this, He wanted to have them as His own, still.

The theme of the new covenant is that God will mentally, psychologically almost force His love through with Israel. In their heart they didn't want His covenant, but He wants to make it work. Here He addresses their unspoken thought deep in their heart, that they wanted to just assimilate into the Gentile world and forget Yahweh. But God's love is such that despite judging them, He will change even that internal desire: "That which comes into your mind shall not be at all, in that you say, We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone". He will stop their idolatry.

Ezekiel 20:33 *As I live says the Lord Yahweh, surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out will I be king over you*- As explained on :32, the inner thought of the exiles was that they would just quit Yahweh worship and

worship idols like the other nations. But God's mighty hand would rescue them even from that, and through His judgments He would still become their exclusive king- even if only of a remnant. We see here the same tenacity God shows with us, searching for the lost until He finds us. But to again be king over Israel, with them subservient to Him as His kingdom, under His Kingly dominion, He would have to first pour out His wrath. But there was a purpose in that wrath- to establish again His Kingdom over them.

To be king over Israel meant that they would be His people. As noted often in commentary on Hosea, to be "king" was a metaphor also for being a husband. God was intent on pushing through His plan to be Israel's husband, for the covenant to be fulfilled so that they would indeed be "His", His people, His woman, over whom He would be "king". He was going to force this through, despite "wrath" associated with judging their whoredom, and with huge expenditure of mental and personal effort to achieve this. The side of His saving grace had to struggle against and overcome the pole of His wrath and judgment.

Ezekiel 20:34 *I will bring you out from the peoples, and will gather you out of the countries in which you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out*- The mighty hand and stretched out arm of God was available to bring Judah out of Babylon- but most of them preferred to stay there. God was not sanctified before the heathen. The wonderful possibility of a new covenant went unrealized- to be deferred until the true Israel of God are gathered home in our last days. The scenario here envisaged didn't fully come about, because Israel were unwilling to participate. The idea was that He would with anger bring them out of Babylon, and then judge them (:35), and a minority would then form the remnant who would then be the kernel of His Kingdom reestablished in Israel under a Messianic ruler.

This language of bringing His people out and into the wilderness (:35) recalls the exodus from Egypt. There again, He did it by His initiative, by His love and grace, because He wanted them. But they took the idols of Egypt with them, and told Moses to leave them alone to serve the Egyptians. In this sense, as Jer. 31 says, they found grace in the wilderness. That most of Israel and Judah refused this massive effort from Yahweh to bring them out of captivity... is an essay in how stubborn man can be in refusing the most amazing power of grace. But that same huge will to save by grace is now extended to all who accept the new covenant and are willing to come out of Egypt. We note that this prophecy is in the seventh year after the first exiles had been taken; Jerusalem didn't fall until the twelfth year after the first exile, Ez. 33:21. So the idea was that the relatively few exiles who had been taken, along with Ezekiel, could have returned. All God's efforts were set up for this. But they preferred to mope by the Chebar river, refusing to take guilt and repent, instead blaming their situation on their fathers and justifying their "poor me" story (Ez. 18), just as so many do today. Worse still, it seems these exiles had taken the idols with them (:39), just as Israel did when leaving Egypt. The potential plan was to purge out the "rebels" from the group of exiles, purify the rest in the wilderness, and then they would triumphantly enter the land of Canaan. All this potential was wasted at the time. But Ez. 36 will show that God would force through that plan of salvation by grace, in the end; and if not with Israel, then with us who have accepted the new covenant. So we have here yet another carefully planned process of redemption that was refused, by short termism, sinking in the mire of mediocrity, refusal to seriously repent. The very things that stymy the

same careful plans God has made for the redemption of... probably billions who have likewise refused it for the same reasons.

Ezekiel 20:35 *And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there will I enter into judgment with you face to face*- . Ez. 20:30-33 contains God's response to the elders in captivity wanting Ezekiel to pray for them. They were committing whoredom, idolatry etc. Ez. 36:20 likewise comments how they "profaned My holy name" during the Babylonian captivity. They were not enabling God's plan of restoration to be realized. Ez. 20:35-40 therefore goes on to outline what was perhaps another possibility- that God would take the entire captive people into the wilderness at the end of the 70 years captivity, and purge out the rebels, and then bring them into the land, where they would have a temple and worship God (Ez. 20:40)- presumably in the temple outlined in Ez. 40-48. But it seems this alternative didn't work out either. The "face to face" meeting recalls that when the old covenant was made in Dt. 5:4. The judgment was to not merely punish them, but to enter into another covenant with them. "The wilderness of the peoples" was not the same as the lands of their captivity (:34). Those lands were the equivalent of Egypt (:36), and the "wilderness" was a period in which they would be judged and yet again enter covenant with God.

Ezekiel 20:36 *Like as I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I enter into judgment with you, says the Lord Yahweh*- This judgment however was to result in a new covenant and a remnant entering the land (:34,35). The Hebrew for 'entering into judgment' is literally "to plead" (as AV). The experience of judgment was not mere punishment, but a pleading to enter totally into covenant relationship. This pleading or judgment of the exiles is likewise associated with their salvation and restoration in Is. 43:26; 51:5. God would plead with or judge the exiles "because you say, I have not sinned" (Jer. 2:35). This was the purpose of the judgment envisaged- to elicit in the exiles repentance. Ezekiel was trying to achieve that by his ministry, he was to judge them so that they recognized their abominations (Ez. 20:4; 22:2), but they were a rebellious house. And so this idea of bringing them out of Babylon into some situation of judgment was envisaged (Ez. 20:34-38), so that they might repent. Zedekiah personally was to be judged or pleaded with in Babylon concerning his sin (Ez. 17:20), i.e. to make him recognize it and repent of it.

Ezekiel 20:37 *I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant*- This alludes to the custom of *tithing* the *sheep*. The shepherd stood at the door of the fold, where only one sheep could come out at a time. He had in his hand a rod dipped in red die [cp. the blood of Christ], with which he branded every tenth sheep as the Lord's tithe portion. This apparently was known as 'causing to pass under the rod'. The implication would be therefore that only a tenth would survive, and come into the new covenant relationship with God. The size and proportion of the projected remnant differs between prophecies; so many different potential scenarios were possible, all depending upon the freewill repentance of His people. The intention was that having been brought out of Babylonian captivity and judged, those who were repentant would accept the new covenant. But this didn't happen. Something similar will happen in the last days, when the essence of these prophecies will again come true.

Ezekiel 20:38 *And I will purge out from among you the rebels and those who disobey*

against Me; I will bring them forth out of the land where they live, but they shall not enter into the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- The idea as explained on :34-36 was that the exiles would be brought out of exile forcibly, "the land where they live" (Babylon) into a "wilderness" situation, where they would be judged. The rebellious house would be purged; and thus Is. 52:11 would be fulfilled, which speaks of the purged ["clean"] exiles returning to the temple in Zion. Yet this scenario didn't quite work out, because the people were so unwilling to participate. Ezekiel told the captives during the early stages of their captivity that the false prophets and "rebels" amongst them would receive the condemnation and judgment of not returning to the land (Ez. 13:9; 20:38). And yet when the command came to return to the land, most of the people chose to remain in Babylon- and therefore they chose their own condemnation. They were a "rebellious house" (Ez. 2:3). For they were aware from Ezekiel's words that not returning to the land was God's condemnation. Those who will not be in the Kingdom will be those who chose not to be there- all who truly love the Lord's appearing will be accepted.

Ez. 20:38 says that the rebels in the wilderness “shall not enter into the land”, with reference to how when Moses called the people “rebels” and beat the rock, he was disallowed entry into the land. Because he called them rebels, i.e. unworthy of entry to the Kingdom, he also was treated as a rebel. If we condemn others, we likewise will be condemned. On another level, he was simply barred for disobedience; and on yet another, his prayer to the effect that he didn’t want to be in the land if his people weren’t going to be there was being answered; and on yet another and higher level, his offer to be blotted out of the book of inheritance for Israel’s sake was also being heard. Thus God works within the same incident in so many ways!

Ezekiel 20:39 *As for you, house of Israel, thus says the Lord Yahweh: Go, serve each one his idols, and hereafter also, if you will not listen to Me; but My holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and with your idols*- As noted on :25, God is often said *to do*, what He only *permits* to be done. So it is here; He allowed them to be given bad laws from their religious leaders, which led them further into sin. God confirms people in the path they choose; this is the work of the holy Spirit positively, and negatively, an "evil spirit from the Lord" (1 Sam. 16:14) confirms sinners in the path they choose. It is God who is the dynamic in both these scenarios; there is no place for a superhuman, cosmic being called Satan. God wanted to bring an end to the miserable situation whereby His people professed to worship Him but also worshipped idols. His plan therefore was to purge out the rebels, and only those who were repentantly dedicated wholly to Him would return to the land and restore the Kingdom. But the truth was that there were none of them.

Ezekiel 20:40 *For in My holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them, serve Me in the land. There will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the first fruits of your offerings, with all your holy things*- God's vision for the restoration was that the ten tribes would also come out of captivity and join with Judah in repentant, acceptable worship of Him in the one and only high place He recognized, mount Zion. But they were unwilling to leave, and so this prophecy or project will have its final fulfillment in the last days. But such prophecies will be reapplied and only fulfilled in their essence, not in their detail. Hence we are not to imagine them offering literal offerings. For the one acceptable offering for all time was to be that of the Lord Jesus, whom they will then accept.

Ezekiel 20:41 *As a pleasant aroma will I accept you when I bring you out from the peoples*- "Pleasant aroma" is the phrase often used for the "pleasant aroma" of sacrifices to Yahweh- three times in Exodus, seventeen in Leviticus, seventeen in Numbers. As a priest, Ezekiel would have been aware of this. But instead, they offered this to the idols (Ez. 6:13). The Divine hope (see on Ez. 6:9), the desperate hope of the unrequited lover for the beloved, was that a repentant remnant would realize this and then offer "pleasant aroma" again to Him alone. But they didn't. The idea of God 'accepting' Israel is found later in Ez. 43:27; when the temple was built and the sacrifices offered, "I will accept you"- if they passed through the program here envisaged, of coming out of Babylon and being purged by a meeting for judgment in "the wilderness". But this scenario didn't happen, and so neither was the temple vision fulfilled as planned. If Judah had later resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel's plan in penitence, then they could have even then been accepted: "I will take pleasure" in it, God offered (Hag. 1:8).

And gather you out of the countries in which you have been scattered- Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 11:17; 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfill His original intentions for them.

And I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations- As explained on :34-36, God's intention was to forcibly bring His people out from captivity, the ten tribes as well as Judah, into a "wilderness" situation, where there would be some kind of public judgment of them. The wicked would be purged (:38) and the remnant accepted into a new covenant. This would be done "in the sight of the nations", in the hope that Gentiles would also enter that covenant. But this scenario didn't happen in the form envisaged.

Ezekiel 20:42 *You shall know that I am Yahweh when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country which I swore to give to your fathers*- Their knowledge of Yahweh would be in terms of relationship, walking in covenant with Him, in awe at His grace towards them and their experience of salvation by grace. This was and is to know Yahweh; academic knowledge of theological propositions is not in view. The new covenant is based upon the promises to Abraham, hence the frequent reference to their receiving the land sworn to the fathers.

Ezekiel 20:43 *There you shall remember your ways and all your doings, in which you have polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that you have committed*- It is the experience of grace and salvation by grace which elicits an awareness of our sins. The idea originally had been that the remnant would repent in exile and then be restored. But they didn't. And so the Divine hope was that by restoring them in impenitence, they would remember their sins and loathe what they had done. It's the same reason why Jesus broke His bread with as yet impenitent sinners- because He as a doctor was trying to bring sinners to repentance. We note that it was the exiles with Ezekiel who were to loathe themselves for their

pollutions, or that was the intention. It was they there in exile who were still offering their children to their idols, "to this day" (:31). Their self loathing uses the word translated "grieve" regarding God's grieving for Israel's idolatry in the wilderness (Ps. 95:10). They would come to see their sins as God saw and felt them; that is part of repentance. But initially it had been God's plan that they would grieve or loathe their sins whilst in captivity in Babylon (s.w. Ez. 6:9). But now the plan was different; seeing they had not done so, they would be forcibly brought out from Babylon into the undefined "wilderness" situation, where God would purge the rebels from the rebellious house, and then the remnant would be allowed to return to the land; and only then would they loathe themselves for their sins. But then in Ez. 36:21 the grace was extended even further- it was after the restoration of the kingdom conditions in the land that they would be thus provoked to loathe their former sins. God's grace is such that He amends His plans if by any means He might save some. He has that same passion for human salvation today.

Ezekiel 20:44 *You shall know that I am Yahweh when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, you house of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh*- See on :22. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) but we see here how God's earnest passion to save people leads Him to devise means whereby He can all the same save from death (see on 2 Sam. 14:14). It is appreciating this breathtaking grace which is to "know Yahweh", rather than any cold assent to theological propositions, no matter how true they are.

Ezekiel 20:45 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- This final addendum may be an explanation of the otherwise mysterious "wilderness" situation into which God envisaged bringing the people when He had released them from Babylon and before He brought the remnant back into the land of Israel.

Ezekiel 20:46 *Son of man, set your face toward the south and direct your word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the field in the south*- "The south" could refer to the area south of the Chebar river where Ezekiel was located with the captives. This short prophecy may explain area the otherwise mysterious "wilderness" situation into which God envisaged bringing the people when He had released them from Babylon and before He brought the remnant back into the land of Israel.

Ezekiel 20:47 *And tell the forest of the south, Hear the word of Yahweh: Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you and every dry tree. The flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burnt thereby*- This may be the explanation as to how Israel would be released from captivity. "The north", Babylon itself, to the area south of Babylon which is in view (see on :45,46), would be burnt by the fire of God's wrath. It was that wrath which was to lead to Israel being able to leave Babylon (:33,34).

Ezekiel 20:48 *All flesh shall see that I, Yahweh, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched*- The wilderness in which Israel was to meet their God in judgment was to be observed by all the nations (:41). Hence the reference here to "all flesh" observing.

This scenario didn't work out at the time because Israel were so utterly rebellious; had the rebels were purged from the rebellious house, there would have been no remnant. For Ezekiel's ministry began with the comment that all Israel were in totality a rebellious house. But something similar in essence shall happen in the last days.

Ezekiel 20:49 *Then I said, Ah Lord Yahweh! they say of me, Isn't he a speaker of parables?*- It was tragic for the prophets that the people were so indifferent. They portrayed the tragic, passionate love of God to His people, they sung of it, wrote of it, made poetry about it [for much of the prophetic writing is poetry]. And yet they passed this off as mere "allegory" in a mocking way (Ez. 20:49), Ezekiel was "to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice… for they hear what you say, but they will not do it" (Ez. 33:32). They were like buskers singing songs in the subway, which we may listen to with half an ear, even admire them for a few moments, and then walk on in our busy lives. But the prophets were speaking forth the words of passionate love of God Almighty for His people… truly as Paul Simon put it, with an uncanny appropriacy to our train of thought, "the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls". They thought that "the Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill" (Zeph. 1:12); "the Lord does not see us" (Ez. 8:12; 9:9); "my way is hidden from the Lord" (Is. 40:27; 29:15). This of course is the attitude with which we daily live. The question is, will we perceive it as the prophets did?

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 21

Ezekiel 21:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 21:2 *Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and drop your word toward the sanctuaries and prophesy against the land of Israel*- The plural "sanctuaries" may refer to all the high places, or it could be an intensive plural for the great sanctuary, the temple. We recall that Ezekiel was with the exiles in Babylon, hence he looks towards Jerusalem and Israel.

Ezekiel 21:3 *And tell the land of Israel, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, and will draw forth My sword out of its sheath*- For "Israel" to be told of these prophecies, Ezekiel's words must have been published and taken there in some form; see on :13. Or perhaps the cherubim transported him there to give this message to them in person. However the threatened destruction of Judah is being told to the exiles because their repentance could have altered the outcome for the Jews still in Judah. We note Ezekiel's continual reference to Judah as "the land of Israel" because of God's intention to restore both Judah and the ten tribes in the Kingdom He wished to reestablish in the land.

And will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked- The allusion is clearly to Abraham's pleading with God not to destroy both righteous and wicked in Sodom (Gen. 18:23,25). Jerusalem was no better than Sodom, a point already made in Ez. 16. Perhaps the implication was that there was no intercessor like Abraham to stop this eventuality happening; and that the "righteous" were not even as righteous as 'righteous Lot' (2 Pet. 2:7), who himself was weak spiritually and only counted

righteous by faith. Ez. 20 has painted a very bad picture of the spiritual state of things in Judah, with sacrifice of children to idols ongoing at that very time.

Ezekiel 21:4 *Seeing then that I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall My sword go forth out of its sheath against all flesh from the south to the north*- I have often noted that God speaks His judgments, but there is a gap between the statement and its fulfilment. During that gap, there is the possibility of repentance. Hence Nineveh was to be destroyed after 40 days, but in reality it wasn't because there was repentance. This idea of a gap is represented here by the sword of judgment being still in its sheath. If there was no repentance then it would be drawn out of the sheath. Likewise the implication of the Sodom and Abraham allusion could be that the sword would have remained in its sheath if there had been an Abraham type intercessor. Although maybe the state of affairs was such that God saw total destruction as the only way to move forward.

Ezekiel 21:5 *And all flesh shall know that I, Yahweh, have drawn forth My sword out of its sheath; it shall not return any more*- The judgment of Israel in the wilderness spoken of in Ez. 20:36-38 (see notes there) was to also be the judgment of "all flesh". This scenario didn't come about, but it will do so in essence in the last days. The judgment of "all flesh" around Israel and that of the Jews is described in Revelation as being part and parcel of the same series of events. The threatened judgments would not again be delayed or rescinded, the sword would no more return to its sheath. This speaks of a final judgment, such as will only be seen in the last days, but which could have come about in Ezekiel's time had the preconditions been met.

Ezekiel 21:6 *Sigh therefore, you son of man; with the breaking of your thighs and with bitterness you will sigh before their eyes*- We have the impression of the exiles standing around Ezekiel. Perhaps he was still under house arrest. He was personally involved in his message, feeling for the tragedy of it all, and not merely a relayer of information from God; as the GNB expresses the Hebrew, "groan as if your heart is breaking with despair". Just as any preaching work is not merely the imparting of information, but the word has to become flesh in the preacher of it. The despair was for the fact that had the exiles repented, the awful judgment need not have come. "Thighs" is literally "sides", as if his heart had burst and the blood was issuing through his side- yet another way in which he prefigured the ultimate "son of man", the Lord Jesus. "Bitterness" again reflects how Ezekiel was to feel their bitterness, as their "son of man" representative. But GNB offers "sorrow" for "bitterness".

Ezekiel 21:7 *It shall be, when they tell you, 'Why do you sigh?' that you shall say, Because of the news, for it is coming. Every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, every spirit shall faint and all knees shall be weak as water. It is coming, and it shall be done, says the Lord Yahweh*- Because Israel's heart would melt and be feeble "Because of the tidings" which Ezekiel taught, therefore *his* heart sighed and broke because he identified with how they would later feel when his words came true (Ez. 21:6,7). See on Ez. 3:15. There would be a psychological paralysis- evidence that God can work directly on the mind of people, positively [through the "holy spirit"] and negatively [an "evil spirit from the Lord"]. This had been threatened in Ez. 7:17 and Jer. 6:24 in the same words as used here; the point is now made that the words of the prophets were to really come true, and they must be taken seriously.

Ezekiel 21:8 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- There may or may not have been a gap between the prophecies, but the sword which was about to be taken from its sheath has now been prepared by sharpening and polishing (:9,10).

Ezekiel 21:9 *Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says Yahweh: Say, A sword, a sword, it is sharpened, and also polished*- This speaks of the preparation of the Babylonians by God. They were His sword, and would be wielded by His hand.

Ezekiel 21:10 *It is sharpened that it may make a slaughter; it is polished that it may be as lightning*- This is again an allusion to the opening vision of the cherubim, from whom flashed lightning. This huge system of Divine operation was to use the Babylonians in order to destroy His own people.

Shall we then laugh?- As noted on Ez. 20:49, the response to Ezekiel's words was mirth and refusing to take seriously the issues of eternal judgment, just as we see today.

The rod of My son condemns every tree- LXX "be sharpened that thou mayest be bright, ready for slaughter, slay, set at nought, despise every tree"; GNB "There can be no rejoicing, for my people have disregarded every warning and punishment". This would take "my son" as Israel (as in Hos. 11:1). The rod to fall upon Israel would also be the condemnation of every nation or tree, a figure just used in Ez. 20:46,47.

Ezekiel 21:11 *It is given to be polished, that it may be ready for use: the sword, it is sharpened, yes, it is polished, to give it into the hand of the killer*- The sword of Babylon was in fact being prepared by the Jews trying to deceive Babylon by entering into alliances and loyalty agreements with other nations. This was what provoked the sharpness of Babylon's final fall upon Judah. But God worked through that; thereby Judah were preparing their own judgment.

Ezekiel 21:12 *Cry and wail, son of man; for it is on My people, it is on all the princes of Israel: they are delivered over to the sword with My people; strike therefore on your thigh*- The princes were to be judged parallel with the masses of "My people". This is a point often made in the prophets. It wasn't that the masses suffered because of the failures of the minority in leadership. The leaders acted as the people wanted, so that even without democracy, a people effectively get the leadership they subconsciously desire. And so all Judah were to be judged.

Ezekiel 21:13 *For I am putting My people to the test, and if they refuse to repent, all these things will happen to them, says the Lord Yahweh*- The message of Ezekiel, perhaps particularly of this chapter, was to be published in Judah itself; see on :3. It was a call to repentance, and if they failed to respond, then these things would happen. Jeremiah's prophetic words to Judah were likewise to be their "test" (Jer. 6:27 s.w.). The same word is used of how the fire of the invaders' judgment would "test" the people (Zech. 13:9). But they could have avoided this if they had responded to God's word ahead of time. The call to repentance we hear today is likewise a foretaste of the fire of final judgment; and now is the time to respond and not then when it is too late.

Ezekiel 21:14 *You therefore, son of man, prophesy and strike your hands together;*

and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of the deadly wounded: it is the sword of the great slaughter which surrounds them- The sword doubled the third time may simply be an idiom meaning as GNB "the sword will strike again and again". The LXX has "take a second sword: the third sword is the sword of the slain, the great sword of the slain: and thou shalt strike them with amazement, lest the heart should faint". Perhaps the first sword refers to the "test" of :13; the sword point is held at Jerusalem in the hope they would repent on the cusp of Divine judgment. The second sword is repeated twice, in that Jerusalem was to fall and suffer from the sword, and then the exiles also were to suffer the sword in Babylon. The ESV has "let the sword come down twice, yes, three times"; and this would be using the same idiom as "for three and for four" in Amos 1:3 etc. The triple coming of the sword would then connect with the triple 'overturning' of Zion to be spoken of in :27.

"The deadly wounded" refers to Zedekiah, "You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come" (:25). The intention was that Zedekiah would die by the sword, but in fact he didn't. He was blinded, but died peacefully in prison (Jer. 52:11). The wound that ought to have been unto death was in fact not unto death- because God wanted him to be moved by His grace to repent.

Ezekiel 21:15 *I have set the threatening sword against all their gates, that their hearts may tremble, and their ruins be multiplied: ah! it is made as lightning, it is pointed for slaughter*- The sword was a "threatening sword" because it was part of the "test" of :13. It was as if the people of Jerusalem were being held at sword point by Ezekiel's words, telling them that the sword was about to pierce them. If they repented, then it would be withdrawn. That sword was fully prepared for actual slaughter, and the similarity with lightning [from being so highly polished and therefore glinting] was to forge connection with the cherubim vision. God was in and behind and above and controlling the Babylonian invasion; His huge system of operation was involved.

Ezekiel 21:16 *Gather yourselves together, go to the right, set yourselves in array, go to the left, wherever your face is set*- GNB sees this as addressed to the sword, in what could be described as "the song of the sword": "Cut to the right and the left, you sharp sword! Cut wherever you turn". Right and left could return to 'north and south'.

Ezekiel 21:17 *I will also strike My hands together*- Just as Ezekiel had done (:15). Ezekiel was not merely imparting information on God's behalf, but was emotionally caught up in the message as God's representative. And any true preacher of God's word should be likewise.

And I will cause My wrath to rest: I, Yahweh, have spoken it- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the

restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 21:18 *The word of Yahweh came to me again saying*- This further prophecy is also about the sword; but the point is that the Babylonian sword is in fact in God's hand.

Ezekiel 21:19 *Also, you son of man, appoint two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come; they both shall come forth out of one land. Mark out a place, mark it out at the head of the way to the city*- Ezekiel as God's prophet is helped to see that he and his prophetic word are in fact the controllers of the movements of the Babylonian army. Ezekiel was to as it were draw a road coming out of Babylon and then split it into two ways (:21), one going to Rabbah and the other to Jerusalem (:20).

Ezekiel 21:20 *You shall appoint a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites, and to Judah in Jerusalem the fortified*- Perhaps the Jewish false prophets claimed that the Babylonian army advancing from the north was in fact heading for Rabbah and the Ammonites and not for them. But Ezekiel was to prophesy that the same Divine sword was to attack both cities, and the apparent choice exercised by Nebuchadnezzar was in fact all overruled by God.

Ezekiel 21:21 *For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use fortune telling. He shook the arrows back and forth, he consulted the images, he looked in the liver*- The king had a choice as to whether to attack Rabbah first, or Jerusalem. He would have taken two arrows, presumably with the names of the two cities upon them, and shaken them back and forth in his quiver, believing that whichever he withdrew first after a certain ritual would be the one to attack first.

Ezekiel 21:22 *In his right hand was the forecast for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the battle cry, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build forts*- The battering rams are exactly those depicted by Ezekiel (Ez. 4:2);

Ezekiel 21:23 *It shall seem to them as a false forecast in their opinion*- Perhaps the Jewish false prophets claimed that the Babylonian army advancing from the north was in fact heading for Rabbah and the Ammonites and not for them.

They have sworn solemn oaths, but he brings their guilt to remembrance, that they may be caught- The Jews had solemnly promised total allegiance to Babylon, when in fact they had been making such solemn oaths to others, in the hope of assembling enough political and military might to overcome Babylon. This was how the Babylonian sword was so sharpened against Israel; they were angry that they had

been lied to, and that the Jerusalem temple was not merely the shrine of their gods, but of the gods of other nations too. In all this they were used by God to express His anger regarding how Judah had treated *Him*.

Ezekiel 21:24 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have made your wickedness to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered so that in all your doings your sins appear; because you have come to memory, you shall be taken with the hand*- The way the Jews had made alliances with other peoples was an uncovering of their sins. Their previous infidelities to Babylon now were also remembered by the Babylonians; and again, God was manifest through Babylon. Because their feelings of hurt and anger at the deception experienced were exactly those of God- with whom Judah had also entered a covenant of total loyalty, and promised the temple as His sole sacred space.

Ezekiel 21:25 *You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come*- "The prince" of Ezekiel 40-48 is hard to understand as an immortal being such as the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of Ezekiel 21:27 was Judah's last ruler- so "the prince" later in Ezekiel would appear to be a promise of a restored monarchy. Yet tragically, the royal family chose to remain in Babylon. See on Ez. 37:25. "The deadly wounded" of :14 refers to Zedekiah, "You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come" (:25). The intention was that Zedekiah would die by the sword, but in fact he didn't. He was blinded, but died peacefully in prison (Jer. 52:11). The wound that ought to have been unto death was in fact not unto death- because God wanted him to be moved by His grace to repent.

In the time of the iniquity of the end- This phrase could imply that this was the time when Judah's iniquity would be finally punished. It is the same idea as in Dan. 9:24, when after the 70 weeks there was to be an end of Judah's sin, in that the punishment for it would be completed. But as noted there, the 70 years prophecy had become reapplied to a 70 weeks prophecy. So this "end" envisaged didn't in fact come when expected, neither in the death or deposition of Zedekiah, neither at the end of the 70 years, neither at the end of 70 weeks, but only in the last days in the final "time of the end".

Ezekiel 21:26 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Remove the mitre and take off the crown; this shall be no more the same*- It seems that Zedekiah had worn both the crown and the high priestly mitre, declaring himself to be the Messianic king-priest. But "this shall be no more the same", he was not to be a king-priest any more.

Exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high- Zedekiah the high, the proud, was to be abased- blinded and then left to die in prison. But a "low" one was to be exalted to take his place. This would have been possible at the time of the restoration. But the various possibilities didn't work out, and so the prophecy was reapplied and rescheduled to the Lord Jesus, the low one who was made high, as Phil. 2 exults.

Ezekiel 21:27 *I will overturn, overturn, overturn it. This also shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him*- The triple 'overturning' of Ez. 21:25-27 can refer to the three invasions made by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Remember that Ezekiel was primarily speaking to the captives in Babylon who had been taken there after the first and second Babylonian invasions. One more was yet to come. We have here an example of how the kingdom of God and its king

can be treated as parallel; Zedekiah's overthrow was that of God's kingdom. Thus God's kingdom as it was in the nation of Israel ended: "I... will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel" (Hos.1:4). "It shall be no more, *until*..." carries the implication that the kingdom would revive when "he come whose right it is; and (God) will give it him". God will "give (Jesus) the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32,33) - at Christ's return. This, therefore, is when the promise of the kingdom's restoration will be fulfilled. There is a tremendous theme throughout the Old Testament prophets of the *restoration* of God's Kingdom on Messiah's return. Christ's disciples were well tuned in to this: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt you at this time *restore again the Kingdom to Israel*?" i.e. 'Will Ezekiel 21:27 be fulfilled now?' Jesus replied by saying that the exact time of his second coming they would never know, although the angels immediately afterwards assured them that he would, indeed, return at some point (Acts 1:6-11).

And yet the triple overturnings, perhaps parallel with the triple smiting with the sword of :14, could refer to three overturnings of Zion; once by Babylon, then by Rome, and then finally a third time in the last days, which will be the final signal for the Lord Jesus to come and revive the throne.

Ezekiel 21:28 *You, son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh concerning the children of Ammon, and concerning their reproach; and say, A sword, a sword is drawn, for the slaughter it is polished, to cause it to devour, that it may be as lightning*- This is the language of the same sword which was to come upon Judah as described earlier in this chapter. Judah had tried to make an alliance with Ammon so that together they could resist the Babylonian advances against them. But this was not to succeed, and Ammon also was to be destroyed by the same Divinely directed Babylonian sword as Judah. But Ez. 25:3-6 describes the Ammonites rejoicing with Babylon at the destruction of the temple. Clearly they were not sincere in their agreement with Judah; like Judah, they were promising loyalty whilst making the same promise of loyalty to Babylon. The deceivers were deceived by each other.

Ezekiel 21:29 *While they see for you false visions, while they forecast lies to you, to lay you on the necks of the wicked who are deadly wounded, whose day has come in the time of the iniquity of the end*- Ammon like Judah had its false prophets. The "deadly wounded" earlier referred to Zedekiah (:14,25), and the time of the end of the iniquity to the final judgment for Israel's sins (:25). So the idea may be that Ammon was to be judged together with Judah- far from the false prophecies that "No, actually this Babylonian advance is not in fact headed for us, but it's aiming for Rabbah... for Jerusalem". They would perish as it were together, even if they didn't do so chronologically.

Ezekiel 21:30 *Cause it to return into its sheath*- This can be translated as a rhetorical question: "Shall I cause it to return into its sheath?". And the answer was that no, God was really going to bring about this destruction, and the prophets claiming that the sword of judgment was going to return into its sheath at the last moment were going to be shown utterly false.

In the place where you were created, in the land of your birth, will I judge you- Ammon was born of an incestuous relationship in the land of Sodom. Sodom has been associated with apostate Judah in Ez. 16. The idea is that Ammon and Judah would

share a similar judgment because their origins and mentality were similar. Jerusalem's birthplace was therefore defined as being in Canaan, where Ammon's was too (Ez. 16:3). The false prophets were quite wrong to claim that the Babylonians would only judge Ammon and not Judah; and it seems the false prophets of Ammon were saying similarly that Babylon would judge only Judah and not themselves.

Ezekiel 21:31 *I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow on you with the fire of My wrath; and I will deliver you into the hand of cruel men, skilful to destroy*- The idea is that these men had been educated or trained up for this destruction, just as in an earlier analogy the sword of Babylon had been sharpened and polished.

God had previously threatened to judge His people by gathering their enemies together to destroy them by acting like a smith blowing fire upon them. But we will read that the judgment / condemnation of His people which He had planned- would now no longer come about. He would count them righteous, so this would not happen: "they may gather together, but not by Me... Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgement... their righteousness is of Me, says Yahweh" (Is. 54:15-17).

It is another way of saying that His people would be free from the condemnation from Him which on one hand was just. We will now read of the smiths making weapons with which to destroy Israel, and the allusion is clearly to the threat against the exiles made in Ez. 21:31: “And I will pour out upon you My indignation; with the fire of My wrath I will blow upon you; and I will give you into the hands of fiery men, smiths of destruction”. God likens Himself to a smith, gathering materials and blowing fire upon them in judgment of Judah: "As they *gather* silver, brass, iron, lead and tin into the midst of the furnace to blow the fire onto it to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger and in My wrath, and I will lay you there, and melt you. Yes, I will gather you, and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst" (Ez. 22:20,21). God is now saying that this will not in fact happen. He would not be in this 'gathering'. The weapons He had formed / sharpened against His people would not in fact prosper. We too "are saved from [God's] wrath through Him", the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 21:32 *You shall be for fuel to the fire; your blood shall be in the midst of the land; you shall be remembered no more: for I, Yahweh, have spoken it*- If Ammon were but fuel on the fire, the implication is that the fire is burning something else. And according to Ezekiel's pictures of Jerusalem as a pot, that something was Jerusalem. Clearly it was utterly foolish for the false prophets of both Rabbah and Jerusalem to claim that the Babylonian judgment was solely intended for the other party.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 22

Ezekiel 22:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- Chapters 17-22 form an ABABAB structure. Chapters 17,19 and 21 speak of Babylon, and chapters 18,20 and 22 of Judah's sins which warranted the Babylonian involvement.

Ezekiel 22:2 *You, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the city of blood? So now cause her to know all her abominations*- Ezekiel's initial audience were in denial of their sins and that of their families. The Hebrew for 'entering into judgment' is literally "to plead" (as often in AV). The experience of judgment was not mere punishment, but a pleading to enter totally into covenant relationship. This pleading or judgment of the exiles is likewise associated with their salvation and restoration in Is. 43:26; 51:5. God would plead with or judge the exiles "because you say, I have not sinned" (Jer. 2:35). This was the purpose of the judgment envisaged- to elicit in the exiles repentance. Ezekiel was trying to achieve that by his ministry, he was to judge them so that they recognized their abominations (Ez. 20:4; 22:2), but they were a rebellious house. And so this idea of bringing them out of Babylon into some situation of judgment was envisaged (Ez. 20:34-38), so that they might repent. Zedekiah personally was to be judged or pleaded with in Babylon concerning his sin (Ez. 17:20), i.e. to make him recognize it and repent of it.

Ezekiel 22:3 *You shall say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: The city sheds blood in the midst of her so that her time of judgment may come, and makes idols against herself to defile herself!*- The starting point of the 70 or 40 years (see on Ez. 4:6) was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. See on :30. God worked through their sins; it was they who were bringing on their time of judgment, rather than God of Himself.

The shedding of blood was done "in the midst of" Jerusalem, presumably in the temple. Jer. 7:6 likewise laments that innocent blood was shed there, in connection with idol worship. The reference seems to be to the sacrifice of children to other gods in the temple. Lam. 4:13 states that it was the priests, perhaps Ezekiel's relatives, who had shed this innocent blood in the temple. Jerusalem gave the blood of her children to the idols rather than dedicating the firstborn to Yahweh (Ez. 16:36). The ideas of shedding blood and idolatry are again found in Ez. 22:4; 33:25. We may recoil at this awful practice, but to dedicate our children to careers and the idols of this world rather than to Yahweh is in essence the same abomination, and it can likewise be done in the temple of Yahweh.

Ezekiel 22:4 *You have become guilty in the blood that you have shed, and are defiled in your idols which you have made*- "The blood" is AV "Thy blood"; as explained on :3, the reference is to their sacrificing their own children to their idols of their own hands. We must ask what are the equivalents in this age of sacrificing our children to our idols. "Guilty" is the same word sometimes translated "desolate" (Is. 24:6; Ez. 6:6). The desolation of the land was directly their fault. But it may also mean that they were legally now pronounced guilty for the sacrifice of their children- hence after doing it, they 'became guilty'. In the gap between their sin and the execution of judgment for it, they could have repented. We too live in such a gap, giving intensity to the life we live and our response to the calls for repentance.

And you have caused your days to draw near, and have come even to your year of judgment. Therefore have I made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all the countries- See on :3. The idea is that their time of judgment was hastened by their awful behaviour.

Ezekiel 22:5 *Those who are near and those who are far from you shall mock you, you infamous one and full of tumult*- "Tumult" refers to the psychological breakdown of those under Divine condemnation. Shame and mockery were a fate worse than death in the ancient world, and therefore it is so often mentioned that Israel and Jerusalem would become a mockery to the world. God deals with people within the frameworks of their self-understanding and worldviews.

Ezekiel 22:6 *Behold, the princes of Israel, each according to his power, have been in you to shed blood*- The initial audience of Ezekiel would have included members of the royal family. These words were therefore a direct rebuke to them and / or their families. I explained on :3 that the shedding of blood referred to child sacrifices. The princes of Israel, the royal family of Judah, had apparently done this too- with the royal seed.

Ezekiel 22:7 *In you have they set light by father and mother*- The intention of the gripping passage in Ez. 16 was to convict Jerusalem of her sins (Ez. 16:2); because they considered their spiritual and literal prostitution "a small matter". The same word is used in accusing the priesthood of considering it "a small matter" for the flock to have been ruined by them (Ez. 34:18). This was the problem, as it is today- the real implications of attitudes and behaviour are not taken seriously. We fail to perceive how deeply we affect both God and man. Society makes us feel insignificant cogs, but we are not like that to God. This was the problem with Ezekiel's audience; they had a light hearted approach to eternal issues. To them, sin was a light thing (Ez. 8:17; 22:7). This was the role of the prophets, to convict people of the gravity of their sins and positions, and the consequences to come.

In the midst of you have they dealt by oppression with the foreigner; in you have they wronged the fatherless and the widow- Sin brings an appropriate judgment. As they oppressed foreigners, so now Ezekiel's audience were being oppressed by foreigners. And yet all that follows in this section is exemplification of how the princes had "shed blood" (:6), which I have argued on :3-6 was in the context of idolatry and human sacrifice, with distinct sexual overtones (:9 "lewdness"). We wonder if their sexual perversions extended to masochism and the murder of their sex objects, as in cases of extreme sexual violence today. And their victims led to the exploitation of the most vulnerable in society, including Gentiles. It's all so similar with cases we encounter in the news today.

Ezekiel 22:8 *You have despised My holy things, and have profaned My Sabbaths*- This implies a conscious defilement, a using of the sabbath regulations and holy things as part of idol worship and sexual lewdness (:9). Again, this kind of extreme blasphemy, sexual perversion and masochism is known today, and it seems the princes of Israel, whose relatives and children were before Ezekiel in exile as he uttered these words, were doing the same kind of awful things. And doing them in Yahweh's temple. The same word is used how even after the restoration, the returned exiles "despised" God's Name and offerings ["holy things"] (Mal. 1:6,7,12). They didn't learn the lesson.

Ezekiel 22:9 *Slanderous men have been in you to shed blood; and in you they have eaten on the mountains: in the midst of you they have committed lewdness*- Typical of the prophets, there is a juxtaposition between slandering and shedding blood. The Lord Jesus taught the same- that hatred in the heart was murder. To slander is to murder. And yet slander is here listed along with the grossest sexual immorality imaginable, apparently involving the murder of vulnerable people in the process of it. See on :12.

Ezekiel 22:10 *In you have they uncovered their fathers' nakedness; in you have they humbled her who was unclean in her impurity*- The sexual lewdness (:9) involved with the idol worship involved sleeping with family relatives and sexual perversions with menstruating women. This was all a conscious denial of Yahweh worship. And yet they claimed loyalty to Him.

Ezekiel 22:11 *One has committed abomination with his neighbour's wife, another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law; and another in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter*- These sexual perversions with close relatives were, in the context, performed in the temple and as part of idol worship. "Abomination" is elsewhere used in that sense. And thereby the most basic moral teachings of the Law of Moses, Israel's covenant with God, were broken.

Ezekiel 22:12 *In you have they taken bribes to shed blood. You have taken interest and increase, you have greedily gained from your neighbours by oppression and have forgotten Me, says the Lord Yahweh*- The prohibition of taking interest was so that "your brother shall live by / with you" (Lev. 25:36). By having done so, those now in exile were separated from their poorer brethren. They had placed personal material gain before the unity of God's people. Again, that is a timeless warning. This taking of interest specifically happened in the temple, according to Ez. 22:12; suggesting the priesthood had become a financial racket which exploited the poor. It is the priesthood and ruling classes whom Ezekiel addresses, for they were those in exile with him.

As noted on :9, we have here a powerful juxtaposition. Sexual perversion in the temple as part of idol worship, even involving masochism and the murder of the women they abused, is mentioned along with taking bribes and lending on interest to their brethren. These things might seem insignificant compared to those apparently far grosser sins. But not to God through the prophets. We note that the bribes were "to shed blood", and there seems no reason to doubt that literal murder was in view.

Ezekiel 22:13 *Behold, therefore, I have struck My hand at your dishonest gain which you have made, and at the blood which has been shed in the midst of you*- As noted on :9 and :12, some "dishonest gain" here and there might appear not at all on the same scale as sexual perversion / idolatry in the temple, even involving murder of those sexually abused as sacrifices to the idols. But to God, such sin is in fact in the same league. There are degrees of sin, as the regulations of the Law of Moses itself reflected; but all sin against persons, especially abuse of God's people, is seen as within the same league- be it deceiving them financially or murdering them. For hatred is murder, in the Lord's book.

Ezekiel 22:14 *Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you? I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and will do it*- The implication is that

they had psychologically strengthened and desensitized themselves to perform the gross abominations just discussed. That was surely the only way they could have committed murder as part of a sexually perverted session of idol worship, performed within Yahweh's temple. But in the day of judgment, all such hardening of themselves would collapse, and even they would face God's judgment with weak hands and broken hearts. It is for us to soften ourselves before Him now, and never become hardened in sin. See on :22.

Ezekiel 22:15 *I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries; and I will consume your filthiness out of you*- This didn't actually happen; the captivity didn't reform them. And yet the essence of the prophecy will come true in the last days. This suggests that as the day of the second coming approaches, Israel will be progressively purged and move closer and closer towards repentance. We marvel too at God's desire to ultimately save; for the perversions listed previously are so disgusting that we would assume that such persons should just be destroyed and forgotten eternally. But God's intention was as ever to punish with a view to reformation. We must never forget this in any discipline we may be called upon to minister.

Ezekiel 22:16 *You shall be profaned in yourself, in the sight of the nations; and you shall know that I am Yahweh*- This was perhaps the Divine hope; that the filthiness would be consumed from out of them in captivity (:15) and thus they would know Yahweh, coming into a relationship with Him. But this didn't happen; they refused to be cleansed, and so they didn't come to know Yahweh. And nationally, they even went on to slay His begotten Son. But this shall ultimately come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 22:17 *The word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- This next prophecy seeks to develop the idea of how God hoped to consume the filthiness out of His people (:15). He hoped to achieve that by their exile, and yet here we have the hope that this might be achieved by the judgment of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The hopefulness of God comes through powerfully.

Ezekiel 22:18 *Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me: all of them are brass, tin, iron and lead in the midst of the furnace; they are the dross of silver*- God's intention was that the fire of Babylonian judgment would somehow purge His people in Jerusalem. Impurity had become so mixed with purity that only this crisis could separate them. It seems this was true both in the hearts of individuals, and in society- in that not a single person was found with a pure heart (:30).

Ezekiel 22:19 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem*- As noted on :18, they "all" were dross. Impurity was apparently inextricably mixed with purity, and only the fire of the Babylonian holocaust could possibly divide the righteous from the wicked, and also purify the hearts of even the righteous.

Ezekiel 22:20 *As they gather silver, brass, iron, lead and tin into the midst of the furnace to blow the fire onto it to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger*- The gathering of the impure metals into the furnace was fulfilled through the peasant masses fleeing into Jerusalem in the face of the Babylonian advance. Again we see that it was not just the leadership who were corrupt, but the masses too.

And in My wrath, and I will lay you there, and melt you- "I will lay you" uses the word usually used about the resting of God's wrath. And that seems the preferable translation. The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 22:21 *Yes, I will gather you, and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst*- As noted on :20, the gathering of the impure metals into the furnace was fulfilled through the peasant masses fleeing into Jerusalem in the face of the Babylonian advance. Again we see that it was not just the leadership who were corrupt, but the masses too.

Ezekiel 22:22 *As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so you will be melted in its midst; and you will know that I, Yahweh, have poured out My wrath on you*- "Melted" is often translated "poured out", so there is a play on ideas here. The intention of the pouring out of wrath was to pour them out. We noted on :14 the psychological hardening of the people to do the abominations which they did. The intention of the fire of judgment was to soften them. But the Divine hope and intention didn't come about. Instead of softening them and purging them, the fire consumed them (:31). They were not cleansed of their dross.

God had previously threatened to judge His people by gathering their enemies together to destroy them by acting like a smith blowing fire upon them. But we will read that the judgment / condemnation of His people which He had planned- would now no longer come about. He would count them righteous, so this would not happen: "they may gather together, but not by Me... Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgement... their righteousness is of Me, says Yahweh" (Is. 54:15-17).

It is another way of saying that His people would be free from the condemnation from Him which on one hand was just. We will now read of the smiths making weapons with which to destroy Israel, and the allusion is clearly to the threat against the exiles made in Ez. 21:31: “And I will pour out upon you My indignation; with the

fire of My wrath I will blow upon you; and I will give you into the hands of fiery men, smiths of destruction". God likens Himself to a smith, gathering materials and blowing fire upon them in judgment of Judah: "As they *gather* silver, brass, iron, lead and tin into the midst of the furnace to blow the fire onto it to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger and in My wrath, and I will lay you there, and melt you. Yes, I will gather you, and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst" (Ez. 22:20-22). God is now saying that this will not in fact happen. He would not be in this 'gathering'. The weapons He had formed / sharpened against His people would not in fact prosper. We too "are saved from [God's] wrath through Him", the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 22:23 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- This prophecy follows on from the fact just presented that the fire of Babylonian judgment would not in fact cleanse Judah of their dross. Hence :31 concludes that the fire would not purge but rather consume them.

Ezekiel 22:24 *Son of man, tell her, You are a land that is not cleansed nor rained on in the day of indignation*- As noted on :23, the intention of the "day of indignation" was that it would be a fire which would cleanse the land. But it didn't, the dross was not removed, and the rain of blessing intended therefore didn't come.

Ezekiel 22:25 *There is a conspiracy of her prophets in its midst, like a roaring lion tearing the prey: they have devoured souls; they take treasure and precious things; they have made her widows many in its midst*- The reason as to why the land was not cleansed by the fire of judgment in the "day of indignation" (:24) is now given. The people allowed the false prophets to devour them. It was the ordinary peasant masses who were to be gathered in to the furnace of Jerusalem and judged (:20). They were equally culpable; for the false prophets had spoken and acted as they perceived the masses wanted them to. And so the prophets became like the Babylonians, as a roaring lion, the symbol of Babylon. They were to be identified with Babylon; the Babylonian judgment was what they had done to themselves, as :31 makes explicit. Perhaps the valuable items of the peasants fleeing into Jerusalem was taken by the false prophets. The souls and widows they devoured may refer, as earlier in this chapter, to vulnerable women whom they killed during perverted sex acts as part of their worship of idols. And this was done in the "midst" of the city, in the temple.

Ezekiel 22:26 *Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things: they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they caused men to discern between the unclean and the clean and have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them*- See on :8. The priests were those who actually performed the human sacrifices (Jer. 2:34; 19:4). But the root cause of their gross abominations was because they had failed to recognize and teach a distinction between holy and common, clean and unclean. The Mosaic regulations about these things were intended to teach a clear separation in the conscience between sin and righteousness. But when the line between sin and righteousness is blurred into so many shades of grey... then the awful abominations mentioned in this chapter are committed. And this is our abiding challenge, in a world which increasingly cannot tell right from wrong.

Ezekiel 22:27 *Her princes in its midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood and to destroy people so that they may get dishonest gain*- The attitude of the princes to the people is described in terms appropriate to the Babylonians, who were to act as wolves in devouring the people (Jer. 5:6; Hab. 1:8). By so doing, and with the people tacitly supportive of the whole system, they had brought about the Babylonian judgment; for this would be but an extension of their own attitudes (:31). 'Getting dishonest gain' characterized the entire society, from the poor to the rich (Jer. 6:13; 8:10). See on :29.

Ezekiel 22:28 *Her prophets have plastered for them with whitewash, seeing false visions and foretelling lies to them, saying, Thus says the Lord Yahweh, when Yahweh has not spoken*- The gross immorality spoken of earlier in this chapter was justified by false claims that Yahweh in fact sanctioned it. The scary thing was that such gross immorality was performed in His temple; the people involved would have subconsciously wished to have Yahweh's sanction of it in order to ease their bad conscience, and so the false prophets complied. Again we see that as in the New Testament, the false prophets or teachers were not simply genuinely mistaken over abstract theological issues; the false teaching of false teachers in the Bible is nearly always in a moral context, justifying sin as righteousness.

Ezekiel 22:29 *The people of the land have used oppression and committed robbery; yes, they have troubled the poor and needy and have oppressed the foreigner wrongfully*- Again we see how the judgment to come was not just because of the sins of the leadership, the princes and false prophets (:27,28). The ordinary people had in their turn also abused the weak and vulnerable. And so it was appropriate that now foreigners were to oppress them. 'Getting dishonest gain' (:27) characterized the entire society, from the poor to the rich (Jer. 6:13; 8:10 s.w.).

Ezekiel 22:30 *I sought for a man among them, who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none*- See on :3. If a person had been found who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap', God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. But there was not such a person, because they were "all" dross (Ez. 22:18,19). Jeremiah was in the land at the time and was surely righteous, but he had been told not to intercede for the people (Jer. 11:14; 14:11). It seems that if another like him had been found, in addition to Ezekiel in exile, then the judgments could have been averted. There were simply so many possible scenarios! And this is what we must expect if even time periods can be shortened or extended in response to human behaviour. And yet Jeremiah himself seems to have been too 'pro' Israel. He was shocked at the depth of their weakness and even naive to it; and in Lamentations he seems to consider God had acted too harshly against His people. So perhaps in any case Jeremiah was not the appropriate interceder.

Ezekiel 22:31 *Therefore have I poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath. Their own way have I brought on their heads, says the Lord Yahweh*- As noted on :22, the fire of Babylonian judgment had been intended to purify them, to remove the dross. But the dross would not be removed, and so they were in fact consumed by the fire. And this was completely the result of their own

ways, rather than simply the anger of God. Judgment is really always an extension of a man's own way in his time of opportunity.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 23

Ezekiel 23:1 The word of Yahweh came again to me saying- The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (Ez. 23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (Ez. 16:7,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (Ez. 16:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (Ez. 23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are modern readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word… realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism.

Ezekiel 23:2 Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother- Unlike the similar lurid passage in Ez. 16, this appears to be a private revelation to Ezekiel, addressed personally as "son of man". Perhaps he still struggled to realize that the priesthood and society he had come from were really as bad as God saw them to be. The Jews considered the Israelites of the ten tribes to have been so far worse than themselves that they had gone into captivity in Assyria. One purpose of this allegory was to remind them that Israel were not worse than Judah; in fact the opposite was the case, and they were all the same sisters.

Ezekiel 23:3 And they played the prostitute in Egypt; they played the prostitute in their youth; there were their breasts pressed, and there were fondled the breasts of their virginity- The people of Israel worshipped idols in Egypt, and there lost their virginity. It was by grace that God took them on as His wife when they were already not virgins. The language of pressing the breasts means groping. They were raped, but raped as prostitutes are raped, half willingly so, in Egypt.

Ezekiel 23:4 Their names were Oholah the elder, and Oholibah her sister: and they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters- God's grace is here noted, that He

married such defiled women; and by grace, they had children, when prostitutes were stereotypically perceived as barren.

As for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem Oholibah- "Oholah" is "her tent", a reference to the false sanctuary created by Jeroboam for the ten tribes; and "Oholibah" 'my tent is in her', reflecting how indeed God's true sanctuary was in Jerusalem and not Samaria. But the allegory will continue to reveal that this didn't make her superior but rather even more responsible for the profanity performed in that sanctuary. So the assumption of Judah that they were somehow more righteous because they had the true sanctuary amongst them is thereby subverted.

Ezekiel 23:5 Oholah played the prostitute when she was Mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours- Those lovers turned on her and destroyed her. She was taken captive to Assyria, the people whose gods she had so loved. "Doted" is literally 'to breathe after', the language of a woman in heat. This is how God presents her attraction to the Assyrian idols. And the word and extreme image is repeatedly used here (:7,9,12,16,20).

Ezekiel 23:6 Who were clothed with blue, governors and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses- It was as horsemen that the young men of Assyria came as soldiers to destroy Samaria and lead her into captivity. Her rulers were attractive because Israel thought that they had power to protect and save them instead of their God. And there again is a timeless warning. What they found so attractive turned to be their destruction. It was God's Kingdom which should have been "desirable" to Israel (s.w. Is. 27:2; 32:12), but the passing visual attraction of the world was more "desirable".

Ezekiel 23:7 She bestowed her prostitution on them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them; and on whoever she doted, with all their idols she defiled herself- Idolatry is presented as prostitution. But she "bestowed her prostitution on *them*", rather than them coming to her. For "doted" see on :5. Every relationship with the idols of our age is likewise prostitution against the God who has so loved us. "Choicest men" is used of soldiers (Dan. 11:15; Jer. 48:15; Ex. 15:4). It was the protection of Assyria's handsome soldiers which was so attractive to Israel; and therefore they agreed to serve their idols to have their protection. And it was those same soldiers who were to turn and destroy them.

Ezekiel 23:8 Neither has she left her prostitution since the days of Egypt; for in her youth they lay with her, and they fondled the breasts of her virginity; and they poured out their prostitution on her- Israel is presented as having been sexually unstable from her youth; her subsequent encounter with Yahweh, her marriage to Him and His pouring out His love upon her... didn't change her basic mentality. She was not serious, light minded, and went to whatever her eyes and flesh were attracted to. This is our tendency as humans. She didn't leave her prostitution "for" or because she had lost her virginity in Egypt, before she met Yahweh. The long term effect of her idolatry there, just like the long term effect of sexual promiscuity in youth, was that she never settled down to a stable monogamous relationship, even though she had the best ever husband.

Ezekiel 23:9 Therefore I delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians on whom she doted- For "doted" see on :5. It was appropriate that she

should be delivered into the hand or power of the Assyrians, for they were the ones she had loved more than Yahweh.

Ezekiel 23:10 These uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and her daughters and her they killed with the sword, and she became a byword among women; for they executed judgments on her- The 'death' of the ten tribes must be compared to the insistence of all the restoration prophets that a revived Israel and Judah would together return to the land and form God's reestablished Kingdom. This has to imply that the slain Samaria would be as it were resurrected; which is what Ez. 37 predicts, a resurrection of the dry bones. The uncovering of nakedness implies shame, as does becoming a byword. This was a fate worse than death in their terms. The uncovering her nakedness means she was revealed for who she was- a worn out whore, self-ruined by her profligate life. What was uncovered by the Assyrians was her whoredom (:29). The Assyrians realized that Samaria had not been faithful to them as she had promised, but in fact had made similar agreements with other powers, and also worshipped their gods- as well as Yahweh. It was this discovery which made the Assyrians so angry with Samaria, just as the Babylonians were to be with Judah.

Ezekiel 23:11 Her sister Oholibah saw this, yet was she more corrupt in her doting than she, and in her prostitution which was more than the prostitution of her sister- This repeats Jeremiah's message to the Jews still in the land (Jer. 3:7). For "doting" see on :5. The idea seems to be that Jerusalem was encouraged in her immorality by Samaria. The reasoning was that because the sanctuary was in Jerusalem, Judah were automatically more righteous than Israel, and could therefore sin more than her. This is where mere tokenism and externality leads in religious life- to spiritual and literal immorality. "Corrupt" is the word used about the situation before the flood, when the *eretz* was again "corrupt" and was "destroyed" (Gen. 6:11-13)- both are valid translations of the same Hebrew word. To be corrupt was to destroy oneself. The judgment was the sin.

Ezekiel 23:12 She doted on the Assyrians, governors and rulers, her neighbours, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men- For "doting" see on :5. She was infatuated by the Assyrian leadership and military, the very things which Judah found attractive as promising protection and stability, when instead she should have looked to Yahweh for this.

Ezekiel 23:13 I saw that she was defiled; they both took one way- Again it is stressed that Judah was not better than Israel, as she imagined; she took the same "way". "Defiled" means that she was no longer a virgin (s.w. Gen. 34:5,13,27). But she had lost her virginity in Egypt; it was there that she had been defiled by idolatry (Ez. 20:7). The idea therefore is that God recognized that this was how she had been from the beginning; He "saw" the iniquity in His people which earlier by grace He had not 'seen' because He imputed righteousness to them, as the object of His love (Num. 23:21). It was specifically the temple which was "defiled" (s.w. Jer. 32:34; Ez. 5:11; 43:7), and perhaps that is the location of "the wall" in :14.

Ezekiel 23:14 She increased her prostitution; for she saw men portrayed on the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion- I suggested on :13 that the context is of the temple. It could be that Jews went to the land of the Chaldeans and were impressed with the friezes on their walls, coloured with bright red. For they

loved anything foreign, rather than the things of Yahweh. But more likely were these friezes replicated on the walls of the temple. Instead of the motif of the protecting cherubim within the temple, there were friezes of Chaldean soldiers, her pinups, her heroes and preferred saviours. "The wall" in Ez. 8:10; 43:8 refers specifically to the wall dividing the holy and most holy place; there, perhaps on the inside of the most holy, there were the friezes of idols and Chaldean warriors, used in a pornographic sense.

Ezekiel 23:15 Dressed with girdles on their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them princes to look on, after the likeness of the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their birth- See on :23. The men depicted on the wall (:14) were *like* the Babylonian soldiers depicted on the friezes in the palaces and cities of the Chaldeans. The Jews had visited these lands and in their love for anything foreign, had replicated such motifs and friezes upon the walls of the temple.

Ezekiel 23:16 As soon as she saw them she doted on them, and sent messengers to them into Chaldea- For "doted" see on :5. She sent to Chaldea for these men to come to her, suggesting the pictures of the men were on the walls of the Jerusalem temple, and even within the holy places (see on :15). It is stereotypically *men* who respond to visual representations of *females*. Here it was men responding to the pictures of Chaldean men. It could be a reference to homosexual attraction, but the idea was that the lust was for the military protection of these soldiers; when the entire Angelic army symbolized by the cherubim was ready to protect Jerusalem. But they had removed the cherubim motif and replaced it with these images.

Ezekiel 23:17 The Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their prostitution, and she was polluted with them, and her soul was alienated from them- Judah felt that she had not been given the protection and support from Babylon which she had expected.

Ezekiel 23:18 So she displayed her prostitution, and uncovered her nakedness: then My soul was alienated from her, like as My soul was alienated from her sister- Jer. 6:8 and Ez. 23:18 speak of how God's soul "departed" (AV) from His people- but the same word is translated to hang / crucify (Num. 25:4; 2 Sam. 21:6,9,13). It's as if God was crucified in His pain for Israel. And in the death of His Son He went through that pain. And so never, ever, ever... can we nor Israel complain that our pain is greater than God's. Never. The pain of God at Israel's sin leads Him to exclaim (almost in the language of piercing and crucifixion): "Before me continually is grief and wounds" (Jer. 6:7). We can wound God by our sin, so sensitive is He to us. In the end, we read that God's "soul" departed from them, because "the Lord has rejected you" (Jer. 6:8,30). This is the same language used about Saul- God rejected him, and so His spirit departed from him (1 Sam. 15:23; 16:14). The implication was that God's very soul / spirit is "with" us, and therefore He can be so terribly wounded by us in His heart by the rebellions of those in covenant relationship with Him. For His heart / soul / spirit is *so* close to us His beloved people.

Ezekiel 23:19 Yet she multiplied her prostitution, remembering the days of her youth, in which she had played the prostitute in the land of Egypt- Despite God's departure from her, perhaps symbolized by the visible departure of the cherubim and glory from the temple described earlier in Ezekiel, she instead repeated her prostitution and

multiplied it, by trying to make treaties with the Egyptians and accepting their idols and gods.

Ezekiel 23:20 She doted on their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of donkeys, and whose issue is like the issue of horses- For "doted" see on :5. The language here is crude, but it reflects the crude nature of Jerusalem's attraction towards the other nations simply on the basis of their external attributes. Donkeys or asses were famed for having large reproductive organs, and horses for having much sperm. And these characteristics of the men portrayed on the walls of the temple (see on :14) were so attractive to the Jews. The horse was used by the Egyptians as the hieroglyphic for a lustful person; and as just pointed out in :19, Judah was still influenced by Egyptian thought and idolatry.

Ezekiel 23:21 Thus you called to memory the lewdness of your youth, in the fondling of your bosom by the Egyptians for the breasts of your youth- Under threat from the Babylonians, Judah returned to Egypt to make treaties with them, which involved accepting their idols into the Jerusalem temple. She was thus returning to her youth, acting as she had done then.

Ezekiel 23:22 Therefore, Oholibah, thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will raise up your lovers against you, from whom your soul is alienated, and I will bring them against you on every side- This alienation refers to the falling out between Judah and her masters in Babylon. She fell out with all her lovers once they realized she had been making similar treaties with other nations ["lovers"] and therefore her temple in Jerusalem was filled with the idols of various nations. She was alienated from Yahweh (:18) and now was alienated from her lovers. She was pathetically and tragically alone- and this is the picture of the condemnation of all who reject Yahweh. A gnashing of teeth alone in the darkness.

Ezekiel 23:23 The Babylonians and all the Chaldeans- The "Chaldeans" refer to a group of Aramean people who attacked and conquered Babylon in 625 BC. They came to establish the kingdom known as Babylon, but strictly the "Babylonians" at this stage referred to the local inhabitants of Babylon before the Chaldeans arrived there.

Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and rulers all of them, princes and men of renown, all of them riding on horses- These other nations are mentioned as exemplification of how Judah had been a whore in wanting relationship with so many different peoples. The names of these people all hint at the judgment upon Judah which they would bring: 'Punishment', 'Cry for help' and 'Shriek'. Judah befriended and 'loved' those who would later be their punishment, and force Judah to shriek urgently for help- which would then not be forthcoming.

Ezekiel 23:24 They shall come against you with weapons, chariots and wagons, and with a company of peoples; they shall set themselves against you with buckler and shield and helmet all around; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments- LXX "And they all shall come upon thee from the north, chariots and wheels". This is clearly an allusion to the cherubim, seen also from the north, with chariots and wheels. The armies of cherubic protection which they had rejected (see on :14) would turn against them in the form of the

Babylonian invaders. God could have judged Jerusalem for her unfaithfulness to Him, but He allowed the other offended lovers to judge her for her unfaithfulness to them. In this sense He committed her judgment to them.

Ezekiel 23:25 I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal with you in fury- As explained on :24, God too was jealous, as the betrayed husband and lover. But the other lovers were also jealous, and so He judged them through allowing those lovers to judge her in their own way.

They shall take away your nose and your ears; and your residue shall fall by the sword. They shall take your sons and your daughters; and your residue shall be devoured by the fire- Cutting off nose and ears was a Mesopotamian punishment rather than a Hebrew one. So the idea may be that God would allow the former lovers to judge Judah, rather than He Himself directly. And they would judge in their way. The nose rings and earrings she had adorned herself with would be taken away and left for the executioners to pick up; her actual nose and ears would be cut off and she would be stoned to death, through the Babylonian siege engines hurling rocks at Jerusalem. For this was how they judged unfaithful women.

Ezekiel 23:26 They shall also strip you of your clothes, and take away your beautiful jewels- This alludes to the Mesopotamian custom (see on :25) of the executioner taking the clothes and jewels of the adulteress, and then leaving her dead body to be sexually used by any who wished. We note that Babylon was judging Judah for adultery against her; Judah had sworn total loyalty to Babylon as well as other nations, and when her whoredom / nakedness was discovered, when it was realized that the Jerusalem temple was full of the idols of all manner of gods; then Babylon judged Jerusalem as an adulterous wife. And God Himself of course wanted to do so, but as noted on :25, He allowed Babylon to do this for Him as it were.

Ezekiel 23:27 Thus will I make your lewdness to cease from you, and your prostitution brought from the land of Egypt; so that you shall not lift up your eyes to them, nor remember Egypt any more- The emphasis upon Egypt is perhaps because it was Egypt who tempted Judah to trust in her strength and therefore break her agreements with Babylon and Assyria. The unfaithful woman Jerusalem would be stoned to death by her one time lovers; but here we get the impression she would somehow be revived, resurrected to a position where she would never again make the same mistakes. And this is the revival spoken of in the valley of dry bones prophecy in Ez. 37. But this spiritual revival didn't happen at the restoration; it is yet to come, when these prophecies shall come to their final term.

Ezekiel 23:28 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will deliver you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom your soul is alienated- Illicit love always turns to hatred. Never was this more true than in the case of Judah and her lovers. The true seed of Abraham were to dominate those who hated them (Gen. 24:60 s.w.). But Jerusalem was dominated by her haters. For she had broken the covenant.

Ezekiel 23:29 And they shall deal with you in hatred, and shall take away all your labour, and shall leave you naked and bare; and the nakedness of your prostitution shall be uncovered, both your lewdness and your prostitution- Their lovers hated

them now, and so did God because of their deep unfaithfulness (Jer. 12:8; Hos. 9:15; Am. 5:21; 6:8 s.w.). Their prostitution was uncovered [the same word used of exiles being sent into captivity] in that all the nations came to realize what God already had experienced with Jerusalem- that she had made exclusive covenants with them all, and accepted their gods into the Jerusalem temple. But she

Ezekiel 23:30 These things shall be done to you because you have played the prostitute after the nations, and because you are polluted with their idols- Jerusalem's prostitution involved idolatry in that as noted on :29, each of her lovers expected her to worship their idols as part of the covenant deal they made with her. The exposure of all this was when they each realized that they were being spoken with in just the same way as Jerusalem was dealing with various nations.

Ezekiel 23:31 You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore will I give her cup into your hand- Again the point is made that Judah were so wrong to think that they were so intrinsically better than the ten tribes. To drink a cup from the Lord is a double symbol- either the cup of blessing which we bless at the communion service (1 Cor. 10:16), or the cup of condemnation, also given from the Lord. In this sense at the breaking of bread service we drink either blessing or condemnation to ourselves, as Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 11. Hence self examination at that time ought to be naturally elicited.

Ezekiel 23:32 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You will drink of your sister's cup, which is deep and large; you will be ridiculed and held in derision; it contains much- To be ridiculed and derided was a fate worse than death in the ancient world, and is often mentioned as Israel's fate. As with Job, the thing greatly feared comes upon those who are condemned; the nature of their condemnation will be appropriate to them. But the degree to which derision and ridicule is so painful to a person is directly related to their pride. It was Judah's pride which made these things so hard for them. If they had been humble, the derision would have been far less painful.

Ezekiel 23:33 You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of your sister Samaria- The physical desolation of the land during the exile was a reflection of this, and was one of the curses for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:33). And yet there is archaeological evidence that agriculture didn't cease in the land during the exile, the poor of the land, the vast majority of the population, were left there; and they even brought grain offerings to the temple site (Jer. 41:5). So God ameliorated this absolutely deserved judgment, in His pity and grace. And this God is our God. The "astonishment" reflects how they had wilfully believed the words of the false prophets. They really thought they were better than Samaria. And it was this deep seated spiritual arrogance which was their worst problem, and which enabled their conscience to become so blunted.

Ezekiel 23:34 You shall even drink it and drain it out, and you shall gnaw the broken pieces of it, and shall tear off your breasts; for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh- This is the picture of absolute self hatred. Plucking off their own breasts is another way of describing the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected in their self hatred. The Bible has a lot to say about condemnation. Yet God doesn't wish to condemn and takes no pleasure in it. This vast array of Biblical information is therefore given, I suggest, in order to help us appreciate what a great salvation we

have received by grace in Christ; this is what we deserve, and yet we have been saved from it. Without that backdrop, the concepts of salvation, grace, redemption, rescue etc. all seem less wonderful.

Ezekiel 23:35 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have forgotten Me, and cast Me behind your back, therefore you also shall bear your lewdness and your prostitution- They had committed awful "lewdness" but there is here the implication that they didn't have to 'bear' it, to take the judgment for that sin. But they cast Yahweh behind their back, and so they had to bear the consequences. They refused Ezekiel's urgent calls for repentance. They worshipped their idols with their backs to Yahweh's sanctuary (Ez. 8:16). They did not literally 'forget' Yahweh. But effectively they did, for He was not continually in their self awareness and conscience. And this again is a timeless warning to all who claim to be His people. To cast Yahweh behind the back meant worshipping other gods (1 Kings 14:9). And yet they claimed to be Yahweh worshippers. So the point is that if we do not put God first and solely in our lives, then we have cast Him behind our back. We cannot have Him as merely part of our devotions and religious life. Nehemiah had heard these words of Ezekiel, and interpreted them as meaning that they had cast God's law behind their backs (Neh. 9:26 cp. Ps. 50:17). God is His word; "the word was God". Our attitudes to His word are our attitudes to Him.

Ezekiel 23:36 Yahweh said moreover to me: Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations- This could imply (as elsewhere) that Ezekiel struggled to really understand that his people, especially the priesthood he had come from, were really that bad. By declaring to the people what he had been privately shown in this chapter, he would thereby judge them. This is a parade example of knowledge of God's word bringing responsibility to judgment. If the word was declared to them and they refused to respond, then they had thereby their judgment.

Ezekiel 23:37 For they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands; and with their idols have they committed adultery- This may appear a mere repetition of the obvious. But perhaps the stress is upon "they *have*...", because as noted on :26, Ezekiel was reluctant to accept they had in fact sinned this deeply.

And they have also caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to their idols to be devoured- Whilst all our children are born to God, the reference would be particularly to the firstborn, who were to be devoted to God in memory of the Passover deliverance. And instead, they offered their firstborn to idols. That their children should be carried away into captivity in these lands to serve their gods was therefore an appropriate judgment, seeing the Jews had offered their firstborn to those idols.

Ezekiel 23:38 Moreover this they have done to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned My Sabbaths- God feels sin very deeply and personally; what they did was "done to Me". We marvel at His sensitivity, that so far from us and above us, yet He is so close and so deeply affected by our actions. We can likewise touch His heart so relatively easily by our devotion to Him. It seems Judah purposefully committed their worst sacrilege in the temple on the sabbath, "in the same day". The child sacrifices of :39 were committed on the sabbath. They had

justified their perversions by claiming that they were in fact a form of Yahweh worship. That was the only way their consciences could be numbed to do as they did. This is the scenario of Jer. 7:7-10; they offered their children in nearby Gehenna and then came into the temple, reasoning that they were "delivered", saved from Egypt and from threatened judgment, in order to be able to sin without conscience. This was the Old Testament form of continuing in sin because grace abounded (Rom. 6:1).

Ezekiel 23:39 For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into My sanctuary to profane it; and behold, thus have they done in the midst of My house- See on :38. Excavations of the Elephantine community reveal that the Jews mixed Yahweh and Baal worship to such an extent that they believed that Yahweh , like Baal, had a consort called Anat. Inscriptions from Quntillet Ajrud show the names Yahweh and Baal mixed together, including one which appears to speak of "Yahweh and his asherah". Ez. 16:21 and Ez. 23:39 are quite specific about this anyway- Israel offered sacrifice to idols in Yahweh's own temple.

Ezekiel 23:40 Furthermore you have sent for men who come from far, to whom a messenger was sent, and behold, they came; for whom you did wash yourself, paint your eyes, and decorate yourself with ornaments- As explained on :16, this was in response to their beholding the images of these men carved on the friezes of the temple instead of the cherubim, symbols of God's protection. The painting of eyes recalls Jezebel, notorious queen of apostate Samaria. Judah were no better; that is the recurring message. For it was that sense of spiritual superiority which led them into so much of their grosser sin.

Ezekiel 23:41 And sat on a stately bed, with a table prepared before it, whereupon you set My incense and My oil- The fornication committed involved elements of Yahweh worship. As noted on :38,39, this was the way in which they allowed their consciences to be so numbed. They justified their immorality as Yahweh worship. The table was the altar, with the incense and oil of Yahweh worship upon it; and they had sex with the representatives of the Gentile nations right in front of that altar. This was typical paganic worship- to sleep with the cult prostitutes before the altar. And they did this right within Yahweh's sanctuary. We too have an altar, a table at which we eat as Christian believers (Heb. 13:10). And before that we surely cannot commit such adultery.

Ezekiel 23:42 The voice of a multitude being at ease was with her: and with men of the common sort were brought drunkards from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on both their hands, and beautiful crowns on their heads- LXX "And they raised a sound of music, and that with men coming from the wilderness out of a multitude of men, and they put bracelets on their hands, and a crown of glory on their heads". I suggested on :41 that they committed religious and literal fornication before Yahweh's altar, as part of a ritual which they justified to themselves as Yahweh worship. I say "to themselves" because the later anger of their lovers was when the lovers realized that Jerusalem was not wholly devoted to them; her whoredom was revealed and uncovered to all when it was realized that she worshipped many gods, including Yahweh. The music therefore refers to the temple songs, and the crown for beauty to the high priestly crown. Hence in captivity they were mockingly asked to continue singing Yahweh's temple songs (Ps. 137:3).

Ezekiel 23:43 Then I said of her who was an adulteress of old, Now will they play the prostitute with her, and she with them- The final section of the prophecy is a reflection upon the fact that right to the end, the two women had continued their immorality. The idea here may be 'Who would really want to use such an old worn out prostitute?'. But as she was in her youth, so she continued to old age. She had no attraction, reflecting the lack of benefit in forming any alliances with the failed state of Judah, but still she desperately tried to sell herself. There was no repentance right to the end.

Ezekiel 23:44 They went in to her, as they go in to a prostitute: so went they in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the lewd women- Now both sisters are again mentioned; neither repented (see on :43), they were merely used, there was no love, no permanence. That alone was available in Yahweh their God and husband.

Ezekiel 23:45 Righteous men, they shall judge them with the judgment of adulteresses, and with the judgment of women who shed blood; because they are adulteresses, and blood is in their hands- The judges were "righteous" in that they executed just judgment upon her; she was a "lawful captive" (Is. 49:24). The judgment of an adulteress and of a woman who sheds blood is apparently different. The latter may refer to a woman who slays her own children. The two charges were connected in that Jerusalem slew her children as part of her spiritual adultery with other gods.

Ezekiel 23:46 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will bring up a company against them, and will give them to be tossed back and forth and robbed- This "company" equate with the crowd of witnesses who stoned an adulteress to death. And yet the figure implies she was both killed, and yet survived to be tossed back and forth and robbed- a description of Judah in exile. Does she survive this death, or not? This paradox is finally resolved in Ez. 37, when the dead bones of Judah are resurrected. Despite the awful sin of Judah, by God's grace He was not finished with her and would resurrect her to an intended further relationship with Him. That after all that she rejected Him and murdered His beloved Son is a tragedy beyond words. "Tossed back and forth" is literally "be removed", the word used for the punishment for breaking the covenant (Dt. 28:25). "Robbed" is s.w. 'to take for a prey'. Having repeatedly said that sinful Jerusalem would be given for a prey (Jer. 15:13; 17:3; Ez. 7:21; 23:46) we read that the latter day invasion of Israel comes as a great company (as in Ez. 23:46) to "take a prey" (Ez. 38:12,13); but that invasion is not to be successful, unlike the previous historical invasions which took Jerusalem for a prey. The implication therefore is that Jerusalem finally repents, and so shall not be given for a prey in the very last invasion.

Ezekiel 23:47 The company shall stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords; they shall kill their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire- This sounds as if the prostitute was to be permanently killed as a prostitute would have been executed. But the marvel of the dry bones prophecy in Ez. 37 is that there would be revival and resurrection of this dead, shameful body; and God would enter again into relationship with her. Let’s remember that God’s own law was pretty clear about adultery. The adulterous woman was to be punished with death- for one act of adultery. Even if she repented. And in any case, it was a defiling abomination [according to the Mosaic Law] to remarry a divorced wife. But Hosea doesn’t keep

the law. He lets his wife commit multiple acts of adultery, and he still loves her and pleads with her- even though he was a man in love with God's law. And this reflects the turmoil of God in dealing with human sin, and His sinful people. Hosea outlines his plan in Hosea 2. He will hamper her movements so she can't find her lovers; if she does find them, he will take away her food and clothing, so she appreciates his generosity to her; and if she still doesn't return, he will expose her naked and shamed in front of her lovers. But there's no evidence Hosea ever did that. He just… loved her, was angry with her as an expression of that love, loved her yet more, yet more… And this perhaps too reflects God's mind- devising and declaring judgments for Israel, which are themselves far less than what He has earlier stated in His own law, and yet the power of His love means He somehow keeps bearing with His people. Even in the context of speaking of His marriage to Israel, God says that He will punish them "as women that break wedlock are judged" (Ez. 16:38; 23:45). And yet, He didn't. His love was too great, His passion for them too strong; and He even shamed Himself by doing what His own law forbad, the remarriage to a divorced and defiled wife. Perhaps all love involves a degree of paradox and self-contradiction; and a jealous, Almighty God in love was no different. This, to me, is why some Bible verses indicate God has forsaken Israel; and others imply He hasn't and never will. Somehow, even right now, the Jews you meet… are loved still by their God. And he still fantasizes, in a way, over their return to Him. Imagine His utter joy when even one of them does in fact turn to Him! That alone motivates me to preach to Israel today.

Ezekiel 23:48 Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness- Through such terrible judgments it was God's intention that a resurrected, revived Judah would not again commit such unfaithfulness, and "all women", the other nations, would likewise be taught God's ways. Both these things were potentially possible at the restoration. But they didn't happen. Judah again fell into unfaithfulness, and the Gentile world weren't preached to by a repentant Judah. And so these things have been rescheduled and reapplied to the last days.

Ezekiel 23:49 They shall recompense your lewdness on you, and you shall bear the sins of your idols; and you shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh- As noted on :48, Judah were intended to bear the punishment for their idolatry and immorality. Although the punishment was total and shameful death, yet for her to 'know Yahweh' she would be revived, resurrected from the pile of dead, disgraced bones, as Ez. 37 states. But this didn't happen at the restoration as was potentially possible. Judah shall only know Yahweh ultimately through the application of these things in the last days.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 24

Ezekiel 24:1 *Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me saying*- The very day on which the army of Nebuchadnezzar began the two year siege of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:1; 2Kings 25:1-12).

Ezekiel 24:2 *Son of man, write the name of the day, this selfsame day: the king of Babylon came close to Jerusalem this day*- The date was to be recorded because this

parable of how Jerusalem would become a boiling pot of destruction was given the day the two year siege started. The false prophets were claiming that the people would survive the siege, and like some today, claimed that Jerusalem was inviolate. But this was not to be, and Bible prophecy likewise indicates that all the Zionist Christian claims that Jerusalem cannot fall to her enemies will also be proven tragically false.

Ezekiel 24:3 *Utter a parable to the rebellious house*- We wonder why this prophecy is given to those already in captivity. They are described in Ez. 2 as rebellious. The implication is perhaps that for the sake of the repentance of that group already in captivity, the suffering of the rest of Judah in Jerusalem could have been avoided; they could have returned from exile, and the further waves of captivity and awful suffering of Jerusalem avoided. But they refused. In the last days, perhaps the repentance of Judah / Jewry in dispersion could avert the latter day suffering of Jerusalem. Hence we ought to be witnessing to them.

And tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Set on the cauldron, set it on, and also pour water into it- In Ez. 11:3 the Jews had mocked: "This is the cauldron, and we are the meat". This would have been a sneering at Jeremiah's prophecy that Jerusalem would be boiled in the fire of Babylonian judgment- Jer. 1:13 "I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north". Their idea was that the holy city was as a cauldron which would defend them from the fire of judgment. But this is deconstructed her by Ezekiel in the parable of Ez. 24. The cauldron would refuse to respond to the purging of the fire and they would all in fact be destroyed. Their concept of sacred space would not save them.

Setting on a large pot with selected good pieces in it suggests preparations for a feast. God's judgment is likened to a banquet to which the nations are invited. As with the cup of wine, to be at God's banquet is a double symbol- either of blessing or of condemnation. This is why being given the Lord's cup at His table, the breaking of bread, is cause for self-examination.

Ezekiel 24:4 *Gather its pieces into it, even every good piece, the thigh, and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones*- The valley of dry bones vision in Ez. 37 depicted Israel in captivity as bones waiting to come together and return to the land as a great army. Jer. 8:1 and other passages earlier in Ezekiel (Ez. 6:5; 24:4) had described both Judah and Israel as dry bones. The feeling of those bones was that "our bones are dried and our hope is lost" (Ez. 37:11). Judah in captivity felt that they had no "hope", that God had cast them off, and that they were unable to have a full relationship with Him outside the land. However, it seems that this was a rather convenient piece of theology for them- they were doing well in Babylon, and despite the opportunity to return to the land, they largely chose to remain in Babylon. The good pieces, thigh and shoulder [considered the softest and best part of the animal], may refer to the royal family and priesthood. The ordinary people fled from the Babylonians into Jerusalem, thinking they must be safe there; but this false belief was used by God to effectively gather those who believed it into the pot of judgment.

Ezekiel 24:5 *Take the choice of the flock, and also a pile of wood for the bones under the cauldron; make it boil well; yes, let its bones be boiled in its midst*- The choice of the flock would refer to the leadership of Judah. The bones are emphasized; because the cauldron was to boil dry, and those dry bones would be cast out but then by grace be revived in the Ez. 37 vision. The choice of the flock ought to have been offered to

God in sacrifice; but instead, by keeping the best for themselves and other gods, it would all the same be destroyed. We either give the best or lose it at judgment day.

Ezekiel 24:6 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the city of blood, to the cauldron whose rust is therein, and whose rust is not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece*- The earlier fire of Babylonian judgment had been intended to purge the cauldron, representing Jerusalem. But it didn't, and so the heat was increased.

No lot is fallen on it- There was to be total destruction. The invaders typically counted off a certain "lot" to be spared and taken into captivity. But this apparently was not to be. And yet not all were destroyed; indeed, some were taken by lot into captivity (Joel 3:3). This again is God's grace, relenting because of His grace and pity; or because of the intercession and repentance of a minority. See on :26.

Ezekiel 24:7 *For her blood is in the midst of her; she set it on the bare rock; she didn't pour it on the ground, to cover it with dust*- Blood was poured out on the earth and covered with dust to teach the total dedication of life to God. There was also the custom of covering blood shed in violence with earth, to as it were prevent it from crying to God for vengeance (Gen. 4:10; Jer. 16:18). But Jerusalem didn't even try to cover the blood of the children she had slain; she justified it as part of a ritual of Yahweh worship. And so it was uncovered blood, which cried to God for vengeance.

Ezekiel 24:8 *So that it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance, I have set her blood on the bare rock, that it should not be covered*- The blood, as noted on :7, was not covered, and so it as it were cried out for vengeance. "Her blood" may mean the blood shed by Jerusalem, which has earlier been defined as the blood of child sacrifices made to other gods. They did this because they kidded themselves that they were doing this as part of Yahweh worship; they were open about it, placing the blood on the bare rock of the altars, as was perhaps required by the sacrifice rituals. And God saw that and refused to Himself cover it; and the blood cried out to Him for vengeance, as did that of Abel slain by his brother.

Ezekiel 24:9 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the city of blood! I also will make the pile great*- God as it were augmented the pile of firewood by adding the bones out of the boiled dry cauldron to it (:5). The resurrection and revival of these dry, charred bones in Ez. 37 is therefore all the more miraculous, just as in Ez. 15 the charred vine twigs were to be revived and used by God. The language of the restoration is used of us in the New Testament; this is how amazing is His ability to use we who were rendered worse than useless by sin.

Ezekiel 24:10 *Heap on the wood, make the fire hot, boil well the flesh, make thick the broth*- The language of Is. 30:33, where we learn that the firewood is kindled by the breath or Spirit of God breathing upon them. But it was that same breath of God which was to revive the dry bones in Ez. 37.

And let the bones be burned- Again the bones are emphasized; the cauldron boiled dry and itself melted in the end, and the bones were taken out of it and used as firewood (:5,9). But still by absolute grace, in Ez. 37 it is these bones which are to be revived. This is the power of the Spirit and the prophetic word breathed into those bones.

Ezekiel 24:11 *Then set it empty on its coals*- It boiled dry, explaining how the dead bones of Israel in Ez. 37 were dry bones.

That it may be hot and its brass may be hot, so that its filthiness may be molten in it, that its rust may be consumed- The "coals" are the same word used about the coals used in the sanctification of the tabernacle after the gross apostasy of Aaron's two sons (Lev. 16:12). The coals were used to burn incense which formed a cloud which covered the most holy place and made atonement for the desecration of the tabernacle (Lev. 16:13,17). The situation is clearly that of Ez. 10, where Ezekiel takes the coals and then the cloud of God's glory fills first the most holy, then the holy and then the entire temple. The cleansing ritual is then symbolized as complete by a live goat having the sins of the house of Israel placed upon it, and sent by a willing [AV "fit"] man into the desert far away. This willing man represented Ezekiel, sent by the Lord into the desert and thence to Babylon along with the captives. The word is also used in Ez. 24:11 concerning how there would be "coals" of fire in Jerusalem, upon which the cauldron of Jerusalem would be burnt and judged. This action was a direct result of Ezekiel taking the coals of fire from the cherubim in Ez. 10:2 and scattering them upon the city. This was therefore a direct result of the action of the cherubim, God's massively powerful Angelic way of working, in cooperation with Ezekiel. The whole arrangement shows God's eagerness to work with people. The coals of fire therefore don't solely and simply speak of the burning of Jerusalem by fire at the hands of the Babylonians. That burning was part of the cleansing of the temple from its apostasy, and the exile into Babylon along with Ezekiel, the willing man of Lev. 16:21, was in fact the bearing away of Israel's sin. There is always a silver lining to God's judgments. They are not simply Him lashing out in the offended anger of an omnipotent deity. They were and are designed to propel forward His purpose of saving by grace whilst at the same time judging sin and sinners. And yet tragically, the Babylonian holocaust did not purge the cauldron of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 24:12 *She has wearied herself with lies*- Jerusalem wearied herself with lies in that the "lies" were her dishonest covenants with the various surrounding nations, as well as with Yahweh. She even became 'weary' of this way of life; but still she would not be purged. The Hebrew word carries the idea of loathing; they in a sense hated their sin (s.w. Jer. 9:5), climaxing in Jerusalem loathing herself and wanting to pluck off her own breasts (Ez. 23:34). The world is full of people weary with sin, who loathe their own addictions and sin, yet they will not surrender themselves to God's demands and be purged.

Yet her great rust doesn't go forth out of her; her rust doesn't go forth by fire- As noted on :3, it could be that the repentance of a minority could have averted the boiling of the city. But the fire experienced so far at the hands of Babylon didn't make the rust go forth.

Ezekiel 24:13 *In your filthiness is lewdness: because I have cleansed you and you weren't cleansed, you shall not be cleansed from your filthiness any more*- As noted on :3,12, there was the opportunity to be cleansed by the initial wave of Babylonian attacks and the captivity of a minority. But this wasn't achieved. This will be true in the last days too; which is why the prophetic program is open ended, as so much depends upon when and whether a remnant repent.

Until I have caused My wrath toward you to rest- The cessation, accomplishment or resting of God's wrath is mentioned several times in Ezekiel, and nowhere else in

this way (Ez. 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 16:42; 20:8; 21:17; 22:20; 24:13). The idea is not that God was so angry that He had to express that anger and only calmed down once He had as it were lashed out. He does have real wrath; the huge love He has cannot exist in a dimensionless vacuum, it of itself implies He also has wrath. Ez. 5:13 continues: "I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, *and I shall be comforted*", and the Hebrew there for "comforted" is literally 'to sigh', to be sorry, even to repent / change. Having expressed His legitimate anger, God knew that He would then be sorry and would then embark upon a process of restoration- by grace. For the objects of His wrath didn't deserve any restoration. "To rest" is the word translated "to place" in Ez. 37:14: "I shall place you in your own land" at the restoration from captivity. His wrath had to be expressed, and yet it was part of His wider purpose toward restoring His people and Kingdom. We would be quite wrong, therefore, to read these words as meaning that God was furiously angry and needed to lash out and get it all expressed so that He could as it were calm down again. His judgments are always ultimately constructive, and therefore "the wrath of God is the love of God". His wrath is therefore described in Ez. 5:15 as the rebuke of His fury / wrath; it was intended to rebuke, to achieve instruction, that they should 'know Yahweh'. The tragedy was that the captives for the most part refused to perceive it this way and respond.

Ezekiel 24:14 *I, Yahweh, have spoken it: it shall happen, and I will do it: I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I relent*- This could simply mean that the threatened judgment upon the people in Jerusalem would indeed happen; Ezekiel is repeating Jeremiah's message to the Jews in Judah itself (Jer. 4:28 s.w.). But this could also be an example of where God speaks in legitimate anger, but in grace does retract; for He did spare and relent, at least on a national level. And the scale of destruction in Jerusalem was not as total and absolute as implied at times. This could have been from pity; or as the result of the intercession and repentance of a minority. For God does "go back" if there is repentance (s.w. Jer. 18:8,10; 26:3; Joel 2:13,14).

According to your ways and according to your doings shall they judge you, says the Lord Yahweh- The judgment was therefore not so much by God as by "your doings". Sin is its own condemnation and judgment.

Ezekiel 24:15 *Also the word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- As noted on :3,12,13, there had been repeated attempts to spiritually cleanse Judah but they had not responded. And so now Jerusalem was to fall and the temple be destroyed, represented by the death of Ezekiel's beloved wife.

Ezekiel 24:16 *Son of man, behold, I will take away from you the desire of your eyes*- Ezekiel loved his wife and was clearly faithful to her, unlike Jerusalem. God recognizes how much he loved her. He is aware of how much we feel towards those we love and whom we lose. We recall God's understanding of Abraham's love for Isaac in Gen. 22:1 "Your only son, whom you love". Ezekiel's very deep and personal loss was to represent how God felt over the loss of Jerusalem; for He was represented by Ezekiel.

With a stroke: yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, neither shall your tears run down- "With a stroke" (s.w. "plague") is LXX "by violence"; :18 can be translated as saying that she not only "died" but 'was killed'. If Ezekiel's wife was indeed slain by

violence, then this would point forward exactly to the destruction of Jerusalem. If she were slain by local Babylonians, then the correspondence would be exact. If she were slain by the Jews who were hostile to Ezekiel's ministry, then this would also point forward to how Jerusalem was to be destroyed due to the violence of the Jews towards each other.

Ezekiel is told ahead of time that his wife is going to be slain "by violence" (LXX). He believed this, and the exiles were likewise being asked to believe that indeed, Jerusalem will fall and be slain. They were to prepare for this as Ezekiel was psychologically preparing for the loss of his wife.

Ezekiel 24:17 *Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead; bind your headdress on you, and put your shoes on your feet, don't cover your lips nor eat men's bread*- The priests were allowed to mourn for their deceased ones; but the high priest was not, and was forbidden from removing his mitre. This command to Ezekiel could imply that with the destruction of the high priesthood in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was effectively the high priest, the spiritual leader of Judah. Or it could be that the idea simply is that Ezekiel is not to mourn at all, even though as a priest he would normally have been permitted to mourn for his wife. Mourners usually went barefoot, but he was to keep his shoes on his feet. Nor was he to eat the bread brought by men to mourners.

Ezekiel 24:18 *So I spoke to the people in the morning; and at evening my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded*- Ezekiel's personal loss was so intimately connected with the loss of the temple. He was totally involved in the message he preached, as we should be. "Died" here can also be translated "killed" (as it is in Ex. 1:16; 4:24; 16:3 and often); see on :16. The intention of this severe acted parable may have been to recognize Ezekiel's emotions [for his love for her is recognized] but to ask him to grieve by hiding his emotions. He was not to show others the extent of his grief- he was to hide his emotions. This was because he was God's representative; the loss of the temple was going to be deeply tragic to God, and yet He would not reveal His grief about it. The intention of the sign was so that the people would "know" Yahweh (:24); they would come to realize that indeed He had internally suffered greatly as Ezekiel had in the loss of his wife (cp. God's loss of the temple). The extreme restraint and apparent silence of His suffering was such that Jeremiah lamented that the destroyed temple was a sign of God's wrath (Lam. 2:7), rather than learning the lesson taught by Ezekiel- that the loss of the temple had been so painful for God.

Ezekiel 24:19 *The people said to me, Won't you tell us what these things are to us, that you do so?*- This was the intention of the acted parable; to elicit the question, "What are you doing? / What do you mean?", as in Ez. 12:9; even though in their consciences the answer was surely clear. The question was elicited; but this was followed by the direct revelation of God's word. And so it is in our witness; our lives elicit questions and pique interest from those around us, as a springboard toward the declaration of God's word to them. It was clear enough to them that Ezekiel was intentionally hiding his emotions and not sharing them with others; as noted on :18, this was to demonstrate the degree to which God intensely suffered in the destruction of thet temple, and His lack of emotional outburst should not be read as meaning that He didn't feel for them. It could be argued that God isn't necessarily recorded as slaying Ezekiel's wife; perhaps she was terminally ill and now has a final stroke from

the Lord leading to her death. But he is being told not to mourn for her, and his restraint of his feelings seems to be the point of the acted parable rather than the death of his wife.

Ezekiel 24:20 *Then I said to them, The word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- See on :19.

Ezekiel 24:21 *Speak to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pities*- This is how a man should feel about his wife if he truly loves her; he is proud of her, desires her, she is his holy place, and the one he pities / sympathizes with (Heb.). This was how Ezekiel felt to his wife, and how the people felt for the Jerusalem temple. But in reality they had profaned that which they loved and were proud of. They only loved the externalities of their religion. And we have here powerful reason for self examination; for we can love our church religion in all its external forms, being proud of it to others- and yet profane Yahweh's sanctuary in real spiritual terms.

And your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind shall fall by the sword- The prophecy was initially given by Ezekiel in captivity; the older, more senior members of the royal family and priesthood were already in captivity. And they were learning that now their children left behind in Judah were to die. It is psychologically credible that their angry reaction to this prophecy was to arrange the murder of Ezekiel's wife.

Ezekiel 24:22 *You shall do as I have done: you shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men*- The Babylonian discovery that the Jewish leadership had lied to them and made covenants with other nations, placing their gods in their temple along with those of Babylon, would lead the Babylonians to turn against the royal family and exiles already in Babylon. Perhaps the idea is that they would not have a chance to eat bread brought to them by sympathizers- for there would be no sympathizers, and they themselves would be persecuted and slain. But the reason for not mourning is given in :23.

Ezekiel 24:23 *Your ornaments shall be on your heads, and your shoes on your feet: you shall not mourn nor weep; but you shall pine away in your iniquities, and groan one toward anothe*r- They were not to remove their ornaments and go barefoot, as was done when mourning. The reason was that they would lament beyond tears and all external mourning; they would mourn internally for their sins (s.w. Ez. 33:10). We wonder why Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, which appears to be a record of his external mourning. Whilst the book was inspired by God, at times Jeremiah there appears to be lamenting in a way inappropriate. He 'wept' (Lam. 1:16), whereas in Ez. 24:23 Judah were told not to externally weep. He did not take on board the idea that there was to be no mourning or weeping externally, but rather deep internal recognition of their sins. It seems the Jews were not obedient to Ezekiel's command not to externally weep but to internally mourn their own sinfulness; the same word for "weep" is used of how they did weep by the rivers of Babylon (Ps. 137:1).

Ezekiel 24:24 *Thus Ezekiel shall be a sign to you; according to all that he has done, you will do. When this comes, then you will know that I am the Lord Yahweh*- In Ez.

24:22-24, Ezekiel's feelings of grief for the loss of his wife were to be understood as representative of two things- Israel's grief for losing the temple, and God's grief over losing His people. In this way, Ezekiel was set up as a bridge builder, in that his feelings reflected both those of God and those of his audience- in order that his preaching could come over as God appealing to them. And consciously and unconsciously, this is how God uses us too, today. By opening our hearts to others, they open theirs to us and to the Lord. This was precisely how Paul dealt with Corinth. He opened his mouth and his heart to them, and in return he asks them: "Open you hearts to us" (2 Cor. 6:11; 7:2 RV). Paul received them into his heart (2 Cor. 7:3), and wished to be received into theirs.

Ezekiel 24:25 *You, son of man, shall it not be in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their heart, their sons and their daughters*- "In the day" may not refer to the same literal day; for it would have taken longer than a day to travel from Jerusalem to Ezekiel in Babylon. "At that time" seems to be the idea. The Jerusalem temple had been their strength, joy, glory, desire and psychological obsession (:21)- to the point that it is now paralleled with how they felt about their own children. And yet despite this very deep love for the religion of Yahweh, their behaviour toward Him was despicable, and they had cast Him behind their backs. This is the problem with being religious; form so easily swamps content. Some people are wired to be attracted to religion, to the outward, external forms of religion such as meetings, places of worship, tradition and history of the religion etc. These types have to be so careful to ensure that form is not swamping content; for the form is meaningless, indeed it is a distraction; it becomes "their strength... joy... glory... desire... that whereupon they set their heart", when it is God and His Son who should be all these things for us, and not mere religion. He is our strength and joy (2 Sam. 22:33; Neh. 8:10; Jer. 16:19), our glory (as the cherubim vision of Ez. 1 had shown}, our desire.

Ezekiel 24:26 *That in that day he who escapes shall come to you, to cause you to hear it with your ears?*- We noted on :6 that God had originally threatened total destruction of all within Jerusalem, but in actuality He repented of this. But in Ez. 24:26 Ezekiel is told that in fact one would escape and come to him with the news which by prophecy he already knew. This happened (Ez. 33:21). The mention of one who escapes is therefore a tacit reflection of God's grace in not doing all He threatened in Ez. 24:6.

It could be that Ezekiel was struck dumb (:27) and deaf by the death of his wife, just as he had endured a similar period earlier in Ez. 3:24-26; 4:4-8, but when the news of Jerusalem's fall came, he recovered hearing and speech. In that period of prophetic silence and deep mourning we see reflected God's mourning and silence to His people throughout the two year siege. It has been suggested that the period of dumbness recorded in Ez. 3:24-26; 4:4-8 actually refers to this same period. But it could just as well be that Ezekiel, like us, experienced one such situation as a preparation for the repeat of that situation later in life.

Ezekiel 24:27 *In that day your mouth will be opened to him who has escaped, and you shall speak, and be no more mute. So you will be a sign to them; and they shall know that I am Yahweh*- At the Lord's return, God will use a repentant Israel to achieve great things in terms of converting this world unto Himself. They will walk up and down in His Name, witnessing to Him as He had originally intended them to (Zech.

10:12); men will cling to their skirts in order to find the knowledge of their God (Zech. 8:23). "In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee (Israel) the opening of the mouth in the midst of them (the surrounding nations, see context); and *they* shall know that I am the LORD", in that Israel will preach to them from their own experience of having recently come to know Yahweh (Ez. 29:21). But at the time of the Lord's return, when Israel repent and enter the new covenant with Him, they will remember all their past sins "and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more because of your shame... for all that you have done" (Ez. 16:63). They will be so ashamed that they *will feel as if* they can never open their mouth. But Yahweh will open their mouth, and they will witness. In some anticipation of this, Ezekiel as the "son of man" prophet, a representative of his people just as the Lord was to be, had his mouth shut in dumbness, and he only had his mouth opened when Israel came to know [to some degree] that "I am the LORD" (Ez. 24:27). In all these evident connections something marvellous presents itself. Those who feel as if they just cannot open their mouths in witness are the very ones whom the Father will use; He will open their mouths and use them exactly because they are ashamed of their sins! And so it should be with us.

Ezekiel's prophetic mouth was to be opened at the time when the siege finished and it would be opened to the remnant who had escaped. Through the ministry of His prophetic word, God would again speak to the remnant whom He hoped would repent and return to reestablish His Kingdom in Israel.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 25

Ezekiel 25:1 The word of Yahweh came to me, saying- We now have a distinct section, from Ez. 25-32, containing seven judgments upon the nations around Judah. The seven nations are surely a symbolic number. All the nations around her were to be judged for their participation in her judgment. The last of these prophecies was some 15 years later, so they were widely spaced. This sets the pattern for the book of Revelation, which described the seven judgments upon latter day Israel, followed by the various judgments upon those who have judged her.

Ezekiel 25:2 Son of man, set your face toward the people of Ammon, and prophesy against them- Whilst Ezekiel looked toward them from Babylon, his prophecies were to be told to them (:3). Perhaps a scribe was taking down his words and would take the scroll to the Ammonites.

Ezekiel 25:3 And tell the people of Ammon, Hear the word of the Lord Yahweh- All the practical effort involved in getting these prophecies to Ammon, not least the risk for the messenger, was surely only required because Ammon were intended to repent upon receiving these words of judgment.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Because you said, Aha, against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate; and against the house of Judah when they went into captivity- Ammonites joined with the Babylonians in attacking God's people (2 Kings 24:2). Ez. 25:3,6,8,15 reveal how sensitive God is to what is said and felt about the people whom He loves. Because Ammon mockingly said "*Aha!*" when Israel went into captivity, because Moab sneered that Judah were like any other nation now, because the Philistines had "despite of soul" (RV) against Israel… therefore God so condemned them even

though Israel were so spiteful to Him at that very time. Even though they betrayed Him, His sensitivity for them, His feeling, His emotion, His passion, His pleading with them…surely inspires us to plead likewise with them, for His sake. For the sake of His feelings, His passion…

Ezekiel 25:4 Therefore behold, I will deliver you to the people of the east for a possession, and they shall set their encampments in you, and make their dwellings in you; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk- The nomadic "people of the east" regularly attacked the more settled lands west of them such as Ammon. But they usually grabbed what they could and then returned to their nomad encampments. But now they were to actually move into Ammon and make permanent dwellings there. It has been suggested that Rabbah was left undefended whilst the Ammonites joined in the attack upon Jerusalem with the Babylonians; and so their judgment was immediate and appropriate.

Ezekiel 25:5 I will make Rabbah a stable for camels, and the people of Ammon a resting place for flocks: and you shall know that I am Yahweh- As noted on :4, the Bedouin nomads usually attacked and retreated with their spoil. But now they were to come and settle down in Ammon, no longer always driving their flocks to new pasture, but using Rabbah as a resting place and stable. The intention was that Ammon too would come to 'know Yahweh' through this judgment, just as Judah were intended to.

Ezekiel 25:6 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have clapped your hands, stamped with the feet and rejoiced with all the despite of your soul against the land of Israel- Ammon was like Judah, sometimes in covenant with Assyria and Babylon and sometimes not. But they eagerly joined in with their invasions of Israel to vent their anger upon God's people. It had been for Ezekiel to stamp with his feet to symbolize God's judgment of His people (Ez. 6:11). Ammon is here condemned for playing God in condemning others, when it is His prerogative alone to do that.

Ezekiel 25:7 Therefore behold, I have stretched out My hand upon you and will deliver you for a spoil to the nations; and I will cut you off from the peoples, and I will cause you to perish out of the countries. I will destroy you; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- In the same way as God at times threatened total destruction upon Judah but didn't literally carry it out because of His pity or because some repented, so it seems it was with Ammon. For some form of Ammonites continued. And again we have the hope of a national revival, in that they were to be "cut off" as Judah was, and yet come to know Yahweh in repentance.

Ezekiel 25:8 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because Moab and Seir say, Behold, the house of Judah is like all the nations- Moab had mocked Judah when they were destroyed (Zeph. 2:8; Jer. 48:27). The Moabite Stone, found in the ruins of Dibon records how Mesha, King of Moab, exults about his conquest of Judah along with other nations, treating them as just another nation he had defeated. This treatment of God's people as if they were nothing special was particularly offensive to God. We are to learn that His people are special, and even in disagreement, we are to respect them as His people and not treat them as if they are just worldlings.

Ezekiel 25:9 Therefore, behold, I will open the side of Moab from the cities, from his

cities which are on his frontiers, the glory of the country, Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, and Kiriathaim- The "side" is Heb. "shoulder", referring to the high cliff face which formed Moab's defensive frontier. All that seems humanly invincible and the guarantee of our safety and endurance can be opened by God in an instant. We note that the names of the cities all have connections to idols, and that they were the defences of Moab's northern frontier- which was to be overcome by the Babylonians. These cities were actually part of the original Israelite inheritance (Jud. 11:23).

Ezekiel 25:10 To the people of the east, to go against the children of Ammon; and I will give them for a possession, that the people of Ammon may not be remembered among the nations- As with the judgments upon Judah, it seems these were not carried out fully at this time. The Ammonites were still an important people in the time of the Maccabees (1 Macc. 5:6,30-45) and are mentioned by Justin Martyr. As noted on :11, the final fulfilment will be in the last days.

Ezekiel 25:11 I will execute judgments on Moab; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- The seven nations listed in Ezekiel for judgment are also spoken of in Jeremiah: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Zidon and Egypt. The original intention was that they would be judged, and along with a judged but repentant Israel enter into covenant with Yahweh in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. But this potential didn't work out. So the prophecies must come true in the last days. But it seems unwise to try to look for geographical entities which match e.g. "Moab". The seven nations are surely meant to represent all the nations surrounding Israel, the peoples of the *eretz* promised to Abraham who are the focus of Bible prophecy. There are likewise seven nations mentioned in Amos 1 and 2.

Ezekiel 25:12 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because Edom has dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance and has greatly offended and revenged himself on them- Edom had taken a special pleasure in desecrating the temple and ensuring it was razed to the foundation stones (Ps. 137:7). The theme of Edom / Esau wanting revenge is significant; it was the old hatred of Esau for Jacob (Ez. 35:5). The vengeance was for the incident of Jacob tricking Esau out of his birthright. But these prophecies against Edom demonstrate that the promises of Isaac associated with that birthright were in fact meaningless, and not worth any striving about. The judgment upon Esau / Edom, therefore, was effectively for their lack of forgiveness. And that is the abiding lesson for all ages. For out of the seven surrounding nations judged by Ezekiel, the others all finally will come to "know Yahweh", but Esau / Edom never will. This is not said of them. For hatred and unforgiveness of our brother is presented as the mortal sin.

Ezekiel 25:13 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, I will stretch out My hand on Edom, and will cut off man and animal from it; and I will make it desolate: from Teman even to Dedan shall they fall by the sword- As with the curses upon Judah, this utter destruction of every man and animal didn't quite happen. God relented, or perhaps a minority repented. These words about Edom / Esau differ markedly from the 'blessing' of Isaac upon Esau, that he would live by his sword and throw off the yoke of Jacob and also find blessing. I suggest therefore that the blessings of Isaac were of his own will and paternal imagination, rather than from God. And so all the angst between Jacob and Esau about obtaining those blessings was utterly misplaced and human.

Ezekiel 25:14 I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel; and they shall do in Edom according to My anger and according to My wrath- Israel never really fully did this, although John Hyrcanus did invade Edom and force its people to receive circumcision; but he did not make the area empty of man and animal (:13). And so as noted on :11, it will come true in the last days.

And they shall know My vengeance, says the Lord Yahweh- Unlike the other curses upon the nations, there is no comment that Edom would know Yahweh, i.e. enter into relationship with Him after the experience of judgment. God was going to take vengeance upon Esau / Edom, and the language of the curse upon Edom is far more intense than that upon the other nations. Esau was Jacob's brother, and therefore so much more was expected of him. Attitude and hatred toward our brother is therefore of paramount importance, and will lead to eternal condemnation as it did and shall do for Edom / Esau. The equivalent of "Edom" will have this fate in the last days (see on :11).

Ezekiel 25:15 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with despite of soul to destroy for the old enmity- The Philistines were given Israelite territory by the Babylonians, both during the Assyrian invasion of Israel and the Babylonian conquest of Judah. But the Philistines weren't satisfied with that, and are judged here for wanting personal vengeance. They sold Israelite villages into slavery (Am. 1:6-8), beyond what the Assyrians and Babylonians had intended. It's as if God cut the Philistines a certain amount of slack, but when they went beyond that in "despite of soul", they became the more culpable to judgment. The "enmity" is the same word as in Gen. 3:15, and the 'ancient' enmity strengthens the allusion. They were the seed of the serpent at enmity with Israel, the seed of the woman; which considering Judah's deep sin at this time, reveals how God by grace still saw them as His special people of purpose.

Ezekiel 25:16 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I will stretch out My hand on the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites, and destroy the rest of the sea coast- I suggested on :11 that these prophecies never came fully true as intended because Judah and these surrounding seven nations didn't repent after the Babylonian invasion. But they will come true in the last days. It is significant that the "sea coast", the Gaza strip, is a hotbed of hatred against God's people today; and judgment is threatened upon it. "Cherethites", those from Cyprus, is a word play upon the Hebrew word translated "I will cut off". These kinds of word play are common in the Bible because the text was initially used with illiterate people who would have appreciated such aids to memorization.

Ezekiel 25:17 I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes; and they shall know that I am Yahweh, when I shall lay My vengeance on them- Zech. 9:7 implies that a remnant of the Philistines would repent and turn to Yahweh. But again, this wasn't seen in the immediate context, and so it must refer to the last days- even though in that day their territory will be given to Israel (Obadiah 19; Is. 11:14). But then, material possession of land will be unimportant; all that will matter is knowing Yahweh, being in relationship with Him, which is the ultimate purpose of His "vengeance" or judgments.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 26

Ezekiel 26:1 *It happened in the eleventh year in the first day of the month that the word of Yahweh came to me saying*- The LXX adds "the first month". Jerusalem fell in the eleventh year on the ninth day of the fourth month. This message was presumably taken to Tyre, as a warning for them not to rejoice at her fall. However some manuscripts read "the twelfth year". This would clear up the problem and explain more easily why Tyre is now being warned not to rejoice over Jerusalem's fall. The messenger who came to Babylon with the news of Tyre's fall in the tenth month of the eleventh year (Ez. 33:21) could have gone to Tyre too, or at least, another such messenger may have done.

Ezekiel 26:2 *Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken!*- The judgments upon Tyre and Egypt are far longer than those upon the other five of the seven surrounding nations condemned by Ezekiel in this section. This is because of their relative size and importance, and their attraction to Judah as defenders against Babylon. The past tense is apparently used, but it seems (see on :1) that Jerusalem had not yet fallen. So the sense of the tense may be 'This is how you ought not to respond after you hear the news'.

The gate of the peoples is now is turned to me; I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste- Jerusalem in Ez. 16 and Ez. 23 has been described as a whore, inviting men from all nations to come to her. She loved everything foreign, rather than the things of her God, and had thus acquired a name as an international metropolis; and Tyre now eagerly looked forward to replacing her in Canaan as this city.

Ezekiel 26:3 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I am against you, Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up*- The "therefore" reflects how God is deeply sensitive to the thoughts and even unexpressed hopes and fantasies of people and nations; and judges them accordingly. The figure of the sea is appropriate to Tyre as an island citadel.

Ezekiel 26:4 *They shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers. I will also scrape her dust from her and make her a bare rock*- The apparently invincible technology of this world cannot resist Divine judgment; and that applies to all our insurance policies of whatever form. The reference to "a bare rock" here and in :14 uses the same term as that about Zion in the time of her condemnation (Ez. 24:7,8). The phrase is used nowhere else. The connection would be in the impression that Zion was to be judged in the same way as Tyre, with the same hallmark of Yahweh's activity. Neither was superior to the other, as they both considered. Again and again, the prophets reveal that it is human pride and the sense of inherent superiority which is to be brought down.

Ezekiel 26:5 *She shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh; and she shall become a spoil to the nations*- Tyre did revive at various times after the Babylonian invasion. So as noted on Ez. 25:11, we are to look for the final fulfilment in the last days. "The nations" who spoiled Tyre would refer to the various peoples confederate with the Babylonians and Greeks who effected Tyre's judgment. As noted on :4, the same kind of judgment was brought upon Tyre as upon Zion.

Ezekiel 26:6 *Her daughters who are in the field shall be slain with the sword; and they shall know that I am Yahweh*- "Daughters" can refer to confederate cities, and here the reference is to those towns and cities on the mainland who were connected with island Tyre. But did they really 'know Yahweh' through the Greek and Babylonian attacks upon Tyre? It seems that as noted on Ez. 25:11, this remains to be fulfilled in some latter day judgment of Tyre.

Ezekiel 26:7 *For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will bring on Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, from the north, with horses, with chariots, with horsemen and a company, and many people*- The language is that of the cherubim of Ez. 1; again we see how movements of peoples and armies on earth were under Divine control. Ez. 26:3-14 speaks of how Babylon will surround and destroy Tyre. But this never happened- it was done by Alexander and the Greeks much later. So, did the prophecy just go unfulfilled? Ez. 29:17-20 explains that because the King of Babylon laboured so hard to take Tyre- even though he never actually succeeded- God would give him the land of Egypt as a reward. For me, this doesn't mean that the word of prophecy failed. Rather does it mean that God is open to a rethinking of plans and futures in accord with human response. Although all the conditions for Tyre's fall and Babylon's victory against her aren't given, evidently there must have been such unrecorded conditions; and they weren't fulfilled, hence Tyre was spared destruction by the Babylonians, and yet they were 'rewarded' for their part in the situation.

The following comment from Ted and Bev Russell expands upon this: "The prophecy about Tyre (in Ez. 26) indicated that the place would be scraped of her dust and made like the top of a rock, a place for spreading of nets, plundered for the nations, cast out, devoured with fire, (Hosea, Amos and Zechariah also), and *never rebuilt*, (Ez. 26:21) (11th year). However, later in Chapter 29, (27th year), we learn that Nebuchadnezzar and his soldiers would be given the land of Egypt, because they laboured strenuously and long against Tyre, so long that the soldiers had rubbed heads and shoulders from their leather helmets and armour, (verse 18), but they did not overcome Tyre. So instead God would give Nebuchadnezzar the land of Egypt, for wages. "Spoil and pillage from Egypt will be the wages that My servant will take from Egypt, instead of the reward I promised you at Tyre" , (verse 17, 18, 19). Nebuchadnezzar was " God's servant" , and even though he did a great service for God, in punishment at Tyre, (verse 18), God changed the terms and conditions of his labour. He would not conquer Tyre, but he was given Egypt instead! Tyre was *not* laid bare, and *not* never rebuilt. It thrived and still thrives. It had its ups and downs, with different conquerors, of course. To the best of my memory the peninsula that they built into the sea to defend themselves is not there now, but the seaside town is. It lays nets out, as a fishing town, but it is not bare. We have photos of us there. We know it was there in NT times (Peter). Is it that God changes His mind? Did someone, (of whom there is no record), plead successfully for Tyre, like Lot did unsuccessfully for Sodom? Or is it that He tells us something, only a piece of the future at a time, and then we get a fuller picture later on? The prophesy goes on and on about Tyre's destruction, and one has to be quick to see the change of circumstance in a few verses in Ezekiel 29! The complete destruction of Tyre has been used to show that the Bible is true, by some undiscerning folk, in past lectures, in our time, (with lantern slide pictures of destruction there). Once world travel was easily available and people more readily saw Tyre, that mistake is not made now. The point, (that the Bible is true), is better made elsewhere.

We do not need to question God's prophesies. We can believe Him each time, and believe the changes He makes, as well. In this prophecy do we know a reason why God changed his mind about utter and complete destruction of Tyre? It does indicate that we don't know everything, that we don't need to, and that God does not tell us. He decides what is best. Certainly the Bible record keeps us on our toes! For then "They shall know that I am the Lord", Ez. 29:21".

To this I would add a comment from Is. 23:1,2,4,15,18. These verses seem to imply that if Tyre had howled in repentance and then been silent and ashamed, she would be 'forgotten' 70 years and then become devoted to Yahweh. This never happened. Yet the 70 year period is of course analogous to Judah's 70 years in captivity, also without repentance.

Ezekiel 26:8 *He shall kill your daughters in the field with the sword; and he shall make forts against you, and cast up a mound against you, and raise up the buckler against you*- As noted on :7, this was not done by Babylon but by Greece under Alexander. The prophecy was reapplied and rescheduled, just as many Bible prophecies are; the original human preconditions for the first or ideal fulfilment did not come about.

Ezekiel 26:9 *He shall set his battering engines against your walls, and with his axes he shall break down your towers*- See on :8. This is the language of Alexander's invasion, not Nebuchadnezzar's. Alexander breached the walls by using battering rams attached to his ships.

Ezekiel 26:10 *By reason of the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover you. Your walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wagons, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into your gates, as men enter into a city in which is made a breach*- The noise of chariots and AV "wheels" recalls that of the cherubim of the opening visions. The human armies and chariots depicted here were under the direct control of the Angel cherubim. See on Ez. 13:13. Alexander conquered Tyre by making a breach in the southern wall, through which his army entered from the causeway they had built. The description of this fall of Tyre would have seemed impossible of fulfilment. For nobody thought that a causeway could be built enabling such military hardware to rumble into Tyre itself.

Ezekiel 26:11 *With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all your streets; he shall kill your people with the sword; and the pillars of your strength shall go down to the ground*- See on :8. This is the language of Alexander's invasion, not Nebuchadnezzar's. But as with the judgments upon Judah, the scale of destruction was not quite as envisaged. Alexander killed 8,000 defenders of Tyre and sold the remaining 30,000 into slavery. This is not the scale of total destruction implied here, and so we must look to a latter day fulfilment.

Ezekiel 26:12 *They shall make a spoil of your riches, and make a prey of your merchandise; and they shall break down your walls, and destroy your pleasant houses; and they shall lay your stones and your timber and your dust in the midst of the waters*- This was clearly done by Alexander the Great and not Nebuchadnezzar; although the rubble of the old Tyre was used by Alexander to build the causeway to island Tyre. According to Babylonian records, Tyre surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and was not destroyed. So the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to him, and

yet some of the language still doesn't ring true to what even Alexander did. So the ultimate reapplication will be in the latter day judgment of "Tyre" at the Lord's return.

Ezekiel 26:13 *I will cause the noise of your songs to cease; the sound of your harps shall be no more heard*- Tyre sung songs so that her memory would be preserved (Is. 26:13). But all such attempts to achieve permanence beyond the grave are doomed; and we have there a lesson. The idea may be that the only sound would be the music of the sea washing over her bare rocks (:14). But again this is the language of Zion's judgment (Is. 24:8; Jer. 7:34). There was to be the same hallmark stamped upon it. Zion was no better than Tyre of the Gentiles.

Ezekiel 26:14 *I will make you a bare rock; you shall be a place for the spreading of nets. You shall be built no more: for I Yahweh have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh*- Tyre was rebuilt, to such an extent that it was besieged by the Crusaders in the 12th century. As noted on Ez. 25:11, this prophecy shall only come totally true in its latter day fulfilment.

Ezekiel 26:15 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh to Tyre: shall not the islands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when the slaughter is made in the midst of you?*- "Islands" can mean 'sea coasts' and would refer to the areas with whom Tyre traded, such as Philistia (Is. 20:6), south and east coasts of Arabia (Ez. 27:15) and Caphtor. The language of merchant partners mourning her fall is that regarding Babylon in Revelation. I have suggested on Ez. 25:11 that the intended scenario at Ezekiel's time didn't come about, because neither Judah nor the judged nations repented and turned to Yahweh. So the prophecies are to be rescheduled and reapplied; and perhaps the judgment of Tyre is to be reapplied in the last days to Babylon, just as the prophecies in this chapter about Nebuchadnezzar were reapplied to Alexander the Great. For judgment upon Babylon is not specifically mentioned in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 26:16 *Then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones and lay aside their robes and strip off their embroidered garments: they shall clothe themselves with trembling; they shall sit on the ground and shall tremble every moment, being astonished at you*- As noted on :15, this is more the language of the merchant partnes of Babylon in Revelation 17-19 mourning that the queen city of their trading system has come to a disgraceful end. But the fall of Tyre didn't mean, in Ezekiel's time, the loss of political power [coming down from thrones] for her trading partners; we are to look to the last days for the complete fulfilment.

Ezekiel 26:17 *They shall take up a lamentation over you and tell you, How you are destroyed, who was inhabited by mariners, the renowned city, who was strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants, who caused their terror to be on all who lived there!*- The peoples who traded with Tyre (see on :15) do not rejoice that an oppressor has fallen, but rather lament that their source of trade and profit has fallen. So "terror" here refers more to awe and respect rather than fear of an oppressor. "Lived there" is not the best translation; the word is used about marriage, and the idea is that her trading partners were as it were married to her in covenant.

Ezekiel 26:18 *Now shall the islands tremble in the day of your fall; yes, the islands that are in the sea shall be dismayed at your departure*- The "islands" refer to coastal

areas who were associated with Tyre by trade (see on :15). 'Trembling at the fall' of Tyre is the same phrase used about Egypt (Ez. 32:10). The similarity is in that the same hallmark of Yahweh's judgment is seen upon all who are judged by Him. They were not mere victims of random event; the Divine hand was in the fall of all in whom His wayward people had trusted.

Ezekiel 26:19 *For thus says the Lord Yahweh: When I shall make you a desolate city like the cities that are not inhabited; when I shall bring up the deep on you and the great waters shall cover you*- The covering of island Tyre with the waters, which had seemed so impossible, was to parallel the waters of invading armies taking her over. And yet this was not fulfilled under Nebuchadnezzar nor really under Alexander; the city was rebuilt and was not left uninhabited; even under Alexander the majority of the population were not slain. So the main fulfilment is in the last days.

Ezekiel 26:20 *Then will I bring you down with those who descend into the pit, to the people of old time, and will make you to dwell in the lower parts of the earth, in the places that are desolate of old, with those who go down to the pit*- In her death, Tyre would go down to the grave with other Gentiles (Ez. 32:19) and be at rest there. So there is no sense at all that "the pit" included conscious beings. For death is unconsciousness. Tyre would no longer be seen as superior to others, for death was to be the great leveller- a principle which likewise applies today.

That you be not inhabited- After the Babylonian invasion, Tyre was inhabited; indeed Is. 23:15 speaks of a 70 year period of Tyre's desolation. But the final fulfilment therefore must be future, because as noted on Ez. 25:11, the whole series of prophecies in this section of Ezekiel was part of the wider Divine intention that the Gentiles along with Judah would repent after the Babylonian destruction and come into covenant with Him, 'knowing Yahweh'. But this didn't happen as God hoped and potentially enabled; and so the prophecies have their final fulfilment in the last days.

And I will set glory in the land of the living- This is the language of the restored Kingdom of God in Israel, where Zion will become characterized by "life" (Ez. 47:19). God's glory would be set there; as noted above and on Ez. 25:11, the intention was that the Gentiles along with Judah would repent after the Babylonian destruction and come into covenant with Him, 'knowing Yahweh'. But this didn't happen as God hoped and potentially enabled; and so the prophecies have their final fulfilment in the last days.

Ezekiel 26:21 *I will make you a terror, and you shall no more be rebuilt; though you are sought for, yet you will never be found again, says the Lord Yahweh*- But Tyre was rebuilt after the Babylonian invasion. Indeed Is. 23:15 speaks of a 70 year period of Tyre's desolation. So the final fulfilment therefore must be future, as explained on Ez. 25:11.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 27

Ezekiel 27:1 The word of Yahweh came again to me saying- The previous chapter has recorded the prophesied destruction of Tyre. Perhaps the idea was that as with the proclamation of Nineveh's destruction after forty days, so Tyre was intended to receive this message and repent. Perhaps this further prophecy was given because the first one had not been responded to as hoped for.

Ezekiel 27:2 You, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre- A funeral dirge is recited after a demise; Tyre's destruction was so sure to happen that Ezekiel can therefore recite this before the event, but in the past tense. This is a clear example of the 'prophetic perfect' tense in Biblical Hebrew.

Ezekiel 27:3 And tell Tyre: You who dwell at the entry of the sea, who are the merchant of the peoples to many islands, thus says the Lord Yahweh: You, Tyre, have said, I am perfect in beauty- Or, "you are a ship perfect in beauty". This poem about Tyre likens her to a great ship in the sea. The same phrase "perfect in beauty" is used of Jerusalem (Lam. 2:15; Ez. 16:14). Clearly Tyre considered herself as the holy city of God, and in Ez. 28 there are many allusions to the tabernacle. It seems Tyre was envious of Jerusalem's claim to be Yahweh's holy city, and rejoiced at the demise of Jerusalem and its temple, thinking that she would then replace it.

Ezekiel 27:4 Your borders are in the heart of the seas; your builders have perfected your beauty- As noted on :3, it was Zion who was the perfection of beauty (Ps. 50:2). That beauty was taken away in the destruction of the temple (s.w. Lam. 1:6; 2:1), and so Tyre wrongly imagined that she would replace Zion.

Ezekiel 27:5 They have made all your planks of fir trees from Senir; they have taken a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you- This is appropriate if in fact Tyre is being likened to a great ship (see on :3). We noted on :3 and :4 that Tyre was presenting itself as a fake and replacement Zion; the cedars of Lebanon were so associated with the Jerusalem temple that the temple is even called "Lebanon" in Zech. 11:1. So Tyre having the cedar of Lebanon as its mainstay and most focal point would suggest she was seeing the pagan temple in her midst, like the mast on the ship "Tyre", as replacing Zion.

Ezekiel 27:6 Of the oaks of Bashan have they made your oars; they have made your benches of ivory inlaid in boxwood from the islands of Kittim- Is. 2:13 and Zech. 11:2 imply that oaks of Bashan were used in the Jerusalem temple, so again we have the impression that Zion was being 'imitated' by Tyre; see on Ez. 28:12. Whilst "benches" refers to the benches sat upon by the rowers of the ship "Tyre", this is the same Hebrew word more commonly used for the "boards" of the tabernacle (Ez. 26:15-29 etc.). All the time we see allusions to the tabernacle and temple of Zion; which Tyre was imitating, suggesting she was greater than Zion, and her gods than Yahweh.

Ezekiel 27:7 Of fine linen with embroidered work from Egypt was your sail, that it might be to you for a banner; blue and purple from the islands of Elishah was your awning- Tyre is being likened to a glorious ship (see on :3). But again the descriptions recall that of the tabernacle, decked with embroidered work [which in the tabernacle was also made of material "from Egypt"], blue and purple (Ex. 25:4; 26:1,31). The ballad of the ship "Tyre" presents her as a floating, but fake, tabernacle.

Ezekiel 27:8 The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers. Your wise men, Tyre, were in you; they were your pilots- The reference is to Tyre as a great ship (:3), captained by their own "wise men", with the local peoples as their "rowers". Tyre was famed for her wisdom, and her destruction reflects God's desire to judge and bring

down all human pride. See on :28 for the connection of "rowers" with the ship of Tarshish used by Jonah.

Ezekiel 27:9 The old men of Gebal and the wise men of it were in you, your repairers of ship seams. All the ships of the sea with their mariners were in you to deal in your merchandise- As noted on :8, all human wisdom comes to nothing before God's judgment. "Gebal" is LXX "Byblus", between Beirut and Tripoli. The latter day fulfilment of all this seems to be that the 30 or so nations listed here as confederate with Tyre will all be involved again in the final desolation of Israel and will be finally judged at the Lord's return. Thus Gebal is mentioned in Ps. 83:7 as one of the ten nations confederated under the aim of destroying Israel.

Ezekiel 27:10 Persia, Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war. They hung the shield and helmet in you; they set forth your beauty- "Put" is LXX "Libya", and this and "Persia" are listed in Ez. 38:5 as members of the final alliance which will be judged in the last days. That is the point when these prophecies have their final fulfilment.

Ezekiel 27:11 The men of Arvad with your army were on your walls all around, and heroic men were in your towers; they hung their shields on your walls all around; they have perfected your beauty- This is the sight that greeted Alexander the Great as he approached the island Tyre; but the seeming impregnability was destroyed by the Divine judgment at his hands.

Ezekiel 27:12 Tarshish was your merchant by reason of the multitude of all kinds of riches; with silver, iron, tin and lead they traded for your wares- Tarshish is not the source of these metals, but rather the merchant in them, the "caravans" or transporters of them (:25). Any attempt to claim that tin from Cornwall in the UK therefore makes Tarshish equal Britain is desperate in the extreme. "Tarshish" traded directly with Tyre and there is no evidence that Britain every did so. Tarshish was noted for its silver not its lead (Jer. 10:9), and the only place where these metals occur together in close proximity is at the site of Tartessus on the coast of Spain. For "Tarshish" both the LXX. and the Vulgate give "Carthaginians". Tartessus was one of the chief Phoenician colonies in Spain, called Carthago Nova, because it was a colony of Carthage. They were famed for their large trading vessels, which were used to trade with Tyre; and thus "ships of Tarshish" became a generic term for merchant ships.

Ezekiel 27:13 Javan, Tubal, and Meshech, they were your traffickers; they traded the persons of men and vessels of brass for your merchandise- Javan is Greece, and Joel 3:6 mentions Tyre as selling Israelite slaves ["the persons of men"] to Greece. Tubal and Meshech were clearly not Tobolsk in Siberia and Moscow in northern Russia, as has been claimed by russophobic wishful thinkers; there is no evidence Tyre traded with those areas. They clearly refer to areas with which Tyre traded by sea. All the other areas listed are "coastlands", accessible to sea transport, and this consideration would make Tubal and Meshech probably refer to areas on the Black Sea coast or possibly southern Turkey.

Ezekiel 27:14 They of the house of Togarmah traded for your wares with horses and war horses and mules- The identification of Togarmah with Armenia is difficult in that the current Armenia was not then noted for its horses, and it was landlocked,

whereas this is a list of the coastal areas which Tyre traded with by sea. The identification with parts of modern coastal Turkey is therefore to be preferred.

Ezekiel 27:15 The men of Dedan were your traffickers; many islands were the market under your control. They brought you in exchange horns of ivory and ebony- Dedan would therefore likely be somewhere in the south with access to elephant tusks and "ebony" from India and Ethiopia. Solomon used ships to get these things via Ezion Geber (1 Kings 9:26; 10:22). So the "islands" or coastlands in view could be on the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea. But the problem with that view is that one ship could not travel directly from Tyre to those places, seeing there was no Suez Canal then built. The description of the nations here is in an intentional order. It begins in the far west at Tartessus in Spain, goes east through Javan [Greece], to the north west corner of Turkey (Tubal, Meshech) and it would make sense if the circular description now moves down to the islands of the Aegean. These were the "islands... under your control", and the men of Dedan [even if we insist Dedan was in the Persian Gulf] were the merchants. That is not quite the same as saying that Tyre's ships sailed to Dedan itself.

Ezekiel 27:16 Syria was your merchant by reason of the multitude of your handiworks. They traded for your wares with emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral and rubies- Again we find here the things used in the tabernacle, priestly clothing and breastplate (Ex. 28:7,13,18,19; 39:12). This confirms the impression that the ballad of the good ship Tyre presents her as a fake, floating tabernacle. We are being set up to expect the utter destruction of this false system, which we indeed find in Ez. 28.

Ezekiel 27:17 Judah and the land of Israel, they were your traffickers. They traded for your merchandise wheat of Minnith, and confections, honey, oil and balm- Here Judah and Israel, the special people of God, are mentioned as if they were treated by Tyre as just some other Gentile nations with whom they traded. And the style of the record here reflects that perspective. This too was to be a reason for Tyre's destruction; for God's people are special, and we too should treat them as such and not in the way we would relate to standard secular unbelievers. Tyre as a city state was always in need of food, and Palestine was a logical source for this.

Ezekiel 27:18 Damascus was your merchant for the multitude of your handiworks, by reason of the multitude of all kinds of riches, with the wine of Helbon and white wool- This doesn't have to mean that the ships of Tyre went to Damascus, which is landlocked. Rather we can read as with GNB "The people of Damascus bought your merchandise and your products, paying for them with wine from Helbon and wool from Sahar".

Ezekiel 27:19 Vedan and Javan traded with yarn for your wares: bright iron, cassia and calamus were among your merchandise- Cassia and calamus were used in the tabernacle rituals (Ex. 30:23,24; it is the "sweet cane" to be offered to Yahweh in Is. 43:24; Jer. 6:20). See on :16.

Ezekiel 27:20 Dedan was your trafficker in precious cloths for riding- They "traded saddle blankets for your goods" (GNB).

Ezekiel 27:21 Arabia and all the princes of Kedar, they were the merchants of your hand. In lambs, rams, goats, in these were they your merchants- These three animals were part of the tabernacle rituals; again we have the impression that Tyre is being presented as a fake tabernacle, a conscious imitation of Yahweh's shrine in Jerusalem. See on :16. We also find these three animals listed in the same order in Ez. 39:18, as the possessions of the confederacy of nations who will invade Israel in the last days under Gog, and be destroyed. The idea would be that the final fulfilment of this prophecy is at the Lord's return, although "Tyre" may be reapplied to "Babylon" or whoever leads that latter day confederacy. Such reapplication and shifting of fulfilment from one to another is common in Bible prophecy; we noted on Ez. 26 how the destruction of Tyre was intended to be done by Nebuchadnezzar, but this prophecy was reapplied and shifted to Alexander the Great. Likewise prophecies which have one context in the Old Testament are applied in a different context in the New Testament. Thus Rachel weeping for her children in Jeremiah is shifted to apply to the women weeping for their children at the time of Herod's massacre. See on :27.

Ezekiel 27:22 The traffickers of Sheba and Raamah, they were your traffickers. They traded for your wares with the chief of all spices and with all precious stones and gold- Again this doesn't require the ships of Tyre to have gone to Sheba, the idea is that men from Sheba traded with Tyre. And again, these were all used in the tabernacle construction and rituals; spices (s.w. Ex. 25:6; 35:8), "precious stones" is the term used for the "costly stones" brought from Tyre and Lebanon for the foundation of the temple (1 Kings 5:17; 7:9-11); and gold was likewise throughout the sanctuary.

Ezekiel 27:23 Haran and Canneh and Eden, the traffickers of Sheba, Asshur and Chilmad, were your traffickers- Men from throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham worked for Tyre; she is presented as having relationships and economic control over the entire territory. This may be somewhat exaggerated, as Babylon was the greater power in the area; but the picture is thus painted because Tyre stands as representative of the latter day entity which shall be judged at the Lord's return.

Ezekiel 27:24 These were your traffickers in choice wares, in wrappings of blue and embroidered work and in chests of rich clothing, bound with cords and made of cedar, among your merchandise- Again, this is all the language of the priestly robes and the tabernacle and temple construction- the words and ideas are all used elsewhere in that context: wrappings, blue, embroidered work, cords, cedar. As noted on :16, Tyre is presented as an imitation tabernacle which is to be judged.

Ezekiel 27:25 The ships of Tarshish were your caravans for your merchandise, and you were replenished, and made very glorious in the heart of the seas- As explained on :12, the people of Tartessus [Tarshish] in Spain were famed for their large trading vessels, which were used to trade with Tyre; and thus "ships of Tarshish" became a generic term for merchant ships. They were the maritime equivalent of desert "caravans". "Very glorious" is the phrase translated "very grievous" about the sin of Sodom (Gen. 18:20). A parallel is being drawn because this proud, immoral system and city is about to likewise fall in judgment.

Ezekiel 27:26 Your rowers have brought you into great waters. The east wind has

broken you in the heart of the seas- This verse suddenly interrupts the description of her greatness and all the good thinks packed onto the good ship Tyre. The sudden east wind from God will destroy her; clearly there are similarities with the Jonah story, see on :28.

Ezekiel 27:27 Your riches, your wares, your merchandise, your mariners, your pilots, your repairers of ship hulls and the dealers in your merchandise, and all your men of war who are in you, with all your company which is in the midst of you, shall fall into the heart of the seas in the day of your ruin- See on :28 for the connections with Jonah. The good ship Tyre, loaded with wealth and sailors from throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham, was to capsize and sink to the bottom of the seas under Divine judgment. This is the punishment of Babylon and those confederate with her. It seems that what was here threatened upon Tyre didn't fully come to pass; but the essence of the prophecy will do, in that the prophecy is to be reapplied and transferred to Babylon. See on :21.

Ezekiel 27:28 At the sound of the cry of your pilots the suburbs shall shake- "Pilots" is the word translated "captain" in Jonah 1:6, the only other usage of the word outside Ez. 27. The ship of Tarshish or Tyre was rowed into deep waters, "the heart of the seas" (:27), which is where Jonah was plunged into (Jonah 2:3). The connection with the Jonah story is perhaps the implication that Tyre could have repented as those sailors did, and the ship of Tyre would not have been wrecked as it was going to be. And of course the book of Jonah is the great example of where Divine judgment was stated but not carried out because of Gentile repentance. And this was exactly why Ezekiel is making this appeal to Tyre.

Ezekiel 27:29 All who handled the oar, the mariners and all the pilots of the sea shall come down from their ships. They shall stand on the land- This is the very picture of Babylon's supporters, portrayed as mariners, 'standing' in mourning over her (Rev. 18:17). If we enquire why the judgments of latter day Babylon are portrayed in terms of Tyre's fall as described here in Ezekiel, I suggest the answer is as explained on :21. The prophecies of Tyre's fall could have happened in Ezekiel's time, within the context of the intended repentance of the exiles and the nations, and the reestablishment of a kingdom of God in Israel. But this didn't happen, and so the prophecies about Tyre have been transferred and reapplied to Babylon, to come to total fulfilment in the last days.

Ezekiel 27:30 And shall cause their voice to be heard over you, and shall cry bitterly and shall cast up dust on their heads, they shall wallow themselves in the ashes- This is the bitter lamentation over Babylon of Rev. 18:8-10; casting dust on their heads is quoted and applied to the mourners for latter day Babylon in Rev. 18:19; see on :29. Wallowing in ashes was Zion's judgment (Jer. 6:26; 25:34); they had rejoiced at Zion's fall, but were to come to the same.

Ezekiel 27:31 And they shall make themselves bald for you, and clothe them with sackcloth, and they shall weep for you in bitterness of soul with bitter mourning- This is the language of the exiles mourning for the destruction of Zion (Jer. 4:8; 6:26 and throughout Lamentations). The implication is that Zion was but a fake sanctuary of Yahweh, just as Tyre was. They would meet the same end.

Ezekiel 27:32 In their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for you and lament over you, saying, Who is there like Tyre, like her who is brought to silence in the midst of the sea?- Babylon likewise is to be cast into the seas in the last days (Rev. 18:21), and those who traded with her shall wail and lament (Rev. 18:11); see on :21,29.

Ezekiel 27:33 When your wares went forth out of the seas, you filled many peoples; you enriched the kings of the earth with the multitude of your riches and of your merchandise- The list of Babylon's merchandise in Rev. 18 is based upon the "wares" which are listed here as Tyre's trade. See on :29.

Ezekiel 27:34 In the time that you were broken by the seas in the depths of the waters, your merchandise and all your company fell in your midst- The seas refer to the confederated nations who were to break her, and cause all her wealth and supporters to drown in the depths. Again we see the similarities with the ship of Tarshish in which Jonah was placed, which averted this catastrophe by repentance; see on :28.

Ezekiel 27:35 All the inhabitants of the islands are astonished at you, and their kings are horribly afraid; they are troubled in their face- This suggests shock. The fall of Tyre is portrayed as coming suddenly and unexpectedly. But even in Alexander's time, she only fell after an extended siege. The impression of a sudden fall, akin to Babylon's plagues coming suddenly and being like a famine which came in one day (see on Rev. 18:8), means that we must look to the last days for the total fulfilment of the prophecy.

Ezekiel 27:36 The merchants among the peoples hiss at you; you are become a terror- This could imply that the merchants who initially lamented the fall of Tyre because of their own personal loss therefrom, now change and hate her. For "hiss" suggests scorn. In the transference to Babylon, this would be the horns hating the whore (Rev. 17:16).

And you shall never again have any being- Tyre did revive, and suffered many more sieges and invasions, right up to the time of the crusades. So the prophecy didn't come fully true at the time, but it will do in its reapplied form in the last days.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 28

Ezekiel 28:1 *The word of Yahweh came again to me saying*- This prophecy is specifically intended to be given to the prince of Tyre (:2). We noted in Ez. 27 the allusions to Jonah. The ship of Tyre was to sink, but repentance was possible to avert this.

Ezekiel 28:2 *Son of man, tell the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because your heart is lifted up, and you have said, I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet you are man, and not God, though you set your heart as the heart of God*- For an asylum seeking exile like Ezekiel in Babylon to tell the king of Tyre that he was going to perish unless he repented... was a hard mission. And our witness is likewise not so easy, in the proud, secular world in which we are to make it. We note that the primary issue with the king of Tyre was not his idolatry, but his pride

and playing God. This is what is so utterly abhorrent to God. And we must have that same perspective. Throughout this chapter and on Ez. 27 we note that Tyre is portrayed as having a fake tabernacle and temple, an imitation Zion; and her prince was therefore enthroned there as if he were Yahweh. He consciously "set his heart" on this fantasy. The Ugaritic documents reveal that the kings of that time considered themselves to be Divine, the human reincarnation of a god who had died and was now rising again. But this king, perhaps Itobaal II or Azemilcus, was consciously impersonating the Yahweh religion of Zion.

Ezekiel 28:3 *Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that is hidden from you*- He was not in fact wiser than Daniel nor did he know all secrets [which in Daniel's context referred to his understanding of the prophecies]. But this is how the prince of Tyre thought of himself, and so he is addressed in his own terms. The reference to his supposed wisdom is no proof that a super-human being is referred to; this is an illustration of Lk. 16: 8: “And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light”.

Ezekiel 28:4 *By your wisdom and by your understanding you have become rich, and have gathered gold and silver into your treasures*- This is another way of saying that the prince's wisdom was not actually that of Daniel (:3). For this was all the result of secular wisdom rather than spiritual. It has been suggested that these verses here are alluding to or even quoting a hymn to the prince of Tyre. The later allusions to a story of Adam's fall may likewise be alluding not so much to the Genesis account but to some Tyrian religious myth. For God likes to speak to people within the terms of their own reference, as we should in our sharing of the Gospel.

Ezekiel 28:5 *By your great wisdom and by your traffic you have increased your riches, and your heart is lifted up because of your riches*- Wealth and pride go together. God wants us to be humble, and that is likely the reason why "to the poor the Gospel is preached", and wealthy people find the humility required by the Gospel so difficult.

Ezekiel 28:6 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have set your heart as the heart of God*- For all the things that the prince of Tyre could have been condemned for, his state of heart was the essential issue. And this is typical of the prophets- to focus, as did the Lord Jesus, upon the state of human hearts as the critical issue in God's judgment of men.

Ezekiel 28:7 *Therefore, behold, I will bring strangers on you, the terrible of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom, and they shall defile your brightness*- The language of brightness recalls the cherubim vision of Ez. 1. Tyre was a fake Zion, appearing to even have the cherubim presence around their central temple and prince. Perhaps he is called "the prince" rather than the king to draw a similarity with how the true Zion is to have a "prince". His beauty and brightness may refer to the temple in the centre of Tyre which was the obsessive pride and joy of her prince. This was to be desecrated by strangers. "The terrible of the nations" refers to the Babylonian confederacy in Ez. 30:11; 31:12. But ultimately it was the Greeks and not Babylonians who brought Tyre down. Again we see how the

prophecies about Tyre were transferred from one possible fulfilment to another, and the ultimate, final transference will be to the destruction of the last days.

Ezekiel 28:8 *They shall bring you down to the pit; and you shall die the death of those who are slain, in the heart of the seas*- This particularly refers to the prince of Tyre personally, who claimed he was God (:9). But Azemilcus, the king of Tyre when the city finally fell to Alexander the Great, was spared by Alexander. Again we see that the prophecy didn't come true exactly. The ultimate best fit fulfilment will therefore be in the last days. See on Ez. 27:21,29. The predictions in Ez. 26-28 about the king of Tyre personally are one of the biggest reasons to think that they did not come true as intended at the hands of the Babylonians or Greeks; and therefore these prophecies are to be transferred for their final fulfilment to some other figure.

Ezekiel 28:9 *Will you yet say before him who kills you, I am God? But you are man and not God in the hand of him who stabs you*- The Babylonians besieged Tyre for 13 years under Nebuchadnezzar and failed to capture island Tyre. This didn't happen, as noted on :8. The ultimate best fit fulfilment will therefore be in the last days. See on Ez. 27:21,29.

Ezekiel 28:10 *You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh*- The person was to "die the deaths of the uncircumcised" (Ez. 28;10), but angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36). There is no reference here therefore to any sinful Angel in Eden. He was a man (:9). The reference to death by the uncircumcised could suggest that Tyre in their mock imitation of Yahweh worship also practiced circumcision.

Ezekiel 28:11 *Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying*- The words "devil" , "satan" and "angel" do not occur in this chapter, nor in the rest of Ezekiel. The context shows this is a prophecy about the King of Tyre; the preceding chapter 27 is an oracle against Tyre, and now chapter 28 speaks specifically about the King of Tyre. Ezekiel chapters 27 and 28 clearly hold together as a literary unit. The city of Tyre and the King of Tyre are described in similar terms, e.g. "perfect in beauty" (compare Ez. 27:3 and Ez. 28:12; Ez. 27:16,17 with Ez. 28:13; Ez. 27:33 with Ez. 28:16). The passage plainly speaks of the King of Tyre, not anything that happened at the beginning of the world.

Ezekiel 28:12 *Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and tell him*- As noted on :7-10, no king of Tyre was actually killed neither by Nebuchadnezzar nor Alexander. This funeral lamentation over him therefore looks ahead to the last days; see on Ez. 27:21,29. There must therefore arise an individual similar to some historical king of Tyre who sets himself up as if he is in Zion, sitting in the throne of God. This is the latter day antichrist figure of 2 Thess. 2:4 who sits as God in the temple.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You seal up the imitation, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty- The same phrase "perfect in beauty" is used of Jerusalem (Lam. 2:15; Ez. 16:14). Clearly Tyre considered herself as the holy city of God, and in the next verses there are many allusions to the tabernacle. It seems Tyre was envious of Jerusalem's claim to be Yahweh's holy city, and rejoiced at the demise of Jerusalem and its temple, thinking that she would then replace it. She considered herself the "imitation"

of Zion and Yahweh worship; but the simple message was that Tyre was to be destroyed, and God's plan was to restore Zion rather than transfer Zion to Tyre. I have explained above that the final fulfilment of the destruction of the "prince of Tyre" will be in the last days, when it will be as it were transferred to the destruction of Babylon and her "man of sin" leader who will likewise create a false sanctuary in imitation of Yahweh worship, perhaps literally in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 28:13 *You were in Eden, the garden of God*- I suggested on :4 that this section may be part of an allusion to a Tyrian religious myth rather than to the Hebrew account in Gen. 2. But the text here refers to where the king of Tyre was in place, not in time. Pharaoh and Assyria are similarly described as being a “cedar in Lebanon”, no “tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty... all the trees of Eden envied him... yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised” (Ez. 31:2,3,8,9,16,18). Thus "You have been in Eden" has similarities with the language used by Ezekiel about Egypt in Ez. 31. Egypt is described in language which recalls the trees in the garden of Eden, watered by many waters- and then cut down. In the same way as the Garden of Eden was ended, so would Egypt be.

The trees in Eden are not to be taken literally, they represent the nations whom Pharaoh and Assyria conquered, possibly referring to the fact that they were all within the old geographical boundaries of the garden of Eden. Pharaoh being the greatest of the trees in Eden and the most appealing maybe, suggests that he was taking to himself the place of the tree of knowledge, which was in the midst of Eden and probably the most attractive of them all, seeing that it fascinated Eve so much with its tempting fruit. Pharaoh was not literally that tree, but in the parable he was making himself like it. Similarly the king of Tyre is likened in this parable to the cherubim in Eden.

Every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz, emerald, chrysolite, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl. Gold workmanship of tambourines and of pipes was yours. In the day that you were created they were prepared- These were the stones in the high priestly breastplate; as noted on :12, Tyre pretended to being an "imitation" of Zion, Yahweh's holy city. David and Hiram of Tyre had been close friends (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:1,6,7,10), and Hiram and Solomon had made a league in which Hiram supplied materials for the building of the temple (1 Kings 5:12,17,18). But this was now abused by Tyre in creating an imitation sanctuary in Tyre rather than Zion.

With Hiram’s knowledge of the true God, it seems that subsequent Kings of Tyre came to put themselves in the position of God, presenting themselves as seated between the cherubim on Mount Zion, in the same way as the king of Assyria effectively aspired to the same thing - Phoenician inscriptions have been uncovered calling the king of Tyre “Lord of the Heavens”. Even more amazingly, the jewels described in :13 were all found embedded in the sphinx-cherubim unearthed in Tyre. The three jewels of the breastplate missing from the list in :13 were also missing from the sphinx. Inscriptions also describe Tyre as the “garden of God”, and reliefs of cherubim guarding Tyre as they did Eden have been found. Thus the king of Tyre had set up a blasphemous system of worship copying that of the temple and of Eden, with himself as God in the midst of it. Harry Whittaker makes a distinction between "the prince of Tyre" (Ez. 28:2) and "the king of Tyre" (Ez. 28:12). which he sees as a reference to the Tyrian god Melkart ("King of the city"). He suggests that Tyre had

installed a system of Yahweh worship similar to that which was in Jerusalem (perhaps a result of Hiram's relationship with Solomon and assistance in building Yahweh's temple)- but this had become mixed with the worship of Melkart (H.A. Whittaker, *The Very Devil* (Wigan: Biblia, 1991) p. 33.). God is saying that He is aware that this replica ["imitation", :12] of His system of worship has been pushed by the king of Tyre as far as it can go - no wonder a prophecy like Ezekiel 28 was necessary to expose his sin!

According to the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary: "This feeling of superhuman elevation in the king of Tyre was fostered by the fact that the island on which Tyre stood was called "the holy island" [Sanconiathon], being sacred to Hercules and Melkart, so much so that the colonies looked up to Tyre as the mother city of their religion". "The city was thought of as rising from the waters like the rock-throne of God" (Ralph Woodrow, *Was Satan Once An Angel In Heaven?* (Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1968) p. 7. Woodrow was one of the few, if not the only, popular American Evangelical preacher of the 20th century who spoke out against the popular view of Satan). This would explain why the King of Tyre is criticized for saying "I am a God, I sit in the seat of God" (Ez. 28:2). It would also explain all the allusions to Israelite worship- he was setting himself up as a rival to Zion, dressing himself in clothing featuring all the jewels in the High Priestly breastplate (Ex. 28:15-20); the word used for his "workmanship" with those jewels in Ez. 28:13 is used in Ex. 31:3,5; 35:31 of the workmanship of the tabernacle and associated garments. Note how Ez. 27:22 says that Tyre traded in "all precious stones". The King of Tyre claimed to be "perfect in beauty" (Ez. 28:12)- just as Zion was described earlier in Ezekiel in the same terms (Ez. 16:14).

Ezekiel 28:14 *I put a terrifying messenger there to guard you*- "Guard" is related to the term used for the cherubim overshadowing the ark. The suggestion may be that Tyre as a great mercantile power was privileged to cast its ‘wings’ over Israel. It was the abuse of this exalted position that was a factor in the ruin of Tyre (: 4,5). God is clearly superior to the prince of Tyre. God was in control of the cherub.

The king of Tyre is likened to a cherub dwelling in Eden, the garden of God. However, the Genesis record stresses that the cherubim dwelt not *in* the garden, but east of it. It would therefore seem that Ez. 28:11-19 is alluding to some pagan story of the garden of Eden (see on :4), and re-focusing the myth upon a real, known human being on earth- i.e. the king of Tyre.

Cassuto points out that the Ezekiel reference to the cherub 'walking in the midst of the stones of fire' is an allusion to Ugaritic poetry which speaks of 'stones of fire'. Ezekiel does the same thing in Ez. 31:8,9, where he references pagan ideas about Eden, the cherubim etc., and re-focuses them upon Pharaoh, king of Egypt. It could even be argued that Ezekiel's detailed visions of the cherubim in Ez. 1 and 10 are a deconstruction of Babylonian and underlying Canaanite myths about the cherubim- showing who the cherubim *really* are.

A number of sphinx have been discovered, which appear to be a Canaanite pagan rendition of the cherubim described earlier in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10. “A sphinx is merely a pagan cherub. The sphinx often depicted a king's head, and an animal's body—the animal was usually regarded as a god. Head and body were a composite god: the deification of the king” (Arthur Gibson, “The Diabolical Prince of Tyre”, *The Testimony* Vol. 46 (1976) p. 174).

A large cherub-sphinx with a king’s head and animal’s body set on a base of sculptured mountains was discovered in nearby Sidon, apparently a deification of a

king of Tyre who is here described as being "upon the holy mountain of God" (Ez. 28:14). Phoenician and Ugaritic texts record the King of Tyre pronouncing that "I am *El*"- exactly what we read him doing in Ez. 28:2, proclaiming that "I am God, I sit in the seat of God" (Descriptions of the sphinx-cherubim discovered and the references to the King of Tyre's claim to be "El" are to be found in R. D. Barnett, "Ezekiel and Tyre", *Eretz-Israel* Vol. 9 (1969), p. 9 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society). The King of Tyre claiming to be *El* is also referenced in W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London: Athlone Press, 1968) p. 49).

You lived on My holy mountain and walked among sparkling gems- This holy mountain is Mt. Zion, on the earth, not symbolically in heaven as the Watchtower asserts (see Ez. 20:40). This is an allusion to the stones set in the breastplate of the high priest of Israel (Ex. 39:10-14).They were 'stones of fire' because of the way they would shine when exposed to the brilliance of the Shekinah glory of the sanctuary. They symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 39:14). Hiram the earlier king of Tyre walked in the midst of these stones of fire when he moved among the children of Israel (as in the preparation of the materials for the temple). But now Tyre had as it were created a similar sanctuary and breastplate in Tyre.

Ezekiel 28:15 *You were perfect in your ways*- "You were perfect in your ways" is no proof that a super-human person is being spoken of, seeing that the word is applied to Noah, Abraham, Job and David (Gen. 6: 9; 17:1; Job 1:1; Ps. 18:23 & 25). Those who believe in a personal devil are faced with a contradiction- was the devil originally a sinner, or, was he once perfect but fell?

From the day that you were created- "Perfect" (upright) from the time of his spiritual birth - which is how the word "created" is used in Ezekiel 21:30 and Psalm 102:18 (cp. 2 Cor. 5:17). Perhaps this refers to how under Hiram, Tyre had become a proselyte state of Israel.

Until unrighteousness was found in you- There may be allusion to the falling out between Hiram and Solomon.

Ezekiel 28:16 *By the abundance of your trading they filled the midst of you with violence, and you have sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane out of the mountain of God; and the angel who guarded you drove you away from the midst of the stones of fire*- Tyre was no longer accepted by God as a proselyte state with the right to worship at the Jerusalem temple; and perhaps in protest at this, Tyre had created their own imitation temple and Yahweh cult in Tyre. "The king of Tyre" (:12) is the subject of this prophecy. Verses 4 and 5 describe him as getting rich by his trading in silver and gold, and getting proud because of this - much more applicable to a human king than to an angel. His sin is defined in Ez. 28:15,16: "The iniquity of your trading... by the multitude of your trading... you have sinned". The sin in view wasn't some Angelic rebellion against God; it was specifically his trading and avarice, which have been described in detail in the last two chapters, and refer to the king of Tyre rather than to anything in the garden of Eden. I suggested on :4 that this section may be part of an allusion to a Tyrian religious myth rather than to the Hebrew account in Gen. 2.

Ezekiel 28:17 *Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness. I have cast you to the ground; I have laid you before kings, that they may see you*- It appears that the prophecy of the fall of Tyre is being consciously framed to mirror the fall of Adam, e.g. :2: "you are a man";

"man" is *Adam* in Hebrew, as if God is saying to the prince of Tyre, "You are like Adam in this parable". Verse 17 tells how he will be brought to the ground - as Adam had to return to the dust. The passage is often skim read, leading to the assumption that the King of Tyre is being likened to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, or to some Satan figure who fell from Heaven at that time. But careful reading shows that the King of Tyre is being likened to Adam in Eden, not to the serpent.

Ezekiel 28:18 *By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trading, you have profaned your sanctuaries; therefore have I brought forth a fire from the midst of you; it has devoured you, and I have turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all those who see you*- As noted on :16, the sin of the prince was his trading, which has been explained in the previous two chapters. This is what was in view rather than the sin of some supposed angel in Eden. Like Adam, the prince of Tyre was to return to the dust.

This verse may imply that Tyre had set up forms of worship similar to that of Israel. Hiram was 'ever a lover of David' and rejoiced with Solomon in the building of the temple (1 Kings 5: 1-12). The king of Tyre would so doubt have learned about God's kingdom in Israel from these two kings of Israel. Or, the verse may be interpreted this way: Tyre's sanctuaries were in Israel when the divine presence and favour were manifest. But Tyre failed to appreciate its privileged association with Israel. When Nebuchadnezzar came down into Jerusalem (586 B.C.), the prince of Tyrus said: 'Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken, it has swung open to me; I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste' (Ez. 26:2 R.S.V.). In so saying, Tyre had spoken her own nemesis according to the decree of Genesis 12: 3: 'I will... curse him that curseth thee'. Tyre, in her self-centred, mercantile interests, had profaned the sanctuaries and was herself to be reduced to ashes.

Tyre could not with impunity violate her privileged relationship with Israel. When Nadab and Abihu treated the sacred as secular, 'there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD' (Lev. 10:2). Similarly, Tyre had failed to make a difference between the holy and unholy. It was, therefore, to be reduced to ashes - devoured like Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24,25).

Ezekiel 28:19 *All those who know you among the peoples shall be astonished at you. You have become a terror, and your life shall end evermore*- This would be axiomatic if it spoke simply of the personal prince of Tyre. Clearly enough Tyre politically is in view. She revived many times after the Babylonian and Greek attacks upon her. So the final fulfilment is yet future, in the last days.

Ezekiel 28:20 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- Now we have a brief judgment upon Sidon, a neighbour of Tyre. This underlines how the previous passage concerns Tyre, a literal entity on earth, and has no reference to the fall of any angel in Eden.

Ezekiel 28:21 *Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against it*- Whilst Tyre was in ruins after the surrender to Babylon and lost power, nearby Sidon apparently revived in power. This prophecy was therefore to preclude any conclusion that Tyre was reviving in the form of Sidon nearby. She too was to fall.

Ezekiel 28:22 *And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you Sidon. I will be glorified in the midst of you; and they shall know that I am Yahweh when I*

shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her- Again we have the Divine hope that the judged nations around Judah would repent and sanctify Yahweh as their God. This didn't happen, and so the prophecies have been transferred and reapplied to the last days.

Ezekiel 28:23 *For I will send plague into her and blood into her streets. The wounded shall fall in the midst of her, with the sword on her on every side; and they shall know that I am Yahweh*- This repeats the language concerning Judah's judgment (Ez. 5:12; 6:12). Judah was to be punished like the Gentiles because of her Gentile heart; that was the immediate lesson for the first audience of these words as they sat in Babylonian captivity.

Ezekiel 28:24 *There shall be no more a pricking brier to the house of Israel, nor a hurting thorn of any that are around them, that scorned them; and they shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh*- As noted on :22, we see here Yahweh's intention that the judged nations around Judah would repent and sanctify Yahweh as their God. This didn't happen, and so the prophecies have been transferred and reapplied to the last days. Sidon was clearly a thorn and brier to Israel, alluding to the calamity upon Eden which happened due to Adam's sin. This prophecy will only be fulfilled when paradise is restored at the Lord's return to earth.

Ezekiel 28:25 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the nations, then shall they dwell in their own land which I gave to My servant Jacob*- They were gathered back [although they resisted this in that many preferred to stay in the soft life of Babylon], but they hardly dwelt safely or confidently in their land. They planted vineyards, but received a poor harvest due to their lack of attention to God's house; their enemies destroyed their fruits, and their vine "cast her fruit before the time" (Hag. 1:6; Mal. 3:10,11). Haggai and Malachi criticized Israel for this, saying it could be rectified by their obedience: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:10). Yet in Nehemiah's time, Judah refused to pay tithes properly; but even then, if they had thoroughly repented, the Kingdom conditions were still possible. Such was God's desire to continue working with His hopeless people.

Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 11:17; 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfil His original intentions for them.

Ezekiel 28:26 *They shall dwell securely therein; yes, they shall build houses, and plant vineyards, and shall dwell securely, when I have executed judgments on all those who do them despite all around them; and they shall know that I am Yahweh their God*- After Tyre and Sidon would be judged, then Israel would plant vineyards and dwell "securely". It seems that this was potentially possible; Judah could have

become Yahweh's battle axe against Tyre, the nations brought to fear Him, and then the Kingdom conditions would have begun. This would then have led to the Ez. 38 invasion with Israel dwelling "securely". But all these things have been reapplied to the last days.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 29

Ezekiel 29:1 In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me saying- The relevance of the date is that this was during the siege of Jerusalem, six months before the final fall of the city; and all Judah's hopes were on salvation from the Babylonians by the Egyptians. And so at that time Ezekiel warns that Egypt shall fall. The prophecies about Egypt are given on different dates, a year before and after the fall of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 29:2 Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt- The judgments upon Tyre and Egypt are far longer than those upon the other five of the seven surrounding nations condemned by Ezekiel in this section. This is because of their relative size and importance, and their attraction to Judah as defenders against Babylon.

Ezekiel 29:3 Speak and say, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers, that has said, 'My river is My own, and I have made it for Myself'- The dragon or crocodile was also a symbol of Egypt in Is. 27:1; 51:9; ps. 74:13. The "rivers" refer to the various branches of the Nile at the Nile delta. As with the prince of Tyre, the king of Egypt considered himself God and the creator of the Nile. It was this arrogance and playing God which was so offensive to God. For He values humility above all.

Ezekiel 29:4 I will put hooks in your jaws, and I will make the fish of your rivers stick to your scales; and I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, with all the fish of your rivers which stick to your scales- This describes how a crocodile would be captured (the "monster" of :3). The fish stuck to its scales refer to the various smaller peoples confederate with Egypt.

Ezekiel 29:5 I'll cast you forth into the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers. You'll fall on the open field. You won't be bound together, nor gathered. I have given you for food to the animals of the earth and to the birds of the sky- This may refer to the destruction of the Egyptian army in the wilderness whilst attacking Cyrene. This meant they were unable to help Judah as Judah hoped.

Ezekiel 29:6 All the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am Yahweh, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel- The crocodile lived amongst reeds in the Nile marshlands, so the reed is an appropriate symbol to use. Egypt had been a staff of reed to Judah during the earlier Assyrian invasion 100 years earlier (Is. 36:6); but they failed to learn the lesson, and were desperately trusting them again. Circumstances repeat in our lives, in order to test us and develop our learning in the life of faith. Judah should have learnt from the failure of Egypt to stop the Assyrians; but they didn't. The situation repeated quite accurately, in that the Egyptians appeared

to give some support against Assyria, leading to a withdrawal from Jerusalem for a short while; just as happened during the Babylonian siege (Jer. 37:5).

Ezekiel 29:7 When they took hold of you by your hand, you broke, and tore all their shoulders; and when they leaned on you, you broke, and paralyzed all of their thighs- To take by the hand speaks of entering a covenant. The idea seems to be that the covenant was mutually destructive to both Judah and Egypt. The wrath of Babylon was upon both parties, seeing they had also made agreements with them. It was God who broke the arm of Egypt (Ez. 30:21 s.w. "you broke..."). God worked through these dishonest covenants in order to break both parties.

Ezekiel 29:8 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will bring a sword on you, and will cut off man and animal from you- As with the prophecies against Tyre in Ez. 26-28, these prophecies about Egypt didn't come totally true; man and animal were not cut off from Egypt in totality. Perhaps some repented and so the full brunt of the destruction was averted. Or more likely, these prophecies are part of the wider potential scenario, whereby the remnant of Judah would repent along with the nations judged by Babylon, and together they would reestablish Yahweh's kingdom in Israel. This didn't happen, because God will not force human freewill decisions. And so the essence of the prophecies will come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 29:9 The land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste- This along with many phrases used in this condemnation of Egypt were in fact descriptions of what God had threatened to do to Judah at the hands of the Babylonians (e.g. Ez. 12:20). But instead of Egypt averting the fulfilment of those prophecies, as Judah hoped, Egypt would itself suffer them as well.

And they shall know that I am Yahweh- As explained on :8 this didn't come totally true. The Divine hope and intention was that Egypt would come to know Him, i.e. to have relationship with Him.

Because you have said, 'The river is mine, and I have made it- Pharaoh believed that the river Nile was his own creation. This playing of God is cited repeatedly as the reason for their destruction. And we too can so easily do the same in our attitudes and judgments.

Ezekiel 29:10 Therefore, behold, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from the tower of Seveneh even to the border of Ethiopia- "Syene" as the modern Asswan. The idea is from the northern border to the southern border of Egypt. This never completely happened; see on :8.

Ezekiel 29:11 No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of animal shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years- Throughout Ez. 26-28 I have noted that the promised judgments upon Tyre didn't come about exactly as predicted. There was the possibility of transference of the prophetic words from one context to another; e.g. the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar was delayed and transferred to Alexander the Great. But the final fulfilment will be in the last days. But that fulfilment will be in essence and not necessarily to the letter. There will be reapplication as well as rescheduling and transference. These forty years of desolation would have come true within the wider possible prophetic vision, of Judah and the judged nations all repenting and turning to Yahweh, and His Kingdom being

reestablished in Israel. But this was not to be because the human freewill preconditions didn't come about- e.g. Judah didn't repent and many of the exiles preferred to stay in Babylon. And so likewise this forty years desolation unto repentance of Egypt didn't happen. Although the essence of it will come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 29:12 I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of the countries that are desolate; and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be a desolation forty years; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries- As noted on :11, this is not recorded as having happened. The nations around Egypt were likewise not completely desolated. There was no invading army which systematically destroyed all the cities of Egypt as required here. And so we look to a latter fulfilment. However the language of a desolate land and cities is taken from Lev. 26:33, the curses upon Israel for breaking the covenant. It seems that Egypt could have entered a covenant with Yahweh and so were punished for breaking it in that they refused that covenant.

Ezekiel 29:13 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: At the end of forty years will I gather the Egyptians from the peoples where they were scattered- As explained on :11, this is all part of a potential scenario which could have come about if Judah had repented and allowed themselves to be restored. Had they done so, then the Egyptians and others would also have been restored. Had Egypt accepted unity with God's people and with Yahweh, then the restoration of Judah would have been theirs; for the language of restoration, just like the language of their judgments (see on :9), is identical to that used about Judah's restoration.

Ezekiel 29:14 And I will bring back the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their birth; and they shall be there a base kingdom- To 'bring back the captivity' means to 'restore the fortunes', to lift up or exalt. And this is the phrase used about the restoration of Israel, in which Egypt potentially could have had a part. And yet this idea is apparently juxtaposed with that of her being "a base kingdom". But there is no contradiction, once we appreciate that the word for "base" is often used of how a person or nation must be abased, brought down, *so that* they may be exalted. Ezekiel has used the term exactly in this sense, to describe how Judah shall be base or abased, so that she may be exalted (Ez. 17:24; 21:26). And it is the teaching of other scriptures too; the abased Jewish remnant were to be exalted (s.w. Is. 57:15), the abased ["humble"] in spirit are to be lifted up (Prov. 29:23; Job 5:11). This is why the idea of Egypt being an abased kingdom is mentioned in the same breath, as it were, as the promise of her revival. But this would happen only if she identified with the restoration of Israel, accepted Yahweh as her God, and repented.

Ezekiel 29:15 It shall be the most base of the kingdoms; neither shall it any more lift itself up above the nations; and I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations- As with the permanent destruction of Tyre never to rise again, this didn't happen. The Seleucid kingdom was powerful in Egypt, it became "the king of the South", and has at times been a powerful nation. So the final fulfilment is to be in the last days. But as explained on :14, the idea was that Egypt would be "most base" *so that she might be exalted*, in God's sight. She would no longer be "above the nations"

because in the new system envisaged, God would be the king and if any particular nation was to be lifted up above other nations, it would be Israel. The same Hebrew term translated here "lift itself up above the nations" is used in Is. 2:2; 11:12 of how in the Messianic kingdom, Zion [and therefore, not Egypt] would be exalted / lifted up above the nations.

Ezekiel 29:16 It shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing iniquity to remembrance, when they turn to look after them- So often Yahweh is portrayed as the only "confidence" or trust of His people. Judah's confidence in nations like Egypt was therefore a betrayal of their relationship with Yahweh. This rejection of trust / hope in foreign alliances was behind Jeremiah's comment that the man who hoped / had confidence in Yahweh alone would be blessed (Jer. 17:7 s.w.). The immediate context referred to having Egypt and other nations as their hope / confidence.

And they shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh- The Divine hope was that the repentance of Israel and that of Egypt would happen at the same time, and they would come into relationship with ["know"] Yahweh. This didn't happen as it could have done, and so the fulfilment is deferred until the last days.

Ezekiel 29:17 It came to pass in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me saying- This was 17 years after the prophecies given either side of it. it is inserted here to make the powerful point that years later, Ezekiel reminded God's people that the help they had expected from Egypt at the time, 17 years before, hadn't come. Only Yahweh would be their help, even 17 years later.

Ezekiel 29:18 Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyre: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was worn; yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyre, for the service that he had served against it- Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for 13 years, and as noted on Ez. 26-28, he didn't achieve all that was prophesied, and much of it was transferred to Alexander the Great to fulfill; indeed much of it will only have a total fulfilment in the last days. Babylon didn't even plunder Tyre, and so was not as it were paid any wages for her efforts. But all the same, God noticed the efforts and wanted to reward him. The reference to the suffering of the heads and shoulders would refer to the unsuccessful efforts of the Babylonians to build a causeway out to the island Tyre using the rubble of the destroyed city.

Ezekiel 29:19 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall carry off her multitude and take her a spoil and take her a prey; and it shall be the wages for his army- We note God's sensitivity to even pagan Gentiles. The 13 year unsuccessful siege of Tyre by Babylon had not even yielded the Babylonians any plunder from Tyre. And so God wanted to recompense them somehow, so He would give them Egypt. But how much more eager to recompense is God when it comes to the feeble attempts of us His servants to please Him!

Ezekiel 29:20 I have given him the land of Egypt as his recompense for which he served, because they worked for Me, says the Lord Yahweh- This happened only to a limited extent; it was to be at the time when a Messiah figure would appear in Judah,

and the Egyptians would know Yahweh, i.e. enter relationship with Him (:21). This scenario didn't work out at the time of the restoration, which could potentially have occurred at the same time Babylon took Egypt (:21 "in that day"). In some form, the essence of these things must therefore come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 29:21 In that day will I cause a horn to bud forth to the house of Israel- This budding forth of a shoot or horn speaks of the possibility of a Messiah figure arising (Ps. 132:17) in the likes of Zerubbabel. Again, this was the scenario which could have happened at the restoration, but it didn't. The final fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus in the last days.

And I will give you the opening of the mouth in their midst; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- At the Lord's return, God will use a repentant Israel to achieve great things in terms of converting this world unto Himself. They will walk up and down in His Name, witnessing to Him as He had originally intended them to (Zech. 10:12); men will cling to their skirts in order to find the knowledge of their God (Zech. 8:23). “In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee (Israel) the opening of the mouth in the midst of them (the surrounding nations, see context); and *they* shall know that I am the LORD”, in that Israel will preach to them from their own experience of having recently come to know Yahweh (Ez. 29:21). But at the time of the Lord’s return, when Israel repent and enter the new covenant with Him, they will remember all their past sins “and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame... for all that thou hast done” (Ez. 16:63). They will be so ashamed that they *will feel as if* they can never open their mouth. But Yahweh will open their mouth, and they will witness. In some anticipation of this, Ezekiel as the “son of man” prophet, a representative of his people just as the Lord was to be, had his mouth shut in dumbness, and he only had his mouth opened when Israel came to know [to some degree] that “I am the LORD” (Ez. 24:27). In all these evident connections something marvellous presents itself. Those who feel as if they just cannot open their mouths in witness are the very ones whom the Father will use; He will open their mouths and use them exactly because they are ashamed of their sins! And so it should be with us.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 30

Ezekiel 30:1 The word of Yahweh came again to me saying- The continued trust of the people in Egypt as their last minute saviour from Babylon called for repeated appeals at different times and perhaps to different groups.

Ezekiel 30:2 Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Wail, Alas for the day!- The fall of Egypt was seen as a tragedy; for Ezekiel too was human, "son of man", and the death of any man diminishes each of us. This lamentation may also have even been an appeal for Egypt to repent.

Ezekiel 30:3 For the day is near, even the day of Yahweh is near; it shall be a day of clouds, a time of the nations- This is the language of the latter day judgment upon all the nations around *eretz* Israel (Joel 1:15; 2:1,2; Obadiah 15). I have explained from Ez. 26 onwards that much of the scenario presented of the judgment of Tyre and Egypt didn't come true as planned. It was God's intention that Judah would repent, and the nations judged by Babylon would likewise, and together they would reestablish God's Kingdom in Israel. But they didn't repent, and so the prophecies will have their final fulfilment in the last days. This explains why we read here language which is elsewhere used about the final judgment of all nations around the time of the return of the Lord Jesus. That will be the ultimate coming of the day of clouds (Rev. 1:7).

Ezekiel 30:4 A sword shall come on Egypt and anguish shall be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in Egypt; and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundations shall be broken down- "Anguish" is the word for birth pangs; the implication could be that out of the agony of Babylonian judgment there was to be brought forth something new, a repentant remnant. Life was to come out of death.

Ezekiel 30:5 Ethiopia, Put and Lud, and all the mixed people, and Cub- These were the nations confederate with Egypt whom the Jews hoped would help them.

And the children of the land that is allied with them, shall fall with them by the sword- The reference appears to be to the Jews who had already gone down into Egypt, trusting in the alliance made with her. They were the children of their own land in that they were not in their own land but still associated with her. Jer. 42:22; 44:14 were clear that these Jews would fall by the sword along with the Egyptians. And so appears the timeless lesson- that Egypt, the world, is no safe haven and will not save us in the end.

Ezekiel 30:6 Thus says Yahweh: They also who uphold Egypt shall fall- "Uphold" is the same word translated "lean" in Is. 36:6; whoever leaned upon the staff of Egypt would fall, and Egypt herself would "come down" as a result of this. Her attempt to help Judah would be her downfall rather than her blessing, as the false prophets of Judah perhaps claimed.

And the pride of her power shall come down: from the tower of Seveneh shall they fall in it by the sword, says the Lord Yahweh- The tower of Syene was the border of Egypt, and as noted on Ez. 29:10, the idea is 'All of Egypt from the north to the south'.

Ezekiel 30:7 They shall be desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate; and her cities shall be in the midst of the cities that are wasted- As noted on Ez. 29:11,

this is not recorded as having happened. The nations around Egypt were likewise not completely desolated. There was no invading army which systematically destroyed all the cities of Egypt as required here. And so we look to a latter fulfilment. However the language of a desolate land and cities is taken from Lev. 26:33, the curses upon Israel for breaking the covenant. It seems that Egypt could have entered a covenant with Yahweh and so were punished for breaking it in that they refused that covenant.

Ezekiel 30:8 They shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and all her helpers are destroyed- The Divine hope was that the repentance of Israel and that of Egypt and the other surrounding nations would happen at the same time, and they would come into relationship with ["know"] Yahweh. This didn't happen as it could have done, and so the fulfilment is deferred until the last days. And so the destruction of Egypt by fire likewise didn't happen exactly as envisaged here, because the wider potential scenario of repentance didn't come about. "Set a fire" is the phrase used about putting fire on the altar (Lev. 1:7), so again we have a hint that Egypt was to become an acceptable sacrifice, through the fire of Babylonian judgment. But it is also used of how Zion was to be put or set into the fire (Ez. 15:4,6). Far from saving her from this judgment as Judah hoped, Egypt was to share her condemnation.

Ezekiel 30:9 In that day shall messengers go forth from before Me in ships to make the careless Ethiopians afraid; and there shall be anguish on them, as in the day of Egypt; for, behold, it comes- "Messengers" is *malak*, the word also translated "Angels". As taught in the opening vision of the cherubim in Ez. 1, the Angels were behind the movements of Gentile nations as well as of Israel. All that happens on earth is not random, but a reflection of the vast system of Divine operation and control spoken of in the cherubim. The primary reference is to messengers going from Egypt along the Nile to tell the Ethiopians of the arrival of the Babylonians, just as they had told them about the Assyrians in this way in Is. 18:1,2. But Angels were propelling those messengers on their skiffs.

Ezekiel 30:10 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon- The idea seems to be that Egypt's large population would be noticeably reduced by the invasion, but this didn't quite happen at the hands of the Babylonians. The scenario that was potentially possible didn't come about at this time, although the essence of it will in the last days.

Ezekiel 30:11 He and his people with him, the terrible of the nations, shall be brought in to destroy the land; and they shall draw their swords against Egypt, and fill the land with the slain- Such mass destruction didn't actually happen. Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptian army at Carchemish on the Euphrates, quite far from Egypt itself (Jer. 46:2). Egypt was then placed under tribute and in this way, the Babylonians received their "wages" for besieging Tyre. But there is no record of any major Babylonian incursion into Egypt; Herodotus doesn't mention it whilst providing an otherwise detailed history of these times.

Ezekiel 30:12 I will make the rivers dry, and will sell the land into the hand of evil men; and I will make the land desolate, and all that is therein, by the hand of strangers: I, Yahweh, have spoken it- This is the idea of Is. 19:6, that the "brooks of defence shall be emptied", the artificial canals would dry up. But as noted on :11, the

Babylonians didn't completely do this to Egypt; and so the essence must be seen in the last days. Or it may be that just as the prophecy about Nebuchadnezzar conquering Tyre was transferred to Alexander the Great, and the prophecies about Tyre become transferred to Babylon in the last days, so these words about Egypt were to be transferred for fulfilment to Babylon or some other power. For Babylon also fell as a result of her rivers being dried up. The selling of the land may allude to how earlier the Egyptians had been forced by famine to sell their land, but to Joseph, a good man (Gen. 47:20); now famine would dry their rivers and force them to sell their land to wicked men.

Ezekiel 30:13 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also destroy the idols and I will cause the images to cease from Memphis; there shall be no more a prince from the land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt- As explained on :11, the immediate prophetic potential for Egypt was precluded from fulfilment by the lack of repentance. And so the idols continued in Egypt. And likewise the idea that Egypt would never have a prince was not immediately fulfilled; Egypt has had plenty of local rulers in its long history. The idea is more as in GNB, speaking of that immediate generation: "There will be no one to rule Egypt, and I will terrify all the people". Or we could read with the LXX: "I will also destroy the nobles from Memphis, and the princes of Memphis out of the land of Egypt; and they shall be no more".

Ezekiel 30:14 I will make Pathros desolate, will set a fire in Zoan and will execute judgments on No- The destruction of Egypt by fire likewise didn't happen exactly as envisaged here, because the wider potential scenario of repentance didn't come about. "Set a fire" is the phrase used about putting fire on the altar (Lev. 1:7), so again we have a hint that Egypt was to become an acceptable sacrifice, through the fire of Babylonian judgment. But it is also used of how Zion was to be put or set into the fire (Ez. 15:4,6). Far from saving her from this judgment as Judah hoped, Egypt was to share her condemnation.

Ezekiel 30:15 I will pour My wrath on Sin, the stronghold of Egypt; and I will cut off the multitude of No- "Sin" is LXX "Syene". We wonder why all these details are given when the potential scenario wasn't to come about. But that is the same question as to why we have Ez. 40-48 recorded. This is the whole tragedy- that such detailed plans are laid by God, but human lack of response and repentance precludes so much potential from coming about. Divine volumes could likewise be written about our own lives and wasted potentials. And yet in essence, all these things shall come true albeit in a different application and time.

Ezekiel 30:16 I will set a fire in Egypt; Sin shall be in great anguish, No shall be broken up and Memphis shall have adversaries in the daytime- The destruction of Egypt by fire likewise didn't happen exactly as envisaged here, because the wider potential scenario of repentance didn't come about. "Set a fire" is the phrase used about putting fire on the altar (Lev. 1:7), so again we have a hint that Egypt was to become an acceptable sacrifice, through the fire of Babylonian judgment. But it is also used of how Zion was to be put or set into the fire (Ez. 15:4,6). Far from saving her from this judgment as Judah hoped, Egypt was to share her condemnation.

Ezekiel 30:17 The young men of Aven and of Pibeseth shall fall by the sword; and

these cities shall go into captivity- "Aven" is On. And the idols of On were accepted by Judah (Hos. 4:15; 10:5 LXX). The record of the destruction of Egypt's idols and the cities in which they were enshrined was directly relevant to the Judah of Ezekiel's day, who had accepted the worship of these idols in return for Egypt's military support. That is the implication of the passages describing Judah's adultery in Ez. 16,23.

Ezekiel 30:18 At Tehaphnehes also the day shall withdraw itself, when I shall break there the yokes of Egypt, and the pride of her power shall cease in her: as for her, a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity- The day withdrawing itself is language used about the latter day time of judgment (Am. 5:20; 8:9; Is. 5:30; Jer. 13:16). This will be the time when the spirit of these prophecies comes to its final fulfilment. We note the connection between pride and power. God's hatred of pride, and desire to save us the humble, is one reason He doesn't give secular "power" to many of His children lest they be lifted up in pride.

Ezekiel 30:19 Thus will I execute judgments on Egypt; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- The purpose of Divine judgment is not simply punishment, nor merely the expression of His anger and irritation. It is designed ultimately to restore and to bring the likes of Egypt to "know" Him, to walk in relationship with Him. This is and was His intention for Egypt. The link between His judgments and positive human response to them may be one reason why not all these judgments were actually carried out upon Egypt.

Ezekiel 30:20 It happened in the eleventh year, in the first month, in the seventh day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me, saying- This was at or about the time of the abortive attempt of Pharaoh-Hophra to come to save Jerusalem from the Babylonians (Jer. 34:21; 37:5-7).

Ezekiel 30:21 Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and behold, it has not been bound up, to apply healing medicines, to put a bandage to bind it that it be strong to hold the sword- This again suggests that God had worked to bring about the healing of Egypt in her repentance after her first defeat by the Babylonians. But she didn't respond. Jer. 46:17 therefore says of Pharaoh: "he has let the appointed time pass by". He was given a window of repentance but he refused it. The breaking of Pharaoh's arm was in fact by being a staff of reed to Judah which collapsed. This was all the very opposite narrative to that which the faithless Jews at the time wished to believe- that the strong arm of Pharaoh would save them from the Babylonians. Instead, both Judah and Egypt would collapse as it were in a heap together before the Babylonians. And from this debased state they were both intended to arise as repentant, knowing Yahweh. But they didn't.

Ezekiel 30:22 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong arm, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand- One arm had already been broken by the first Egyptian conflict with the Babylonians. They ought to have repented and turned to Yahweh as a result of this. But as a result of that, they would now again be punished, and left with no strength, no arm, and no ability to hold a sword in their own defence, let alone in that of Judah.

Ezekiel 30:23 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries- Scattering and dispersal was the judgment threatened upon Judah (Ez. 12:15; 20:23; 22:15). This didn't literally happen to the Egyptians to the same extent, but the idea was that they would suffer Judah's judgment rather than save Judah from that judgment.

Ezekiel 30:24 I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand: but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a deadly wounded man- As noted on Ez. 29:11, this is not recorded as having happened. Just as the king of Tyre was never dealt with as prophesied, neither was the Pharaoh. And so we look to a latter fulfilment.

Ezekiel 30:25 I will hold up the arms of the king of Babylon; and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I am Yahweh, when I shall put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out on the land of Egypt- This was absolutely not what the initial audience of Ezekiel wanted to hear; that God would hold up the arms of Babylon and make the arms of Pharaoh, their hoped for saviour, to wax feeble. God would put His sword in Babylon's strengthened arms. Our message too is unpopular and counter instinctive to what our society wants to hear.

Ezekiel 30:26 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through the countries; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- Scattering and dispersal was the judgment threatened upon Judah (Ez. 12:15; 20:23; 22:15). This didn't literally happen to the Egyptians to the same extent, but the idea was that they would suffer Judah's judgment rather than save Judah from that judgment. But the final Divine intention was that Egyptians and perhaps also Babylonians [for the grammar is purposefully ambiguous here] could come to know / have relationship with Yahweh. This didn't happen, and so the final fulfilment of the essence of all this must be in the last days.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 31

Ezekiel 31:1 It happened in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me saying- Two months after the previous pronouncement of woe upon Egypt. The length of these prophecies against Egypt may appear to us a mere droning on, but there was an urgent need for God's people to realize that Egypt was not to be their help; and we need the same message repeated.

Ezekiel 31:2 Son of man, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt and his multitude: Whom are you like in your greatness?- Presumably this prophecy was to be taken to Pharaoh. This involved no small effort for an exile and asylum seeker in Babylon to achieve. The reason for commanding Ezekiel to go this effort was presumably because like Nineveh, had Pharaoh repented, the threatened judgments need not have happened. Perhaps the fact they did not all work out as stated could reflect some degree of repentance in Egypt. See on :10.

Ezekiel 31:3 Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches, and with a forest-like shade and of high stature; and its top was among the thick

boughs- We may wonder why Egypt is addressed (:2) through a description of Assyria's fall some time previously. We have here a classic idea of what I term 'prophetic transference', whereby the prophetic words about a certain person or entity at one stage of history are transferred or reapplied to another person or entity at another point. Thus we noted on Ez. 26-28 that the prophecies about the fall of Tyre and her king never came exactly true, but they are quoted in Rev. 18 about the fall of latter day Babylon. The fulfilment of the words about Tyre was reapplied or transferred to Babylon. Likewise the specific prophecy that Tyre would fall to Nebuchadnezzar was reapplied or transferred to the victory of Alexander the Great against Tyre. This feature also explains why the New Testament appears to quote Old Testament prophecies quite out of context. This makes perfect sense once we understand this ability of God to transfer prophetic burdens from the initially intended person or entity to another, perhaps at another time- often in the last days. In the first year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had declared himself master of Nineveh (Assyria), and so the allusion to Assyria's fall was to remind Egypt that they would likewise fall before Babylon.

Ezekiel 31:4 The waters nourished it, the deep made it to grow. Its rivers ran all around its plantation; and it sent out its channels to all the trees of the field- The reference is to the Nile being the source of Egypt's prosperity. But the reference is to how rivers, especially the Tigris, were also the source of Nineveh's strong position, although rivers giving nourishment to other trees also suggests military support for the "trees" under her dominion. But Assyria's fall was to be that of Egypt. And Judah were to believe this and therefore not trust in Egypt.

Ezekiel 31:5 Therefore its stature was exalted above all the trees of the field; and its boughs were multiplied, and its branches became long by reason of many waters, when it shot them forth- Assyria like Egypt appeared to have influence far beyond its home area, represented by the long branches. And Judah were tempted to take refuge in it. But like Assyria, Egypt would fall.

Ezekiel 31:6 All the birds of the sky made their nests in its boughs; and under its branches all the animals of the field brought forth their young; and all great nations lived under its shadow- This is exactly the language of Ez. 17:23 and Mt. 13:32 about the Kingdom of God, which will be, and could then have been, the Kingdom of Israel reestablished as God's Kingdom on earth. Instead of trusting in the kingdom of Egypt as their salvation, they were to raise their spiritual horizons and believe that if they repented, then they would not only survive Babylon's threat but would become the reestablished Kingdom of God on earth, under whose branches all the nations would come to live in fellowship with Yahweh- including Babylon and Egypt.

Ezekiel 31:7 Thus was it beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches; for its root was by many waters- The beauty and strength of the tree is associated with its root being by "many waters"; referring to the Tigris for Nineveh, and the Nile for Egypt. But Ezekiel will go on to describe a situation when living waters flow out from Zion and water the entire area, bringing life from the God of Israel to all the surrounding nations. This was where they should have been focused, on the promised restoration of the Kingdom of God in Israel, rather than trusting in the kingdom of Egypt. Like Assyria, this was to fall; see on :6.

Ezekiel 31:8 The cedars in the garden of God could not hide it; the fir trees were not like its boughs, and the plane trees were not as its branches; nor was any tree in the garden of God like it in its beauty- The nations around Assyria are defined as the other trees in Eden, the garden of God. This confirms my suggestions on Gen. 2 that Eden was in fact the *eretz* promised to Abraham. The same idea is found in describing Tyre as having been in Eden (Ez. 28:13). The language of unequalled beauty however is applied to Zion in Lam. 2:15; Ez. 16:14. It is also used of Tyre in Ez. 28:12,17. So we conclude that as often in the Bible, we are reading things from how they seemed to men at the time. Hence the language of demon possession in the New Testament. Tyre considered herself the perfection of beauty, and so did Egypt and so did Assyria. But the true perfection of beauty from God's viewpoint was Zion.

Ezekiel 31:9 I made it beautiful by the multitude of its branches, so that all the trees of Eden that were in the garden of God envied it- The beauty and power of the nations was given by God. The God of Israel, Yahweh, who was using all the nations towards the possible reestablishment of His Kingdom in Israel. It was for Israel to cooperate with this rather than resist it by trusting in Egypt as if it were Assyria.

Ezekiel 31:10 Therefore thus said the Lord Yahweh: Because you are exalted in stature and he has set your top among the thick boughs and his heart is lifted up in his height- Again, pride is identified as the prime reason for the judgment to come. We note the change of pronouns. Now the individual, "you", is addressed. This whole prophecy was directed to Pharaoh personally (see on :2). The similarity with the language of Daniel about Nebuchadnezzar as a great tree was because Daniel was using this kind of parable to urgently appeal for that man's repentance, lest he be cut down. And so Ezekiel was appealing for Pharaoh's.

Ezekiel 31:11 I will even deliver him into the hand of the mighty one of the nations. He shall surely deal with him. I have driven him out for his wickedness- The tenses vary here between future and past (:12). This is because the allusion is to the past downfall of Nineveh and Assyria, but that is being used as a warning to Egypt. The singular "mighty one of the nations" is not named, because we are intended to see the term as referring to God. But "mighty one" is the same word translated "ram", and this same word in this sense is used as a symbol of the Medes, who along with the Babylonians destroyed Assyria (Dan. 8:20).And the fall of Assyria is being here transferred to Egypt.

Ezekiel 31:12 Gentiles, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off and have left him: on the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the watercourses of the land; and all the peoples of the earth are gone away from his shadow, and have left him- All the big powers were only powerful by reason of the other nations who were under them, and whose mercenaries formed the bulk of their military strength. The collapse of support for Assyria was to be seen for Egypt too. And it was this apparent strength which was so attractive to Judah. "The terrible of the nations" is the word used for how Assyria appeared to Judah at the time of Hezekiah; but they were destroyed by just one Angel (Is. 25:3-5; 29:5, 20). And now, other nations appeared "terrible" to Assyria and had destroyed her; and the same cycle was about to happen to Egypt. Yet somehow human nature doesn't think that the

inevitable cycle will reach us personally, and so Pharaoh and his supporters in Judah didn't want to see that in fact Egypt was set to follow the path of Assyria, and all apparent strength would evaporate. In the end, Yahweh would be the "terrible one" (Jer. 20:11).

Ezekiel 31:13 On his ruin all the birds of the sky shall dwell, and all the animals of the field shall be on his branches- In the parable of the tree, the birds and animals which once lived in its branches will now prowl around over those dead branches once they are fallen to the earth. This was how fickle were the supporters of the superpowers; and so Judah should not consider that Egyptian military might was that great, because it depended upon the tribes and smaller nations who supported her. And such support was unreliable and fickle at best.

Ezekiel 31:14 So that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves in their stature, neither set their top among the thick boughs. Their mighty ones shall not stand up on their height, even all who drink water; for they are all delivered to death, to the lower parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with those who go down to the pit- The GNB clarifies: "And so from now on, no tree, no matter how well-watered it is, will grow that tall again or push its top through the clouds and reach such a height. All of them are doomed to die like mortals, doomed to join those who go down to the world of the dead". The prophetic scenario envisaged was that the Babylonian judgments of the nations would lead to their repentance and 'knowing Yahweh', coming into relationship with Him. The judgment of Assyria had been intended to teach all the trees, the nations, the utter folly of pride. But this lesson wasn't learnt, there wasn't repentance, Egypt didn't learn the lesson from Assyria and neither did Judah and the other nations. And so the potential scenario just didn't happen, which explains why not everything predicted in these prophecies came strictly true. It was a potential scenario.

Ezekiel 31:15 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the day when he went down to Sheol I caused a mourning. I covered the deep for him, and I restrained its rivers; and the great waters were stayed; and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him- I suggested on :14 that the intention of the fall of Assyria as that of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4 was in order to elicit repentance amongst the nations. But this didn't happen. Even though God arranged things to provoke sorrow and mourning amongst the nations, it seems they didn't mourn Nineveh's fall, and neither would they mourn that of Egypt nor Judah. Because the hoped for repentance hadn't been elicited.

Ezekiel 31:16 I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to Sheol with those who descend into the pit. And all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the lower parts of the earth- I suggested on :14 that the intention of the fall of Assyria as that of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4 was in order to elicit repentance amongst the nations. But this didn't happen. The nations didn't tremble and fear because Assyria had been cast down by God because of her pride. The image of comforting doesn't have to mean that the previous nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham, "Eden", were conscious after death. The idea is that they would all alike be unconscious in *sheol,* they would all meet the same end. And the purpose was that Judah would realize that Egypt

would go the way of Assyria and of all earth's proud empires and pass away. And therefore they would not trust in them, but in God.

Ezekiel 31:17 They also went down into Sheol with him to those who are slain by the sword; yes, those who were his arm, that lived under his shadow in the midst of the nations- The arm or strength of Assyria as of Egypt was not God, but rather her associated, supportive nations. And this was the arm or strength which Judah was tempted to depend upon rather than the revealed arm of Yahweh their God. Death is presented here as the great equalizer; the minions of Assyria [and Egypt] came to the same end in death. Appreciating the mortality of Egypt ought to have helped God's people realize the futility of trusting in Egypt rather than Yahweh.

Ezekiel 31:18 To whom are you thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the lower parts of the earth: you shall lie in the midst of the uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, says the Lord Yahweh- As explained on :18, Pharaoh and her supporting nations were revealed as sharing the same fate. It is emphasized that all the trees of Eden, the nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham, all went to the same place in death. Those who had been the minions or colonies of Egypt and Assyria were the same as their masters in death; Pharaoh himself would lie in the midst of the other nations. In death they were all alike, and the ideas that a Pharaoh went to live somewhere else were just fiction. Judah were being invited to share this perspective and therefore not trust in their apparent strength. And for us too, appreciating the fundamental mortality of man helps us realize the folly of trusting in man. For Pharaoh, to whom this message was personally addressed (:2), this would have been a very hard message. Because death was a major theme if not obsession with the Egyptians. The pyramids reveal how much of life was spent preparing for the death of the Pharaoh, involving detailed claims about the journeys of the Pharaoh after death. But Ezekiel is turning all that on its head, and asking Pharaoh to accept that death is death, and he will be amongst the uncircumcised, and all go unto one place- the grave. The only way out was through relationship with Israel's God and the hope of bodily resurrection at the last day.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 32

Ezekiel 32:1 It happened in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, in the first day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me saying- About a year and a half after the destruction of Jerusalem. In that time many of the Jews left in the land had fled into Egypt, although in Jer. 44 Jeremiah had foretold their judgment there. That prophecy was probably given at about this time, and is another example of Jeremiah and Ezekiel being used by the Spirit in parallel to say the same things at the same time to different audiences of the Jews.

Ezekiel 32:2 Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and tell him, You were likened to a young lion of the nations: yet you are as a monster in the seas; and you broke out with your rivers, and troubled the waters with your feet and fouled their rivers- The Jews considered Egypt to be like a lion, a strong alternative to the Babylonian lion threatening them, But instead of being a lion, Egypt was to be revealed as a flabby water monster of the rivers who would be dragged out of them

and slain. And this monster does nothing good for other rivers / peoples; he muddies their waters. The dragon was intended to remain in the Nile, where he was; any attempt by Egypt to extend influence beyond that was 'breaking out' from where God had placed Egypt, and would not prosper. And Judah should take warning from that and not look to Egypt for help against Babylon.

Ezekiel 32:3 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will spread out My net on you with a company of many peoples; and they shall bring you up in My net- Egypt's judgment at the hand of a coalition of peoples clearly looks to her defeat by the Babylonians, whose army was comprised of mercenaries from many nations. These "many nations" were animals "of the whole earth" / *eretz* promised to Abraham (:4) who were in coalition with Babylon. The defeat in view is clearly that of the Egyptian army at Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar. But the further desolation of Egypt itself is not recorded as having happened at the hands of the Babylonians. This was part of the prophetic scenario which didn't then happen; see on :15.

Ezekiel 32:4 I will leave you on the land, I will cast you forth on the open field and will cause all the birds of the sky to settle on you, and I will satisfy the animals of the whole earth with you- Being cast out into the open field in the desert was exactly what happened to the infant Israel (Ez. 16:5), and she was saved from that state by Divine grace alone. The parallel is because God intended Judah to perceive that Egypt was going to share her judgment, and would not save Judah from it but rather herself experience it. And yet as God sought to save Israel from that situation in the "open field", so He sought to save Egypt if they repented.

Ezekiel 32:5 I will lay your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your height- This is the language of the final destruction of Israel's enemies in Ez. 39:17. The connection is because the prophetic scenario here described didn't completely come about. The threatened judgments were intended to elicit repentance (see on :15), but because God foresaw that repentance would not be forthcoming, He didn't bring about the full judgments. And yet the prophetic word is to come ultimately true. This will be achieved by what I have elsewhere called 'transference'. The judgment of Egypt will be transferred to the nations of Ez. 38, several of whom are also mentioned later in this chapter 32 (Meshech, Tubal etc.) as sharing the same judgment as Egypt.

Ezekiel 32:6 I will also water with your blood the land in which you swim, even to the mountains; and the watercourses shall be full of you- As often observed in this commentary, there is no historical evidence that the land of Egypt itself was desolated like this. See on :5.

Ezekiel 32:7 When I shall extinguish you, I will cover the sky and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon shall not give its light- This is language elsewhere used (notably in the Olivet prophecy, see on :9) about the last days judgment of the nations around Israel. I have explained on :5 that the judgments on Egypt didn't fully come about, but they will in essence in the last days, and the specific judgments upon her will be transferred to other entities and situations. Just as the judgments upon Tyre and her king didn't come about completely, but the language used is then reapplied in Revelation 18 to Babylon's judgments in the last days.

Ezekiel 32:8 All the bright lights of the sky will I make dark over you and set darkness

on your land, says the Lord Yahweh- Darkness upon Egypt recalls the plague of darkness. the impression given thereby is that these judgments are a lead up to another Passover deliverance- during which many repentant Egyptians identified with Israel and made the journey out of Egypt towards the promised land. And this was the Divine intention for Ezekiel's time and the restoration. See on :13.

Ezekiel 32:9 I will also trouble the hearts of many peoples- As explained on :7, the Olivet prophecy picks up some of the language used here and applies it to the latter day judgment of Israel's enemies. In this case the connection is with Lk. 21:26.

When I shall bring your destruction among the nations, into the countries which you have not known- This simply didn't happen to the Egyptians as a result of their conflict with Babylon. There would have been historical testament to this if it had happened. The whole situation looks ahead therefore to the last days, bearing in mind the concept of transference of prophecy outlined in :5 and elsewhere.

Ezekiel 32:10 Yes, I will make many peoples amazed at you, and their kings shall be horribly afraid for you, when I shall brandish My sword before them; and they shall tremble every moment, every man for his own life, in the day of your fall- 'Trembling at the fall' of Egypt is the same phrase used about Tyre (Ez. 26:18). The similarity is in that the same hallmark of Yahweh's judgment is seen upon all who are judged by Him. They were not mere victims of random event; the Divine hand was in the fall of all in whom His wayward people had trusted. The sword God would brandish was that of Babylon (:11); they were being used by Him, and it was futile for Judah to think that Babylon and other nations could save them from this sword. The Jerusalem temple was full of the idols of various nations who were aligned with Egypt, whom Judah hoped would save them from Babylon. But these nations were to crumble once Egyptian power was destroyed by Babylon.

Ezekiel 32:11 For thus says the Lord Yahweh: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come on you- Earlier prophecies in Ezekiel had spoken of the sword coming upon Jerusalem. Judah were to realize that their destruction by Babylon was connected with the wider judgment of Egypt and other nations.

Ezekiel 32:12 By the swords of the mighty will I cause your multitude to fall; they are all the terrible of the nations; and they shall bring to nothing the pride of Egypt, and all its multitude shall be destroyed- All the big powers were only powerful by reason of the other nations who were under them, and whose mercenaries formed the bulk of their military strength. The collapse of support for Assyria was to be seen for Egypt too. And it was this apparent strength which was so attractive to Judah. "The terrible of the nations" is the word used for how Assyria appeared to Judah at the time of Hezekiah; but they were destroyed by just one Angel (Is. 25:3-5; 29:5, 20). And now, other nations appeared "terrible" to Assyria and had destroyed her; and the same cycle was about to happen to Egypt. Yet somehow human nature doesn't think that the inevitable cycle will reach us personally, and so Pharaoh and his supporters in Judah didn't want to see that in fact Egypt was set to follow the path of Assyria, and all apparent strength would evaporate. In the end, Yahweh would be the "terrible one" (Jer. 20:11).

Ezekiel 32:13 I will destroy also all its animals from beside many waters; neither shall the foot of man trouble them any more, nor the hoofs of animals trouble them-

This scenario didn't come about, just as the complete destruction of all persons in Judah didn't. The Nile flood lands were not abandoned, all animals weren't destroyed. But the allusion is to the earlier plagues upon Egypt which targeted their livestock (see on :8). These judgments were to be seen as a lead up to another Passover deliverance- during which many repentant Egyptians identified with Israel and made the journey out of Egypt towards the promised land. And this was the Divine intention for Ezekiel's time and the restoration.

Ezekiel 32:14 Then will I make their waters clear, and cause their rivers to run like oil, says the Lord Yahweh- This promise of rivers of oil sounds like the blessings of the Messianic kingdom and the reward for obedience to the covenant (Dt. 32:13; 33:24). Again there is a hint that Egypt like Judah were intended to repent as a result of the Babylonian judgments, and then come into relationship with God, "to know Yahweh", and experience His blessings.

Ezekiel 32:15 When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate and waste, a land destitute of that of which it was once full, when I shall strike all those who dwell therein, then shall they know that I am Yahweh- This didn't totally happen. Egypt was defeated militarily at Carchemish, far from the borders of Egypt; there is little evidence of desolation within Egypt and certainly not to this extent. The connection is between "When..." the desolation happens, *then* "they will know Yahweh", entering relationship with Him. This wasn't chosen by them, and so the desolation which could have brought that about didn't happen. God perhaps foresaw that they wouldn't repent, and so He didn't bring that desolation which could potentially have brought about their repentance.

Ezekiel 32:16 This is the lamentation with which they shall lament, with which the daughters of the nations shall lament therewith; over Egypt and over all her multitude shall they lament therewith, says the Lord Yahweh- As noted on :16, Ezekiel was asked to do the work of the lamenting women and make this lamentation. Jeremiah's lamentations over Jerusalem had already begun (see on :1), and they were to be seen as part of a wider lamentation over the other nations to be judged at the same time as Judah. The "multitude" of Egypt, the nations of her coalition, would not save Judah. Their hope was only in Yahweh.

Ezekiel 32:17 It happened also in the twelfth year, in the fifteenth day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me, saying- The two weeks which elapsed since :1 were perhaps to give both Judah and Egypt a chance to repent. Two weeks was perhaps a reasonable time to allow communication from Chebar in Babylon to reach Judah and Egypt.

Ezekiel 32:18 Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt- This is asking Ezekiel to do the work of women, just spoken of in :16: "This solemn warning will become a funeral song. The women of the nations will sing it to mourn for Egypt and all its people" (GNB). Such challenges of gender roles are common in the Bible, thousands of years before this kind of thing was on the secular agenda.

And cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, to the lower parts of the earth, with those who go down into the pit- Here we see the power of the prophetic word. Ezekiel's word had cast down Egypt. The nations of her coalition are called her daughters because they had as it were acted in whoredom

toward Jerusalem. The casting down is another connection with the casting down of Babylon spoken of in Is. 14. Absolutely all the superpowers were to come down, it was just a question of when. And instead of seeking salvation from whichever one seemed strongest, Judah were instead to throw themselves upon Yahweh their God.

Ezekiel 32:19 Whom do you pass in beauty? Go down, and be laid with the uncircumcised- The language of unequalled beauty however is applied to Zion in Lam. 2:15; Ez. 16:14. It is also used of Tyre in Ez. 28:12,17. So we conclude that as often in the Bible, we are reading things from how they seemed to men at the time. Hence the language of demon possession in the New Testament. Therefore GNB gives: "Say to them: "Do you think you are more beautiful than anyone else?". Tyre considered herself the perfection of beauty, and so did Egypt and so did Assyria. But the true perfection of beauty from God's viewpoint was Zion.

Ezekiel 32:20 They shall fall in the midst of those who are slain by the sword, she is delivered to the sword; draw her away and all her multitudes- The picture is of the mass execution of the Egyptian soldiers along with the foreign mercenaries who supported them, their bodies falling into a pit already filled with dead bodies, and then the corpses being dragged away.

Ezekiel 32:21 The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of Sheol with those who help him. They are gone down, they lie still, even the uncircumcised, slain by the sword- Judah were reminded that Egypt was not strong of herself; her military might was due to "those who help him". Death was a major theme if not obsession with the Egyptians. The pyramids reveal how much of life was spent preparing for death, involving detailed claims about the journeys after death. But Ezekiel is turning all that on its head, and asking the Egyptians to accept that death is death, and they will be amongst the uncircumcised, and all go unto one place- the grave. The only way out was through relationship with Israel's God and the hope of bodily resurrection at the last day.

Ezekiel 32:22 Assyria is there and all her company; her graves are all around her; all of them slain, fallen by the sword- The fall of Assyria has been presented as representative of Egypt's fall in Ez. 31. Assyria too once seemed indomitable, and she too had a "company" of nations who gave her strength. They would go to the same death as Egypt and her coalition. Egypt was allied with the Assyrian king Ashur-uballit II, and marched in 609 BC to his aid against the Babylonians. But Assyria like Egypt was to come to its end.

Ezekiel 32:23 Their graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit, and her company is around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who caused terror in the land of the living- This land of the living may refer specifically to Israel; see on :26. Throughout these prophecies of condemnation of Gentile nations, we have noted constant hints of redemption, if they wished to avail of it. "Company" translates a Hebrew word often used of the company of nations associated with Egypt or Babylon. But the promises to Abraham were that a "company" (s.w.) of nations would and could become part of Abraham's seed (Gen. 28:3; 35:11; 48:4). The "great company" who were to participate in the restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel was intended to include this great company of nations, who for now were judged (Jer. 31:8).

Ezekiel 32:24 There is Elam and all her multitude around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who are gone down uncircumcised into the lower parts of the earth. They who caused their terror in the land of the living have now borne their shame with those who go down to the pit- "The land of the living" may refer specifically to Israel; see on :26. For "multitude" or 'company', see on :23.

Ezekiel 32:25 They have set her a bed in the midst of the slain with all her multitude; her graves are around her; all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for their terror was caused in the land of the living, and they have borne their shame with those who go down to the pit. He is put in the midst of those who are slain- The only honour for Pharaoh would be that he would be at the centre of those who were also ashamed. For the Egyptians, the afterlife was all about glory. But death was to be shame for them. These messages were intended to be taken to the Egyptians in the hope they would repent; see on Ez. 31:2. It was a hard message for them to accept, just as our teaching of conditional immortality and no immortal soul is hard for many to accept.

Ezekiel 32:26 There is Meshech, Tubal, and all their multitude; their graves are around them; all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword- These nations are mentioned in Ez. 38 as participating in the final invasion of Israel in the last days. But the allusion is to how they and the other Scythians invaded the land in the time of Josiah, and the majority of whom then miserably perished (Herodotus i. 106). The Ez. 38 invasion is therefore described in terms of a revival of the nations who had recently invaded and been destroyed.

For they caused their terror in the land of the living- "The land of the living" in :26,32 can too easily be skim read as meaning 'the world of the living'; and indeed it can mean just this. But the land of life is later defined in Ez. 47:7-12 as Israel. Perhaps the idea is that Egypt was a force respected in Judah, but it was to come to nothing. And if Judah had stopped looking to Egypt for help, they could have been restored as God's kingdom and indeed become the land of the living.

Ezekiel 32:27 They shall not lie with the mighty who are fallen of the uncircumcised who are gone down to Sheol with their weapons of war, and have laid their swords under their heads, and their iniquities are on their bones; for they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living- The Egyptians liked to believe that the dead would go to the afterlife with all their favourite swords and domestic possessions; hence the pyramids were found full of such things. But the Egyptians were to have a most dishonourable burial; they would *not* even have the honour of the warriors of some previous uncircumcised nations, who were buried with their swords under their heads. "Their iniquities are on their bones" is hard to understand; the GNB offers "their shields over their bodies". The bones of Israel were also to be dishonourably discarded (Ez. 6:5; 24:10), but those dishonoured bones were to be resurrected and revived according to the prophecy of the dry bones in Ez. 37. The idea may be that such revival was possible for the Egyptians if before their death they repented.

Ezekiel 32:28 But you shall be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised, and shall lie with those who are slain by the sword- This prophecy is an intentional attack upon Egyptian views of the afterlife, whereby preservation of bones unbroken was thought

to be extremely important; see on :27. They would get no special treatment, but would lie together with all the dead, with them and "in the midst of" the other nations.

Ezekiel 32:29 There is Edom, her kings and all her princes, who in their might are laid with those who are slain by the sword. They shall lie with the uncircumcised, and with those who go down to the pit- Edom had just been rejoicing over the fall of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7). So this is to be seen as a prophecy of the future. Perhaps Edom like the Egyptians liked to think that their practice of circumcision gave them some special status; which is what the Jews also believed. This passage is a clear expose of that position. Circumcision alone would not save; covenant relationship with Yahweh involved far more than the mere token of the covenant, just as the baptism which circumcision points forward to (Col. 2:12,13) will not alone save anyone.

Ezekiel 32:30 There are the princes of the north, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who are gone down with the slain; in the terror which they caused by their might they are put to shame. They lie uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit- "Laid to rest" (GNB) confirms the general impression we get here in this insight into "the world of the dead". They lay at rest, dead, silent, doing nothing, and all the nationalities go to the same place and lay still and powerless together. This is quite different to the ideas beloved of the Egyptians, that death was an endless active adventure and journey, and they as the superior nation would be separate from the uncircumcised and other nationalities. Death is presented as a place of silence and unconsciousness, with no division between nationalities. This likewise contradicts the picture of death held by those who believe in the myth of an immortal soul and punishments for the soul after death.

Ezekiel 32:31 When Pharaoh sees them, he will take comfort in his hordes. Pharaoh and all his army will die violently, says the Lord Yahweh- This is almost sarcasm; the only comfort for Pharaoh would be that he had not died alone. However there is no record of Pharaoh being killed at Carchemish, although the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle, now housed in the British Museum, claims that Nebuchadnezzar "crossed the river to go against the Egyptian army which lay in Karchemish. They fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat, decisively. As for the rest of the Egyptian army which had escaped from the defeat so quickly that no weapon had reached them, in the district of Hamath the Babylonian troops overtook and defeated them so that not a single man escaped to his own country". We would expect a mention of the death of Pharaoh but there is none. And the account of the battle of Carchemish in Jer. 46:3-12 doesn't mention it either. Again we see that the prophetic scenario envisaged didn't completely come about, although the essence of it will in the last days.

Ezekiel 32:32 For I have put his terror in the land of the living- "The land of the living" in :26,32 can too easily be skim read as meaning 'the world of the living'; and indeed it can mean just this. But the land of life is later defined in Ez. 47:7-12 as Israel. Perhaps the idea is that Egypt was a force respected in Judah, but it was to come to nothing. And if Judah had stopped looking to Egypt for help, they could have been restored as God's kingdom and indeed become the land of the living.

And he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his hordes, says the Lord Yahweh- Whether or not Egyptians were circumcised is an open question, but the idea that circumcised and

uncircumcised will come to the same end in death is a reminder to the Jews that their circumcision would not of itself save them. It was the token of the covenant, but they had broken that covenant.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 33

Ezekiel 33:1 The word of Yahweh came to me saying- Ezekiel's prophecies had now been fulfilled about the fall of Jerusalem and the inability of Egypt to save. Now it is his duty in the rest of the prophecy to persuade the Jews in exile and in the land of the need for repentance in order to bring about the reestablishment of the Kingdom God had prepared in potential.

Ezekiel 33:2 Son of man, speak to the children of your people and tell them, When I bring the sword on a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them and set him for their watchman- Ezekiel personally was the watchman of Israel (Ez. 3:17). This could be read as an encouragement to Ezekiel to keep on in his duty of witnessing as a watchman, and to remember that his own salvation depended upon it. It would seem, as noted on Ez. 3:17, that he at times flagged in the work. The people of the land hadn't appointed a watchman, but God had- taking the initiative by grace.

Ezekiel 33:3 If, when he sees the sword come on the land, he blows the trumpet and warns the people- The men of Judah blew the trumpet to call their soldiers (Ez. 7:14), but Ezekiel and Jeremiah were blowing God's trumpet of repentance (Jer. 6:1; Ez. 33:3,6). There was a total mismatch between God and His people.

Ezekiel 33:4 Then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and doesn't take warning, if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be on his own head- This is a metaphor from the animals sacrifices, on the heads of which they laid their hands, to symbolize that their guilt should be upon the sacrifice. Animal sacrifice was therefore not going to take away their guilt; and now with the temple in ruins and in exile, this was impossible anyway.

Ezekiel 33:5 He heard the sound of the trumpet and didn't take warning; his blood shall be on him; whereas if he had taken warning, he would have delivered his soul- Ezekiel had been a watchman and had warned them, as Ez. 3 has recorded. Perhaps the exiles were complaining that the death of their relatives at the hands of the Babylonians was somehow unfair. But the point was that Ezekiel had given them warning, as had Jeremiah. Their deaths were completely their own fault.

Ezekiel 33:6 But if the watchman sees the sword come and doesn't blow the trumpet and the people aren't warned, and the sword comes and takes away any person from among them; he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand- There has been a wrong emphasis being placed on the passages in Ezekiel which state that the duty of the prophet was to warn Israel of impending judgment, and if they did that, they would be free of their responsibility. The impression is given that the prophets therefore said " Look out Israel, judgment day is coming!" and then walked away breathing a sigh of relief that they wouldn't be condemned themselves for failing in their duty. But the purpose of the prophets was

to plead with Israel to repent, to describe the judgments for sin with the earnest hope that this would bring about repentance among those who heard. If they didn't do *this* they would be condemned. The Lord says that we are *all* the watchers of the door of the house of the ecclesia (Mk. 13:34,35; Lk. 12:39,40), as the prophets were the watchmen over the city of Zion, God's Old Testament ecclesia. We *all* therefore have a responsibility to guide and warn the ecclesia, not just to scrape out of condemnation for ourselves, but from a genuine, earnest desire to help others to the Kingdom road. This sin of the watchman in not pleading with the sinner would therefore be that of a sin of omission- and most of our sins are likely in that category rather than cold blooded sins of commission.

Ezekiel 33:7 So you, son of man, I have set you a watchman to the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me- This suggests that although the nation hadn't set him as a watchman, God, by grace- see on :2. Ezekiel was still to act as a watchman; judgment was still threatened. After all, God had intended destroying every man and animal in the land, and by grace alone had not done so. Yet instead of being moved by that to repentance, the people remaining in the land and the exiles were continuing in sin.

Ezekiel 33:8 When I tell the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die, if you don't speak to warn the wicked from his way; that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at your hand- Not only our salvation but that of others can be limited by our exercise of freewill. If others' salvation is not dependent upon our preaching, then there is no meaning to the very concept of preaching. This is true to the extent that a watchman can occasion the death of those he could warn, if he doesn't do it. And their blood [for they will die] *will be required* at his hand (Ez. 33:8,13). The wicked will only turn from their ways if the watchmen warns them- and Ez. 33 shows clearly enough that the watchman can be lazy to fulfil his commission, with the result that some will die eternally who need not have done so. It's not that another watchman is raised up to do the job- it is his responsibility, which he can discharge or not. God's word has been delegated to us; to not speak it forth is therefore in a sense to diminish His word. Hence Jeremiah is told to "keep not back a word" of all God's words (Jer. 26:2 AV; RV: "Diminish not a word"). The requiring of blood at our hands suggests that there will to some degree be a 'going through' of all the sins of the rejected at judgment day. For the Hebrew word translated "require" implies some kind of inquisition / explanation.

Ezekiel 33:9 Nevertheless, if you warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, and he doesn't turn from his way; he shall die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your soul- Jerusalem had by now fallen, they had not turned from their way, they had died in their iniquity. But it seems that more judgment was threatened to the Jews who remained in the land and also those in exile, and Ezekiel must continue to warn about it. Dan. 12:3 says, in a restoration context, that those who turn people to righteousness shall "shine" for ever. "Shine" is the same word as "warn" here. If we are shining beacons to others, we shall eternally be so. Our attitudes in this life will be eternally established; in this sense we save our souls or personalities.

Ezekiel 33:10 You, son of man, tell the house of Israel: Thus you speak, saying, Our transgressions and our sins are on us, and we pine away in them- The pining away meant that they had broken the covenant (Lev. 26:39). The AV puts this as a question

from them: "If... our sins be upon us...", as Ezekiel had claimed, and as they still denied. "Sins" is put for "punishment for our sins". They still insisted they were suffering unjustly for the sins of their fathers and not for their own sins, despite Ezekiel rebuking this attitude in Ez. 18.

How then can we live?- Their attitude was that if indeed they were guilty of their sins, well, how could they live further? "How shall we live?" is the question answered by the vision of the dry bones reviving (Ez. 37:11 cp. Is. 49:14). Although they were suffering the punishment of death for sin, yet by grace there could be a revival from that death by allowing God's Spirit to operate.

Ezekiel 33:11 Tell them, As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, house of Israel?- The desire of God for repentance is stronger than His need to punish sin. Hence LXX "Shall I at all desire the death of the sinner, saith the Lord, as I desire that he should turn from his evil way, and live?". This is why He hangs on so long with sinful people, and Israel are the parade example. His desire for repentance, His passion for human reformation, is active and huge. It's not that He has set a bar which must be jumped over, and is passive toward us until that is achieved. God is not passive to human repentance. He wants us to repent and wills us to do so. Those who refuse to turn or repent will die, and He has no satisfaction or pleasure or will for that to happen. The exiles could have repented, both individually and collectively ["turn yourselves" in Hebrew carries that collective implication], and averted the death which was otherwise planned for them and their brethren back in Judah at the hand of the Babylonians. Peter alludes to these words in saying that for all time, God is not willing ["pleasure" in Hebrew can mean 'will'] that any should perish but that all should repent (2 Pet. 3:9). His work of judging insistent sinners is in this sense for Him a "strange act... a strange work" (Is. 28:21). His passion is for our repentance and salvation, not our condemnation.

Ezekiel 33:12 You, son of man, tell the children of your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not save him in the day of his disobedience; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turns from his wickedness; neither shall he who is righteous be able to live thereby in the day that he sins- The "disobedience" in view is not a single act of moral failure. Rather does it seem that the tiny remnant of the righteous at this point were tempted to now break covenant with God as it were in protest at what they saw as unfair treatment of their people. It was the "transgression" of divorce from God, of the adultery which broke the covenant (Is. 50:1; Ez. 21:24 s.w.). The singular "disobedience" of Judah is specifically defined as their idol worship in the name of Yahweh (Mic. 1:5 s.w.). And this kind of thing has been seen so often when previously righteous folk encounter the 'problem of suffering'. Ezekiel had explained the justness of the judgments and revealed the seriousness of sin. But that inspired argumentation was apparently not accepted by them, and that had led them to break covenant with Yahweh.

Ezekiel 33:13 When I tell the righteous that he shall surely live; if he trust to his righteousness and commit iniquity, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered; but in his iniquity that he has committed, therein shall he die- As explained on Ez. 18:22, the good deeds of the righteous will be 'gone through' at judgment day. But if

they turn away, then those good deeds will not be remembered or gone through, but rather his sins.

Ezekiel 33:14 Again, when I say to the wicked, You shall surely die; if he turn from his sin and do that which is lawful and right- "Turn" is the word also used for the 'return' of the exiles. Their repentance would lead to their return. They didn't repent, yet by grace God took the initiative and returned them anyway. Yet most didn't want to return and preferred the soft life in Babylon / Persia, and those who did, as the later prophets make clear, didn't repent. Doing justice and right was the characteristic of Abraham's true seed (s.w. Gen. 18:19). Those who did not do so were therefore not the true Israel of God. Again, the Jewish assumption of salvation from the Babylonians on account of their fleshly descent is being deconstructed.

Ezekiel 33:15 If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that which he had taken by robbery, walk in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die- The "statutes of life" refers to how the law was intended to give life (Rom. 7:10; Lev. 18:5) but in practice, human failure meant that no law gave life (Gal. 3:21). Such sensitivity and generosity to the poor is not a mere optional extra in the spiritual life; it is in fact part of being basically "just" and committed to social justice, part of 'doing right / truly' (:14). The implication is that the wealthy who had gone into captivity were still abusing the poor. They had still not learnt their lesson.

Ezekiel 33:16 None of his sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live- The not remembering of Judah's sins was part of the new covenant offered to them; the same Hebrew phrase is used (Jer. 31:34; Is. 43:25). Yet here this is made contingent upon specific repentance. It seems that God offered them such not remembering of sin whether or not they specifically repented, in the hope it would provoke them to that specific repentance; and even that didn't work with them.

Ezekiel 33:17 Yet the children of your people say, The way of the Lord is not fair; but as for them, their way is not fair- The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon were intended to admit that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them. The complaint that God is unfair is answered by reminding them that they have sinned. And this finally is one aspect of the answer to 'the problem of suffering'.

Is. 40:3, which is quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25). We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25).

Ezekiel 33:18 When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall even die therein- This was perhaps a warning to the righteous remnant who

had so far repented in exile; they were liable to be dragged back into sin by the other exiles and the depressive situation they found themselves in.

Ezekiel 33:19 When the wicked turns from his wickedness and does that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby- The parallel Ez. 18:27 says "Save his soul alive". This implies that judgment is about to come, the death penalty already passed, but his repentance just about averts this at the last moment. It is the term used in Gen. 19:19 of how Lot was just about saved by grace out of Sodom, which was a symbol of Jerusalem under judgment, as Ez. 16 has made clear. This was the desperate urgency of Ezekiel's appeal; and yet he was seen at best as a singer of fairy tales or old time love songs (Ez. 33:32).

Ezekiel 33:20 Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. House of Israel, I will judge every one of you after his ways- God objects to their complaint that He has judged masses of people unfairly because of the sins of a minority. This is the usual human complaint at the 'problem of suffering'. But God insists, then and now, that He judges each person individually. He knows how they would have acted in the future, He weighs fairly the degree of collective guilt they must blame in a society given over to rebellion against Him. And we are to trust His judgment rather than break covenant with Him over it.

Ezekiel 33:21 It happened in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one who had escaped out of Jerusalem- We noted on Ez. 24:6 that God had originally threatened total destruction of all within Jerusalem, but in actuality He repented of this. But in Ez. 24:26 Ezekiel is told that in fact one would escape and come to him with the news which by prophecy he already knew. This now happened. The mention of one who escapes is therefore a tacit reflection of God's grace in not doing all He threatened in Ez. 24:6.

The date here given is about a year and a half after the city's fall. This period is very long. Some manuscripts read the eleventh year, leaving about six months for the news to travel by messenger. Eleven and twelve are easily confused in Hebrews. Or it could be that the "one" who came was not an individual but the group of exiles. In this case, the singular would be used for the plural in a collective sense, as in "the escaped remnant" elsewhere. We have the same thing in "the escaped of Moab" (Is. 15:9); "He that escapeth of them" (Am. 9:1).

Came to me saying, The city has been struck- Ez. 33:21 – 39:29 is a complete section within the book. I understand Ez. 33:21,22 to mean that Ezekiel opened his mouth and gave the six prophetic utterances in this section on the night before the exiles received the news that Jerusalem had fallen. It was on the fifth day of the tenth month of the 12th year of the exile (Ez. 33:21). Ezekiel's mouth was opened by Divine inspiration that evening, and he gave these messages through the night until the messenger arrived in the morning with the news that Jerusalem had fallen. Each of the six messages begin with the rubric "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying…".

Ezekiel 33:22 Now the hand of the Yahweh had been upon me the evening before the fugitive came; and He had opened my mouth by the time the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened, and I was no longer dumb- The idea may be that now he opens his previously closed lips to the Jews. In the interval he had prophesied to foreign nations, as he had been forbidden to speak to the Jews from Ez. 24:27 onward.

Ezekiel 33:23 The word of Yahweh came to me saying- This was a revelation presumably added in answer to specific objections to Ezekiel's statements so far.

Ezekiel 33:24 Son of man, they who inhabit those waste places in the land of Israel speak, saying, 'Abraham was one, and he inherited the land; but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance'- Clearly "many" remained in the land after the destruction of Jerusalem. They ought to have reflected that by grace, the prophecies of absolute destruction of every person hadn't come true. Instead they argued that if one man Abraham inherited the land, then how much more should they. But Abraham didn't inherit the land in his lifetime as promised (Acts 7:5)- to understand this required a belief in a future resurrection and inheritance in the Kingdom of God on earth. And they lacked that perspective.

Ezekiel 33:25 Therefore tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes to your idols, and shed blood. Shall you possess the land?- This is the degree to which the Jews in the land and in exile were so deeply in sin, despite seeing all Ezekiel's warnings come true. The intentional eating of blood was part of the demands of pagan idol rituals. And this was leading them to shed blood as part of their lifting up their eyes in worship to the idols; human sacrifice, not just of firstborn children but others too, was apparently still being practiced.

Ezekiel 33:26 You rely on your sword, you work abomination, and every one of you defiles his neighbour's wife. Shall you possess the land?- "Abomination" relates usually to idol worship in the Old Testament. This is what was leading them to adultery, and also violence with the sword- perhaps relating to human sacrifice, and not just of babies. The spiritual situation in the land and perhaps also amongst the exiles was extremely bad; and yet at the same time, that generation as none before had a vast, Divinely planned potential before them: if they repented, God would pour out His grace and His Spirit and use them to reestablish His Kingdom, and the repentant victims of Babylonian judgment amongst the Gentiles along with the restored ten tribes would join them in the land. These things had all been spoken about earlier in Ezekiel's prophecies.

Ezekiel 33:27 You shall tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword; and him who is in the open field will I give to the animals to be devoured; and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves shall die of the pestilence- The reference seems specifically to the Jews who remained in the desolated land of Judah, the urban poor who were now living in the open fields and caves. God had previously through Ezekiel threatened to destroy the majority of them by the sword, animals and plague- but by grace had relented. Maybe fro pure pity, or also in response to the repentance of a remnant and the intercession of the likes of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. But these three judgments were to return upon them as they stubbornly refused to repent. There is no evidence however that this actually happened; there was not another wave of Babylonian invasion and Jer. 41:5 describes some of the people of the land coming to make offerings at the temple site. Perhaps there was some response to Ezekiel's appeal here, which was presumably taken from Babylon to the people in the land. But maybe God was so eager to accept His sinful, stubborn people that He still tried to forge ahead with His plans as far as possible even without their repentance.

Ezekiel 33:28 I will make the land a desolation and an astonishment; the pride of her power shall cease and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, so that none shall pass through- As noted on :27 this didn't come about to the extent threatened. Even though the Jews were robbed of "power", they still had pride in it. And this is singled out as the reason for their judgment. Breaking "the pride of her power" was one of the curses for breaking covenant (Lev. 26:19). But the covenant had already been broken; yet it seems God still counts them as being within it, in His earnest grace toward them. "The pride of your power" is the same phrase used about the Jerusalem temple which was now in ruins (Ez. 24:21). This had already been caused to "cease", but still their pride remained. The intention of the Babylonian judgments had been to humble Israel, but this still hadn't happened.

Ezekiel 33:29 Then shall they know that I am Yahweh, when I have made the land a desolation and an astonishment, because of all their abominations which they have committed- Judah were to repent, to enter relationship with Yahweh ["knowing" Him in the Hebraic sense] as a result of the desolations. But they didn't. And perhaps God foresaw that, and so as noted on :27,28, He didn't bring all the planned desolations, because He foreknew they would not achieve their effect. These things however will come true in the last days.

Ezekiel 33:30 As for you, son of man, the children of your people talk of you by the walls and in the doors of the houses, speaking one to another, each one to his brother saying, Please come and hear what is the word that comes forth from Yahweh- The walls refers to the public places where in the shade people talked in groups; in the doors refers to private places. "One to another" uses a Chaldee rather than Hebrew word, suggesting they had already begun to adopt the language and speech of Babylon. They were fascinated by Ezekiel- his prophecies had undoubtedly come true. And yet they still did not know Yahweh, they were out of relationship with Him (:29). We can express interest in God's word, and yet be so far from Him. Relationship with Him is not solely predicated upon Bible study or reading.

Ezekiel 33:31 They come to you as the people come, and they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but don't do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their gain- Elsewhere it is idolatry which is cited as the main reason why they didn't respond to God's word. But the attraction of idolatry was "gain"; they were fertility gods, who were thought to give material "gain". This is the same word translated "dishonest gain" which was the characteristic of the leaders as well as the people of Judah (Ez. 22:3,27; Jer. 6:13; 8:10). They considered there was no "gain" in serving Yahweh (Mal. 3:14 s.w. "profit"). Whereas the true gain was in the things of Yahweh's kingdom.

Ezekiel 33:32 Behold, you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they don't do them- It was tragic for the prophets that the people were so indifferent. Ezekiel was appealing for each man to "Save his soul alive" (Ez. 18:27), implying that judgment is about to come, the death penalty already passed, but his repentance just about averts this at the last moment. It is the term used in Gen. 19:19 of how Lot was just about saved by grace out of Sodom, which was a symbol of Jerusalem under judgment, as

Ez. 16 has made clear. This was the desperate urgency of Ezekiel's appeal; and yet he was seen at best as a singer of fairy tales or old time love songs.

The prophets portrayed the tragic, passionate love of God to His people, they sung of it, wrote of it, made poetry about it [for much of the prophetic writing is poetry]. And yet they passed this off as mere “allegory” in a mocking way (Ez. 20:49), Ezekiel was “to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice… for they hear what you say, but they will not do it” (Ez. 33:32). They were like buskers singing songs in the subway, which we may listen to with half an ear, even admire them for a few moments, and then walk on in our busy lives. But the prophets were speaking forth the words of passionate love of God Almighty for His people… truly as Paul Simon put it, with an uncanny appropriacy to our train of thought, “the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls”. They thought that “the Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill” (Zeph. 1:12); “the Lord does not see us” (Ez. 8:12; 9:9); “my way is hidden from the Lord” (Is. 40:27; 29:15). This of course is the attitude with which we daily live. The question is, will we perceive it as the prophets did?

However, whilst "lovely song" can legitimately be understood as a love song, the Hebrew used here is unusual if that is what was meant. The word for "love" is used almost exclusively by Ezekiel in describing the unbridled lust in the name of love which had characterized God's people (s.w. Ez. 23:5,7,9,12,16,20, AV "doted"). Perhaps they were blasphemously using Ezekiel's words and poetry as songs used at the time of their idolatry.

Ezekiel 33:33 When this comes to pass (behold, it comes!), then shall they know that a prophet has been among them- This could equally be translated "It is come". Ezekiel's prophecies had been fulfilled, and they ought to recognize that he was indeed a prophet and not just an interesting person to listen to for entertainment.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 34

Ezekiel 34:1 *The word of Yahweh came to me saying*- Ezekiel was a priest, and they were the shepherds of Israel whom he now condemns as a main reason why the Kingdom was not being established. So he was an appropriate person to be used to deliver the criticism.

Ezekiel 34:2 *Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and tell them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Shouldn’t the shepherds feed the sheep?*- The leadership could have been criticized for many things, but the fundamental issue was selfishness; thinking of themselves and not others. The shepherds refer not only to the priests but to the entire leadership of the people.

Ezekiel 34:3 *You eat the fat*- This should have been given to God, under the Mosaic law (Lev. 3:17). They kept the best for themselves, and thereby were playing God. For the fat was to be 'eaten' by God in the Mosaic rituals. Yet Zech. 11:16 prophesied that God would raise up such shepherds who 'eat the fat' as punishment for Israel. These shepherds sinned of their own freewill, but God confirmed them in that way.

And you clothe yourself with the wool, you kill the fatlings; but you don't feed the sheep- The situation sounds to be ongoing at Ezekiel's time. The priesthood was still profiting from the people rather than feeding them. This criticism of them would have caused many problems for Ezekiel; perhaps he was criticizing his own relatives.

Ezekiel 34:4 *You haven't strengthened the diseased*- The same criticism could be levelled at the 'shepherds' of our times who drive out the spiritually weak rather than seeking to cure and strengthen them. The priests were only interested in what they could get out of people, rather than what they could do for them. The "diseased" [s.w. "sick"] were made diseased or sick by God in punishment for their sins (Mic. 6:13 s.w.). The idea is that those who were sick as a result of their punishments at the hands of the Babylonians should be strengthened by the priests. But they were ignored.

Neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken- The binding up of the breach or break between God and His people was to be in the Messianic Kingdom (Is. 30:26; 61:1). But this was potentially possible at the restoration; if the shepherds led the people towards it.

Neither have you caused to return that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigour you have ruled over them- Very much the language of God causing to return those driven away into captivity. It seems that after the first wave of captives were taken away to Babylon, they could have returned if the shepherds of Judah had acted rightly- those driven away could have returned. God's purpose is so open to our behaviour. Hence :5 "They were scattered because there was no shepherd". The scattering of the majority could have been averted by the spirituality of a minority. It must be so tragic for God to see all these potentials for salvation being wasted time and again. The fact He continues to set up all these potentials, when He sees them wasted multiple times, is testament to His love and passion for us. The shepherds of those in captivity didn't actually want them to return from exile because they personally were benefitted.

Ezekiel 34:5 *They were scattered because there was no shepherd*- The scattering of the flock was here directly blamed upon the shepherds / priesthood.

And they became food to all the animals of the field and were scattered- A reference to all the nations surrounding Israel. When we read of "all the animals of the field" in Genesis 1-3, I have elsewhere suggested that this refers specifically to all the animals within the *eretz* of greater Israel, the land promised to Abraham; for that is how the phrase is used here in Ez. 34:5. It clearly doesn't refer to all animals / nations on the planet. The focus of God is so intensely upon Israel and this is reflected in the language of the Bible. See on :6.

Ezekiel 34:6 *My sheep wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill*- This is very much the language of Israel worshipping idols upon the mountains and "every high hill" (Ez. 6:13; 20:28). Mountains and hills represent nations and peoples; because of this, they were made to wander amongst the nations and peoples. Their judgment was appropriate to their sin; for the practice of sin is really a living out of condemnation.

Yes, My sheep were scattered on all the surface of the earth; and there was none who searched or sought them- We would likely have condemned the shepherds for themselves committing idolatry. But that is never mentioned here; rather is the emphasis upon the fact that the shepherds didn't try to get Israel to repent and return

to God. The lack of spiritual effort for others was the main source of their condemnation. The criticism that the shepherds fed themselves instead of the flock (:2,8) could even imply that the shepherds were not themselves idolaters, but their sin was that of spiritual selfishness.

Ezekiel 34:7 *Therefore you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh*- The following prophecy says that Yahweh will replace the shepherds with His own shepherding, manifest through His chosen individual shepherd. But we could deduce that this threat was also effectively an appeal to the shepherds to repent.

Ezekiel 34:8 *As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely because My sheep became a prey, and My sheep became food to all the animals of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did My shepherds search for My sheep, but the shepherds fed themselves, and didn't feed My sheep*- See on :6 *There was none who searched or sought them.* Israel were given as a "prey" to the Gentiles because of their own sins (Ez. 7:21 s.w.); but here the shepherds are blamed for this. They could have 'stood in the gap' and stopped this judgment coming upon the people. But they didn't care for people; that quite simply is the crushing condemnation.

Ezekiel 34:9 *Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh*- This was an appeal for repentance so that the process of condemnation at the last day (explained on :10) need not happen.

Ezekiel 34:10 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require My sheep at their hand*- When did this happen? This surely suggests that those men will be resurrected and asked at the judgment what they did with the sheep. The pain and anger of God is because Israel were *His* sheep, and He had entrusted them to others to care for. As explained on Ez. 18:22, there will be a 'going through' of the sins of the rejected at judgment day. God will "require" the flock at the hand of the pastors of Ezekiel's day. The Hebrew word translated "require" has the sense of to search / enquire- which suggests a process of discussion during the judgment process.

And cause them to cease from feeding the sheep; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; and I will deliver My sheep from their mouth- The people in view are clearly the shepherds, but they are now likened to the mouth of the ravening beast who devoured them. They were therefore no better than Babylon, the devouring beast; indeed, they effectively *were* Babylon. Here we see the power of sins of omission; omitting to care for the flock made these people the same as Babylon. For nearly all the accusations against the shepherds in this chapter refer to sins of omission rather than commission.

That they may not be food for them- Omitting to feed the sheep meant that they were effectively devouring and eating the sheep. The implication of their laziness and sins of omission is here stated in powerful terms. We too need to think through the implications of our similar sins of omission.

Ezekiel 34:11 *For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I Myself, even I, will search for My sheep, and will seek them out*-

Psalm 80 begins with an appeal to God as the shepherd of Israel, continuing right on from the theme of Israel as God's flock in Ps. 79:13. But their accusation in Ps. 80:5 was that He was a bad shepherd; for a shepherd's duty was to provide food and

water to the sheep. But God has given them tears for both food and water. They had no sense of their own failure as His sheep, and the consequences of their own choices. Part of the new covenant offered the exiles was that God would be their shepherd and regather them (Ez. 34:11), seeing their own shepherds had failed them. But instead of eagerly responding to the shepherd's voice through the prophets, they found fault with their wonderful shepherd. And so the regathering offered in Ez. 34 didn't happen at the restoration, because the sheep refused the voice of the Divine shepherd. God's shepherding of the exiles back to Zion from Babylon was effected through Cyrus: "'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'" (Is. 44:28). But the exiles were unenthusiastic about the decree of Cyrus, they generally remained in Babylon, and those who did return didn't build the foundations of the temple according to the plans given them in Ezekiel. And thus the exiles refused God's shepherding.

This chapter is full of connection with the language of the Lord Jesus as the shepherd of Israel in John 10. There was an intense manifestation of God in Jesus, as there is in all those who do the work of caring for His sheep. Likewise :15 "I myself will be the shepherd...". The terms of the new covenant which God promised a repentant Judah at the restoration included the promise of God shepherding them as a flock (Jer. 31:10). Such a shepherd could have been raised up then, but this didn't come about; and so the ultimate fulfilment is in the work of the Lord Jesus. This is the time when a Messiah figure could have 'shepherded in the strength of Yahweh' (Mic. 5:4 s.w.).

Ezekiel 34:12 *As a shepherd seeks out his flock*- The Lord's teaching places a huge value on the importance of the individual- He is the unusual shepherd who will leave the 99 in the wilderness and go searching for the one lost sheep. Yet His parable of searching for one sheep is clearly based upon a similar one in Ezekiel 34, where we read that God [in His Son] will 'seek out his *flock*' (Ez. 34:12). Perhaps Jesus meant us to understand that for Him, one lost sheep is as good as the whole flock; so important is the individual to Him. He made no effort to start an organization; rather did He focus upon the conversion and radical transformation of a group of individuals. We were each uniquely created in order to manifest some specific aspect of the Father's glory.

In the day that he is among his sheep- This is the intensity of 'God with us' in Christ; God Himself comes among us in order to bring us back to Him.

That are scattered abroad, so will I seek out My sheep; and I will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day- The cloudy and dark day was the day of judgment which came upon Judah, and which resulted in them being scattered into Babylon and Persia. The shepherd who was to deliver them and get them to return from the various places of their scattering was intended to be Cyrus. Is. 44:28 is crystal clear about this. God "says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'". It was God's intention that Cyrus repent and become a proselyte, and Yahweh would then use him to save His people "out of all places where they have been scattered". The decree of Cyrus was addressed to "Whoever is left [of the Jews], in any place where he lives" (Ezra 1:4). "Cyrus" literally means "sun" and so contrasts with the cloudy and dark day. But Cyrus let the ball drop and didn't carry through the Divine purpose as he might have done and neither did the Jews respond as they should have done. Cyrus was Yahweh's

anointed (Is. 45:1), and so the essence of these prophecies is to come true in the last days in the person of the Lord Jesus. We could say that the prophecies are transferred from Cyrus to the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 34:13 *I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country*- This 'causing' to go forth [AV] was by grace, because they had not met the required spiritual preconditions- in that they had not in fact cast away their idols (see on Ez. 20:6-8). And it was to be the same in the exodus from Babylon. This Divine 'causing to go forth' was by the Spirit, for those who left captivity did so because their minds were stirred up by the Spirit to do so, even though they were not spiritually qualified for the restoration (Ezra 1:5). They had been commanded to "go forth" from Babylon (Is. 52:11 s.w.) but it was God who caused them to do this by the grace of His Spirit's operation on their hearts. The same is true of our exodus from this world through the water of baptism. It is all of grace and confirmation of the smallest desire to do so; and so this causing to go forth was by God's "mighty hand" (Ez. 20:34 s.w.).

Ezekiel 34:14 *I will feed them with good pasture; on the mountains of the height of Israel shall their fold be*- A reference to Jerusalem or the temple mount? This was to be the source point of their teaching, the spiritual feeding which the shepherds / priests had failed to provide from the temple.

There shall they lie down in a good fold; on fat pasture shall they feed on the mountains of Israel- The restored Judah did live in a “fat” pasture land, but the fatness of the land was still given to the kings of Persia because of Judah’s spiritual weakness (Neh. 9:25,35-37). They could have broken free and in fact subsumed the surrounding empires and kingdoms into the restored kingdom of Judah.

Ezekiel 34:15 *I Myself will be the shepherd of My sheep, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord Yahweh*- See on :11. This is the language of the wealthy farmer exasperated with his shepherds who goes out into the field and himself shepherds the flock; remembering that shepherds were perceived in social terms as the lowest of the low. Recall how shepherds were despised in Egypt and it was better to say you were a cattle herder than a shepherd (Gen. 46:34). This going out into the fields by God Himself was reflected in His efforts to bring Judah back from Babylon, where they were sitting in captivity in Ezekiel's time. But the majority of them preferred to remain there. Despite such passionate effort from God, manifest through the extraordinary desire of Cyrus to restore them (see on :12). So many today prefer to remain in the Babylon of this world rather than coming out of captivity into the things of God's Kingdom- despite God's intense efforts for them through manipulating life situations for them to lead them to Him.

Ezekiel 34:16 *I will seek that which was lost, and will cause to return that which was driven away. I will bind up that which was broken and will strengthen that which was sick: but the fat and the strong I will destroy; I will feed them in justice*- The binding up of the breach or break between God and His people was to be in the Messianic Kingdom (Is. 30:26; 61:1). But this was potentially possible at the restoration; if the shepherds led the people towards it. The Divine shepherd would act quite differently to ordinary shepherds, who would focus upon the fat and strong and not destroy them,

but rather accept that the broken and sick weren't worth the effort and were an acceptable loss. He would do exactly opposite.

We note here and in :15 the stress on God 'causing' the return. The idea of being given spirituality is repeated so often in the restoration prophecies. Thus Jer. 32:17 "I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all My heart and all My soul". The whole mental focus of God is involved in this. The word *shub* is used both of 'repentance', turning back, as well as the return to the land. But God is consistently presented as the causer of this turning / repenting. Jer. 33:7 is clear: "I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return" [also Jer. 30:3; 32:44; 33:11,26; 34:22; 42:12, seven times in total- a major theme]. Ez. 34:16 makes the spiritual aspect of this 'return' very clear: "I will seek that which was lost, and will cause to return that which was driven away". It's not simply that the lost is found because it wanders back home; it is caused to return.

Ezekiel 34:17 *As for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord Yahweh: See, I judge between sheep and sheep, the rams and the male goats*- Surely the basis for the Lord's parable of His final judgment in Mt. 25:32. The focus seems to move away from the shepherds to another reason for the sad state of Israel's flock- the abuse of the poor majority by the minority of 'fat ones' amongst the flock, the goats. Zech. 11:11 in a restoration context speaks of the poor of the flock as the faithful ones; the false shepherds in Zechariah likewise have to be removed before the envisioned restoration of the Kingdom can happen. But they had been caused to stumble by others within the flock, according to the reasoning here in Ez. 34. The idea seems to be that the sheep will be divided and the fat, abusive ones taken out of the flock and placed together with the goats. It's as if this message in Ez. 34 foresees the likely objection of many: 'But I'm not a shepherd, so this doesn't apply to me'. The focus is now upon the ordinary sheep themselves who have deprived other sheep of spiritual food. So easily, the Lord's sheep are turned away from spiritual feeding by the actions of other sheep. They cease attending places of spiritual feeding, or are banned from attending them, by the behaviour of those who are apparently the best sheep. By so doing, those apparently fat, well fed sheep of :16 are declared to be goats... The connection with Mt. 25:32 suggests that this will be the same basis for judgment at the last day for all the Lord's people. The same issues are in view there as in Ez. 34- not visiting, not feeding, not clothing (Ez. 34:3) and not providing water.

Ezekiel 34:18 *Does it seem a small thing to you*- The intention of the gripping passage in Ez. 16 was to convict Jerusalem of her sins (:2); because they considered their spiritual and literal prostitution "a small matter". The same word is used here in accusing the priesthood of considering it "a small matter" for the flock to have been ruined by them. This was the problem, as it is today- the real implications of attitudes and behaviour are not taken seriously. We fail to perceive how deeply we affect both God and man. Society makes us feel insignificant cogs, but we are not like that to God. This was the problem with Ezekiel's audience; they had a light hearted approach to eternal issues. To them, sin was a light thing (Ez. 8:17; 22:7). This was the role of the prophets, to convict people of the gravity of their sins and positions, and the consequences to come.

To have fed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the remainder of your pasture; to have drunk of the clear waters, but you must foul what

remains with your feet?- It is a characteristic of those who reject the message of the Kingdom that they seek to stop others entering it as well (see on Lk. 11:52).

Ezekiel 34:19 *As for My sheep, they eat that which you have trodden with your feet, and they drink that which you have fouled with your feet*- To tread underfoot was to despise. The leadership had despised that which God wanted to feed them with and this in turn damaged it for the ordinary sheep.

Ezekiel 34:20 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh to them: Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep*- This judgment would be very different to how a human shepherd would judge; he would prefer the fat and reject the lean. But as noted on :16, the fat were to be destroyed. The "lean" or famished by famine are those referred to in Is. 17:4-6, the glory of Jacob who had been "made thin" [s.w. "lean"] would become the faithful, repentant remnant, "gleanings [that] will be left there, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outermost branches of a fruitful tree".

Ezekiel 34:21 *Because you thrust with side and with shoulder and push all the diseased with your horns, until you have scattered them abroad*- The "diseased" or 'stricken' were those stricken by the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 14:17 s.w.). But these were not helped by the "fat", the wealthy leadership and priesthood. Instead they were pushed into captivity by the selfishness of the fat.

Ezekiel 34:22 *Therefore will I save My flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep*- But the rich, the fat among the exiles, still oppressed the lean or the poor (Neh. 5:1-19). And God's people continued to be a prey to the Gentiles. The intended prophetic scenario didn't come about at the time although it will in the last days.

Ezekiel 34:23 *I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd*- This Messianic figure was to be "the prince" of Ez. 40-48. Initially it was intended to be Cyrus (Is. 44:28), but then other possibilities arose, not least Zerubbabel. The system of shepherds, be it the priesthood or the royal family, was to be replaced by one singular shepherd after the pattern of David, although he would have assistants who were also after God's own heart- another way of saying they too would be like David, the man after God's own heart (Jer. 3:15; 1 Sam. 13:14).

Ezekiel 34:24 *I, Yahweh, will be their God, and My servant David prince among them; I, Yahweh, have spoken it*- The "Prince" of Ez. 40-48 could have been this shepherd figure who was to lead scattered Israel back from the Babylonian exile, and who initially could have been Cyrus (Is. 44:28).

Ezekiel 34:25 *I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause dangerous animals to cease out of the land; they shall dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods*- This is the new covenant which was offered with the exiles at the restoration, seeing that they had broken the old covenant. The peace was peace with God. Wild animals, both literally and in terms of marauding nations, would never again threaten the people. They would be safe everywhere. Being safe in the desert

and sleeping in the woods is language appropriate to sheep. They would no longer experience predators.

Ezekiel 34:26 *I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing; I will cause the shower to come down in its season, there shall be showers of blessing*- The implication is that a rebuilt temple in Zion would be the focus for blessings. Joel 2:23 and Hos. 6:3 use similar language in talking of the giving of the Spirit. The new covenant offered in Jer. 31 and Ez. 20 was to involve a new spirit, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of God's sinful people.

Ezekiel 34:27 *The tree of the field shall yield its fruit and the earth shall yield its increase and they shall be secure in their land; and they shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them out of the hand of those who made slaves of them*- The deliverance from Babylon was to be at the same time as dramatic fertility in the revived land of Israel. The returned exiles would dwell there securely- because Babylon would have destroyed one group of local nations, and then God Himself would destroy Babylon and her supporters as Jeremiah had made clear. This scenario didn't happen, but will do at the return of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 34:28 *They shall no more be a prey to the nations, neither shall the animals of the earth devour them*- This can only be really true in the last days, for after the restoration Israel continued to be a prey.

But they shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid- This is the situation predicted when Israel were faithful to the old covenant (Lev. 25:18,19; 26:5). But there is no mention in Ez. 34 of Israel repenting or living righteously; rather the emphasis is that God by pure grace shall go forth and regather His people and make a new covenant with them (:25)- a covenant of grace, whereby He saves them almost in spite of their disobedience. And this is the same new covenant made with us. On one hand, repentance and obedience are required; but on another hand, salvation under the new covenant is by grace alone. And I see no reconciliation between these two poles, at least not by any intellectual process or clever feat of exegesis. This is the mystery of grace and salvation which will have its final revelation at the day of judgment. Note that dwelling securely without fear is the situation developed in Ez. 38:8,11,14; the invasion led by the man Gog will happen after Israel have returned to the covenant. Any signs of an imminent invasion by a figure apparently answering to Gog must therefore be tempered by a recognition that such an invasion will happen *after* God's intervention in regathering His people and welcoming them into the new covenant blessings- a situation not currently seen in the land of Israel.

Ezekiel 34:29 *I will raise up to them a plantation for renown, and they shall be no more consumed with famine in the land, neither bear the shame of the nations any more*- Shame for sin is a major theme with Ezekiel. The days of shame would come to an end (Ez. 16:54; 34:29; 36:15; 39:26)- if Jerusalem accepted shame for her sins. But Ez. 44:13 says that the sins of the Jerusalem priesthood were such that in the restored temple, they would bear their shame in that they would never again minister in it. Likewise the Jewish priesthood who persecuted Jeremiah at this time were to bear a shame that would last for ever (Jer. 20:11). And yet the hope of Israel was that they would eternally be unashamed, world without end (Is. 45:17). The resolution of this

may be in God's willingness to count them totally righteous by grace, upon their repentance. And Ezra "blushed" [s.w. "ashamed"] because of Israel's sins (Ezra 9:6), and Jeremiah at this time cast himself down in shame because of them (Jer. 3:25). This representative intercession for Judah had some effect. Just as the Lord Jesus bore the shame of Israel and all sinners on the cross (Is. 50:6), and yet because of that He would not be ashamed eternally (Is. 50:7). He was to become representative of the repentant Israel of God; for the same words are used of how they too would have unashamed faces eternally (Is. 54:4). But the Jerusalem priesthood refused to take shame, they were unashamed of their whoredoms (Jer. 3:3; 8:12). Ezekiel's appeal in Ez. 16 was so that they would recognize their sins, and be ashamed (Ez. 16:2). There was time for them to do so right up until they were led captive, in the final attempt to make them realize their shame. For when they went into captivity, then God intended that they would be "ashamed" (Jer. 22:22). The final vision of Ezekiel, of the potential that was possible in a restored Zion, was in order to make the exiles ashamed of their sins when they realized the possibilities they had wasted and yet which were still possible by grace (Ez. 43:10,11). But they didn't respond to that vision, they refused to build and operate such a temple system; because they refused to be ashamed in exile, although it was God's intention that they should be. And so it is for us as a new Israel to be ashamed for our sins, and identify with the Messiah figure who would bear Israel's shame and thereby emerge eternally unashamed.

Ezekiel 34:30 *They shall know that I, Yahweh their God, am with them; and that they, the house of Israel, are My people, says the Lord Yahweh*- Having God as their God was a repetition of the covenant promise to Abraham: "I will be their God". The new covenant deal with Judah was to be based upon the promises to Abraham. The "they" refers to the nations of :30 who had abused Israel; they were to perceive that amazingly, this sinful people were truly the people of Yahweh. His grace to them would be understood and noticed, and would serve to convert the nations.

Ezekiel 34:31 *You My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are men, and I am your God, says the Lord Yahweh*- God didn't want Judah to miss the wonder of it all; they really were men, but they were His sheep. His being their God parallels His promise to be their shepherd; He was more than a shepherd to them, but their God. They would be released from prison in Babylon to free pastures (Is. 49:9 s.w.). The tragedy was that this continual statement of such amazing love and care was disregarded by them.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 35

Ezekiel 35:1 *Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying*- The entire section from Ez. 33-39 outlines the possibility of the exiles repenting and a Divine kingdom being reestablished in Israel, with Judah joined by the repentant remnants of the ten tribes and the surrounding nations. In the prophecies against the seven Gentile nations in Ez. 26-32, all are envisaged as coming to "know Yahweh", i.e. to enter relationship with Him; except Edom. The unforgiveable sin, it seems, is of hatred of ones' brother as Esau / Edom / Seir hated Jacob / Israel. And so the total elimination of "Mount Seir" was intended as coming at this time of restoration. It didn't, then, because the wider prophetic picture didn't come about, and has been transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to our last days. But see on :9.

Ezekiel 35:2 *Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it*- This prophecy isn't just inserted here for no reason. It follows on the prediction that Judah shall be saved by God's grace, and made to "dwell safely", which I pointed out in the commentary on chapter 34 is the language of Israel rewarded for obedience to the Old Covenant. They were not obedient to that covenant, but under the new covenant of grace introduced in Ez. 34:25, they are counted as if they were obedient and given the blessing for obedience, even though they were disobedient. Seeing God's righteousness has been imputed to Israel, now we read of the judgment of Seir / Esau / Edom, who mocked Judah's unrighteousness at the time of her exile, and joined in the judgment upon her. So now, Judah is counted righteous, and those who judged her for her unrighteousness are now judged.

Ezekiel 35:3 *And tell it, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you, I will make you a desolation and an astonishment*- The very phrase used about the judgment upon Judah which Edom / Seir participated in bringing about (Ez. 6:14; 33:28,29). See on :1. In commentary upon the book of Revelation, I have noted that the seals refer to judgments upon Israel in the last days, but then the essence of those judgments is found again in the later judgments poured out upon the beast system which brings those judgments. Edom / Seir / Esau's descendants (the Arabic peoples surrounding Israel) are therefore very much associated with the latter day Babylon who is the beast.

Ezekiel 35:4 *I will lay your cities waste and you shall be desolate; and you shall know that I am Yahweh*- This could imply an ultimate repentance by Seir / Esau, leading to the final reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. Or it could mean that in the death throes of condemnation, they come to know Yahweh- but all too late. Just as those who condemned the Lord Jesus will be resurrected and say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!", but tragically all too late. See on :1,9,11,12.

Ezekiel 35:5 *Because you have had a perpetual hatred*- The age old tension between Esau and Jacob. But "perpetual" is literally "old" or "ancient". The "enmity" is the same word as in Gen. 3:15, and the 'ancient' enmity strengthens the allusion. They were the seed of the serpent at enmity with Israel, the seed of the woman; which considering Judah's deep sin at this time, reveals how God by grace still saw them as His special people of purpose.

And have given over the children of Israel to the power of the sword in the time of their calamity- The prophecy against Edom in Obadiah 13,14 makes the same point, as in Ps. 137:7, giving more detail as to Edom's abuse of Judah at the time of the Babylonian invasion.

At the time when the punishment of their iniquity had an end- There is no very solid evidence for the total destruction of Edom in the terms of this prophecy as a result of their viciously joining in with the Babylonian judgment of Judah. Neither was the Babylonian invasion "the time when the punishment of [Judah's] iniquity had an end". Such language has to refer to our last days; and so we are to look for a latter day Seir / Edom / Esau's descendants who will join in the assault upon Israel by the latter day Babylonian, and who will receive their judgment in the terms of this prophecy. For God's words here shall finally come true. With Israel today surrounded

by Esau's descendants, the required scenario is ripe for fulfillment. See on Ez. 35:14 *When the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate.*

Ezekiel 35:6 *Therefore, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you. Since you have not hated blood, therefore blood shall pursue you-* See on Rev. 6:9. "Edom" means 'red', hence the play on the word 'blood'. The idea of pursuit suggests the revenger of blood. And it was God who would avenge the blood of His people, upon Edom. Edom is held far more culpable than Babylon- because they were behaving like this against their brother.

Ezekiel 35:7 *Thus will I make Mount Seir an astonishment and a desolation; and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and the one who returns*- The one who returns may refer to the returning exiles, the returned / repentant ones [as they were envisaged], who would skirt around mount Seir and not pass through it. Or the idea may be as GNB "I will make the hill country of Edom a wasteland and kill everyone who travels through it". The area would gather the reputation of being haunted, a place to be avoided by travellers.

Ezekiel 35:8 *I will fill its mountains with its slain. In your hills and in your valleys and in all your watercourses shall they fall who are slain with the sword*- All these terms are used elsewhere about the judgment upon Israel at the hand of her invaders (e.g. Ez. 6:3). What is done to Israel will be done to her invaders. Those who destroy the earth / land of Israel will be destroyed (Rev. 11:18). See on :11 *I will do according to your anger*. But there was no such wholesale murder of the Edomites at the time; they continued for centuries. The intended prophetic scenario for that time didn't come about because Judah didn't repent and the Kingdom wasn't reestablished under the new covenant and a Messiah figure, as was potentially possible. And so Edom wasn't totally destroyed either, although these things will have their final fulfilment in the last days.

Ezekiel 35:9 *I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities shall not be inhabited; and you shall know that I am Yahweh*- Heb. "your cities shall not return", whereas even though Jerusalem was as Sodom, yet she and Samaria would be cities which returned to their former estate (Ez. 16:55). But Edom would not share in such a revival. I noted on :1 that in the prophecies against the seven Gentile nations in Ez. 26-32, all are envisaged as coming to "know Yahweh", i.e. to enter relationship with Him; except Edom. The unforgiveable sin, it seems, is of hatred of ones' brother as Esau / Edom / Seir hated Jacob / Israel. And so the total elimination of "Mount Seir" was intended as coming at this time of restoration. They would only "know Yahweh" in that as explained on :11,12, they would all too late come to know that Yahweh had heard their insults and remembered their harsh attitude to their brother in his time of rightful judgment for sin.

Ezekiel 35:10 *Because you have said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it*- Edom thought that by siding with Babylon in the destruction of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7) they would be granted possession of Israel by Babylon. But this didn't happen. So although they didn't get their desire, yet their desires were still judged.

Whereas Yahweh was there- Perhaps it is to the physical presence of the Angel in the land (see on Dt. 11:12) that this refers. Ezekiel's prophecy closes with the

statement that "Yahweh is there" (Ez. 48:35), but in essence, His presence was just as real in the land at the time of Judah's exile as it will be in the Kingdom. This has profound relevance to our own sense of Yahweh's presence; for He is essentially with us now just as really as He will be in the Kingdom age. And it continues a theme developed in Ezekiel through the cherubim visions- that the presence of Yahweh was just as much with Judah in captivity as it had been with them in the days of temple worship before the exile.

The Divine presence as symbolized by the cherubim Angels was in the land until Judah went into captivity; hence the cherubim removed from Jerusalem. But here we read that "the Lord was there" after the fall of Jerusalem. Yet God's intention was that His people would return, the Angel cherubim of glory would return, and again it would finally be true that "the Lord is there" (Ez. 48:35). See on Ez. 3:23. And so God speaks of His presence as still being there. It's a case of 'now but not yet'.

Ezekiel 35:11 *Therefore, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I will do according to your anger, and according to your envy which you have shown out of your hatred against them*- See on Ez. 35:8. What we feel about others is often done to us. Edom will be judged according to what they did or intended to do to God's people.

I will make Myself known among them, when I shall judge you- God's Name is articulated in the condemnation of the wicked. This is why His judgments will make the world learn righteousness (Is. 26:9). There is here a difference between "them" and "you". The "you" is Edom (:12) and the "them" is Israel and Judah (:10). When God's people know Yahweh, i.e. re-enter relationship with Him, then Edom would be judged; they would only 'know Yahweh' (see on :9) insofar as they would "know" then that Yahweh had heard their insults against their brother Jacob (:12).

Ezekiel 35:12 *You shall know that I, Yahweh, have heard all your insults which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid desolate, they have been given us to devour*- God listens to the words of pagan nations. His knowledge is total, and this should influence our walk before Him. Verse 13 continues the theme: "I have heard". See on :1,9,11. Edom thought that by siding with Babylon in the destruction of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7) they would be granted possession of Israel by Babylon. But this didn't happen. So although they didn't get their desire, yet their desires were still judged. And the full judgment of Edom for these things is yet future, for not every detail of these judgments against her came true at Ezekiel's time. This is a sober warning to us concerning our desires and feelings against others, even against those who are under rightful judgment for their sins.

Ezekiel 35:13 *You have magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and have multiplied your words against Me, which I have heard*- They had spoken against God's people, but whoever touches Israel touches the apple of God's eye. He was and is intensely manifest in us His people. He is extremely sensitive to all evil done to us. And at that time, Judah were rightfully under condemnation for their sins. But all the same, even in that state, God still identified with His sinful people under judgment. How much more does He do so with us who are in His dear Son.

Ezekiel 35:14 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: When the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate*- Another indication that this prophecy is of the latter days, at the time of the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. The same words for "the earth rejoices" are used about the time of the Kingdom when God reigns in Israel (1 Chron. 16:31;

Ps. 67:4; 96:11; 97:4). But the nations of the *eretz* / earth were intended to repent after the judgments of and upon Babylon, and thus come to joy. That joy was to be in Zion, the reestablished temple system where the presence of Yahweh would be (Ps. 48:2; Jer. 33:9; Lam. 2:15). The joy of Edom's heart was the destruction of Zion (Ez. 36:5), so their exclusion from the eternal joy of the restored Zion is appropriate.

Edom would differ from the other nations in that they alone would not rejoice. Thus in the prophecies against the seven Gentile nations in Ez. 26-32, all are envisaged as finally coming to "know Yahweh", i.e. to enter relationship with Him; except Edom. The unforgiveable sin, it seems, is of hatred of ones' brother as Esau / Edom / Seir hated Jacob / Israel. But see on :9.

Ezekiel 35:15 *As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do to you. You shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, even all of it; and they shall know that I am Yahweh*- As noted on :1, Edom / Esau is the only one of the seven nations judged in Ez. 26-32 who doesn't in the end come to "know Yahweh", into relationship with Him. So here we do not read that "you", Edom, "shall know...", but rather that "*they* shall know that I am Yahweh", referring to the nations of "the whole earth" / *eretz* promised to Abraham in :14. But see on :9.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 36

Ezekiel 36:1 *You, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of Yahweh*- "Mountains" here may be an intensive plural for the great mountain, Zion, "the ancient high place" of :2. The theme may continue from Ez. 35 which speaks of the specific desire of Esau / Edom to destroy Zion and possess it (as in Ps. 137:7). But on :14 I discuss how the stress on the mountains is because these were the location of Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh; Ezekiel 6 has made this connection very clear. Here, verse 15 will specifically state of the mountains "that neither shall you cause your nation to stumble any more". In this way the mountains "bereaved" Israel of its people, quite literally in that child sacrifice was practiced there. The new covenant, the new deal, was to as it were enforce their faithfulness to Yahweh by permanently stopping the idolatry that took place there. Hence the repeated statements that the mountains would be transformed.

Ezekiel 36:2 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because the enemy*- The specific enemy in view may be Edom; see on :1. As explained in commentary on Ez. 34:28, the new covenant with Israel of Ez. 34:25 will mean that Israel are counted as righteous, as having been obedient to the old covenant when in fact they were not; and therefore the blessings of the old covenant will come upon them. One of those blessings was victory over their enemies, as mentioned frequently in Lev. 26.

Has said against you, Aha! and, The ancient high places are ours in possession- Sadly, the Gentiles envied the way Israel used the mountains / hills as idol sanctuaries. But this could be an intensive plural, referring to the great high place- Jerusalem and the temple mount. And this continues to be the "ancient" argument between Jacob and Esau / Edom / Seir, which is the "enemy" in view in the preceding chapter (Ez. 35). Edom is mentioned specifically here in 36:5. See on :5 *That have appointed My land to themselves for a possession.* The argument of Esau / Edom was that the high places were *their* inheritance or "possession". The Koran and the hadith

twist around the Biblical record of the promises to the Jewish fathers, to the intent that the land of Israel was promised to Esau and Jacob / Israel / the Jews was the son rejected from the inheritance. The picture presented here in Ez. 36, whereby Israel's enemies insist that *they* are the rightful inheritors of Palestine and the supreme high place of the temple mount, is exactly relevant to the Muslim claims of today. See on :3 *You became the possession of the rest of the nations.*

"The high places" are consistently the idol shrines. God was willing to reverse everything. He would forcibly take away idolatry from His people, and indeed turn those very places into places reflecting His saving grace. This explains why there is so much prophecy about the mountains / high places, and other areas where idolatry was focused.

Ezekiel 36:3 *Therefore prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh. Because, even because they have made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side*- Israel's latter day enemies (see on Ez. 35:5,14 for the latter day relevance) are likened to a beast with a huge mouth, which is exactly the imagery of the latter day beast prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. "Every side" suggests that what is now known as Jordan will become more intensely anti Israel.

So that you became the possession of the rest of the nations- The Hebrew translated "rest" is also translated "posterity". Esau / Edom / Seir / the Muslim Arabs claim that *they* are the posterity who according to the Koran were promised the land of Palestine as their possession. See on :2 *The ancient high places are ours in possession.*

And you became the talk and evil gossip of the nations-Exactly the scenario we see developing today, with anti-Israel gossip and rhetoric rife amongst the nations around Israel.

Ezekiel 36:4 *Therefore, you mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord Yahweh. Thus says the Lord Yahweh to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes and to the cities that are forsaken, which are become a prey and a mockery to the other nations that are all around*- The forsaken cities refer primarily to those which had already fallen before Jerusalem fell. In the latter day application, the picture is of present day Israel destroyed and the thriving cities such as Tel Aviv and Haifa left in ruins. Such widespread desolation in rural areas was not seen after the Babylonian invasion, although Ezekiel's prophecies had predicted it. The scenario didn't fully happen then; perhaps because of the link between desolation and repentance. God foreknew that wouldn't happen, and so the total desolation prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days.

Ezekiel 36:5 *therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Surely in the fire of My jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the nations, and against all Edom*-

We note God's absolute passion. “Jealousy” is injured self-consciousness; He is so involved in us and with us, and His emotions are deeply involved with us.

The residue of the nations refers in the first instance to the remains of the nations judged by Babylon at the same time as Judah. Edom is singled out for special mention. In the prophecies against the seven Gentile nations in Ez. 26-32, all are envisaged as coming to "know Yahweh", i.e. to enter relationship with Him; except Edom. The unforgiveable sin, it seems, is of hatred of ones' brother as Esau / Edom / Seir hated Jacob / Israel. And so the total elimination of "Mount Seir" in Ez. 35 was intended as coming at this time of restoration. It didn't, then, because the wider prophetic picture didn't come about, and has been transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to our last days.

We sense God's intense fury with Edom for supporting the Babylonians, urging them to raze the temple to the foundation. Edom thought they could possess the land, hence Ez. 35 has spoken so much of Edom's judgment. They appear to have started building forts on the mountains of Israel. Hence the insistence that Israel shall be eternally possessed by God's people and not Edom. Note God's fury with Edom at this point. But He had just sent Judah to Babylon in fury, taking away their king in His wrath. He presents as highly emotional, and so He is.

That have appointed My land to themselves for a possession with the joy of all their heart, with despite of soul, to cast it out for a prey- Again we see the concept of "possession". The Muslim Arabs are convinced from the Koran and hadith that Palestine is their rightful possession, and this language is likewise found in the position statements of the PLO and similar terrorist organizations. Ps. 83:11,12 records how the leaders of the latter day invasion will focus upon the idea of possession of the holy places in Jerusalem: "Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession".

Ezekiel 36:6 *Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and tell to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I have spoken in My zeal and in My wrath, because you have borne the shame of the nations*- This and other prophecies frequently mention the "shame" which will be upon Israel at the hands of their latter day enemies. This is because the Koran repeatedly speaks of the "shameful doom" to come upon the Jews because they do not accept Mohammad. "They shall be held up to shame in this world" (2:114). The scene speaks clearly of the expectations and desires of Israel's Islamic neighbours.

But "shame" can be seen as a reference to Baal, "that shameful thing" as the prophets describe it. Hills, rivers and valleys were all locations of the idol shrines, and this shame was to be removed. The shame for sin would be dissolved by the new covenant.

Ezekiel 36:7 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: I have sworn saying, Surely the nations that are around you, they shall bear their shame*- The focus of Bible prophecy is upon the peoples of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, "the nations that are around" Judah.

Ezekiel 36:8 *But you, mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel; for they are at hand to return*- The idea is that there would be a resurgence of fruitfulness just before Judah left Babylon, so that when they arrived there would be abundant fruit for them ready to eat. This presupposes a specific time for the exodus from Babylon, which would have been when Babylon fell by Divine judgment. All these possibilities were precluded by Judah's lack of repentance. And so the rest of the scenario didn't work out at the time, although it will do in the last days. In fact after dribs and drabs of exiles returned after the decree of Cyrus, they found a famine in the land (Hag. 1), rather than trees loaded with fruit for them. And these famine conditions continued into the time of Malachi. This reflected their lack of repentance.

"At hand to return" surely suggests that this revival could have happened at Ezekiel's time. Likewise :32 NET "I am about to act". Those who were in exile could themselves have returned. Such huge potential was wasted. But as noted on :37, which seems the 'end stress' of the prophecy, all they had to do was ask for it, to want it. And so much would've been given. It may seem barely believable- until we reflect

how many of those near and dear to us stedfastly refuse to simply say "yes" to the offer of grace in the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 36:9 *For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn unto you*- Elsewhere we read that God will turn unto Israel when they turn unto Him (Zech. 1:3 "'Return to me', says Yahweh of Armies, 'and I will return to you', says Yahweh of Armies"). But there is no mention here nor in Ez. 34 of any such turning or repentance of Israel. The covenant of grace introduced in Ez. 34:25 and expanded upon later here in chapter 36 means that God intervenes by grace alone to treat His beloved people as if they are more spiritual than they are. And in the New Testament, He is known for giving repentance and not just forgiveness; He turns hearts by His Spirit acting upon the human spirit (Acts 3:26; Acts 11:18). Jer. 31 has described Israel saying "Turn me, and I shall be turned"- and *then* repenting. The initiative in this turning is always from God.

And you shall be cultivated and sown- Along with :8, the implication is that in the very last days, the land of Israel will be uncultivated and barren when overrun by Edom / Israel's neighbours. This could be due to a scorched earth policy by Israel, or the use of weaponry which destroys the fertility of the land. Such a scenario is now imaginable.

Ezekiel 36:10 *And I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, even all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited, and the waste places shall be built*- This multiplication of men depended upon those "men" returning from exile. But most of them preferred to remain in Babylon. This multiplication of men was to be in response to Judah's prayer (:37 AV); and this was lacking. So we are reading here of potentials. The multiplication refers to the multiplying of Abraham's seed- for those within that covenant. And the promises to Abraham were the basis of the new covenant offered Judah. But they chose not to accept that new covenant, and so the promised multiplication didn't happen.

Ezekiel 36:11 *I will multiply on you man and animal*- The destruction commented upon in :9 is going to be so major that the majority of animals and people are destroyed. This is the kind of picture we encounter in the prophecies of the land's final turmoil in Revelation; we recall that Zechariah predicts the cutting off of the majority of Jews in the land. The reference to animals suggests the use of fearsome weaponry which leaves the land physically and literally desolate. The increase and multiplication of men in Israel would be a sign that again they were in receipt of the covenant blessings (Lev. 26:9).

And they shall increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited after your former manner, and I will do better to you than at your beginnings; and you shall know that I am Yahweh- It was obedience to the covenant that would result in becoming fruitful and increased (Lev. 26:4). They had not been obedient to that covenant, and yet the blessings are given- because the new covenant offers those blessings simply by grace. "Increase and be fruitful" is the term used about how things were in the *eretz* at creation (Gen. 1:22,28). A new creation is in view. This is the language of a restoration of the previous kingdom "after your former manner... at your beginnings", rather than a totally unprecedented new entity. The kingdom of God to come upon earth at the Lord's return is a reestablishment of His Kingdom as it was previously in the form of Israel (Ez. 21:25-27). As noted on :8, the idea is that there would be a resurgence of fruitfulness just before Judah left Babylon, so that when they arrived there would be abundant fruit for them ready to eat.

Ezekiel 36:12 *Yes, I will cause men to walk on you, even My people Israel*- The emphasis on such literality could have been because the very people to whom Ezekiel was preaching in Babylon could have been the very ones who would again walk in the literal land of Israel. The period to be spent in captivity was flexible, in accordance with their repentance. It could have been less than 70 year (see on Ez. 4), and in reality it turned out to be longer than 70 years.

And they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance- The emphasis being on the word "their", seeing that the Muslim Arab argument is that the land and Jerusalem are *their* Divine inheritance. See the earlier comment about the significance of the language of "possession" in this prophecy.

And you shall no more henceforth bereave them of children- The old system had bereaved them of their children because they sacrificed them to the idols. But this was to be no more.

Ezekiel 36:13 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because they say to you, You are a destroyer of men, and have caused bereavement in your nation*- The byword was that Israel was a cursed land, those who lived there always seemed to die. This was to be turned right around, as the land was to become associated with life and blessing. These words were those of the unfaithful spies (Num. 13:32), so the idea was that if Israel had faith, unlike them, and re-entered the land in faith- then this wrong impression of the land would be changed.

Ezekiel 36:14 *Therefore you shall destroy men no more, neither cause bereavement in your nation any more, says the Lord Yahweh*- God comes over as very sensitive as to what people think of Him. He even changed His plan to destroy Israel after Moses pointed out that the nations would mock His ability to save. This is not because God is as it were overly interested in His image, but because He wishes human salvation so earnestly, and wishes to clear up misunderstandings and misrepresentations. We should have this same motivation in any debates we may enter regarding interpretation.

Israel and Judah worshipped idols on the mountains. This is a major theme throughout the prophetic criticisms of Israel. The high places had led them to adultery against God and hence their judgment. In this sense the mountains devoured men. God says that this will not happen ever again, but that therefore means that He will stop Israel worshipping idols and make them loyal to Him for ever. This making loyal and faithful is exactly what the new covenant is all about. This explains why the high places and hills and mountains of Israel are spoken of so often in the new covenant prophecies. God was going to forcibly stop idolatry and unfaithfulness to Him, making His beloved loyal to Him.

Ezekiel 36:15 *Neither will I let you hear any more the shame of the nations, neither shall you bear the reproach of the peoples any more, neither shall you cause your nation to stumble any more, says the Lord Yahweh*- The literal hills of Israel were the location of their high places and idol worship. It is latter day idolatry which will bring about the predicted devastation of Israel.

Shame for sin is a major theme with Ezekiel. The days of shame would come to an end (Ez. 16:54; 34:29; 36:15; 39:26)- if Jerusalem accepted shame for her sins. But Ez. 44:13 says that the sins of the Jerusalem priesthood were such that in the restored temple, they would bear their shame in that they would never again minister in it. Likewise the Jewish priesthood who persecuted Jeremiah at this time were to bear a shame that would last for ever (Jer. 20:11). And yet the hope of Israel was that they

would eternally be unashamed, world without end (Is. 45:17). The resolution of this may be in God's willingness to count them totally righteous by grace, upon their repentance. And Ezra "blushed" [s.w. "ashamed"] because of Israel's sins (Ezra 9:6), and Jeremiah at this time cast himself down in shame because of them (Jer. 3:25). This representative intercession for Judah had some effect. Just as the Lord Jesus bore the shame of Israel and all sinners on the cross (Is. 50:6), and yet because of that He would not be ashamed eternally (Is. 50:7). He was to become representative of the repentant Israel of God; for the same words are used of how they too would have unashamed faces eternally (Is. 54:4). But the Jerusalem priesthood refused to take shame, they were unashamed of their whoredoms (Jer. 3:3; 8:12). Ezekiel's appeal in Ez. 16 was so that they would recognize their sins, and be ashamed (Ez. 16:2). There was time for them to do so right up until they were led captive, in the final attempt to make them realize their shame. For when they went into captivity, then God intended that they would be "ashamed" (Jer. 22:22). The final vision of Ezekiel, of the potential that was possible in a restored Zion, was in order to make the exiles ashamed of their sins when they realized the possibilities they had wasted and yet which were still possible by grace (Ez. 43:10,11). But they didn't respond to that vision, they refused to build and operate such a temple system; because they refused to be ashamed in exile, although it was God's intention that they should be. And so it is for us as a new Israel to be ashamed for our sins, and identify with the Messiah figure who would bear Israel's shame and thereby emerge eternally unashamed.

Ezekiel 36:16 *Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying*- Lest there should be any sense that this great program of restoration was in any sense downplaying or disregarding Israel's sin, the balance is now corrected.

Ezekiel 36:17 *Son of man, when the people of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their way and by their doings. Their way before Me was as the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity*- A menstruating woman was to have a hiatus in her intimate relationships with her husband and she could not enter the sanctuary for worship. Hosea spoke in the same way, of how Israel would have a period of enforced separation from God, to bring them to Him. God very graciously uses this figure, suggesting their uncleanness is just for a limited time, and soon He will resume intimate relationships with them. As discussed on :8, we continually have the impression that the exile [of both Israel and Judah] was temporary and would very soon be gloriously reversed; but Israel refused that potential. And this is how God currently looks upon Israel. See on :25. At Ezekiel's time, He was prepared to restore relationship with them by washing them from their blood through the new covenant. But they were unwilling.

Ezekiel 36:18 *Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had poured out on the land, and because they had defiled it with their idols*- The pouring out of blood is again associated with idolatry. The reference is to the sacrifice of children and perhaps other categories of people to the idols. We note the parallel between the pouring out of Divine wrath, and their pouring out of blood. The phrase 'to pour out blood' occurs multiple times in the Mosaic law; the idea was that life, represented by the blood, was to be poured out to Yahweh. Instead, they had poured out life to idols. And this can be done today, so easily, in the pouring out of life's minutes and hours to images and modern day idols.

Ezekiel 36:19 *And I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. According to their way and according to their doings I judged*

them- The reference to "the nations" could suggest that God also has in view the ten tribes here. This is God being positive; because He did not carry out the full extent of the threatened judgments, the majority of them, "the poor of the land", remained in Judah; and at this very time of restoration, Ezra reflects that God had punished them "less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra 9:13).

Ezekiel 36:20 *When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name; in that men said of them, These are the people of Yahweh, and are gone forth out of His land*- God accepts that the exiles had not repented as they ought to have done. The idea seems to be that the nations realized that the exiles had been exiled because of their sins, and noted that they continued in them. Child sacrifice to Moloch is specifically described as profaning God's Name (Lev. 18:21), and that is the context here (:18). It seems they continued to do this in exile, at least initially. And yet they still carried God's Name, despite having broken covenant with Him. This is proof for all time that God never gives up with His people, even if they give up with Him.

Ezekiel 36:21 *But I had respect for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went*- "Respect" is the word elsewhere translated "pity". The wonder of God's grace was that His eye did spare and He did pity at the restoration (also Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 s.w.), just as His eye had spared them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). Whereas in His wrath He had said that He would never again pity Judah (Ez. 5:11; 7:4; 8:18; 9:10). This reveals the emotion of God, His pity even for the spiritually weak, and how this triumphs over His judgment. Ezekiel speaks as if God's people had already gone amongst the nations; he may have in view the ten tribes as well, for it was God's intention to regather them along with Judah.

Ezekiel 36:22 *Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I don't do this for your sake, house of Israel, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went*- Clearly although there had not been the intended repentance of the exiles in captivity, yet God by all means sought reasons, even excuses, to still restore His beloved people. And so He cites here the need to stop His Name being mocked as a reason for restoring Israel. As mentioned several times in this exposition, the final salvation of Israel under the new covenant is not because of their repentance or spirituality, but by grace alone, and because God respects the grace and pure love which is bound up in His Name / essential personality. It is this salvation of Israel by such pure grace that will cause the nations to gasp at God's love for His people: "I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes" (:23).

Hosea has shown how the Name of God involves both His gracious, loving salvation- and also His judgment of sin. These two poles are in some kind of conflict within Him, but His Name develops in that He comes down on the side of love and grace toward Israel. Therefore their salvation is not because of their repentance, but because of His Name. Because of Him and how He finally is. Is. 43:24,25 says the same: "You have bought Me no sweet cane with money, nor have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices; but you have burdened Me with your sins. You have wearied Me with your iniquities. I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins". Ezekiel talks about God's "Name", Isaiah "for My own sake". His Name is Him, He Himself, His very own "sake". But it is exactly this amazing grace that leads to repentance and being ashamed of our ways (:32). Earlier in Ez. 14 and Ez. 18 there have been appeals for

repentance, but there was no response. God now in any case forces through His plan for Israel, just as He does with us.

God had said He would destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation. But He relented of that, and in Ez. 20:22 we see the picture of His internal struggle, working for His Name's sake, for the sake of the principles incorporated within His Name. So it is an intrinsic part of His Name and essential personality that He changes His judgments from pity. When the Psalmist of Ps. 109:21 asks for God's grace, He asks God to "do" or "work" for the sake of His Name, and not bring about a threatened judgment. Jeremiah likewise understood this and asks God to still be gracious to Israel despite their lack of repentance- through working for His Name's sake (Jer. 14:7). To save by grace was therefore working or doing according to His Name's sake, rather than according to human merit (Ez. 36:22). Thus by working for His Name's sake, the repentant exiles would come to 'know Yahweh' (Ez. 20:44), they would come to see who He essentially is. And He is revealed as the very opposite of a stone faced, unchanging, insensitive God, which was then the standard conception of a deity.

Ezekiel 36:23 *I will sanctify My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am Yahweh, says the Lord Yahweh, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes*- The returned exiles however did just what a previous generation had done before the exile. They profaned the Name (Ez. 36:20), the Sabbath and also the covenant and temple (Mal. 1;12; 2:10,11), in that they saw it all as mere religion, and the fire of a true relationship with the Almighty was smothered.

All the "I will..." statements allude to His Name, I will be who I will be. His revival of Israel is for the sake of that Name, and experiencing that Name makes us "know [experientially] that I am Yahweh". “I will sanctify my great name” (v 23); “I will take you...and gather you...and bring you into your own land” (v 24); “I will sprinkle clean water upon you” (v 25); “I will put my spirit within you” (v 27); “I will be your God” (v 28); “I will deliver you...” (v 29); “I will make the fruit of the tree” (v 30).

The taking of Israel out from the nations would lead to the nations knowing Yahweh's Name. This didn't happen in the 20th century. The idea is that they had been disgusted at the moral depravity of Israel, and this had reflected badly on their God. He appeared merely a God of judgment. But they would see His extreme grace in saving them without their repentance, and thus they would know His Name as it really is- of grace triumphing over the pole of judgment.

Ezekiel 36:24 *For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land*- Time and again in the context of the restoration it is emphasized that God would return to His exiled people if they returned to Him (Zech. 1:3; Mal. 3:7). And they didn't return to Him- most chose not to return to the land, and those who did for the most part did not return to their God in their hearts. The whole basis of Israel's covenant relationship with God was that if they were exiled from the land for their sins, they must repent and *then* God would return to them (Dt. 30:1-10). Yet God graciously states to the exiles: "I am returned unto you" (Zech. 1:16; 8:3). Here was grace indeed. Passages like Ez. 36:24-31 therefore speak as if God's grace to the exiles was effectively a new covenant- which has in essence been extended to us. Having stated the conditionality of His 'returning' to His people, and recognizing they hadn't fulfilled their part of the conditions- God all the same returns to them, such was and is His almost desperate desire for relationship with His beloved people. This is a lesson for us in our relationships with

others- to continue our acceptance and 'return' to them, even if they don't fulfill their part of the deal. For this, day by day, is how our God deals not only with us but with His weak and wayward people as a whole.

This verse repeats the words of the new covenant offer in Jer. 32:37. But they generally refused to be gathered from 'all nations'. This element of the new covenant is now articulated through the great commission, inviting people from all nations to the covenant; calling out of the nations a people for His Name.

Ezekiel 36:25 *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you*- A reference to the water which cleansed a woman from the uncleanness of her separation from her husband (Num. 19:9 Heb.). Israel have been likened to a woman unclean by reason of menstruation in :17. We note throughout that the initiative is with God in this work of cleansing. They were taken from among the many nations that comprised Babylon / Persia; they were brought, as many as could be bothered to go, to their own land. They were cleansed there (s.w. Ezra 6:30; Nehemiah 12:30). But they became un-cleansed through allowing Tobiah into the temple chambers, by trading on the Sabbath, and by marrying Gentiles (Nehemiah 13:9,22,30). The priesthood needed to be “cleansed” again (Mal. 3:3 s.w.). The promise of Ezekiel 36 sounds unconditional- as if, whoosh, God would make His sinful people righteous regardless of their own will. And so some have misunderstood the operation of God’s Spirit in our own days. But although not directly stated, the promise of entry into the new covenant, whereby God would encourage obedience through the work of His Spirit, was conditional. Judah could have entered the new covenant there and then, with all its requirements for a Messiah figure to abrogate the Mosaic law. But they turned back to their uncleannesses, they would not keep God’s statutes, and their potential Messiah figures failed to appear. Yet again, the promise of entry into a new covenant was deferred, to be fulfilled in a new Israel who are sprinkled through the waters of baptism. The promise was fulfilled, but in a far different context to that intended.

The word for "sprinkle" is nearly always used about the sprinkling of blood. The idea seems to be that blood will wash and cleanse as water does. The new covenant here was therefore confirmed and made operative by the Lord's blood, the blood of the new covenant. So as Paul says, His death confirmed the new covenant.

But ritual water sprinkling is nearly always used for the consecration of priests (Ex. 29:4) and Levites (Num. 8:7). And it was done by priests to priests. The priesthood was corrupted. So God Himself would be the priest, and would turn Israel into a nation of priests, as originally intended.

Ezekiel 36:26 *I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh*- see on 1 Sam. 10:9. The new covenant involves God on His initiative giving His people a new psychology ("within you") that makes them obedient (:27). This same gift of a holy spirit is likewise available to all who accept the new covenant today. "Also" suggests that the new heart and spirit is given at the same time as the regathering of :25. The word is redundant otherwise. So it is hard to see the return of some Jews to Israel in the 20th century as fulfilling this, seeing this return wasn't accompanied by a change of their hearts nor entry into the new covenant. These prophecies play on the word *shub* meaning both to return and to repent. The return was to be associated with repentance. In Ez. 11:19 and 18:31, Israel had been told to get a new heart and spirit. They hadn't done so, and now God says that anyway, He

will give them this, as it were enforcing it upon them because He wants them for Himself.

This "new heart" matches the new covenant promise of Jer. 32:39: "I will give them one heart and one way". To sing "Lord, give me an undivided heart" is to ask for this to happen now. This again is without conditions. It is a heart transplant operation, unilaterally decided upon by God. "Out of your flesh" encourages us to imagine a literal heart transplant operation. This is how carefully and delicately God would work.

Hearts of flesh rather than stone imply sensitive, responsive hearts. This is what Hosea wanted from Gomer, and what God wanted from Israel. Hearts that were for Him, sensitive and not hard to Him. For love is sensitivity. 2 Cor. 3:3 alludes to this verse and applies it to the new covenant experience which we now have, and which Israel are yet to experience: "you are a letter of Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts... who made us adequate to be servants of a new covenant not based on the letter but on the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life... But their minds were hardened, for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains, because in Christ it passes away. But to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face seeing the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord, the Spirit".

The great restoration prophecies of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31 speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The Hebrew word *shub* means both 'to return' in the sense of returning to the land, and 'turning' in the sense of repentance. But these restoration prophecies are packed with allusion to the great shepherd Psalm 23. Here, David says that the good shepherd 'causes me to repent' (Ps. 23:3 Heb. "He returns / restores my soul"). This is matched in Ez. 36 by the idea of God *giving* Israel a new heart. And the Lord's amazing parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also these restoration passages, in speaking of how He goes out and finds the lost sheep and brings it back home. The sheep is found, and accepts being found- there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the 'return' of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God- He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace. The even more incredible thing, though, is that Judah refused to accept this grace; they didn't 'return' to the land because they saw no need to 'return' to God. They willingly forgot that they were only in Babylon because of their sins; to 'return' to the land was a 'return' to God, which He had enabled. But they were like the lost sheep refusing to sit on the shepherd's shoulders, preferring to sit in a hole and die... and this is the warning to us. For truly, absolutely all things have been prepared for us to enter the Kingdom. It's only those who don't want to be there who won't be.

36:27 *I will put My Spirit within you*- This is the same idea as developed in the valley of dry bones prophecy, where God causes His Spirit to enter into Israel and revives them (Ez. 37:5). The Corinthians were given the Spirit potentially, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). Like many today, they wasted the potential. And the same was true of Judah at the restoration. Ezra 9:9: “For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us [s.w. “put” my spirit] a reviving, to set up the house of

our God, and to repair the desolations". They revived the stones out of the heaps (Nehemiah 4:2). A new spirit was potentially given to them, God put in the heart of men like Nehemiah to revive the work (Nehemiah 2:12 s.w. "what my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem"). But this didn't force them to be obedient. They chose not to be, and so the promised kingdom blessings of corn etc. were replaced by famines, in the times of Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi. Judah were forgiven at the restoration; but they failed to live the life of response to that grace, and therefore the spirit did not continue with them.

And cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My laws and do them- God under the new covenant gives a spirit of obedience, He makes us obedient to Him. The same causative power is referened in the many prophecies that Yahweh would "cause" the captives to "return", to repent, and then return to the land.

We notice the clear parallel with the new covenant of Jer. 31:33, which says that God would put His law within them; here, "my spirit I will put within you". The spirit of God is in His word, the law of Moses was intended to produce the spirit of Christ, ultimate spirituality. But God promises to instill this within His people, to make them internalize His perfect law. Jer. 31:33 continues: "And I will be their God, and they shall be My people". This is matched here in Ez. 36:28: "And you shall be my people, and I will be your God".

Ezekiel 36:28 *You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God*- This restoration of the exiles in Babylon would be all of grace, for they had not repented. But many of them preferred to remain there, as did the ten tribes in the former Assyrian empire. Such huge grace was turned down. And it's the same today. God is thirsting to make people His obedient people, His Kingdom; and most refuse because the petty issues of material life block their vision of anything else, just as with the exiles.

This is the equivalent to the statement under the new covenant of Jer. 32:38, which states [with no command to obey God] that God will make Israel His people, and He their God. This differed from the original offer of the covenant in Jer. 7:23: "Obey my voice, and I will become your God and you will become my people". It is in the Spirit of Yahweh in Hosea concluding that somehow He will make His beloved Israel "His" even though they are unfaithful to Him.

Ezekiel 36:29 *I will save you from all your uncleanness, and I will call for the grain and will multiply it, and lay no famine on you*- There are many links discernible between Ezekiel and Zechariah, as they both prophesy concerning the same scattering and restoration of Israel. Here the connection is with Zech. 9:17 "Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids... how great is His goodness" (in forgiveness).This was potentially possible at the restoration, but as Haggai and Malachi reveal, there were instead famines and the potential blessing wasn't poured out.

The grace shown by God to His people, reflected in Hosea's grace toward Gomer, was especially shown to the exiled Jews in Babylon. By grace, Hosea and God granted forgiveness to their women in order to lead them to repentance (Hos. 2:16; 7:1). Hosea wanted to call Gomer and her children "my people", and to give them grain and all the good things that went with a marriage relationship (Hos. 2:24). But this is the very language of Ez. 36:24-31 about God's intentions for the restoration from Babylon- the people would be cleansed, called "my people", given grain and all God's blessings- in the hope that *then* they would repent and loathe their

immorality and unfaithfulness. Such is God's grace that His acceptance *leads to* repentance, rather than repentance being a condition of His grace and acceptance. Hosea's attitude to Gomer says it all.

But the exiles refused all this grace. And so as Haggai and Malachi records, the exiles had famine laid upon them. "Save" is *yasha*, component of 'Yahoshua', Jesus, Yah's salvation or saving. Finally this wonderful salvation was to be fulfilled in Him, and in we who say yes to it.

Ezekiel 36:30 *I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, that you may receive no more the reproach of famine among the nations*- These are all blessings for obedience to the covenant. But that obedience as explained in the previous verses, is given by God directly upon their hearts. Their having the fruit of the spirit means that the physical land would respond in fruitfulness. This was the potential available for the exiles if they had repented; they would have returned to a land full of fruit. But most of them didn't return and those who did, didn't return to God in their hearts. And so as Haggai records, they experienced famine. But the words will have their main fulfilment at the time of the Lord's return and the full reestablishment of the Kingdom on earth. They don't apply to any usage of agricultural technology in 20th century Israel; that was a multiplication of harvest by human strength, whereas what is in view here is something miraculous, directly from God, and associated with the repentance of His people.

Ezekiel 36:31 *Then you shall remember your evil ways and your doings that were not good; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations*- Note the chronology. They are made obedient, by grace, and *then* they realize how wicked they have been and repent of it. The goodness of God leads them to repentance. It cannot be over emphasized that God is not facing off against man over an open Bible, and telling us that if we repent, then He will forgive us. Here we see God taking the initiative and forgiving Israel without repentance, cleansing their hearts, making them obedient- and that experience of grace leads them to repentance. On a far lower level, we see the same in our human relationships. A policy of 'Forgiveness upon repentance' rarely works; the grant of forgiveness, frankly and sincerely, is that leads the sinner to repentance and restored relationship.

The self loathing for sin is spoken of in Ez. 20:43. The idea originally had been that the remnant would repent in exile and then be restored. But they didn't. And so the Divine hope was that by restoring them in impenitence, they would remember their sins and loathe what they had done. It's the same reason why Jesus broke His bread with as yet impenitent sinners- because He as a doctor was trying to bring sinners to repentance. We note that it was the exiles with Ezekiel who were to loathe themselves for their pollutions, or that was the intention. It was they there in exile who were still offering their children to their idols, "to this day" (Ez. 20:31). Their self loathing uses the word translated "grieve" regarding God's grieving for Israel's idolatry in the wilderness (Ps. 95:10). They would come to see their sins as God saw and felt them; that is part of repentance. But initially it had been God's plan that they would grieve or loathe their sins whilst in captivity in Babylon (s.w. Ez. 6:9). But then the plan in Ez. 20:34-38 was different; seeing they had not done so, they would be forcibly brought out from Babylon into the undefined "wilderness" situation, where God would purge the rebels from the rebellious house, and then the remnant would be allowed to return to the land; and only then would they loathe themselves for their

sins. But now in Ez. 36:21 the grace was extended even further- it was after the restoration of the kingdom conditions in the land that they would be thus provoked to loathe their former sins. God's grace is such that He ammends His plans if by any means He might save some. He has that same passion for human salvation today.

The chronology is in sharp contrast to that of the old covenant in Lev. 26:40-42: "If they confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers... and also recognize that because they walked contrary to Me,
... if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity;
then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham; and I will remember the land". Here, there is no "if... then". God will circumcise their heart, remember the [re]newed covenant made to Abraham and the fathers, and only *then* will they confess their sins. This is proactive grace extraordinaire. And this is the same chronology of Jer. 31:18,19: "Turn me, and I shall be turned; for You are Yahweh my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I struck on my thigh: I was ashamed, yes, even confounded".

Ezekiel 36:32 *Not for your sake do I this, says the Lord Yahweh, be it known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, house of Israel*- Having been unable to achieve their repentance in exile, God now tries another way. Instead of abandoning His program of restoration because of the lack of repentance, He offers to restore them anyway by pure grace, in the hope that this would be appreciated and elicit from them an appropriate shame. But even this was refused by most of Judah and the ten tribes; they preferred to remain in the world rather than participate in the restored Kingdom of God. "Ashamed and confounded" is the same Hebrew phrase used by Ezra in his prayer at the restoration (Ezra 9:6). He was taking note of Ezekiel's prophecy here, but the majority didn't. The term is also used of condemnation at the last day (Ps. 70:2; Is. 41:11; 45:16); in repentance, we are to recognize that our condemnation would be just, and as it were feel as if we are condemned at the judgment seat; and thence we shall know the wonder of forgiveness, salvation, and the change of verdict which Romans 1-8 speak of.

"Do I this" suggests immediately, NET "I am about to act"; see on :8. God was about to do this. But the exiles wasted such huge potential. The implication of :37 in the NET is that these things would happen if Israel asked for them. God had opened that possibility, He had allowed then to ask for them. But they didn't: "This is what the sovereign LORD says: I will allow the house of Israel to ask me to do this for them: I will multiply their people like sheep". All the stress that "I will..." do these things was conditional upon the exiles wanting it.

Ezekiel 36:33 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the day that I cleanse you from all your wickedness, I will cause the cities to be inhabited and the waste places shall be built*- There is a connection between Judah's forgiveness and the rebuilding of the land. The returned exiles were forgiven, they did rebuild... but they didn't repent, despite this huge initiative of God's grace. The suggestion here could be that the rebuilding would be achieved miraculously. Perhaps the latter day fulfilment of this will be in the new Jerusalem literally coming down from God out of heaven, ready built (Rev. 21:2).

Ezekiel 36:34 *The land that was desolate shall be cultivated whereas it was a*

desolation in the sight of all who passed by- "Cultivated" is the word used of how Adam before the fall was intended to "till" the *eretz* (Gen. 2:5,15). And :35 specifically talks about Eden. The final fulfilment will be at the Lord's return, when the original situation in Eden shall be restored. To claim this applies to Jewish settlers cultivating the land of Palestine in the latter half of the 20th century is to wrest this passage completely out of its context. And contrary to what many seem to think, Palestine was not "desolate" before their arrival. The British Census of Palestine recorded Jerusalem as having a population of 157,000 in 1944.

Ezekiel 36:35 *They shall say, This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden*- One of many hints that Eden was in fact the *eretz* promised to Abraham. The restoration of Israel makes it clear that this prophecy has its major fulfillment in the last days, when the Kingdom is established physically upon earth. In any case, there were no previous examples of this happening- and God's word shall come true.

And the waste and desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited- "Ruined [Heb. 'beaten down'] cities" is the phrase specifically used about what Babylon did to Judah (Is. 14:17). They really could have been fortified by God at Ezekiel's time. They would marvel at this because the rebuilding was to be miraculous, perhaps a literal miracle was potentially in view; the latter day fulfilment of this will be in the new Jerusalem literally coming down from God out of heaven, ready built (Rev. 21:2).

Ezekiel 36:36 *Then the nations that are left around you shall know that I, Yahweh, have built the ruined places and planted that which was desolate. I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and I will do it*- Ezekiel's prophecies of Israel's regathering had their primary fulfilment in the restoration. The other nations that the Babylonians had placed in Israel would "know that I the Lord build the ruined places", by the miraculous rebuilding of the temple amidst great opposition and against all odds. But the idea of :37 seems to be that this would only happen if Judah prayed for it.

Ezekiel 36:37 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: For this also will I be inquired of*- Previously, as noted on Ez. 20:3,31, they had not been permitted to inquire of God. The elders who came to Ezekiel are in the same category as those in Judah who did not seek / inquire of Yahweh, although they did externally (Jer. 10:21). We can pray and come to God's word, when in reality we are not doing so from our whole heart and are doing this simply on the level of religious interest rather than wholehearted devotion. They would only 'find' God is they 'sought' with their whole heart (Jer. 29:13). But now in the new covenant, they would seek God with their whole heart and so inquire of Him.

This could be the end stress of this section. All this unconditional making of Israe righteous, changing their heart- had to be asked for. It was theirs for the asking. And they didn't even want it. But we surely do. And so the new covenant is offered to us and we are taken out from the nations for the sake of His Name.

By the house of Israel, to do it for them. I will increase them with men like a flock- The idea may be that all this great potential would come about if Israel really prayed for it. "The house of Israel" suggests Israel and Judah would unite at the restoration, as envisaged in several of the restoration prophecies. "Inquired" could as well be translated 'worshipped'. Israel will eternally worship God for His grace. The original text however is unclear. Some variants of the Hebrew and LXX read: "I will also further reveal My grace to the house of Israel, in that I will multiply their people

as a flock" [see the Russian Synodal version]. This fits admirably with the theme of grace which dominates the chapter.

Ezekiel 36:38 *As the flock for sacrifice, as the flock of Jerusalem in her appointed feasts, so shall the wasted cities be filled with flocks of men; and they shall know that I am Yahweh*- There is a parallel between the men and the flock. They were to respond to all this grace by becoming living sacrifies (Rom. 12:1).

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 37

Ezekiel 37:1 *The hand of Yahweh was on me and He brought me out in the Spirit of Yahweh, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones*- The Spirit comes into these bones, thus continuing the teaching of Ez. 34:25 and chapter 36, that God will give a new heart to latter day Israel. "The valley" suggests a specific valley in view, and I suggest in the latter day fulfilment, it is the valley of Armageddon. Although initially it was the valley near the Chebar of Ez. 3:22, from where the exiles could have been revived. They were being offered a new deal, a new covenant seeing they had broken the old one, which would be eternal in that they would be given a new heart (Ez. 36) which would never again be able to sin: "I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them and multiply them and will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore" (Ez. 37:26). As discussed on Ez. 36:8, that generation could have been revived and those of Rachel's children slain by the Babylonians (Jer. 31) could have been resurrected. Hence the connection with the valley / plain where the exiles were currently located as Ezekiel gave this prophecy. These are the bones in the pot of Ez. 24:1-14, boiled dry by the Babylonian invasions; they are specifically, initially, relevant to the exiles with whom Ezekiel was sitting in the Chebar valley. The bones are unburied, suggesting they had been slain in wartime and not the death of old age, and not given any burial rites. This was the curse for breaking the covenant in Dt. 28:26, specifically applied to those who went into exile in Jer. 34:20, that Israel's bodies would be left unburied on the open fields of the valleys. Jeremiah laments that many Jews were left unburied by the Babylonians. They had broken the covenant- but God was going to force through the fulfilment of the new covenant with them. The figure is reversed two chapters later, when Gog's army is left as unburied bones in a valley. This vision primarily concerns the exiles with whom Ezekiel was and the possibility of a reversal and resurrection at that time. After the news that Jerusalem has fallen arrives with the exiles in Ez. 33, the rest of the prophecy from Ez. 34-37 is full of positive new covenant blessing. The judgment for their sins had happened, as predicted by Ezekiel earlier in his prophecy. But it seems God was now going to force through the new covenant with them, even to the point of resurrecting and saving them. Hosea has said the same, speaking of how God will ransom Israel from the power of the grave (Hos. 13:14), and raise up Israel "on the third day" (Hos. 6:1-3).

Dan. 12:2 may appear to contradict this, by speaking of how although "your [Daniel's] people" would be delivered (Dan. 12:1), there would be a resurrection where some receive eternal life and others "shame and everlasting contempt". But those terms "shame" and "contempt" are often used of the Gentile nations around Israel and Judah; possibly those resurrected to shame are the Gentile abusers of God's people during their exile. It was those nations who had shamed and despised [s.w. "contempt"] Israel and Judah in exile (this is stated very often, s.w. Neh. 1:3; 2:17; 4:4; 5:9; Ps. 44:13; 79:4; Is. 4:1; 25:8; Jer. 24:9; 29:18; 44:12; 51:51; Lam. 5:1; Ez.

5:14; 16:57; 21:28; 22:4; 36:15; Dan. 9:16; "reproach" is s.w. "shame"). Those who had shamed and reproached God's people would be the ones who experience shame and reproach at the day of judgment at the resurrection. Thus Ps. 79:12 "Render unto our neighbours sevenfold their reproach wherewith they have reproached". This will come true at their judgment at the resurrection. Thus Egypt will finally have "shame and reproach" (Is. 30:5) as will Edom (Jer. 49:13), the very words here used of the shame and reproach given to those rejected after resurrection to judgment.

But there can also be a specific latter day application of these things. The bones in that valley connect with the picture developed in chapters 34-36 of the final destruction of Israel and the people in the land just before the Lord's coming. The earthquake associated with their revival (:7) is that which brings down the cities of the nations in Revelation, and is perhaps also referred to in Zech. 14 as occurring when the Lord Jesus sets foot on earth. The significance of the earthquake is totally missed by those who misinterpret the vision as referring solely to the national revival of the state of Israel in the 20th century. I suggest that the vision of Ezekiel 37 speaks of their literal resurrection and a new heart being given them. Ezekiel 39 then speaks of a revived Israel burying the multitudes of their invaders in the valley- surely the same valley is in view. What they did to Israel shall be done to them, as the prophets frequently say will happen.

Elsewhere in these notes on Ezekiel I have commented that there are multiple allusions to the garden of Eden. This is to be restored on earth at the Lord's coming. The idea of bones becoming a living person very much alludes to the creation of Eve, the first Biblical reference to "bones" (Gen. 2:23). The symbology is appropriate to the restoration of Eden which is to come at the Lord's return, and not to the Zionist creation of the state of Israel in the middle of the 20th century. See on :6. The recreation of a body into which the spirit is breathed likewise alludes to Gen. 2:7.

Ezekiel 37:2 *He caused me to pass by them all around: and, there were very many in the open valley; and, they were very dry*- God as it were augmented the pile of firewood by adding the bones out of the boiled dry cauldron to it (Ez. 24:5). The resurrection and revival of these dry, charred bones in Ez. 37 is therefore all the more miraculous, just as in Ez. 15 the charred vine twigs were to be revived and used by God. The language of the restoration is used of us in the New Testament; this is how amazing is His ability to use we who were rendered worse than useless by sin. We see here the power of the Spirit and the prophetic word to revive that which was totally destroyed. They are later called "these slain" (:9); and so these "very many" bones are initially talking about those slain during the Babylonian invasion and capture of Jerusalem: "You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain" (Ez. 11:6).

Ezekiel 37:3 *He said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? I answered, Lord Yahweh, You know*- This continues the idea of Ez. 33:10, where Israel pine away in their sins and ask "How should we then live?". The question is whether Israel can really be forgiven of the enormity of their sins. The revival of the bones therefore speaks of their forgiveness and spiritual restoration, rather than the faithless creation of a Zionist entity by a group of Jewish agnostics and Eastern European atheists which happened in the 20th century. God's response in Ez. 33:11 is to say that Israel must turn from their sins and "live". Beginning in Ez. 34 we saw however that God as it were gives up on the idea of Israel repenting and decides to send His Spirit into

them, binding them into the new covenant- grace indeed. Here we see the same- the Spirit is sent into the bones and they are revived, made to live; rather than them coming to spiritual life themselves.

Over 45 times we read the word "life" in Ezekiel. Usually the context is that the repentant and righteous will live, but the disobedient will die and not live. And Israel were disobedient. Yet they would be made to live by God's grace shown through the work of His Spirit. That is what the new covenant is all about; the reversal of condemnation by grace and His Spirit. Paul in Romans develops this point- that God's grace works out through the work of His Spirit. His grace, *charis*, is the word used for the gift of His Spirit. This promise of life to dead bones is the answer to Israel's miserable complaint that they were dead in sins: "'Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we waste away because of them, how can we live?'" (Ez. 33:10-11). And the promise of the Spirit is likewise the answer to those who feel hopelessly dead in sins. God didn't want them to die but to live, and so He had urged them to repentance (Ez. 18:32; 33:11; cp. 3:16-21). But they chose death over life. But by grace He still gives them life.

The revival is now, but it will come to full term at the resurrection of the body. The resurrection, future aspect to the promise is what helps us cope with the fact that our spiritual transformation now is clearly so incomplete and partial. Speaking of the same work of the Spirit, Paul can say that we see in a mirror in darkness, with just partial transformation of our image, just some parts changed and just seeing / knowing some parts of Him; but then in completion, face to face.

Ezekiel 37:4 *Again He said to me, Prophesy over these bones, and tell them, you dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh*- Note the parallel between God's Spirit and His word. Ezekiel appears to represent the latter day Elijah who will bring about this resurrection and revival through his latter day ministry; and again, this speaks of the latter days, not of Israel's political fortunes in the 20th century. The grace of it all is in the fact that dry bones can't hear God's word, neither can the dead exiles whom the bones represent. So obedience is not the basis for God's action- as so often stated, it is because of His Name, His essential love for Israel.

The idea of dryness has been used earlier in Ez. 17:9,10 for how Judah had been a healthy vine that was now dried up. The same figure is in Ez. 19:12 "it was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit. Its strong rods were broken off and withered". Likewise the idea that "our hope is lost" (:11) has been used in Ez. 19:5 of how the lioness of Judah "saw that she had waited and her hope was lost". Ezekiel is saying that his prophecies of condemnation and permanent destruction of God's people were going to be reversed. By the grace of the new covenant; and, as he labours, not because Israel had repented but because of the grace associated with God's Name. God's Name, as Hosea explains, involves a struggle between the pole of His grace and that of His judgment, with His love and grace finally winning out.

Ezekiel 37:5 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh to these bones: I will cause spirit to enter into you, and you shall live*- God takes the initiative; He no longer awaits their revival on their own initiative (Ez. 33:11), now He causes His Spirit to enter and transform them; and this is the token of the new covenant which we too have entered by grace. Ezekiel 37 had its primary fulfilment in the return under Ezra. Then, Israel was given "a quickening" (Ezra 9:9 LXX), in fulfilment of how the dry bones in captivity were revived. At that time, Judah *could* have fully revived. But most of them chose to stay in Babylon. And so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied. But this gift of the

Spirit is part of the promise of the new covenant, the new heart and spirit of Jer. 30,31; Ez. 20,36 etc. And God is willing to give that to all who enter it by baptism today.

We note that what happens here had been Ezekiel's personal experiencing at the time of his first calling (Ez. 2:2). The Spirit had entered him, and he stood upon his feet to serve Yahweh. All Israel were going to have the same experience- on a national level, they were to become Yahweh's servants as much as Ezekiel had been.

Ezekiel 37:6 *I will lay sinews on you, and will bring up flesh on you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am Yahweh*- The language of creation; see on 37:1 *bones*. It could be that the literal resurrection of those slain by the Babylonians was in view. But this was transferred to refer to the spiritual enlivenment possible for those within the new covenant. The sinews of flesh are perhaps intended to contrast with how Israel had previously had "iron sinews" (Is. 48:4); the idea is that now they had been given a heart of flesh, a soft heart to God's ways, rather than a hard heart. Many times, Israel had been bidden "know Yahweh", to have relationship with Him- and they had refused. The work of the Spirit however is to make them "know Yahweh" (:13,14 too). This is part of the same theme of Ez. 36- a new heart and Spirit will be given to God's people, apparently without their requesting it. The vision clearly speaks of the bodily resurrection of the last day [if scripture interprets scripture, that conclusion is unavoidable], but also of spiritual revival now. This is exactly the position we are in. The resurrection to eternal life is related to our possession of the Spirit now- "if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). Therefore those "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for... the redemption of our bodies" at the resurrection (Rom. 8:23). Just as the Lord Jesus was put to death in the flesh but was made alive by "the Spirit of Christ" which He had in His life (1 Pet. 3:18).

Ezekiel 37:7 *So I prophesied as I was commanded. As I prophesied, there was a noise*- This meant that the “whole house of Israel” was to stand up from their graves and return as a mighty army to the land. The “noise” is s.w. in Ezra 1:1 about the “proclamation” of Cyrus for Judah to return to the land. All of God’s people didn’t return; the majority preferred to stay in Babylon.

And an earthquake- Heb. 'a shaking'. The cherubim spoke of God's people. The sound of the cherubim Angels which Ezekiel heard was like the noise of an earthquake (Ez. 3:12 LXX). Now he hears the "noise" of "shaking" or earthquake as the bones of Israel in exile come together by the spirit / Angelic operation of Yahweh (Ez. 37:7). The same word is used about the latter day events in Israel when the latter day 'king of the north' invades (Is. 9:5; 29:6; Jer. 10:22; 47:3). And the same word is soon to be used in Ez. 38:19 for the earthquake which will happen when Gog is destroyed, and which will happen at Christ's return to save a Jerusalem which has fallen to her enemies (Zech. 14:5). They may well refer to the same event- for events will happen quickly at the time of the Lord's coming and the meaning of time may well be changed. See on :9.

And the bones came together, bone to its bone- There was to be a unity between the ten tribes and Judah, brought about by the experience of repentance, forgiveness and the work of God's Spirit. But this didn't happen at the restoration from Babylon; the nobles continued to oppress the people.

Ezekiel 37:8 *I saw, and, there were sinews on them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them*- See on :6. The Divine intention had been that the exiles repented, and then He would return them to Zion, having miraculously judged Babylon and also released the ten tribes from their captivity. But they wouldn't repent, and so God brought them back to their land anyway. This perhaps is the significance of the bodies being rebuilt but still lacking the Spirit / breath. Yet the allusion is clearly to the creation of Adam, who was likewise created and then given the Spirit. This is to be Eden restored, a new creation. But the exiles stubbornly refused all this. The whole prophetic scene here has been transferred to our days, when any man in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and filled with the Spirit within. And this is to happen nationally to Israel in the last days.

"No breath in them" references similar statements about idols. Israel had become like that which they worshipped, and yet even from that hopeless situation, God was able to revive them. Just as in Hosea, His people had refused His overtures and turned to idols, but still He wanted them as His own- and He would get them, through His Spirit.

Ezekiel 37:9 *Then He said to me, Prophesy to the wind, prophesy, son of man, and tell the wind*- God makes His Angels spirits / winds. Is this the command to Michael, Israel's Angel which comes into action for them in the last days (Dan. 12:1) to start to revive Israel? He is called forth from his exalted place dwelling between the four cherubim Angels. The language is reminiscent of that in Gen. 2:7, where the Angel breathed into man the breath of life, which caused him to stand up upon his feet (cp. Ez. 37:10)- and here the Angel is being asked to do the same, to Israel. Further connections between the "wind" and Israel's Angel are in Jer. 4:11-13.

But the meaning in reality is that the prophetic word was to be the source of the Spirit entering into the repentant exiles, if they repented. For the wind / spirit / breath is presented as under the control and bidding of Ezekiel the prophet.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Come from the four winds, breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live- The Spirit came from four places (Ez. 37:9)- just as there were four cherubim. As the sound of the cherubim was as of a great army (Ez. 1:24), so revived Israel stood up as a great army (Ez. 37:10).The Angel cherubim would work with God's disillusioned and broken people, to revive them, so that they would become like the guardian Angels of Israel above them. The point was that the Angel cherubim system which Ezekiel had seen at work amongst the captives was able to gather them together, and give life to the nation. And yet that didn't happen to those exiles- because they didn't walk in step with the spirit. The potential was that just as the exiles had been scattered to the four winds, so they would be spiritually revived wherever they were, and brought to Zion.

The revived bones represent those who had been "slain", the children of 'Rachel' for whom she wept because they were not. The slain Jews could have been resurrected then; but the whole program has been deferred to our last days.

Ezekiel 37:10 *So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly great army*- See on :9. The potential was that God would have used them as an army to destroy Babylon; " You are my battle axe and weapons of war: and with you will I break in pieces the nations; and with you will I destroy kingdoms; and with you will I break in pieces the horse and his rider; and with you will I break in pieces the chariot and him who rides

therein; and with you will I break in pieces man and woman; and with you will I break in pieces the old man and the youth; and with you will I break in pieces the young man and the virgin" (Jer. 51:20-22). The Jews who had been slain by the Babylonians would be resurrected and in turn become a mighty army who would judge Babylon. This is the meaning of the repeated "with you...". The strong emphasis upon 'breaking in pieces' recalls the little stone of Dan. 2 cut out from the great mountain (Babylon) which was to destroy the kingdoms of men then dominating Israel and become a great kingdom of God on earth. This potential didn't happen; but it shall do finally in the last days.

Ezekiel had experienced the same personally, in the same "valley" (see on :1). He had been as dead, and the Spirit came to him, revived him, and set him on his feet to do God's work (Ez. 2:2; 3:24). His physical revival was to be that of Israel. A literal resurrection is therefore in view here, regardless of what other dimensions there are to the revival. The two stage re-creation here, forming the dead body and then putting spirit into it, recalls man's creation in Gen. 2:7. Here we have a new creation, realized now when we are "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17); and yet clearly looking ahead to the "not yet" of literal resurrection and transformation at the Lord's return. Physical, literal resurrection is so clearly in view here; limiting it to some highly doubtful connection with Israel's becoming a state in 1948 seems to miss so much. The two stages are also seen in Ezekiel's personal experience; he fell on his face as dead, but then the Spirit of God entered him and he stood up as God's prophet and priest (Ez. 1:27; 2:2). He became representative of what God was to do to all Israel.

Ezekiel 37:11 *Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are totally cut off*- The valley of dry bones vision in Ez. 37 depicted Israel in captivity as bones waiting to come together and return to the land as a great army. Jer. 8:1 and other passages earlier in Ezekiel (Ez. 6:5; 24:4) had described both Judah and Israel as dry bones. The feeling of those bones was that "our bones are dried and our hope is lost" (Ez. 37:11). Judah in captivity felt that they had no "hope", that God had cast them off, and that they were unable to have a full relationship with Him outside the land. However, it seems that this was a rather convenient piece of theology for them- they were doing well in Babylon, and despite the opportunity to return to the land, they largely chose to remain in Babylon. "The whole house of Israel" repeats the great prophetic theme- that both Israel and Judah were to revive and return to Zion. But they would not (see on :22). The reason why this didn't happen is the same reason as to why people aren't revived today; the exiles thought they were just too far gone, they had lost their hope and were too lifeless to be revived, so they may as well remain in Babylon and live their lives out there, for better or for worse. This is exactly the reason why people refuse to accept the work of the Spirit in their lives today; they lack the faith to believe that from an apparently hopeless human situation, God can revive.

"Cut off" is a status defined in Ps. 88:5 as meaning God would never remember them again, they had died the death of Divine condemnation. This sets up the wonder of God's resurrection of these cut off, condemned, dead bones. Just as David in Ps. 88:5 felt during his life that he was at this point, so did they; but from that they were lifted up in the power and grace of resurrection. This is how low we have to get- a stage beyond merely mouthing the words "I know I'm a sinner". We have to feel condemnation, as Peter did as he wept bitterly in the darkness [both of which are the fate of the condemned]. But from there, we can be revived by the Spirit. The problem

was that the exiles in Babylon didn't feel "cut off", which precluded the great spiritual revival of the new covenant which was then potentially possible. It has been offered to us in our age. And so "cut off" suggests they were cut off from their people through condemnation (Num. 9:13), cut off from the temple, from the holy space of Israel [as they understood it], cut off from God, cut off from Israel as a people, cut off from the covenant. They had no "hope" of the Kingdom, they had lost it. The idea is of salation through resurrection even for the condemned of Israel. This is the grace of the new covenant. The Old Testament clearly teaches the condemnation of those who leave the covenant, and the salvation of those who abide in it. But just as the wages of sin is death yet we are quite illegitimately saved from this by grace in Christ, so it seems the historical Israel, at least up to the time of the end of the old covenant in Christ, shall be resurrected. By grace alone. And so all Israel shall be saved, and we share Paul's marvel at the depth of God's grace and eternal love for Israel. And that love is for us too under the new covenant.

There seems an allusion to Ps. 88:4-7, which implies that being cut off from God is permanent: "I am like a man who has no help, set apart among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more- they are cut off from Your hand... Your wrath lies heavily upon me". But the point is that apparently irreversible condemnation in death can be reversed. Just as their wound was "incurable" but was cured; or as Hosea puts it, they had been mauled to death and consumed by the Divine lion, but would be resurrected. The wonder of it all is that Israel themselves considered they were beyond salvation. But God didn't and the new covenant is about His grace in saving them despite their belief that they were beyond saving. This is grace in its most radical form.

"Behold, they say..." continues a theme in Ezekiel- that God knows the very words of the exiles and the sayings they have. Ez. 12:21 is an example: "What is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel: saying, 'The days grow long, and every vision comes to nought'". Likewise Ez. 18:2: "What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel,
'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you". See too Ez. 11:3; 33:24. The simple point is that the exiles, who felt forgotten by God, were to know that He looked carefully at their thoughts and heard all their words. And their depressive words were going to be mightily upended by His prophetic plan. This all provides comfort for those in depression and with the sense that God is distant.

Ezekiel 37:12 *Therefore prophesy and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel*- God really would have done this at the restoration from Babylon, but the exiles lacked the faith in these simple words. For them to be addressed with these words, we can conclude that it is spiritual revival which is in view. Although a literal resurrection may also have been possible then. The resurrection is presented here as happening before they enter the land of Israel. That resurrection would be by such grace that they would know Yahweh through it (:13); something which didn't happen in any figurative 'resurrection' of the state of Israel in the 1940s. Those Jews who emigrated to Israel in the 1940s and 1950s died without knowing Yahweh nor having any spiritual revival. "My people" is a hint that God has unilaterally accepted them again as His people. For during their great divorce, as explained in Hosea, God has called them lo-ammi, 'not My people'. But

He is as it were forcing through His purpose with them here, by resurrecting them and calling them "My people" once again.

Ezekiel 37:13 *You shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have opened your graves, My people, and caused you to come up out of your graves*- The opening of the graves precedes the coming into the land of Israel (:12). It cannot be that the opening of graves refers to a revival of Israel after the holocaust in Europe; for they did not then 'know Yahweh' before entering the land. Rather I suggest does this refer to the literal resurrection of Jews killed during the Babylonian invasions and perhaps also to those killed during the latter day desolation of the land. Radical Islam speaks of burying the bones of every Jew now alive in Israel. If this happens, then this prophecy will have a comfortable literal fulfillment. The way a revived Israel then bury the bones of their abusers in Ez. 39 would be a way of demonstrating that the judgments meted out upon Israel by her latter day enemies are then meted out to the invaders.

This whole section concludes with the comment that Israel would know Yahweh through being gathered back to the land through resurrection and spiritual transformation. This knowing of Yahweh means knowing His amazing grace. If indeed the historical Israel of the time are resurrected and transformed, they will spend eternity marvelling at His grace. Thus Ez. 39:28,29: "They shall know that I am Yahweh their God, in that I caused them to go into captivity among the nations, and have gathered them to their own land... neither will I hide My face any more from them; for I have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel". To have the Spirit is therefore to see God's face, to be in open relationship with Him because of the assurance that sin has been dealt with.

Ezekiel 37:14 *I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; and you shall know that I, Yahweh, have spoken it and performed it, says Yahweh*- This alludes directly back to the vision of the Angel-cherubim's spirit being placed in the "wheels" of natural Israel in Ez. 1:20,21. The placing of the Spirit within them was to be associated with their return to the land; being "placed" there suggests God's work. This isn't what happened in the 20th century revival of the state of Israel; although that was not without significance. For the prophecies require an invasion of the land in the last days and suffering of Jews within it, and so they had to be gathered there for this to happen. The phrase "place you in your own land" is used in Is. 14:1 of the time when the Gentiles "shall be joined with them and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob". This is yet future, but it was potentially possible at the time of the restoration from Babylon. But sadly the Gentiles mocked Judah for continuing serving their idols, and were hardly encouraged to connect with the hope of Israel.

In the first context, the subjects of resurrection are those who had died outside the land. Clearly the exiles are in view. The vision is in the valley / plain, the same as that of Ez. 3:22 where the exiles were. Those who were dying in exile would be resurrected and return to the land- that is the message. They would be 'placed in their own land', or "I will bring you home". We could argue that they failed to realize this amazing potential. Or that this whole plan was reapplied to spiritual Israel. Or that quite simply, they will be resurrected by pure grace alone at the last day.

Ezekiel 37:15 *The word of Yahweh came again to me, saying*- The unity of God's people was and remains a major concern with God. The common experience of grace

and repentance was intended to unite Israel with the Gentiles (see on :14) and also to unite Judah with the ten tribes.

Ezekiel 37:16 *You, son of man, take one stick and write on it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions. Then take another stick and write on it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions*- Unity between Israel and Judah was a major dimension of the new covenant. "Joseph" is used here to make the point- he was the one separate from his brethren and in this sign, he is now joined to his brethren. There are many links discernible between Ezekiel and Zechariah, as they both prophesy concerning the same scattering and restoration of Israel. Here, the connection is with Zech. 10:6 "The house of Judah... the house of Joseph... they of Ephraim". There was envisaged a unity between Judah and Israel [Ephraim] at the restoration, but it never came about. And finally Zechariah breaks his sticks, as if to say the potential prophesied by Ezekiel was not going to happen in the restored community; although it shall come finally true in the last days.

There is a massive stress upon the unity which would be achieved under the new covenant. "The whole house of Israel" were to experience unity through the resurrection (:11). And now the acted parable of the united sticks is used to preface the dramatic presentation of Israel's spiritual revival under the new covenant. The word 'one' is used 11 times in Ezekiel 37:15−28 (verses 16 [2 times], 17 [3 times], 19 [2 times], 22 [2 times], and 24 [2 times]). This is a huge emphasis. This unity is predicated upon the one King who reigns over them represented by the one stick or ruling rod. This is the sceptre of Messiah, called "David" here in Ez. 37 because it suggests the resurrection of David, and the Messiah being his descendant: "there will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms" (Ez. 27:22). For those who have accepted the new covenant, unity under King Jesus is in fact a sign of being in the covenant. Whilst it is a case of "now but not yet", it is also so that actions of disunity with those in the covenant are actually a denial of that covenant.

Ezekiel 37:17 *Join them yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand*- The intention was that the prophetic word of Ezekiel would be the basis for the unity of God's people; this unity would happen through his hand. But they didn't take him seriously, and so this didn't happen at the time of the restoration. "Join" is the word used for the exiles joining or coming near to Yahweh (Ez. 44:16; Zeph. 3:2); as to this day, our connection with God becomes our connection with our brethren, and we cannot have one without the other. 'Becoming one' continues the allusions to the creation; it is the phrase used about "man" becoming one flesh through the union of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:24). The joining together of the sticks matches the coming together of the dry bones, bone to bone is marched by stick to stick. The stick is really a ruling scepter; the idea is that the unity of God's people is connected with His reigning over them, being accepted as their Lord. Unity between His people is required for His Kingdom reigning over them. But again, it is now but not yet. We are to live in unity with all others in the new covenant, and the cup of the covenant is to be the bond of that. But unity between persons eludes us in this life, and we will only experience it under the Lord's literal kingship at His return when "we shall be changed".

Ezekiel 37:18 *When the children of your people shall speak to you saying, Will you not show us what you mean by these?*- Ezekiel performed the miracle before their

eyes. The message was obvious because the sticks were clearly marked (:16). Failure to understand God's word nearly always has a moral basis. They naturally recoiled at the idea of such unity with those whom they considered inferior. And so they make out that they don't understand, even though the explanation given in :19 is really only stating the obvious from what the miracle of the joined sticks had itself taught.

Ezekiel 37:19 *Tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand*- See on Ps. 80:2 and :18. Ezekiel's hand was to be seen as God's hand (:17 "in your hand"). The rods represented leadership and kingship; the hand of Ephraim was to no longer hold a stick, neither would Judah; God's hand would hold the united stick. There was to be a new, Divinely appointed kingship. ten tribes were all the same.

"I will take" is Heb. "I am about to take". We see here the huge potential that was available right then for the exiles. They wasted so much Divine potential; He so wanted to act to end the exile and resurrect those who had been "slain" (:9).

Ezekiel 37:20 *The sticks whereon you write shall be in your hand before their eyes*- The idea is that Ezekiel's hand was to be seen as representing God's hand (:17,19). They were to see with their eyes that in a miraculous way, God through Ezekiel's word could unite Israel and Judah with Him as king, holding the rod or stick which represented rulership. But as ever, petty parochialism meant that this great potential didn't happen at that time.

Ezekiel 37:21 *Say to them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they are gone, and will gather them on every side and bring them into their own land*- "Take... gather... bring" suggests they were to be assembled and then brought together back to Zion. This never happened with the exiles; the gathering together by the river Ahava (Ezra 8:15,21,31) was a very small fulfilment, but the majority weren't interested. The fulfilment therefore has to be in the last days. The same words "take... gather... bring" are found in Ez. 36:24, where this is to happen *before* they are sprinkled and given a new heart by the work of God's Spirit (Ez. 36:25,26). It is this new heart which would empower the exiles from whatever background to become "one nation" (:22). Unity is a gift of the Spirit, beyond our human achievement- but we must be open to receive it.

Ezekiel 37:22 *I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all*- "Make them one nation" suggests that unity is brought about by the work of God on men's' hearts; see on :21. This is the interpretation of how God made the two one stick (:19 s.w.). It was a psychological miracle of the spirit that He was willing to perform, just as the two sticks had miraculously become joined in Ezekiel's hand. Remnants of the 10 tribes had been taken into captivity along with the two tribes; it *could* have been that at the restoration, the difference between Israel and Judah was ended and one Messianic King reigned over them. This was likewise in view in Is. 11:13; Jer. 3:18; Hos. 1:11 etc.. But they refused. The majestic prophecy of Jer. 23:5-7 had prophesied that when Israel returned from Babylon, “the branch” would rise and save them “and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth”, i.e. establish the Messianic Kingdom (cp.

Ps. 72:2; Is. 9:7). But Zerubbabel, the “branch-from-Babylon”, lead the people back from Babylon, half heartedly built a temple- which faithful men wept at, when they saw how feeble it was compared to that which should have been (Ezra 3:12). And then he beat it back to Babylon. Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called “the people of Israel” (cp. Ezra 2:2).

Some of the ten tribes did return with Judah. Thus “the Jews” is used synonymously with “Israelite” (Neh. 2:10; 4:1; 5:1,8; 7:73; 12:47). 12 he-goats and 12 bulls were offered for “all Israel” in Ezra 6:17; 8:35. But still Judah and Israel remained divided; and no “prince” arose to fulfil the prophecies. The intended unity between God's people will only happen in the last days when they are bound together by their repentance and experience of forgiveness.

Ezekiel 37:23 *Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will save them out of all their dwelling places in which they have sinned and will cleanse them. So shall they be My people, and I will be their God*- Not serving idols is paralleled with no longer being divided (:22). Idolatry in whatever form leads to division amongst God's people. The existence of only one God is therefore a demand for total unity between His worshippers- for their whole hearts will be for Him and not for anything else. Paul, writing to those who thought they believed in the unity of God, had to remind them that this simple fact implies the need for unity amongst us His children, seeing He treats us all equally as a truly good Father: "If so be that God is one... he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and [likewise] the uncircumcision through faith" (Rom. 3:30 RV).

"Their dwelling places" are the places in exile to where they had been scattered. But they were the places in which they had sinned by idolatry. This supports the impression that the exiles whom Ezekiel was addressing were idolaters still at that time. LXX "out of all their backslidings", as in Hos. 14. Those slipping back hopelessly can be stopped from that by the power of God's reviving Spirit.

"They will be my people, and I will be their God" repeats the promise to Abraham of Gen. 17:7,8. Being God's people [through being made not to sin any more and to be faithful to Him] and Yahweh being their God is therefore a fulfilment of the promises to Abraham- which are the basis of the new or renewed covenant. Thus Peter perceives that those promises imply being "turned away" from our sins (Acts 3:25,26).

We must be aware that the idolatry mentioned here is the idolatry of the exiles with whom Ezekiel was living and working. For they were the ones 'defiling' themselves with idols, as Ez. 20:30,31, spoken to the elders of the Jewish exiles, is explicit: "Tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Do you defile yourselves in the way of your fathers? and do you play the prostitute after their abominations? Shall I be inquired of by you, house of Israel? As I live says the Lord Yahweh, I will not be inquired of by you".

Ezekiel 37:24 *My servant David shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd. They shall also walk in My ordinances and observe My statutes and do them*- This is clearly the same “prince” as referred to in Ezekiel 45-48. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 30:9 speaks of a returned Judah serving “David their king, whom I shall raise up unto them”- implying that David would have been resurrected at the restoration, if all had gone according to what was possible? But Zech. 6 offers other

potential fulfilments for the prince in Zerubbabel and Joshua; but these also didn't come about. And so the final fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus. Likewise Cyrus could have been Yahweh's shepherd at the restoration (Is. 44:28). There were so many potentials possible, just as there are in our lives and those of so many. God's enthusiasm and interest in us given our failures as a race and His people... is so wonderful. He must be so thrilled when we at least try to respond and allow His plans to progress in us.

Ezekiel 37:25 *They shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they shall dwell therein, they and their children and their children's children, forever: and David My servant shall be their prince for ever*- Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", perhaps for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. "The prince" of Ezekiel 40-48 is hard to understand as an immortal being such as the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of Ez. 21:27 was Judah's last ruler- so "the prince" later in Ezekiel would appear to be a promise of a restored monarchy. Yet tragically, the royal family chose to remain in Babylon.

The restoration was to be associated with the appearance of a potential Messiah figure. This is a point repeatedly made in so many prophecies of the restoration. Take Is. 61:1-4: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison [Babylon] to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion [the "poor of the land" allowed to remain after the Babylonian invasion], to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness [cp. how they sat and wept by the rivers of Babylon]...And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations". And there are many other such prophecies which connect the appearance of a Messiah with the rebuilding of Zion. Haggai prophesied to encourage the people to get on with building the temple (Ezra 5:1), and yet he spoke of the desire of all nations (Messiah) coming with an earthquake and glory filling the temple (Hag. 2:7). I submit that this is a prophecy of what *could* have happened at that time, but it has been deferred to the second coming of the Lord Jesus. The cherubim visions of Ez. 1,9 and 10 are applied in the New Testament to the glorified Christ (Rev. 2:18; 1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Pet. 2:4-9). This surely implies that they were ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah; and perhaps we are to understand that they could have had fulfilment in a Messiah figure at the time of the restoration.

Ezekiel 37:26 *Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them and multiply them and will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore*- They had broken the old covenant, and so a new covenant was offered- which would last eternally and would achieve peace with God. It could only last eternally because the possibility of Israel breaking their side of it would be removed, through the work of the Spirit in their hearts. This would be the

fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, for it was those promises which spoke of their 'multiplication'. The promises to Abraham are to this day the basis of the new covenant, which we too can enter, although the exiles refused it. "My sanctuary" appears parallel with "my tent" (:27,28). The essence of this will finally come true as described at the end of Revelation- God will Himself dwell with men. In the context of the possible scenario at the exile, they could have witnessed this dwelling of God with them by building the temple system of Ez. 40-48, into which the shekinah glory of God would have entered to represent His dwelling with them. But they didn't build it as commanded, and so they precluded the possibility of all this.

Ezekiel 37:27 *My tent also shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people*- Although the exiles were commanded to build the temple of Ez. 40-48, they were to be aware that essentially God doesn't dwell in temples made with hands. He had always made that point by dwelling in a tent. And this is therefore brought to view again here.

Ezekiel 37:28 *The nations shall know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in their midst forevermore*- The sanctuary God envisioned originally was one which *His* hands made (Ex. 15:17; Ps. 78:69). The permission to build a temple with human hands was a concession to human weakness; although the word is used many times in Ez. 40-48 of the temple Israel were to build. But they refused to do so as commanded. The essence of the sanctuary was to be Messiah; He was to be a sanctuary for God's people (Is. 8:14). And this was and is how Yahweh shall eternally tabernacle with His people.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 38

Ezekiel 38:1 The word of Yahweh came to me saying- Ezekiel 38 must be understood within its context. Ezekiel was a captive in Babylon, and the book bearing his name records series of prophecies which he gave. Ez. 33:21 – 39:29 is a complete section within the book. I understand Ez. 33:21,22 to mean that Ezekiel opened his mouth and gave the six prophetic utterances in this section on the night before the exiles received the news that Jerusalem had fallen. It was on the fifth day of the tenth month of the 12th year of the exile (Ez. 33:21). Ezekiel's mouth was opened by Divine inspiration that evening, and he gave these messages through the night until the messenger arrived in the morning with the news that Jerusalem had fallen. Each of the six messages begin with the rubric "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying…". The message has been that Judah shall enter a new covenant, although there will be terrible times of trouble and judgment for both her and her enemies. Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, and so it is understandable that the invasion described in chapter 38 alludes to the Babylonian invasion, but climaxing in the good news that Messiah's coming will save Judah and all Israel. The message was that the tragedy of losing Jerusalem was to be repeated again, on an even grander scale, in the last days- and yet it was to be but a prelude to Messiah's triumphal coming and the permanent establishment of God's Kingdom based in Israel. The various nations listed in Ez. 38 may well have been those who were confederate with Babylon in the historical invasion of Judah- this would have been their relevance to Ezekiel's initial

audience of captives in Babylon. Ten nations from within the land are listed in total, plus Persia- and Revelation speaks of an entity, a “beast”, dominated by Babylon but having ten horns, or powers, associated with it. These would correspond to the ten toes of the image of Daniel 2. The significance of the nations listed is that they are from every point of the compass around Jerusalem: Gomer and Togarmah from the North, Persia from the East, Cush from the South and Put / Tarshish from the West. The common description of the invasion of Judah by ‘all the nations round about’ thus comes to term in the prophecy of Ez. 38.

There *could have been* the restoration promised in Ezekiel 35-37, followed by the invasion by the surrounding nations in Ezekiel 38, and then the judgment of those nations and establishment of the restored Kingdom as detailed in Ezekiel 39, followed by an obedient Judah building and operating the temple of Ez. 40-48. Ezekiel 37 had its primary fulfilment in the return under Ezra. Then, Israel was given “a quickening” (Ezra 9:9 LXX), in fulfilment of how the dry bones in captivity were revived. At that time, Judah *could* have fully revived. But most of them chose to stay in Babylon. If there had been a full revival, then the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 would have taken place. It has been suggested that there was a primary fulfilment of Ezekiel 38/9 in an unrecorded invasion of the land at the time of the restoration. However, historical evidence for this is severely lacking. And yet the Scythian tribes such as Magog, Gomer, Meshech, Tubal etc. are all recorded as being the scourge of the Middle East at that time. They were marauding into more prosperous areas “to take a spoil”, especially “cattle and goods”, at around Ezekiel’s time. They could so easily have turned their attentions toward Israel. That invasion *could* have happened; but it didn’t. But because Israel were not faithful the temple was not built properly, and therefore the Ezekiel 38 invasion didn’t happen, and therefore Yahweh’s intervention and establishment of His Kingdom as described in Ezekiel 39 didn’t occur. In some ways, the Ezekiel 38 invasion and 39 defeat *could* have occurred but instead has been deferred until the last days... because through that invasion the establishment of the Kingdom is led into. This suggestion makes sense of the thorny problem of Ezekiel 38:11 stating that the invasion would come at a time when Judah would be living in unwalled towns, without bars nor gates, “at rest”- which is the very language of Jer. 30: 10, that the restored Judah would be “in rest and be quiet”. The same word is used in Zech. 1:11 to describe how the land was “at rest” when the captives returned to rebuild Zion.

We must also factor in that Haggai and Zechariah outline a scenario in which the Jewish exiles would rise up against Babylon / Persia, and before Zerubbabel the great mountain of Babylon / Persia would have become a plain. And so the image of Dan. 2 would have been brought down at that point.

Haggai 2:6 says that "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land". In a "short time", God would yet once more (GNB) shakes the heavens and earth as He had done at Sinai. The potential was that soon after Haggai's words [in "a little while"] there would be direct Divine intervention involving earthquakes and the shaking of all nations (Hag. 2:7) to support the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel under the Messianic rulership of Zerubbabel. This is also foreseen in Zech. 14, where the earthquake is seen as creating a new plateau upon which a new temple could be built. This plateau was also see in the opening of the Ez. 40-48 vision of the commandments as to how to build the new temple complex. This could be brought about by the shaking / earthquake which could have come at the end of the Ez. 38 invasion: "in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel... all the men who are on the surface of the earth, shall shake at

My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall and every wall shall fall to the ground" (Ez. 38:19,20). Had Judah accepted the new covenant offered to them in Ez. 33,34, they would have revived as in Ez. 37, the Ez. 38 invasion and earthquake would have happened and then on the resultant plateau, the new temple would have been built. Despite Judah's failures to engage with these things, Haggai and Zechariah were saying that if the people wanted, they could have the earthquake and temple. God really was trying to force through His saving purpose.

But it didn't happen then. Judah didn't repent, and Zerubbabel beat it back to Babylon. These words have therefore been reapplied and rescheduled, to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and to the final literal establishment of the Kingdom at His second coming; in this context they are quoted in Heb. 12:26-28.

Zech. 2:9 gives more possibilities: "For, behold, I will shake My hand over them"- an idiom for direct Divine action in the destruction of Babylon (Zech. 2:7). Although Babylon had fallen to Cyrus, he left the city intact. The total destruction of the city envisioned in the prophets didn't happen at that time- perhaps because God's people weren't ready to leave as they should have done. For the exit of the Jews from Babylon was envisaged as preceding Babylon's total destruction (Isaiah 13,48; Jeremiah 50,51). Although the people hadn't left Babylon, God now gives another scenario- they could leave now, and then Babylon would fall as predicted. Ezra leads another group from Babylon in response to this call (Ezra 7), but again there was very limited response to his efforts to get the Jews to leave. We marvel at God's desire to somehow make it all work out. We note too how what happens amongst nations is directly related to the readiness of God's people to respond. Thus the Persians reversed the decree to rebuild the temple because God's people didn't really want to build it. Darius could easily have failed to regain control of Persia and Persia would have fallen before Zerubbabel; had the Jews left Babylon, the city would have been reduced to rubble as prophesied.

Zech. 2:9 goes on to say that "They will be a spoil to those who served them". The NET brings out how immediately Persia was to fall by internal division: "I am about to punish them so that they will be looted by their own slaves", or "by those who were once their servants". This began to happen on the death of Smerdis as the subject tribes and territories began to rebel. The tribes of Ez. 38 could have risen to power and invaded the recently revived state of Judah. This was what could have happened and was set to. But Judah just didn't respond despite all God's enthusiasm, and so Darius stabilized the empire and it continued another 200 years. And the Scythian tribes were overcome by Darius rather than becoming strong enough to attack Judah.

Ezekiel 38:2 Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog- This chapter speaks of an invasion of Israel at some point after the Jews have returned to their land (Ezekiel 37) and before the establishment of God's kingdom on earth (Ezekiel 39,40). This latter day invader will be destroyed by Divine intervention. The language is clearly based upon the historical Assyrian: Ez. 38:4 = Is. 37:29; Ez. 38:7 = Is. 8:7; Ez. 38:8 = Is. 8:8; 10:3; Ez. 38:9,10 = Is. 28:2; 8:9,21; 10:3,7; Ez. 38:11 = Is. 37:24; Ez. 38:12 = Is. 10:6; Ez. 38:19 = Is. 30:27; Ez. 38:22 = Is. 29:6; 30:30; Ez. 38:19,20 = Is. 29:6; 30:25; Ez. 38:23 = Is. 10:15; Ez. 39:10 = Is. 33:1. See on :17; Ez. 39:3. Rev. 20:8 defines "the nations which are in the four quarters of the land" as being "Gog and Magog"; clearly the Ezekiel 38 Gog is being defined as the epitome

of the nations along the borders of Israel, who both historically and currently are Israel's main enemies.

Gog is a personal name, he will be the *rosh* or prince / caliph of the invading group of nations. The only Biblical Gog was an Israelite who went away from the core of Israelite worship and lived on the East of Jordan, and later assimilated into the Assyrian territories and lived on the banks of the Euphrates (1 Chron. 5:4-9,25,26). The Biblical Gog is therefore from the far northern boundary of the land promised to Abraham, the ends of the *eretz* / earth. Gog is described as coming from his homeland in the uttermost parts of the north (Ez. 38:15). His origin will be on the northern edge of the land promised to Abraham- which is the Euphrates River. This, then, is the location of Magog; which would explain why there are no cuneiform inscriptions bearing this name. It is simply the land of Gog, and its exact location is irrelevant- it's simply presented as a territory on the far northern border of the land promised to Abraham. We can look for the latter day Gog to be born somewhere along the Euphrates River.

The usage of the term Gog suggests that this invasion is being made and led by a false Israel. And we find that idea continued when the invaders are described as "a great company" (Ez. 38:4,7,13,15); yet the *qahal* is a term usually used about the congregation of Israel (Ps. 22:26; 35:18; 40:10,11; Ezra 10:1). Gog is "the chief prince" (Ez. 38:2), but this term is elsewhere used only of the chief princes of the tribes of Israel (Num. 10:4; 36:1). The invaders "come to a land", Israel (Ez. 38:8)- using the very expression used of how *Israel* were to "come to a land", that of Israel (Lev. 14:34; Num. 15:2; 34:2; Dt. 8:7; 17:14; 18:9; 26:1; 32:52). Likewise the beast / whore in Revelation is described in terms of Solomon's Kingdom, trading in the same goods, and associated with the number 666 as Solomon was (1 Kings 10:14). The point may be that the beast / whore system is a fake Israel, a mock Kingdom of God. Which fits ISIS and Islam. The anti-Christ doesn't mean so much 'against Christ' as 'that which appears as Christ', in the place of Christ. And likewise there is a fake Kingdom of God, a pseudo-Israel... which is what Islam created when Mohammed in the Quran twisted the Genesis record to make the Arab peoples 'Isaac' and the Jews from Jacob as 'Ishmael'. And this would explain why the codename for the leader of the invasion is Gog, an apostate Israelite who likewise lived on the Euphrates.

It's worth noting that some versions of the LXX in the apocryphal book of Sirach 48:17 speak of Gog coming to Jerusalem at the time of the Assyrian invasion at Hezekiah's time. This would definitely associate Gog with the leader of an Assyrian invasion. It's also interesting that the LXX of Dt. 3:1,13; 4:47 speaks of "Og king of Bashan" as "Gog". Bashan refers to the area of the Golan Heights- the northern entrance to Israel, on the border with Syria. This is exactly where the IS are building up their forces and this would be the logical invasion point into Israel.

Haman "the Agagite" is surely another prototype for Gog; Agag and Gog are very similar original words. The similarity is not simply in the similarity of the names. The "wicked device" or plan of Haman to destroy the Jews (Esther 8:3,5; 9:25) is described with the very same word used of how Gog thinks up an evil plan against Israel (Ez. 38:10).

We should note that "Gog" occurs in another place in the LXX, but not in the Masoretic Text: "Thus has the Lord God shewed me; and, behold, a swarm of locusts coming from the east; and, behold, one caterpillar, king Gog" (Am. 7:1). Israel's

enemies are typically described as coming from the north, because armies from Babylon and Assyria [to the East of Israel] would follow the transport routes along the Euphrates and then come down from the north into Israel- rather than marching across the trackless desert. But Gog is described as coming "from the east". This makes sense if Gog is a person, rather than a nation or army. His origin was to the east of Israel. The "locusts" whom he leads connect with the Assyrians being called locusts (Is. 33:4), and the locusts of Rev. 9:3,7 being paralleled with thousands of horsemen coming against Israel from the Euphrates. Before dismissing the LXX too quickly, remember that the vast majority of Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament are from the LXX, and that version is often preferred over the Hebrew [Masoretic] Text. Yet Amos intercedes: "Repent, O Lord, for this. And this shall not be, saith the Lord". This would suggest that the Gog invasion was conditional and was forestalled by the intercession of Amos; thus not only Ezekiel 40-48 would be conditional prophecy, but Ezekiel 38 and 39 also.

The chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him- I calculate ten nations in Ez. 38 [cp. the ten horns on the beast] on the basis that *rosh* is a proper noun meaning 'chief prince' and doesn't refer to any nation bearing the name *rosh*. There was no such nation. All attempts to force this word into equivalence with the Kievan *rus*, from whence 'Russia', are opportunistic and cavalier in the extreme. Because two words contain two identical letters when transliterated doesn't mean they are one and the same word. Further, I understand "Are you come to take a spoil?" in Ez. 38:13 to not be a challenge, but rather said with the implication 'Are you going to spoil them? We will come too!'.

In Ezekiel 27:13, Meshech and Tubal are mentioned as being sellers of slaves to Tyre; and in Ezekiel 32:26, they are spoken of as "instilling terror in the land of the living." Meshech is thought to be a people called the Moschi dwelling in the Caucasus mountain regions according to Assyrian inscriptions. Tubal is thought to be a people called the Tibareni dwelling on the Southeast shores of the Black Sea [perhaps from whence modern Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia]. But whoever they were, they were connected with the nations of Genesis 10; for all the nations of Ez. 38 are found in that list. We note that none of the descendants of Shem in Gen. 10 are found here in Ez. 38. The nations of Gen. 10 were all peoples within the *eretz* promised to Abraham; the area which was flooded and then repopulated after the flood, which is the context of Gen. 10.

Ezekiel 38:3 And say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal- "Chief prince" means just that; it is facile to try to interpret "rosh" ["chief"] as a proper noun. The word occurs very many times in the Bible and simply means "chief". The same phrase chief prince" often occurs about the princes of the tribes of Israel (Num. 1:16; 7:2; 10:4; 36:1 etc.).

Ezekiel 38:4 I will turn you around- There are many similarities between Assyria and the Gog invasion. The two invasions of Gog (or three? Ez. 38:4,8,10; or four if v. 4 implies two invasions: "I will turn you back... and bring you forth"- again) find their basis in Assyria coming up several times before the final onslaught on Jerusalem.

We naturally want to know who precisely the specific nations refer to. But readers of Ezekiel will have been struck by the fact that a number of the nations listed have already been mentioned in Ezekiel- in prophecies which predict or describe their destruction. Tyre (Tarshish), Meshech and Tubal have all been described as having

come to their end (Ez. 27:13; 32:5,26,27). The impression, therefore, is that there will be a latter day *revival* of these nations. And that is what we are seeing happening in the lands around Israel, whose peoples and geographical areas were dormant and insignificant for centuries- until their revival in recent times. A coalition of those nations will arise which includes those territories or ethnic groups. And their intention is clearly and ultimately to invade Israel and destroy the Jews. Radical Islam is already in control of much of the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham. Indeed, Ez. 38:4 opens the prophecy by saying that God will 'return' Gog [AV "turn thee back"], and the Hebraism is well translated elsewhere as 'restore the fortunes of…'. A revived Gog means a revived Assyria / Babylon. The question is, why does Ezekiel not specifically mention Assyria / Babylon as the leader of this group of nations? Why refer obliquely to them as 'Gog'? The answer may be that because Ezekiel was a captive in Babylon at the time, he referred to them under this code name. Peter does the same in referring to Rome under the code name of Babylon (1 Pet. 5:13). It may be that some of the other nations mentioned in Ez. 38 are likewise code names- because it is very hard to conclusively demonstrate that some of the nations or peoples bearing exactly those same names existed in Ezekiel's time. The description of Gog's destruction in Ez. 39 is likewise hard to take literally, and this may mesh well with 'Gog' being used as a codename. See the later notes on Ezekiel 39.

Put hooks into your jaws, and will bring you out- Gog is manipulated with hooks in his jaws (Ez. 38:4-6). This alludes to how the Assyrians presented themselves in steles and other art forms as putting hooks in the mouths of those they conquered. The Zincirli Stele pictures Esarhaddon holding Egypt and Tyre by hooks in their jaws; Assyria "took Manasseh captive in hooks" (2 Chron. 33:11 Heb.). The point is, that what Assyria did to others is effectively being done to the latter day Assyrian by God. This is the very picture of Rev. 13:10- the beast who led God's people into captivity shall be taken into captivity by God at the last day, and hooks being put in the jaw is the very picture of captivity. Gog and his entity is the beast of Revelation. Indeed, the whole language of putting hooks in the jaws is based upon God's word to Assyria, that He would put hooks in their jaws and a bridle in their mouth (Is. 37:29)- as if they were an aggressive beast.

The idea is found far back in Gen. 27:40, where Jacob made a promise about the relationship between Jacob (Israel) and Esau (forefather of many of the nations living in the land promised to Abraham). Jacob predicted that although Esau would be beneath Jacob, there would come a time "when you shall have dominion [Heb. 'to trample down', which will happen when Israel and Jerusalem are trodden down by Esau's invasion of the last days, and will rule or have dominion over Jacob]; and you [Esau] shall break his [Jacob's] yoke from off your neck". This suggests that the families of Esau are again presented as a beast that must be controlled. Jacob's words have so far had no significant fulfilment; but they will do, however briefly, when the beast of Esau takes over Israel and dominates the Jews.

With all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armour, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them handling swords- One cannot miss the emphasis in Ezekiel 38 on the many "horses and horsemen", and the type of armour described ("Bucklers and shields") gives the impression of many well armed cavalry men. Notice Ez. 38:15 too: "All of them riding upon horses". Why this emphasis on cavalry? The Angels are described as horse riders in Zechariah and Revelation; the horses in the chariots of Zech. 6 are also Angels), and there is the obvious connection

with the Angel-cherubim chariot. Further Angelic language is found in Ez. 38:20 "My presence"; Ez. 39:7 "The Holy One".

Rev. 9:14-18 describes how 200,000,000 horsemen came from just beyond the Euphrates (exactly where the jihadist hordes have come), using "fire and smoke and brimstone" to punish God's apostate people. This was John in the first century struggling under 'the tyranny of words' to describe modern warfare. "By these three was the third part of men killed", suggesting that this invading army has three aspects to its work. The huge number of horsemen must allude to the "great company" of horsemen of Ez. 38:4, which we have shown (:2) to be rooted in the Assyrian invasion. The 200,000,000 horsemen of Rev. 9:16 may correspond to the fact that history records the strength of the Assyrian army which came against Jerusalem as being 200,000 men. The jihadist culture is full of allusion to horsemen, seeing themselves as the revival of previous horse-mounted Islamic warriors. The motif is common in jihadist promotional videos. Jerusalem was truly "compassed with armies" by the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days.

Ezekiel 38:5 Persia, Ethiopia and Libya with them, all of them with shield and helmet- We note the lack of reference to Babylon and Assyria in the list of ten nations. The primary, potential application of the prophecy was to the repentant captives standing up as a great army in Ez. 37, destroying Babylon and returning to Zion along with the repentant ten tribes and the six nations of Ez. 26-32 who repent and "know Yahweh". They would come to a land made miraculously fruitful for them (Ez. 36). The nations listed here in Ez. 38 are those from all around the compass who then come up to invade the reestablished kingdom of God with its Messianic king. But the invasion is unsuccessful. This prophetic scenario however didn't happen, because the humans involved in it refused to repent. This invasion by various peoples and the Scyths, who were not confederate with the two contemporary power blocks of Babylon and Egypt, could have happened; but it didn't, and so the essence of it will be fulfilled in the last days. I have suggested on Rev. 20 that the Ez. 38 invasion is there described as happening around the return of the Lord Jesus. This would then be the scenario of Psalm 2, with the Lord Jesus enthroned in Zion, surrounded by His enemies, but easily destroying them.

I have explained elsewhere that the latter day beast with ten horns is to dominate the *eretz* / land of Israel, the area promised to Abraham from Egypt to the Euphrates. The ten toes of Daniel's image are rooted in the earth / land, and these are the basis for the ten horns in the later development of that vision in Daniel 7 and Revelation. This entity is dominated by a charismatic leader, the little horn; also expressed in Revelation as the whore riding the beast. In Ezekiel 38, we have ten nations plus Persia, led by an individual called Gog [reading *rosh* not as a nation but as "chief prince", as it is always elsewhere translated]. Those ten nations are all from within the land promised to Abraham, because they are extracted from the list of nations in the land in Genesis 10. The picture presented is of ten nations or leaders [horns, toes] from within the land promised to Abraham- perhaps to be fulfilled in an Islamic caliphate dominating that area, with ten leaders or factions or peoples under its control. *Plus* Persia- Iran. It's unthinkable given current geopolitics that such an invasion would happen and Iran would not get involved. They will- according to Ezekiel 38. It's also worth noting that Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish appear to join in the invasion as a separate entity. We are left wondering whether this has relevance to the three horns mentioned separately in Dan. 7:8,20,24.

Another approach is to consider that this refers to an entity of nations from immediately outside the land promised to Abraham, who are distinct from the nations within the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham. The nations of Ez. 38 who invade Israel after the Lord Jesus has returned are not those within the *eretz* / land / earth. They are those in the "sea" of nations immediately surrounding the "land" promised to Abraham. The geographical areas include therefore Iran, Egypt and Turkey. Thus when we read that Togarmah comes from "the north border [AV "quarters"]" (Ez. 38:6), this refers to the northern limit of the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. Perhaps this is the equivalent of the "beast of the sea" of Rev. 13 which is presented as related to but separate from the "beast of the earth / land". We can look to these areas joining together under one charismatic leader, "Gog", to seek to repeat the invasion of the land and people of Israel by the latter day Assyria / Babylon. This is why although Assyria isn't mentioned, the invasion of Ez. 38 is full of allusion to the prophetic language concerning the Assyrian invasion [hooks in the jaws, etc.]. It will be a foolhardy repeat of the behaviour of the entity within the "land" / *eretz* which was destroyed by the Lord's coming. The invasion of Ez. 38 is clearly that of the "Gog' of Revelation, which occurs after the Lord's return and establishment in Jerusalem, when the people dwell securely in unwalled villages- the language of the Kingdom. There is repeated emphasis that Elam [Persia] uses a bow and quiver (Is. 22:6; Jer. 49:35); perhaps a reference to Iranian usage of missiles against Israel. protected by a defensive shield and helmet (Ez. 38:5). Iran has developed missile technology to the point that they are a major exporter of military missiles; Iran has invested and developed missile technology [both offensive and offensive missiles] rather than an air force. This may be the latter day equivalent of the bows and quivers which feature in the prophecies about Persia.

Ezekiel 38:6 Gomer, and all his hordes- Gomer is thought to have been the Cimmerians, who occupied central Turkey in the days of the Assyrian empire [perhaps the forerunners of the Kurds, who came to live within the *eretz* promised to Abraham].

The house of Togarmah in the uttermost parts of the north and all his hordes; even many peoples with you- The names of the peoples mentioned are solely relevant to the land promised to Abraham. Thus when we read that Togarmah comes from "the north border [AV "quarters"]" (Ez. 38:6), this refers to the northern limit of the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. The allusion to the Genesis 10 list of nations in Ez. 38 would therefore be to signal that the peoples of the land, the kings of the land, would come up against Israel in the last days- and the only outside nation who joins in is Persia / Iran. And that is absolutely imaginable today! The numerical value in the Hebrew for the term *Gog and Magog* is seventy- and there are 70 peoples listed in the table of nations in Gen. 10. There is no need to become fixated by issues of historical geography in trying to locate where these peoples may have once lived- they are all within the land promised to Abraham. Any reference to Russia, Turkey, Europe etc. is thereby made inappropriate.

Nearly all of the nations mentioned occur in the table of nations in Genesis 10. Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Cush [AV "Ethiopia"], Put [AV "Libya"], Gomer, Togarmah, Dedan, Tarshish and Sheba are all mentioned there- in fact, all of them apart from Persia (Iran is beyond the land promised to Abraham). The connection between Ezekiel 38 and the Genesis 10 table of nations must therefore be highly significant. That table of nations served as an explanation to ancient Israel of the origins of the nations in the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham. They wondered why

they were attacked and opposed by the peoples of the land- and Moses was given Genesis to explain to them the context of geography and history in which they were situated. Genesis and the Pentateuch are God's version of history, geography and geopolitics for His people. Given this relevance to the situation in the land promised to Abraham, it is foolhardy to speculate that Shem, Ham or Japheth refer to Africans, Europeans etc. Ham refers specifically to "Canaan", and his servitude under Shem [Israel]; the predicted tension between Shem and Ham refers to the Jew-Arab tension, and not any other tension such as between black people and white European colonialists. This is just wishful thinking, and reflects the cavalier, opportunistic usage of Bible verses for which 19th century Western European theologians have become famous.

Ezekiel 38:7 Be prepared, yes, prepare yourself- The idea is that this confederacy would prepare themselves and yet be confirmed in their own freewill direction by being prepared by God. The 'preparation' is for military action (s.w. Ez. 7:14; Nah. 2:3).

You, and all your companies who are assembled to you, and be a guard to them- They assemble together in order to "take a prey" (:13); according to Ez. 36, the returned exiles could have come to a land miraculously fruitful and prosperous. This would explain the attraction, at the time of the restoration, for the war weary nations to come and take a prey. Gog personally would be a guard to these nations, as if they feel that under his charismatic leadership, they can come to no harm.

Ezekiel 38:8 After many days you shall be visited. In the latter years- Gog was to "be visited". This is Angelic language. The related passage in Is. 24:21-23 also speaks of the Gog confederacy: "And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall punish (Heb. 'visit') the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered together in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then... the Lord of Hosts (Angels) shall reign". There are clear parallels with Gog's confederacy being visited by God, after they have been 'imprisoned' by Gog in order to support Gog's invasion. Gog is to be a "guard"- 'a prison' (s. w. Gen. 42:19)- to the other nations (38:7). "The host of the high ones that are on high (Heaven), and the kings of the earth upon the earth" refers to both the Angels and their earthly charges. The Isaiah passage implies a gathering together of the confederacy associated with a first Angelic 'visiting', followed by a "many days" period after which there will be a second Angelic visiting and the final invasion. The phrase "many days" does not necessarily imply a very long period of years- "Jacob... mourned for his son many days" (Gen. 37:34)- not more than twenty years at the outside. A woman could have "an issue of her blood many days" (Lev. 15:25). "Ye abode in Kadesh many days" (Dt. 1:46). Shimei "dwelt in Jerusalem many days" (1 Kings 2:38). These two Angelic visitings are spoken of in Ez. 38 too: "I (the Angels) will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth". And secondly "After many days thou (Gog) shalt be visited" by the Angels; "things (shall) come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: and thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages" (v. 10,11). This thinking was a result of Angelic visiting of Gog- to achieve their purpose of making both Assyria and Gog invade Israel, the Angels acted and will act directly on the hearts of the leaders of those nations.

I observed on Ez. 4 and elsewhere that the length of the exile was flexible. But perhaps that was the "many days" in the primary application of this prophecy.

You shall come into the land that is brought back from the sword- The word for "brought... back" is to be found in the references to Judah's return at the restoration (Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh. 7:6; 8:17). The same word is to be found in Ezekiel 38:8 and 39:27, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. As if knowing this, Hos. 6:11 had prophesied [otherwise strangely] that Judah would reap their punishment, *when* they returned from captivity. They returned [s.w. 'bring again'], but not to the Most High (Hos. 7:16). They were brought back from the sword perhaps in the sense that Ezekiel's earlier prophecies had predicted they would be totally destroyed by the sword; but they were saved or brought back from this by grace.

That is gathered out of many peoples- The various provinces of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires. The latter day application could be to the state of Israel established on the basis of immigrants from many peoples. But it could also be that there will be a latter day scattering of Jews from Israel after the various latter day invasions, and they are to return from that scattering before "Gog" invades.

On the mountains of Israel, which have been a continual waste- Ezekiel 37 and 38 predict that when the Jews have returned to their land, then there will be a ten nation invasion by a group of surrounding nations, headed up by 'Gog'- which is to be destroyed by the direct intervention of God to establish His Kingdom. This invasion is to be after the Jews have returned to their land, and will begin with an incursion onto "the mountains of Israel"- which are bordering Syria, the Golan heights: "In the latter years you shall come into the land that is brought back from the sword, that is gathered out of many peoples, on the mountains of Israel, which have been a continual waste; but it is brought forth out of the nations" (Ez. 38:8). Only since 1948 and the uprise of serious Arab powers around Israel could this prophecy come true. All we're waiting for is the Arab confederacy to push into the Golan Heights. And we could view the news on the internet or turn on the telly- and find it's happening. Any moment now. And the next step will be the actual return of Christ to earth.

But it is brought forth out of the peoples- This 'bringing forth' was by grace, because they had not met the required spiritual preconditions- in that they had not in fact cast away their idols (see on Ez. 20:6-8). They were caused to be brought forth (s.w. Ez. 20:10; see note there). And it was to be the same in the exodus from Babylon. This Divine 'causing to go forth' was by the Spirit, for those who left captivity did so because their minds were stirred up by the Spirit to do so, even though they were not spiritually qualified for the restoration (Ezra 1:5). They had been commanded to "go forth" from Babylon (Is. 52:11 s.w.) but it was God who caused them to do this by the grace of His Spirit's operation on their hearts. The same is true of our exodus from this world through the water of baptism. It is all of grace and confirmation of the smallest desire to do so; and so this causing to go forth was by God's "mighty hand" (Ez. 20:34 s.w.).

And they shall dwell securely all of them- The invasion occurs when Israel dwell safely, without bars and gates. This is indeed the language of the Kingdom of God on earth, and the idea of Israel dwelling safely has been used in Ezekiel to describe the situation for Israel after they have repented and accepted Christ (Ez. 34:25,27,28). It could be that the invasion happens after Christ has returned and the little stone has begun to establish Kingdom conditions in the land of Israel. This would then fit with

Psalm 2, which describes the kings of the earth [a term used by the Islamic jihadists about themselves] attacking Jerusalem with Christ enthroned there. But this need not make us think that therefore Ezekiel 38 is irrelevant to present conditions. Because Christ could return today and establish His Kingdom in Jerusalem. But the enemies of Israel, Gog and his followers, would have been moved into a position whereby they could immediately then attack Him. Or it could be that in line with predictions in Daniel 8 and 11, Israel make a covenant with their enemies which appears successful, and then when all are saying "peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes". But the very same words are used about Hazor's confident state just before the Babylonian invasion: "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has made a plan against you and formed a purpose against you. Rise up, advance against a nation at ease, that dwells securely, declares the LORD, that has no gates or bars, that dwells alone. Their camels shall become plunder, their herds of livestock a spoil" (Jer. 49:30,31). As Babylon invaded Hazor, so the latter day Gog, as a revived Babylon-Assyria, will invade Israel. Hazor was not then in the Kingdom of God; the language rather speaks of self confidence and assurance. This is indeed how the Hebrew word translated "safely" in Ez. 38:14 is elsewhere used (Jud. 8:11; 18:7 "they lived carelessly"; Job 11:18; Prov. 3:29; Is. 32:17 "assuredness"; Is. 47:8 "carelessly"; Ez. 28:26 "with confidence"; 30:9 "careless"; 39:6 "carelessly"; Mic. 2:8 "securely"). Such a position could be brought about by an Israeli military victory against her enemies, or by a peace agreement which appears to hold.

Ezekiel 38:9 You shall ascend, you shall come like a storm, you shall be like a cloud to cover the land, you, and all your hordes, and many peoples with you- For "ascend" and "come", see on :16; Ez. 39:2. Gog comes as a "storm" to cover the land. This is the very language and Hebrew word *shoa* used of the Assyrian invasion in Is. 10:3. And of course the *shoa* is the term used by Jews today to describe the Nazi holocaust. That is to come again- but in "the land" promised to Abraham. The ascent and covering of the land like a cloud could refer to a massive airborne invasion; or perhaps the mushroom cloud of nuclear weapons. Covering the land with a cloud means that the sun and stars are no longer visible (s.w. Ez. 32:7), and perhaps in this sense some of the imagery of the Olivet prophecy and Revelation will come literally true over the land of Israel; the heavenly bodies will no longer be visible for a brief period, as a sign that the final end is about to come.

Ezekiel 38:10 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: It shall happen in that day, that thoughts shall come into your mind, and you shall devise- As noted on :11,16 and Ez. 39:2, Gog's freewill is emphasized, although he is Divinely confirmed in that freewill. Or perhaps the thoughts that come to Gog's mind are from God, but Gog does the devising of an evil plan. Thoughts coming into the mind is a phrase which could refer to a memory returning, although not necessarily; the phrase is used like this in Jer. 51:50. The invasion would therefore in this case be motivated by a desire to settle the ancient scores between Israel and her neighbours the Arabs.

An evil plan- The very same words used about the plan of Haman the Agagite, the man of Gog, to liquidate the Jewish population (Esther 8:3; 9:25). The actions of Gog in Ez. 38 are clearly based upon Haman's evil plan. The same phrase is used about the leader of Assyria, who was to devise an evil plan against God's people and thereby Yahweh Himself (Nah. 1:11).

Ezekiel 38:11 You shall say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages- Zech. 2:4

had foretold that “Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein”, seeing that Yahweh Himself would be as a wall of fire around her to protect her from her adversaries (Ezra had recognised this promise, that God would be a wall to them- Ezra 9:9). Note how this prophecy is introduced by an Angel with a measuring reed measuring out the rebuilt Zion (Zech. 2:1), just as we have in Ezekiel 40. But Judah disbelieved the promise of a Divine wall of fire, and insisted on building a physical wall to protect them; and the record in Nehemiah has plenty of reference to their setting up of bars and gates in their fear (Neh. 3:3,6,13-15). By doing so they disallowed the fulfilment of Ez. 38:11, and thereby precluded what was prophesied as subsequently following. If they had trusted Him and paid their tithes, their cattle would have multiplied, and the Scythian tribes would have come down to seek to take them, as Ez. 38:12,13 foretold. But as it happened, their cattle were diseased and their agriculture not blessed because of their dilatory attention to Yahweh’s house that lay waste (Haggai 1:11). So therefore there was no invasion, and no victory against the nations, and no Kingdom established at that time. See on :1.

"Go up" is "ascend" in :9,16. The thought of Gog is that he and his coalition will "ascend and go up". But the same words are used in :16 of how God will make them ascend and go up. God will work through their own desires and magnify and confirm them; this is how He places hooks in Gog's jaws to manipulate him. But the manipulation is not total, but rather a confirmation of men in that which they themselves wish to do.

I will go to those who are at rest, who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls and having neither bars nor gates- See on :1. Israel dwelling in ‘peace and safety’ in Ez. 38 could refer to the conditions of the Messianic Kingdom; or it could refer to a sense of security which arises in literally the very last days before the Lord’s return, as a result of some peace agreement being reached. Whenever the invasion happens chronologically is not our immediate concern; what is significant is the preparation of the geopolitical situation to enable such a situation. And that is what we are seeing now developing.

There is much evidence that the Kingdom starts initially in Jerusalem and then spreads worldwide slowly. Many of the prophecies concerning it are addressed to "Jerusalem" and "Mount Zion". The stone of Daniel 2 hits the earth and grows from there to cover the earth. It is logical if it hits the earth at Jerusalem, where all the kingdoms of men represented by the metals will be present, gathered together against Jerusalem. It appears that the unworthy having been destroyed, a colony of saints is established around Jerusalem, living in Kingdom conditions. They live in "the land of unwalled villages... dwelling safely all of them... without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" (Ez. 38:11)- Kingdom language. The Angels give Gog the "evil thought" of invading the "land of unwalled villages", apparently after the invasions of the land as a whole. The people living there are "gathered out of the nations"- capable of reference to the saints (Mt. 25:31-34) who have just been gathered from all nations. The great wealth which attracts Gog must be due to the Kingdom conditions there- the Arab invasions of Zech. 14 (which must be before the second coming, seeing that Jerusalem is ransacked) will have devastated the land of its present wealth. The sudden prosperity reported around Jerusalem will no doubt intrigue the world, and prove a fatal attraction.

Ezekiel 38:12 To take the spoil and to take the wealth- It could be argued that because Ezekiel 38 doesn't specifically describe any success of the invasion or suffering of Israel, that it therefore describes a futile attack on the Lord Jesus once He is established in Jerusalem. However, the absence of such language doesn't mean that the invasion will not be successful. It could be that the focus of Ezekiel 38 and 39 is upon the final destruction of the invader, and therefore the suffering of Israel is not mentioned- because that is not the burden of these oracles about Gog. The perspective is not so much upon Gog's conflict with Israel, but rather upon Gog's conflict with God. The prophecy is elevating the issue far higher- Gog is to have a showdown with God through making this invasion. Gog comes to take spoil (Ez. 38:12,13). But Zech. 14:1 uses the same word in predicting that Jerusalem will indeed be captured by the final invaders, the women raped, and "your spoil shall be divided in the midst of you". We must also give due weight to Ez. 39:22: "The house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward". It is their salvation from Gog and the process of Gog's destruction which persuades Israel that Yahweh is their God "from that day forward". That reads very awkwardly if they have already repented and are sitting happily in God's Kingdom when the Ezekiel 38 invasion happens.

Having repeatedly said that sinful Jerusalem would be given for a prey (Jer. 15:13; 17:3; Ez. 7:21; 23:46) we read that the latter day invasion of Israel comes as a great company (as in Ez. 23:46) to "take a prey" or "spoil" (Ez. 38:12,13); but that invasion is not to be successful, unlike the previous historical invasions which took Jerusalem for a prey. The implication therefore is that Jerusalem finally repents, and so shall not be given for a prey in the very last invasion.

To turn your hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered out of the nations, who have gotten livestock and goods- "The waste places that are now inhabited" in the latter day context probably refers specifically to the temple area/old city of Jerusalem which will have been the scene of much bitter Israeli/Arab fighting. Thus the final onslaught of Gog and his followers occurs, this time with Christ and the redeemed in Jerusalem, thus fulfilling Psalm 2: "The kings of the earth (cp. Is. 24:21) set themselves... against the Lord, and against His anointed (Christ)... yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion". Rev. 20 describes how Gog and Magog will push the saints back into Jerusalem with Christ, until He breaks out upon them again.

Who dwell in the middle of the land- The invasion comes against "the navel of the land" (Ez. 38:12). This could be a reference to the ultimate 'high place', Jerusalem. Both the Bible and Judaism speak of 'going up' to Jerusalem or 'coming down' from there. The language of Israel and Zion being lifted up is used of the Kingdom situation- another evidence that this invasion happens after the Lord has returned and is enthroned in Zion. The Greeks wrote of their sanctuaries at Dydima, Miletus and Delphi as being 'the navel of the land'; so there could be a reference to the temple mount. Or it could allude to how the land currently inhabited by Israel is the highest point in the land promised to Abraham, from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt. Just as Assyria's focus was upon Jerusalem, so the latter day Assyrian will have the same interest. And that fits an Islamic Assyrian, for Jerusalem is the burning issue for Islam. The many allusions to the Assyrian invasion which we find in Ezekiel 38 are specifically alluding to how Assyria came up against *Jerusalem*. Gog 'ascends' against the once wasted mountains [an intensive plural for *the* great mountain- Zion?], he 'comes up' against the land (Ez. 38:9,11,16; 39:2- quite some emphasis). The language of 'ascent' is relevant specifically to 'going up' to Jerusalem specifically.

And Rev. 20:9 has Gog's armies specifically coming up against Jerusalem. The jihadist Magazine *Dabiq* number 4 (October 2014) is clear that whatever battles are going on in Iraq and Syria, their focus ultimately is Jerusalem: "We perform jihad here while our eyes are upon al-Quds" (p.4).

Ezekiel 38:13 *Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish*- These three nations make up a total of ten nations who come against Israel, inviting connection with the ten nations of Psalm 83, the ten toes of the latter day image and ten horns of the latter day beast. The ten nations of Ez. 38 are from the points of the compass around Israel, going around clockwise. The picture is of Israel's enemies coming at her like a whirlwind from all points of the compass. There may not, therefore, be undue significance in the actual names of the nations- rather is the picture being created of all the surrounding nations, from every point of the compass, coming against Israel under the leadership of Gog as their *rosh* or "chief prince". Isaiah 23 clearly associates Tyre with Tarshish; Jonah's journey to Tarshish was clearly to some point known to people living in Israel at his time, rather than to some unfamiliar place such as Britain. Sheba and Dedan were sons of Abraham through Keturah, and are therefore ancestors of some Middle Eastern peoples (1 Chron. 1:32). Dedan is noted in Jer. 25:23 as being an associate of Tyre / Tarshish who will be confederate with latter day Babylon, and will drink the same cup of judgment given to Babylon. So this group of three nations, whilst mentioned separately, are hardly on Israel's side in the last days. "The calamity of Esau" will come upon Dedan (Jer. 49:8), for Dedan was within the territory of Edom which is Esau (Ez. 25:13). The men of Dedan worked for Tyre as "traffickers" (Ez. 27:15), so we can understand the association of Dedan with the merchants of Tarshish / Tyre. These three nations along with most of the others mentioned in Ez. 38 are all taken from the table of nations in Genesis 10, which refers to the peoples within the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of Bible prophecy. The Bible therefore has very little to say about nations outside of that area.

It could be argued that this verse suggests that the other nations so far listed are somehow under the leadership of Tyre. It has been observed that the nations listed in Ez. 38 were all the historical allies of Tyre against Babylon. They formed an alliance to resist Babylon, which failed and was defeated. Their attack on Israel here likewise fails. The primary fulfilment may be that this alliance under Tyre went to fight against Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon within the territory of Israel, and was defeated.

Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tyre / Tarshish are the nations of the extreme East and West of the land promised to Abraham. The picture is of Israel's enemies coming at her like a whirlwind from all points of the compass. There may not, therefore, be undue significance in the actual names of the nations- rather is the picture being created of all the surrounding nations, from every point of the compass, coming against Israel under the leadership of Gog.

Sheba is the same word translated "Sabeans" in Job 1:15; the people of Sheba fell upon a peaceful member of God's people whilst he lived in "peace and safety" without bars or walls and "took away" his cattle and goods, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword. These are the very same Hebrew words used about the behaviour of the people of Sheba in Ez. 38:13. Tarshish is associated with those who are *against* God's people, not with them or defending them.

The "merchants" are attracted to the "silver and gold" perceived to be in Israel. Hence ISV renders: "Businessmen based in Sheba, Dedan, Tarshish...".

The nations with Gog are defined in Ez. 39:18 as "the princes / kings of the earth"- the leaders of the peoples within the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham. These

are the same “kings of the earth / land” which are so often mentioned in Revelation as coming against God’s people as part of the beast entity (Rev. 6:15; 16:14; 17:2,18; 18:3,9). This alludes to the kings of the earth who are raised up from the borders of the earth / land and come with Babylon to invade Israel (Jer. 50:41). The very idea of ‘the borders of the earth’ suggests that ‘the earth’ doesn’t refer to a sphere like the globe, but rather to a specifically defined territory. That territory is the land promised to Abraham. When we read that all “the kings of the earth” came from the very ends of the earth to hear Solomon’s wisdom, we likewise are to understand “the earth” as the land promised to Abraham. The Queen of Sheba was at the end of that earth / land; but the kings of New Zealand or Hawaii didn’t come.

Tarshish is associated with Tyre in Is. 23:1: "The burden of Tyre. Howl you ships of Tarshish...". It could be that "Tarshish" strictly referred to the isle off the coast of Tyre to which the Tyrians fled when under attack. Hence Is. 23:6: "Pass over to Tarshish! Wail, you inhabitants of the isle!". Tarshish is associated with gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks (2 Chron. 9:21)- not exactly things which Britain is famed for. To suggest that 'Tarshish = Britain' one would have to read passages such as Jonah going to Tarshish as referring to Britain. This equation just doesn't work in the various Biblical references to Tarshish. At best it would refer to the trading ships of Tyre, which become as it were a trademark term for any long distance trading vessel.

Readers of Ezekiel will have been struck by the fact that a number of the nations listed have already been mentioned in Ezekiel- in prophecies which predict or describe their destruction. Tyre (Tarshish), Meshech and Tubal have all been described as having come to their end (Ez. 27:13; 32:5,26,27). The impression, therefore, is that there will be a latter day *revival* of these nations; the invasion could have happened in Ezekiel's time, but the potential prophetic scenario didn't then happen. And that is what we are seeing happening in the lands around Israel, whose peoples and geographical areas were dormant and insignificant for centuries- until their revival in recent times. A coalition of those nations will arise which includes those territories or ethnic groups. And their intention is clearly and ultimately to invade Israel and destroy the Jews. Radical Islam is already in control of much of the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham.

With all her young lions- The "young lions" of Tyre could refer to "all her kings" [as in the Jewish Targum on this phrase], "all her traders", "all her leaders" (ESV) or "all her villages". The same Hebrew word translated "young lions" is rendered "villages" in Neh. 6:2. "Young lions" has been used in Ezekiel to refer to princes (Ez. 19:2; 32:2). The Biblical references to young lions associate them with aggression; they are used to describe the Assyrian invaders of Israel (Is. 5:29; 31:4), and it is clear enough that 'Gog' of Ezekiel 38 is portrayed as a latter day Assyrian invader of Judah. "Young lions" be appropriate language for those who are part of the Assyrian invasion, and not for those against it. The same figure is used for other invaders, such as the Babylonians: "The young lions have roared at him [Israel] and yelled, they have desolated his land" (Jer. 2:15; 25:38; 51:38). The imagery of lions and young lions is heavily associated with Israel's neighbouring enemies, especially Assyria and Babylon. The suggestion that the imagery of 'young lions' suggests 'former colonies' or those raised under the influence of another is simply not supported by the majority of references to "young lions" in the Bible. The common picture is of aggression, and particularly aggression against God's people. There is a Hebrew phrase which means "young lions", but that is not what is used here; one Hebrew word alone is used, and it could be fairly rendered "growling lions" as ISV. So the idea of youth or of them having been raised by a mother lion is not necessarily present.

Shall say to you: Have you assembled your company to take the wealth?- The Hebrew implies that these three nations will join in with the invasion, rather than challenge it. This was noted by Harry Whittaker, and see Jacob Milgrom and Daniel Israel Block, *Ezekiel's Hope: A Commentary on Ezekiel 38-48* (Wipf & Stock, 2012) p. 12.

To carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great spoil?- Ezekiel 38 describes the desire of the invaders to take the wealth and houses of the land of Israel. This is precisely the language used in the Koran regarding how Moslems have a duty to take these things from the disobedient children of Israel: "Allah brought those of the People of the Scripture... down from their strongholds, and cast panic into their hearts. Some ye slew, and ye made captive some. And Allah caused you to inherit their land and their houses and their wealth, and land ye have not trodden. Allah is ever able to do all things" (Sura 33.26,27). The jihadists are carefully observant of the Koran and Hadith, which so often are garbled versions of the Bible, doubtless because Mohammad first heard the Bible in an oral form or by rumour passed on by travelers. But by their careful observance of their holy books, the jihadists will in fact fulfil Bible prophecy exactly.

The Koran teaches that Moslems who go to battle with the Jews will not only win but will be rewarded with much spoil: "And much booty that they will capture. Allah is ever Mighty, Wise. Allah promiseth you much booty that ye will capture... that it may be a token for the believers" (Sura 48.19,20). The enthusiasm of the Ezekiel 38 invaders for "spoil" and "prey" is therefore appropriate for Islamic jihadist invaders.

Ezekiel 38:14 Therefore, son of man, prophesy and tell Gog, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In that day when My people Israel dwells securely, shall you not know it?- The idea seems to be as in GNB and LXX: "Wilt thou not arise in that day, when my people Israel are dwelling securely...?". Perhaps the sense is that Gog realizes that the people are "dwelling securely" as the reestablished kingdom of God, and consciously wishes to attack an entity clearly under God's protection and blessing.

Ezekiel 38:15 You shall come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you, and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses- See on :4. The "horses" suggest the Scythian hordes of Ezekiel's day which surrounded Israel, who could potentially have fulfilled this prophecy. "Uttermost parts of the north" is not the best translation; if read literally it would refer not to Moscow, as wrongly claimed, but to the very northernmost parts of the Arctic. But such a literal reading is unwarranted; the original clearly means 'from the very northern border / side', and the side or boundary in view is that of *eretz* Israel. And already the jihadist factions are massing on the northern borders of *eretz* Israel.

A great company and a mighty army- Human armies are often described in Angelic language because there are Angels controlling them. This is also the case here with the Gog invasion, which is fitting seeing that Angels were behind the initial Assyrian invasion which is the prototype of that of Gog. They are described as "a great company, a mighty army"- reflecting the mighty Heavenly host. The language here is a parody of Jer. 31:8, which speaks of the "great company" (s.w.) of Israel coming from the north and returning to Zion. And it is a revived Israel who in Ez. 37 stand up as a "mighty army". The invaders are therefore presented as a fake, imitation Israel. This image is exactly that of their jihadist enemies, claiming to be the true seed of Abraham, who are massed on the northern borders of the *eretz*.

Ezekiel 38:16 And you shall come up against My people Israel, as a cloud to cover the land. It shall happen in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, that the nations may know Me, when I shall be sanctified in you, Gog, before their eyes- "I will bring you..." means that Gog's desire to ascend and go [s.w. "bring"] against the land in :11 is confirmed by God; see on :11. The 'coming up' or ascending is because God makes them come up (Ez. 39:2 s.w.). At every step, Gog's freewill is allowed but is confirmed. God works through human sin; the whole intention of Gog's latter day destruction is to bring the remaining nations to "know Yahweh", to enter relationship with Him.

Ezekiel 38:17 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Are you he of whom I spoke in old time by My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them?- This invader was repeatedly spoken of by the prophets- it can't refer therefore to Russia but to Assyria / Babylon, of whom the prophets repeatedly speak. And yet the invasion is clearly in the last days. Assyria, therefore, must be revived in some way. The nations listed in Ez. 38 are never spoken of in the prophets as invading Israel; it is usually Babylon and Assyria who are in view. And so we can detect here another case of prophetic transference. The prophecies about Babylon and Assyria are to be transferred to this coalition of the last days; which is why, as pointed out on :2, this invasion is full of allusion to the Assyrians.

Ezekiel 38:18 It shall happen in that day, when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh, that My wrath shall come up into My nostrils- This Divine wrath would lead to a literal shaking in Israel (:19). The metaphor is used repeatedly of God's anger with Israel resulting in Him taking them out of their land (e.g. Dt. 29:28). That wrath is now transferred to their abusers. Even in this we see God's love for His people. A more human God would have felt that all His faithless people had suffered was justified; but His wrath with those who so abused them is of itself a testament to the depth of His love for His sinful people.

Ezekiel 38:19 For in My anger and in the fire of My wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel- This could be the same earthquake as spoken of in Ez. 37 which causes the resurrection and revival of Israel. The chronological conflicts (for at this stage Israel are apparently already revived and living safely in their land) need not concern us once we realize that we are reading apocalyptic here. We are not being necessarily given a chronological sequence of events, but rather snapshots from various points in the overall saga. This especially needs to be appreciated in understanding the book of Revelation.

Ezekiel 38:20 So that the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals of the field and all creeping things which creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the surface of the earth, shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall and every wall shall fall to the ground- The impression given is that this is more than a theophany, with God symbolically and metaphorically 'coming down'; but the literal coming down of God to earth, or the land promised to Abraham, resulting in the fulfilment of the final parts of Revelation, where God Himself dwells with men. Absolutely every strata of creation will be aware of this presence. It is the language of Nah. 1:5 about the destruction of Assyria,

and also of the theophany at Sinai (Ps. 68:8). For the destruction of Israel's enemies is to be associated with God claiming Israel finally and fully for Himself in eternal covenant. Walls falling to the ground is the language of the fall of all Israel's historical enemies: Babylon (Jer. 51:44), Syria (1 Kings 20:30) and the Canaanites in Jericho (Josh. 6:5).

Ezekiel 38:21 I will call to all My mountains for a sword against him, says the Lord Yahweh- This is quoting from Jer. 25:29, where the context is of a group of neighbouring nations invading the land and a sword being called upon them. There are several other links with the nations of Ezekiel 38 when we look closer at Jer. 25:19-26. Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish (Jer. 25:22,23) are also part of the invading force in Ezekiel 38, not against it. "All the kings of the north, far and near" (Jer. 25:26) of course includes Gog from the north. These nations all had their part in the Babylonian invasion, which is why they were to be punished in the end after Israel's restoration from captivity (Jer. 25:12). Ezekiel was prophesying about the time of the restoration- after Ez. 38,39 he goes on to give commands about how to rebuild the temple on their return from captivity. This is the context in which Ezekiel alludes back to Jer. 25.

Every man's sword shall be against his brother- The manner of Gog's destruction also hints at the origin of Gog and those with him. They will be destroyed by every man's sword turning against his brother. But this is the very language of the curse upon Ishmael, the forefather of so many of the Moslem people who now live in the territory of the land promised to Abraham (Gen. 16:12).

Ezekiel 38:22 With pestilence and with blood will I enter into judgment with him; and I will rain on him and on his hordes and on the many peoples who are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstones, fire, and sulphur- Entering into judgment could imply that God is pleading with them even in their last moments for their repentance. The destruction of the Gog invasion by fire (Rev. 20:9) is exactly as here in Ez. 38:22; 39:6. It is the same invasion in view. It didn't happen as was potentially possible in Ezekiel's time, and so it is transferred to the last days for fulfilment. I would go with Harry Whittaker's suggestion that this invasion by Gog of Rev. 20:8 is when the 1000 year reign is established [not "expired" as in AV]; this would fit with the beast / Gog coming against Christ once He has returned and Israel are dwelling confidently and safely. The beast is destroyed at Christ's return, and yet has a revival. This is very much the theme of the various prophecies about the beast receiving a deadly wound but reviving. Yet the chronological issues should not overly concern us. I have elsewhere explained that Bible prophecy is conditional, and therefore there are various possible outcomes and sequences of events. And further, it seems likely that the nature of time will be compressed or changed around the time of the Lord's return.

Ezekiel 38:23 I will magnify Myself, and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- It could have been that at the restoration, Yahweh would have been magnified from the border of Israel (Mal. 1:5 s.w.). But this prophetic scenario was precluded at the time by Israel's lack of repentance. But it shall come ultimately true in the last days. This is the purpose of all this blood and judgment; to bring about the Kingdom on God on earth, where the remaining nations "know Yahweh", i.e. enter relationship with Him. "Magnify" is the word used in Joel 2:20,21 and Mic. 5:4 of how God will "do great

things" in destroying the northern invader; and those great things are in the end for God in the sense that they are for His beloved people.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 39

Ezekiel 39:1 You, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech, and Tubal- It is unclear whether Ez. 39 is a repeat of the situation in Ez. 38, or whether Gog attempts to come up a second time. The language is so similar to Ez. 38 that I would come down on the side of thinking that this is typical apocalyptic genre, describing the same events from a slightly different angle; in Ez. 39, the focus is more upon the judgment of God.

Ezekiel 39:2 And I will turn you around, and will lead you on, and will cause you to come up from the uttermost parts of the north; and I will bring you on the mountains of Israel- The repeated emphasis is that God causes Gog to come up, He brings or makes Gog to "go" against Israel. But it was of Gog's own freewill that he himself decided to do these things; see on Ez. 38:11,16. Rev. 20:8 parallels all the nations in the earth / land with Gog: “To deceive the nations which are in the four quarters / borders of the land / earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle”. The language of deceit is also picking up that of Ezekiel 38 about Gog. "I will drive you forward" (Ez. 39:2, AV "leave the sixth part of thee") appears to be a Hebraism meaning 'I will deceive you' ; see Jacob Milgrom and Daniel Israel Block, *Ezekiel's Hope: A Commentary on Ezekiel 38-48* (Wipf & Stock, 2012) p. 20. Gog is led into the conflict by God, and the entire showdown is not so much between Gog and Israel as between God and Gog. The events in the Middle East are not, therefore, running out of control. All is carefully planned and executed by God, just as the historical Assyrian was a rod in Yahweh's hand, manipulated by Him.

"The mountains" may be an intensive plural referring to the great mountain, Zion, which is the goal of jihadist domination at this time. For "uttermost parts of the north" see on Ez. 38:15.

Ezekiel 39:3 And I will strike your bow out of your left hand, and will cause your arrows to fall out of your right hand- Assyrian bas-reliefs frequently show them posing with their bows. This is another Assyrian allusion; see on Ez. 38:2,17. The idea may be that the military technology in which they trusted is to be removed. The Scythian tribes were famed for their horses and archery; these were the peoples who could potentially have fulfilled the prophecy at Ezekiel's time, but that scenario was precluded by Israel's impenitence.

Ezekiel 39:4 You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you, and all your hordes, and the peoples who are with you. I will give you to the birds of prey of every sort, and to the animals of the field to be devoured- The "mountains" may be an intensive plural for the great mountain, Zion, the focus of radical jihadist attention at this time. And it is the city of God which Gog focuses upon according to the interpretation of this passage in Rev. 20. Dan. 11:45 likewise says that the final destruction of the northern invader will be upon "the glorious holy mountain". The wild animals would then refer to the surrounding nations who are converted to God's perspective upon the invaders,

who come up to Zion to destroy the remnants of Gog's coalition, and turn to Yahweh themselves. The birds which Abraham successfully drove away in Gen. 15 referred to the surrounding tribes of the *eretz* which Abraham feared would persecute him at that time. And they likely refer to the same peoples in this latter day application.

"Hordes" is a word only used by Ezekiel. It refers to bands of marauders, and is more appropriate to the Scythians than to the organized regiments of Babylon or Assyria. The Scythians could have fulfilled the prophecy in Ezekiel's time, but Israel's impenitence precluded the entire scenario envisaged in Ez. 33-48.

Ezekiel 39:5 You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh- The fall will be upon the great mountain of Israel, Zion (:4), so the idea of "the open field" is that they will not be buried, but fall in the open and be devoured there (:4); the classic shame for people of Ezekiel's time.

Ezekiel 39:6 I will send a fire on Magog, and on those who dwell confidently along the sea coasts; and they shall know that I am Yahweh- The destruction of Gog by fire is also spoken of in Rev. 20, confirming our suggestion there that Revelation 20 describes this same event. The sea coasts would refer to the maritime powers in the confederacy, Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish. But "the coastal lands" of the land could also refer to the Gaza Strip. The latter day Assyrian will therefore have connection with the Palestinians in Gaza- which is exactly what we are seeing today. We can note that they are described as living peaceably, "confidently", like Israel in Ez. 38; this might support the suggestion that the peace and safety in the land is brought about by an Israeli-Arab peace accord that appears to last.

This sending of fire uses the same Hebrew phrase used of the final sending of Divine fire of judgment upon Gaza and Tyre (Am. 1:7,10). These are the sea coasts who support "Magog". And the wonder of it all is that some of them will finally come to have relationship with Yahweh, to "know Yahweh".

Ezekiel 39:7 My holy name will I make known in the midst of My people Israel; neither will I allow My holy name to be profaned any more: and the nations shall know that I am Yahweh, the Holy One in Israel- This surely alludes to the similar language used in Lev. 22:31,32 about the sanctification of God's Name in Israel as a result of their obedience to Him. We can therefore see in this a hint that the invasion leads to Israel's repentance. The language here suggests that both Israel and the nations will be in permanent, eternal relationship with God, and Israel will never again profane His Name. The only way for these things to be really true is by a change of nature, to eternal, sinless nature. And therefore the main fulfillment will be at the Lord's return.

Ezekiel 39:8 Behold, it has come, and it is done, says the Lord Yahweh; this is the day about which I have spoken- As noted on :7, the implication of the language is that this is all to be fulfilled in the last days. And this final coming of the Kingdom was so certain that it was as if it had already come and was done in Ezekiel's day. If this was the final reality, then they in his day should have lived the kingdom life there and then.

Ezekiel 39:9 Those who dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall make fires of the weapons and burn them, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the war clubs, and the spears, and they shall make fires of them seven

years- Understandable concern has been raised concerning the seven months of burning Gog's corpses, and the rather unreal feel of the punishments of Gog and the cleansing of the land in Ezekiel 39. Notice the usage of the number seven. There are seven enemies of Israel listed in the opening part of Ezekiel 38, joined in later by another three. The enemies have seven weapons (Ez. 39:9), seven years' worth of fuel is provided by burning them (Ez. 39:9), and it takes seven months to burn the corpses (Ez. 39:12). One wonders whether we are intended to read the 'sevens' literally, or whether this is a device to indicate completeness. If indeed the language here is figurative, then we are the more encouraged to read 'Gog' as a codename rather than seek for a literal historico-geographical reference for him. The simple point is that the invaders will have an array of military technology which will be brought to nothing and permanently destroyed.

Ezekiel 39:10 They shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall make fires of the weapons- These wooden weapons are understandable if indeed Ez. 38 and 39 had a potential primary fulfillment in Ezekiel's time or soon after. This is the invasion and victory that could have happened at the restoration. There seems an intentional contrast with how when Israel first entered the land, they retained the wooden images of the Canaanite tribes (Jud. 1:27,28). The Maccabees tried to obey this command by burning anything that belonged to the Seleucids and Antiochus who had desecrated the temple. But clearly the prophesy was not then fulfilled, at best that was a foretaste of the future cleansing.

And they shall plunder those who plundered them, and rob those who robbed them, says the Lord Yahweh- There is no indication that the invasion of Gog to "take a prey" was successful; and so his followers are judged for what they intended doing, i.e. robbing and plundering, even though they didn't actually do it. This serves as a reminder for all time that we are judged according to our dreams and intentions, whether or not we actually fulfill them; as the sermon on the mount makes clear enough.

Ezekiel 39:11 It shall happen in that day, that I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel, the valley of those who pass through on the east of the sea; and it shall stop those who pass through. There shall they bury Gog and all his multitude; and they shall call it The valley of Hamon Gog- See on :17. This would be close to the location of Sodom and Gomorrah, which likewise suffered "eternal fire" in that their destruction was to be an eternal lesson for others (Jude 7). The allusion is to the highway which then passed through that valley, connecting Syria with Petra and Egypt. This likely has more relevance to the potential fulfillment at Ezekiel's time than to anything in the latter days.

Ezekiel 39:12 Seven months shall the house of Israel be burying them, that they may cleanse the land- For the significance of "seven", see on :9. The lament had been that the land had not been cleansed of Israel's sins (Ez. 22:24 s.w.). Now the land was to be permanently cleansed of all sin, Jewish and pagan, by the repentant Jews themselves.

Ezekiel 39:13 Yes, all the people of the land shall bury them; and it shall be to them for a renown in the day that I shall be glorified, says the Lord Yahweh- "A renown" is literally "a name". The name we shall be given eternally will be a reflection of who we are and what we have done in this life, just as Yahweh's Name is the same- a

reflection of His character and history. Those who are involved in burying Gog's followers will it seems have this as part of their eternal Name, which will itself be a part in the final glorification of Yahweh's Name in His people. See on :16.

Ezekiel 39:14 After the seven months are over, men will be chosen to travel through the land in order to find and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, so that they can cleanse the land- The AV suggests that the travellers themselves will help these appointed men: "passing through the land to bury with the passengers those that remain upon the face of the earth, to cleanse it". There is also the implication that some of the bodies might have been missed, and after seven months there has to be a check made. This all sounds very human, and relevant to the primary fulfillment potentially possible in Ezekiel's time rather than to the last days.

Ezekiel 39:15 They shall go up and down the land; and when anyone sees a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, until the undertakers have buried it in the valley of Hamon Gog- There is still the fear of defilement by touching dead bones; hence only "the undertakers" deal with them, and those who notice the bones simply set up a sign by them. This fear of defilement suggests that this aspect of the prophecy was particularly relevant to its potential fulfillment in Ezekiel's time rather than to the last days.

Ezekiel 39:16 Hamonah shall also be the name of a city. Thus shall they cleanse the land- Possibly it is Jerusalem which is in view, and this will be one of her names, "multitude". As explained on :13, the names given in the eternal kingdom will be a reflection of history, just as the Yahweh Name is. See on :12.

Ezekiel 39:17 You, son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh: Speak thus to the birds of prey, and to every animal of the field: Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to My sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood- As explained on :19, this invitation to partake of a religious meal with God is an invitation to fellowship with Him through participating in the destruction of His enemies. The destruction of the Ezekiel 38 invasion is described in Ez. 39:17-20 in terms of a great supper, and the language is the basis for the description of the final destruction of "the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies" at the 'bird supper' in Rev. 19:17,18. The nations listed in Ez. 38 are therefore the kings of the earth / land. They cannot, therefore, refer to nations outside of the land promised to Abraham (e.g. England and Russia). The emphasis upon horses in Ez. 38:4-7,9,15,22; 39:4,11 and the destruction / 'eating' of their flesh is matched by the horse mounted nations of Rev. 19:15-21 being destroyed and their flesh likewise 'eaten'. The calling for a sword against Gog is matched by the sword proceeding out of Christ's mouth in Rev. 19. It isn't therefore incidental that Revelation 20:8 goes on to use the terms Gog and Magog in describing the final enemies of God. The nations with Gog and Magog come from "the four corners of the earth / land" (Rev. 20:8), and this is alluding to how the nations with Gog in Ez. 38 are from the four compass points around Israel. This is incidental proof that the ten nations of Ez. 38 are all with Gog; "Are you come to take a spoil?" of Ez. 38:13 is therefore not a protest but rather a joining in with the group spoiling of Israel.

Ezekiel 39:18 You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes

of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan- The nations with Gog are defined here as "the princes / kings of the earth"- the leaders of the peoples within the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham. These are the same "kings of the earth / land" which are so often mentioned in Revelation as coming against God's people as part of the beast entity (Rev. 6:15; 16:14; 17:2,18; 18:3,9). This alludes to the kings of the earth who are raised up from the borders of the earth / land and come with Babylon to invade Israel (Jer. 50:41). The very idea of 'the borders of the earth' suggests that 'the earth' doesn't refer to a sphere like the globe, but rather to a specifically defined territory. That territory is the land promised to Abraham. When we read that all "the kings of the earth" came from the very ends of the earth to hear Solomon's wisdom, we likewise are to understand "the earth" as the land promised to Abraham. The Queen of Sheba was at the end of that earth / land; but the kings of New Zealand or Hawaii didn't come. "Bashan" implies the area east of the Jordan, from where the jihadists will come in the last days, and from where the Scythians would have come in the potential fulfillment.

Ezekiel 39:19 You shall eat fat until you be full, and drink blood until you are drunk, of My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you- The surrounding nations are invited to eat at the Lord's table or altar, upon which are sacrificed Gog and his followers. This invitation to eat "at My table" (:20) is an invitation to fellowship and relationship. It implies that the remaining people in the *eretz* of the last days will come to relationship with God through destroying the remnants of Gog.

Ezekiel 39:20 You shall be filled at My table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, says the Lord Yahweh- AV "There you shall be filled at My table" implies that there on the great mountain of Israel, Zion, would be the altar or table of Yahweh. "Chariots" is put for the charioteers. Participating in the destruction of Gog would be a sign of fellowship with Yahweh.

Ezekiel 39:21 I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations shall see My judgment that I have executed, and My hand that I have laid on them- "Set" is s.w. "give". God is to be given glory by the remaining nations when they recognize God's hand / judgment upon them was correct. It will achieve the intended result, of eliciting their repentance and glorification of God. The returned exiles could have 'given / set glory' to Yahweh (s.w. Mal. 2:2) at the restoration, but they didn't. And so the whole scenario was transferred to the last days for fulfillment.

Ezekiel 39:22 So the house of Israel shall know that I am Yahweh their God, from that day and forward- See on Ez. 38:12. This could imply that it is not until the destruction of Gog that Israel are permanently and forever in relationship with God, even though it seems that they are already "dwelling safely" with the Lord Jesus amongst them when the Ez. 38 invasion comes.

Ezekiel 39:23 The nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; because they trespassed against Me, and I hid My face from them: so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they fell all of them by the sword- This hiding of the face was intended to make Israel repent and seek God's face, and finally this will happen (Dt. 31:17; Is. 59:2). The nations will realize that their earlier triumphs over Israel were not due to their righteousness or human strength, but because they were used by God to take Israel captive for their sins. Israel did not "all"

fall by the sword, although this was the punishment threatened. God's grace and pity meant that the deserved judgment wasn't fully carried out. See on :24.

Ezekiel 39:24 According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions did I to them; and I hid My face from them- As explained on :23, God did not actually execute all His wrath upon His people. He did not in fact judge them "according to" their sins, but less than what those sins deserved (Ezra 9:13). But by grace He counts the judgment to have happened. This may have been simply due to His pity and grace; or maybe there was the repentance and intercession of a minority. They were like Cain, driven out of the land / sanctuary and hidden from God's face (Gen. 4:14 s.w.); and yet by grace, a way back was found for them. And it was by the hiding of God's face from them that their seeking for His face would be elicited (Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20).

Ezekiel 39:25 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Now will I bring back the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name- "The whole house of Israel" looks ahead to the final reuniting of Judah with the ten tribes which was possible at Ezekiel's time if they had all alike repented. But Rom. 11:26 gives this a wider application; "so all Israel shall be saved" is understood as meaning both Jew and Gentile alike shall comprise the "all Israel", both natural and spiritual Jews.

Ezekiel 39:26 They shall bear their shame, and all their trespasses by which they have trespassed against Me, when they shall dwell securely in their land, and none shall make them afraid- Shame for sin is a major theme with Ezekiel. The days of shame would come to an end (Ez. 16:54; 34:29; 36:15; 39:26)- if Jerusalem accepted shame for her sins. But Ez. 44:13 says that the sins of the Jerusalem priesthood were such that in the restored temple, they would bear their shame in that they would never again minister in it. Likewise the Jewish priesthood who persecuted Jeremiah at this time were to bear a shame that would last for ever (Jer. 20:11). And yet the hope of Israel was that they would eternally be unashamed, world without end (Is. 45:17). The resolution of this may be in God's willingness to count them totally righteous by grace, upon their repentance. And Ezra "blushed" [s.w. "ashamed"] because of Israel's sins (Ezra 9:6), and Jeremiah at this time cast himself down in shame because of them (Jer. 3:25). This representative intercession for Judah had some effect. Just as the Lord Jesus bore the shame of Israel and all sinners on the cross (Is. 50:6), and yet because of that He would not be ashamed eternally (Is. 50:7). He was to become representative of the repentant Israel of God; for the same words are used of how they too would have unashamed faces eternally (Is. 54:4). But the Jerusalem priesthood refused to take shame, they were unashamed of their whoredoms (Jer. 3:3; 8:12). Ezekiel's appeal in Ez. 16 was so that they would recognize their sins, and be ashamed (Ez. 16:2). There was time for them to do so right up until they were led captive, in the final attempt to make them realize their shame. For when they went into captivity, then God intended that they would be "ashamed" (Jer. 22:22). The final vision of Ezekiel, of the potential that was possible in a restored Zion, was in order to make the exiles ashamed of their sins when they realized the possibilities they had wasted and yet which were still possible by grace (Ez. 43:10,11). But they didn't respond to that vision, they refused to build and operate such a temple system; because they refused to be ashamed in exile, although it was God's intention that they should be. And so it is for us as a new Israel to be ashamed for our sins, and identify with the Messiah figure who would bear Israel's shame and thereby emerge eternally unashamed.

The AV offers "When they dwelt safely in their land". This would mean that they will reflect that they had dwelt safely earlier in their history without repentance. They would be ashamed that they had been treated as righteous when they had not been, and this realization of God's utter grace would elicit even deeper repentance.

Ezekiel 39:27 When I have brought them back from the peoples, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations- The word for "brought... back" is to be found in the references to Judah's return at the restoration (Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh. 7:6; 8:17). The same word is to be found in Ezekiel 38:8, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. As if knowing this, Hos. 6:11 had prophesied [otherwise strangely] that Judah would reap their punishment, *when* they returned from captivity. They returned [s.w. 'bring again'], but not to the Most High (Hos. 7:16).

Ezekiel 39:28 They shall know that I am Yahweh their God, in that I caused them to go into captivity among the nations, and have gathered them to their own land; and I will leave none of them any more there- Such total restoration would be a parade example of God's grace. And in this they would "know" or experience Yahweh. His grace was the causative factor in both their exile and restoration.

Ezekiel 39:29 Neither will I hide My face any more from them; for I have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh- The pouring out of the Spirit is parallel to God's face being revealed and not hidden. The activity of the Spirit is therefore in order to reveal God, to bring people into relationship with Him. Thus the Spirit is poured out as part of the new covenant with Israel in order to make them repentant, all of God's initiative, rather than as a response to their righteousness (Zech. 12:10 "the spirit of grace and supplication", as if this Spirit provokes their supplication / prayer to God; Joel 2:28). This will be the parade example of "prevenient grace".

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 40

Ezekiel 40:1 *In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity-* The captivity of the Jews began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, when Daniel and his companions were carried away, thirty-two years previously. Daniel would have been seven years in captivity when Ezekiel arrived. Daniel and his three friends are presented as the only faithful ones amongst the captives, but clearly Ezekiel was there. There's no reference to their having any contact, perhaps because Ezekiel was at the exile encampment by the Chebar river.

In the beginning of the year- This phrase is used about the jubilee year, and it has been calculated that BC575 would have been a jubilee year. Perhaps the idea was that now was the time for the exiles to accept the proclamation of release, at least in their hearts.

In the tenth day of the month- The month isn't defined, which is understandable if the reference is to the proclamation of a jubilee year on the day of atonement in the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev. 25:9). The idea was that Judah had been forgiven, although they hadn't yet claimed it by repentance, and they were to now

consider the glorious potential future which was thereby possible for them. Hence the emphasis upon "on that very day" in the next clause.

In the fourteenth year after that the city was struck, on that very day, the hand of Yahweh was on me and He brought me there- The city was struck towards the end of the twelfth year of Ezekiel's captivity (Ez. 33:21). The submission of this study is that the return could have led to the establishment of the Kingdom on earth, replete with a Messiah figure and a temple according to the pattern showed to Ezekiel in Ez. 40 - 48. Parts of many of the prophets looked forward to this time, as did the restoration prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah 40-66. All of these could have had their fulfilment in the return under Ezra, but this was disabled by the poor response to the call to return. Under Nehemiah and then even in Malachi's time, these Kingdom prophecies could have had their fulfilment, but time and again Judah failed to live up to the necessary preconditions. In all this lies abundant exhortation for us; so much *could* happen but doesn't, because of our failure to live out and fulfil prophecy... instead, like Judah, we tend to assume that the time for its' fulfilment will inexorably arrive some day, regardless of our effort.

Ezekiel 40:2 *In the visions of God brought He me into the land of Israel and set me down on a very high mountain, whereon was as it were the frame of a city*- Ezekiel saw the temple as if it were already there, located at Jerusalem; he wasn't transported to Heaven to view it. And it was there, potentially, that whole glorious temple. But the captives had to return and build it. turning the prophetic word into flesh, the *logos* into reality. But they didn't. Mount Zion is called "very high" although it isn't, relatively speaking. But it was "very high" in God's purpose and Ezekiel visually got this impression.

On the south- This refers to how Ezekiel was brought to the scene from the north, from Babylon, by the cherubim.

Ezekiel 40:3 *He brought me there; and, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; and he stood in the gate*- This man with the measuring line is the same Angel of Zech. 2:1, who was enabling the restoration of Zion at the time of the returned exiles; but they refused to make use of the potential. The "appearance of brass" recalls the vision of Ez. 1:5, confirming that the opening vision of the cherubim is connected with Angelic activity. The line of flax would have been to measure the land areas, and the reed to measure the masonry of the buildings.

Ezekiel 40:4 *The man said to me, Son of man, see with your eyes and hear with your ears, and set your heart on all that I shall show you; for you are brought here with the intent that I may show these things to you: declare all that you see to the people of Israel*- Ezekiel was not merely to act as a transmitter of information, but to be personally involved in the message. This is the challenge to us all in any teaching or sharing of God's word. The command to declare the vision to "the people of Israel" could mean that whilst in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was to share the message with the impoverished remnant who remained there, as well as with the captives back in Babylon. There is a clear similarity with the command to Moses in Ex. 25:9; the tabernacle was to be built by Israel according to what "I show thee", you singular, Moses. The fulfilment of the potential was therefore dependent upon the faithfulness of Ezekiel in accurately sharing the vision. And that is true for all who bring God's word to others.

Ezekiel 40:5 *See, a wall on the outside of the house all around, and in the man's hand a measuring reed six cubits long, of a cubit and a handbreadth each: so he measured the thickness of the building, one reed; and the height, one reed*- The wall wasn't very high; it was not for defence, but to mark the difference between the sacred and profane. The measuring reed or rod is here defined as being 6 cubits plus 6 handbreadths. We recall the presence of a man's hand, Ezekiel's, within the cherubim visions (see on Ez. 10:8). That represented the human part of the whole wondrous vision; God requires human response, but would work powerfully with it. That may explain this otherwise strange measuring unit which mixed a human hand with the cubit measure.

Ezekiel 40:6 *Then he came to the gate which looks toward the east, and went up its steps: and he measured the threshold of the gate, one reed broad; and the other threshold, one reed broad*- We firstly read of the east gate because the intention was that the cherubim of glory would return through the east gate. *Contra* Henry Sulley, there is no evidence that the temple is circular. The temple can hardly face East, as we are told it will in Ez. 47:1, if it is circular. We note the use of steps (seven of them, :22), forbidden in the Mosaic system; human uncleanness would have been dealt with to some extent in the restored community.

Ezekiel 40:7 *Every lodge was one reed long, and one reed broad; and the space between the lodges was five cubits; and the threshold of the gate by the porch of the gate toward the house was one reed*- These lodges recalled the guard rooms which were commonly placed next to gates of a city. The priests were to keep the charge of these gates and not allow anything unclean to enter (Ez. 44:11). This sounds appropriate to the restored community, but not to a scenario in the Kingdom of God under the rulership of the returned Lord Jesus. See on :21. Then, this truth will be spiritually understood in the vision in which John sees no temple in the new city; "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles, neither works abomination, or makes a lie" (Rev. 21:27).

Ezekiel 40:8 *He measured also the porch of the gate toward the house, one reed*- The measurement given in :9 would be that of the porch in the wider sense, including the projecting side-walls upon it (2 cubits).

Ezekiel 40:9 *Then measured he the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and its posts, two cubits; and the porch of the gate was toward the house*- LXX "inward". It seems :9 is measuring the length of the porch from north to south, whereas :8 measures the depth of it from east to west.

Ezekiel 40:10 *The lodges of the gate eastward were three on this side and three on that side; these three were of the same measure: and the posts had the same measure on this side and on that side*- Nehemiah did his very best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. No fewer than 24 times in Ez. 40-48 are we told that the temple was to be built by 'measure' (e.g. Ez. 40:3,5,10,21,22,24,28,29); and the same word occurs frequently in describing how

Nehemiah gave various groups of Jews their own ‘measure’ in the work of rebuilding Jerusalem (Neh. 3:11,19,20,22,24,27).

Ezekiel 40:11 *He measured the breadth of the opening of the gate, ten cubits; and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits*- The opening of the gate is its entire width. "The length" appears to mean effectively "the height"; the Hebrew is not specific.

Ezekiel 40:12 *And a border before the lodges of one cubit on this side, and a border of one cubit on that side; and the lodges, six cubits on this side, and six cubits on that side*- "The border" is really a barrier. The ten cubits of :11 is therefore reduced by one cubit on each side, to limit the passage to eight cubits. The implication is that there may have been crowd control problems and the guards / gate keepers needed to be able to manage any possible crush. Again, this is a scenario appropriate to a temple rebuilt by the exiles, but not to the future Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. See on Ez. 46:8.

Ezekiel 40:13 *He measured the gate from the roof of the one lodge to the roof of the other, a breadth of twenty-five cubits; door against door*- This is the entire breadth of the gate-buildings.

Ezekiel 40:14 *He made also posts, sixty cubits; and the court reached to the posts, around the gate*- It was an Angel who described to Ezekiel the nature of the temple which the exiles were intended to build; and we even read here that “He made…” [e.g. the posts of the temple]. The Angels had potentially built that temple; it was for Israel to build according to the pattern of it. The measuring now becomes making; what was potentially measured up was thereby as good as made. It all depended upon God's people to actually do it. And for each of us, there are wonderful things prepared for us to achieve for the Lord, made potentially possible, with all the host of Heaven eagerly awaiting our fulfillment of them on earth. But so very often they remain only poorly replicated by us. And the temple prophecies of Ezekiel are a classic example. See on :38; Ez. 1:1,20; 10:8; 11:24.

Ezekiel 40:15 *From the forefront of the gate at the entrance to the forefront of the inner porch of the gate were fifty cubits*- The man on the seventh step would see it clearly: first threshold, 6 cubits; three guardrooms with two intervening spaces, 28 cubits; second threshold, 6 cubits; porch, 6 cubits; projection of the side and gate-pillars, 4 cubits = 50 cubits. This length is double the breadth.

Ezekiel 40:16 *There were closed windows to the lodges, and to their posts within the gate all around, and likewise to the arches; and windows were around inward; and on each post were palm trees*- There are many links between Solomon’s temple and that described by Ezekiel. The repeated stress on the cherubim / palm tree decor in both the records of Solomon’s temple and also Ezekiel’s encourages the idea that the prophesied temple was to be seen as a re-establishment of Solomon’s (1 Kings 6:29,32,35; 7:36 cp. Ez. 40:16,22,26,31,34,37; 41:18-20, 25,26).

It's easy to assume that the temple was totally destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The fact a new foundation stone was laid doesn't actually mean that the entire structure was razed to the ground. Jer. 41:5 refers to 80 people coming to offer offerings and perform some kind of worship there even after the Babylonian destruction. There's ample historical reference to the essential ground plan and some structure still standing even after the Babylonians had effectively destroyed it and

rendered it useless (See R.S. Foster, *The Restoration Of Israel* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) p. 28; John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) p. 325; Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: SCM, 1983) p. 291). This makes it more appealing to consider Ezekiel's vision as a blueprint for the exiles' reconstructing the existing temple, rather than a totally new structure. It's even been suggested that Ezekiel 40-42 was intended as an architectural record of the 'old' temple upon which a new one was to be reconstructed. Zerubbabel is pictured as bringing forth "the premier stone" for the temple (Zech. 4:7). This is a technical term, used in Mesopotamia about "a unit of building material removed from the former temple ruins and then incorporated into the new building" (C.L. & E.M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004) p. 270.). This demonstrates how the projected new temple was a rebuilding of Solomon's temple. The "shouts" with which it was laid (Zech. 4:7) were the "shouts" of the foundation ceremony described in Ezra 3:10-12.

Ezekiel 40:17 *Then brought he me into the outer court; and behold, there were rooms and a pavement, made for the court all around: thirty rooms were on the pavement*- Earlier Ezekiel had seen the wings of the cherubim over the "outer court" (Ez. 10:8). That outer court was now to be rebuilt. The cherubim, simply representing the operation of God for His people, would likewise be involved just as they had been in its destruction; if Judah wished to work with them.

Ezekiel 40:18 *The pavement was by the side of the gates, answerable to the length of the gates, even the lower pavement*- The length of the gates fixed the breadth of the stone pavement. Ez. 40-48 stress the “gates” dozens of times; and Nehemiah’s account likewise stresses many times the attention he paid to setting up the “gates” [s.w.], as if he saw his work as fulfilling Ezekiel’s words.

Ezekiel 40:19 *Then he measured the breadth from the forefront of the lower gate to the forefront of the inner court outside, one hundred cubits*- He measures the breadth of the outer court, starting from the east gate, the gate already referred to, measuring from the front of its porch.

Both on the east and on the north- "Thus with respect to the east side, and the same with respect to the north side".

Ezekiel 40:20 *The gate of the outer court whose prospect is toward the north, he measured its length and its breadth*- This becomes the standard measure of the other gates (:21).

Ezekiel 40:21 *The lodges of it were three on this side and three on that side; and its posts and its arches were after the measure of the first gate: its length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits*- We have to note the emphasis upon the guard rooms in the dimensions and measuring; see on :7.

Ezekiel 40:22 *The windows of it, and its arches, and the palm trees of it, were after the measure of the gate whose prospect is toward the east; and they went up to it by seven steps; and its arches were before them*- If indeed Ez. 40-48 are conditional prophecies, this opens up the possibility that so too are many other prophecies- especially those which involve allusion to them. For example, Rev. 11:1 speaks of a

command to measure the temple- and immediately our minds are sent back to the temple being measured in such detail in Ez. 40:10, 21,22 etc. Is this to be read as a sign that we are about to receive another conditional prophecy? Assuming that Revelation was given just prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD70, we could read the ensuing prophecy in Rev. 11 as saying that although Jerusalem and the outer court would fall to the Romans, the zealots in the inner sanctuary would be preserved, and a command to repentance would be issued by two prophets. Now of course, this didn't happen; but perhaps it could've done, potentially? Consider the possibility- both here and in so many other Bible passages.

Ezekiel 40:23 *There was a gate to the inner court over against the other gate, both on the north and on the east; and he measured from gate to gate one hundred cubits*- Now we are introduced to the relation of the gate (of the inner court) to the gate (of the outer court); and we see it as it were by reference to the two gates described northward and eastward.

Ezekiel 40:24 *He led me toward the south; and behold, a gate toward the south: and he measured its posts and its arches according to these measures*- Ezekiel was now close to the measuring Angel, so close he could be led by Him.

Ezekiel 40:25 *There were windows in it and in its arches all around, like those windows: the length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits*- Like the windows in the gates of :22.

Ezekiel 40:26 *There were seven steps to go up to it, and its arches were before them; and it had palm trees, one on this side, and another on that side, on its posts*- Perhaps by every pillar stood two artificial palms. But literal palm trees may be in view.

Ezekiel 40:27 *There was a gate to the inner court toward the south: and he measured from gate to gate toward the south a hundred cubits*- "Gate" is literally 'an opening'. Whether there were doors upon the gates is left for us to imagine; perhaps if not, we have the impression of a welcoming openness towards the most holy space.

Ezekiel 40:28 *Then he brought me to the inner court by the south gate: and he measured the south gate according to these measures*- Ezekiel was "led" in :24, but now "brought". The Hebrew terms are different but too wide in meaning to be certain of the difference, but the idea could be of some reluctance on Ezekiel's part.

Ezekiel 40:29 *And its lodges, and its posts, and its arches, according to these measures: and there were windows in it and in its arches all around; it was fifty cubits long, and twenty-five cubits broad*- The "lodges" or "chambers" of the temple (s.w. 1 Kings 14:28) are the basis of the Lord's statement that in the Father's house are many abiding places (Jn. 14:1-3); the rebuilding of this temple didn't work out as envisaged, but the essence of the prophecy still comes true in a spiritual sense.

Ezekiel 40:30 *There were arches all around, twenty-five cubits long, and five cubits broad*- The Hebrew for "arches" can also mean a colonnade or portico.

Ezekiel 40:31 *The arches of it were toward the outer court; and palm trees were on*

its posts: and the ascent to it had eight steps- This compares with the seven steps of :22, possibly implying that this was of greater holiness, requiring more effort in human ascent.

Ezekiel 40:32 *He brought me into the inner court toward the east: and he measured the gate according to these measures*- This now describes the inner part of the east gate.

Ezekiel 40:33 *And its lodges, and its posts, and its arches, according to these measures: and there were windows therein and in its arches all around; it was fifty cubits long, and twenty-five cubits broad*- Repeating the style of :29.

Ezekiel 40:34 *The arches of it were toward the outer court; and palm trees were on its posts, on this side, and on that side: and the ascent to it had eight steps*- The motif of palm trees is perhaps to create the idea of direct, upward growth, characteristic of the flourishing of the righteous (Ps. 92:12). Likewise the feet of the cherubim were "straight". The idea is that we respond directly and immediately to spiritual things and possibilities, without all the meandering and distraction so typical of the flesh.

Ezekiel 40:35 *He brought me to the north gate: and he measured it according to these measures*- "Measure" is literally 'to stretch oneself'. It could perhaps be that the measure was the height of the Angel; which would then make sense of Rev. 21:17 where the wall of the new Jerusalem is measured "according to the measure of a man, that is an Angel".

Ezekiel 40:36 *Its lodges, its posts, and its arches: and there were windows therein all around; the length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits*- The prevalence of "windows... all around" recalls the cherubim being full of eyes all around (Ez. 10:18). There is clearly an impression given that the cherubim were to be involved in the rebuilding and functioning of this new temple system; every human effort to engage with it would be blessed and multiplied by the huge Angelic help available.

Ezekiel 40:37 *The posts of it were toward the outer court; and palm trees were on its posts, on this side, and on that side: and the ascent to it had eight steps*- "The outer court" is LXX "the porch", corresponding with :31,34.

Ezekiel 40:38 *A room with its door was by the posts at the gates; there they washed the burnt offering*- Ezekiel saw a functioning temple- he speaks of “where they washed the burnt offering”, he saw animals being killed, things being laid on tables (:38-43). It was all- potentially- ‘happening’. It just had to be realized on earth. See on :14.

Ezekiel 40:39 *In the porch of the gate were two tables on this side, and two tables on that side, to kill thereon the burnt offering and the sin offering and the trespass offering*- The order of the offerings usually features the burnt offering last; after recognizing sin and obtaining forgiveness, there was [and is] to be the dedication to God represented by the burnt offering. But God was so eager to accept the returning exiles that He had forgiven them although they had not generally repented. He wanted

them to respond in dedication, and then for His grace to elicit from them the recognition of their sins.

Ezekiel 40:40 *On the one side outside, as one goes up to the entry of the gate toward the north, were two tables; and on the other side, which belonged to the porch of the gate, were two tables*- There were twelve tables, eight were used for slaughtering and laying the carcasses, and the remaining four for the instruments employed in killing the animals. Of the eight, four stood within the porch of the gate, two on each side, and four outside—two on the side "as one goes up to the entry of the north gate". This seems to mean "at the shoulder to one going up to the gate opening towards the north", i.e. on the outside of the porch's north wall; and two on the other side or shoulder, i.e. on the outside of the porch's south wall. The gate in view is therefore not the north gate, as the AV conjectures, but the east gate, whose side walls looked towards the north and south. The third group of four tables appears to have been planted at the steps, presumably two on each side, "at the ascent", i.e. at the staircase (cp. :26).

Ezekiel 40:41 *Four tables were on this side, and four tables on that side, by the side of the gate; eight tables, whereupon they killed the sacrifices*- See on :40.

Ezekiel 40:42 *There were four tables for the burnt offering, of cut stone, a cubit and a half long, and a cubit and a half broad, and one cubit high; whereupon they laid the instruments with which they killed the burnt offering and the sacrifice*- This speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [NEV “instruments”] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah’s ‘Kingdom’ passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The tables on which the carcasses were placed were of stone, maybe implying the tables for the instruments were of wood.

Ezekiel 40:43 *The hooks, a handbreadth long, were fastened within all around: and on the tables was the flesh of the offering*- "Hooks" is LXX "ledges," or "border guards", to keep the instruments or flesh from falling off; or they could refer to "pegs" fastened in the wall for hanging the carcasses before they were flayed.

Ezekiel 40:44 *Outside of the inner gate were rooms for the singers in the inner court, which was at the side of the north gate; and their prospect was toward the south; one at the side of the east gate having the prospect toward the north*- The chambers for the singers appear to have been the priestly chambers (:45,46). In Solomon's temple, the Levites managed the singing (1 Chron. 6:33-47; 15:17; 2 Chron. 20:19). Now the priests were apparently to do so. LXX: "And he led me unto the inner court, and behold two chambers in the inner court, one at the back of the gate which looks towards the north, and bearing towards the south, and one at the back of the gate which looks towards the south, and bearing towards the north". The emphasis upon the singers is appropriate seeing that so many restoration prophecies envisaged the returned exiles singing praises.

Ezekiel 40:45 *He said to me, This room, whose prospect is toward the south, is for the priests, the keepers of the duty of the house*- The phrase 'to keep the duty / charge / ordinance' is used multiple times as a commandment. The priests were to keep the duty, whereas previously they had not. But the same phrase is used in Mal. 3:14 of

how the restored exiles complained that they had 'kept the duty' of the temple for no profit. The greatest tragedy is when potentials are thrown away, and this was and is the tragedy of God's people.

Ezekiel 40:46 *And the room whose prospect is toward the north is for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar: these are the sons of Zadok, who from among the sons of Levi come near to Yahweh to minister to Him*- It was in this kind of chamber in the restored temple that the enemies of the Jews were allowed a living place and the apostate Tobiah stored his "stuff" (Neh. 13:8). This explains Nehemiah's anger about the situation- they were precluding the fulfilment of the potential envisaged here in Ez. 40:46.

Ezekiel emphasized that the sons of Zadok were to organize priestly work in the temple (Ez. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11); and it was surely not incidental that Ezra, the leader of the initial restoration, was one of the sons of Zadok (Ezra 7:2). He was in a position to fulfil those prophecies, although the bulk of his brethren seem to have precluded this. Ezra was enabled to “beautify” the temple (Ezra 7:27), the very same word used in Is. 60:7,9,13 about how God would “glorify” [s.w.] His temple with merchandise from throughout the Babylonian empire- all of which was willingly offered by Cyrus and Darius. But the people didn't respond to Ezra, and so this scenario didn't come about.

Ezekiel 40:47 *He measured the court, one hundred cubits long, and a hundred cubits broad, foursquare; and the altar was before the house*- Henry Sulley and other popular reconstructions place it, without justification, in the Most Holy Place. Ezekiel commanded that the priests were not to wear their holy garments in the outer courts; and yet if as the popular view suggests they wear them in a central area, at the altar, and then go into their chambers on the edge of the temple, they *would* have to wear them in the outer courts.

Ezekiel 40:48 *Then he brought me to the porch of the house, and measured each post of the porch, five cubits on this side, and five cubits on that side: and the breadth of the gate was three cubits on this side, and three cubits on that side*- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:3). The "porch" appears to have been entered by a folding door of two leaves, each three cubits broad, which were attached to two side pillars five cubits broad, and met in the middle, so that the whole breadth of the porch front was six cubits, or, including the posts, sixteen cubits. The measurements in :49 of the length of the porch (from east to west) twenty cubits, and the breadth (from north to south) eleven cubits, assumes that the pillars, which were five cubits bread in front, were only half that breadth in the inside, the side wall dividing it in two, so that, although to one entering the opening was only six cubits, the moment one stood in the interior it was 6 cubits + 2 x 2.5 cubits = 11 cubits.

Ezekiel 40:49 *The length of the porch was twenty cubits, and the breadth eleven cubits; even by the steps by which they went up to it: and there were pillars by the posts, one on this side, and another on that side*- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:21). See on :48.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 41

Ezekiel 41:1 *He brought me to the temple and measured the doorposts, six cubits broad on the one side, and six cubits broad on the other side, which was the breadth of the structure*- "The temple" here refers to the holy place, the nave. "Structure" is 'tabernacle', to ever remind the people that the temple was but a masonry expression of the simple tent in the wilderness where God met with His wandering people. All organized religious structures must ever remember this.

Ezekiel 41:2 *The breadth of the entrance was ten cubits*- The door into the porch was eleven cubits (Ez. 40:49). This would have the effect of rendering the door into the holy place more conspicuous.

And the sides of the entrance were five cubits on the one side, and five cubits on the other side: and he measured its length, forty cubits, and the breadth, twenty cubits- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:16,17).

Ezekiel 41:3 *Then he went inside and measured each post of the entrance, two cubits; and the entrance, six cubits; and the breadth of the entrance, seven cubits*- The Angel entered the Most Holy, and presumably called out the measurements to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 41:4 *He measured its length, twenty cubits, and the breadth, twenty cubits, before the temple. He said to me, This is the most holy place*- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:19,20). No details are given of what was within the most holy place, perhaps because it was simply to be indwelt by the glory of God. In Ezekiel's system there is a lack of many things required under the Mosaic system (see too Ez. 45:23), because at the restoration they could have been spiritually fulfilled. That didn't work out, and so the fulfilment has been reapplied and rescheduled to the work of the Lord Jesus. There was:

- No Laver (see Ezekiel 36:24-27, John 15:3) ;
- No Table of Shewbread (see Micah 5:4, John 6:35);
- No Lampstand or Menorah (see Isaiah 49:6, John 8:12);
- No Golden Altar of Incense (Zechariah 8:20-23, John 14:6)
- No Veil (Isaiah 25:6-8, Matthew 27:51) ;
- No Ark of the Covenant (Jeremiah 3:16, John 10:30-33).

Ezekiel 41:5 *Then he measured the wall of the house, six cubits; and the breadth of every side room, four cubits, all around the house on every side*- Solomon's system of "chambers" or "ribs" was replicated (1 Kings 6:5,8,16 cp. Ez. 41:5-11 s.w.). The measuring began with the outer wall, which, beginning at the pillars (Ez. 41:1), enclosed the temple on its south, west, and north sides.

Ezekiel 41:6 *The side rooms were in three floors, one over another, and thirty on each floor. The outer wall on each floor was thinner than on the floor below, so that the rooms could rest on the wall without being anchored into it*- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:6,10).The chambers were ranged in three stories of thirty each; Josephus *(Antiquities* 8.3.2) claims this was exactly how it was in Solomon's temple. Perhaps there were twelve threes on each of the longer sides, the north and the south, and six threes on the shorter or western side.

Ezekiel 41:7 *The walls of the house, when seen from the outside, seemed to have the same thickness all the way to the top. Against the house's outer wall, on the outside of the rooms, two wide stairways were built, so that it was possible to go from the lower story to the middle and the upper stories*- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:6,8). The AV speaks of an "enlarging", as if the floor area of each floor increased from the first to the third story. The AV "and a winding about still upward to the side chambers" could suggest that Ezekiel's temple had a spiral staircase like that in Solomon's temple (see 1 Kings 6:8).

Ezekiel 41:8 *I saw also that the house had a raised base all around: the foundations of the side rooms were a full reed of six great cubits*- RV "A raised basement". The six cubits are the height of the ceiling above the floor in each story, which would give a height of eighteen cubits for the three stories; but probably they mark only the height of the temple and side chamber measured from above ground level.

Ezekiel 41:9 *The thickness of the wall, which was for the side rooms, on the outside, was five cubits: and that which was left was the place of the side rooms that belonged to the house*- The five cubits were between the temple wall and the side chambers.

Ezekiel 41:10 *Between the rooms was a breadth of twenty cubits around the house on every side*- The LXX combines :9 and :10: "And that which was left between the side chambers of the house and the cells [along the inner court wall] was twenty cubits round about the house on every side".

Ezekiel 41:11 *The doors of the side rooms were toward the place that was left, one door toward the north, and another door toward the south: and the breadth of the free space that was left was five cubits all around*- The breadth of the court was comprised of: 1. Breadth of the house 20 cubits; 2. Breadth of wall, 6 x 2 cubits = 12 cubits; 3. Breadth of chambers, 4 x 2 cubits = 8 cubits; 4. Breadth of chamber wall, 5 x 2 cubits = 10 cubits; 5. Breadth of corridor, 5 x 2 cubits = 10 cubits; 6. Breadth of free space, 20 x 2 cubits = 40 cubits. Total = 100 cubits. The length of the court was comprised of: 1. The length of the house—60 cubits; 2. The temple wall—6 cubits; 3. The chambers—4 cubits; 4. The chamber wall—5 cubits; 5. The corridor ["free space"]—5 cubits; 6. The space towards the west—20 cubits. Total = 100 cubits. The "house" was thus one hundred cubits square.

Ezekiel 41:12 *The building that was before the separate place at the side toward the west was seventy cubits broad; and the wall of the building was five cubits thick all around, and its length ninety cubits*- "The separate ['cut off'] place" refers to a space behind the temple on the west, which was marked off from the rest of the ground on which the temple with its courts and chambers stood. There was a similar space behind Solomon's temple (2 Kings 23:11; 1 Chron. 26:18), apparently for rubbish.

Ezekiel 41:13 *So he measured the house, one hundred cubits long; and the separate place, and the building, with its walls, one hundred cubits long*- See on :14.

Ezekiel 41:14 *Also the breadth of the face of the house, and of the separate place toward the east, one hundred cubits*- We can summarize: The breadth of the area from west to east:

1. The separate place (including walls)—100 cubits
2. The "house" (with free space behind)—100 cubits
3. The inner court—100 cubits
4. The outer court (the two gates with space between them)—200 cubits
Total = 500 cubits
The length of the area from north to south—
1. The outer court (the two northern gates with spaces between them)—200 cubits
2. The "house" (with free space on both sides)—100 cubits
3. The outer court (the two southern gates with distance between them)—200 cubits
Total = 500 cubits.

Ezekiel 41:15 *He measured the length of the building before the separate place which was at its back, and its galleries on the one side and on the other side, one hundred cubits; and the inner temple, and the porches of the court*- The "galleries" could be "ledges", or some kind of terrace buildings.

Ezekiel 41:16 *The thresholds, and the closed windows, and the galleries around on their three stories, over against the threshold, with wood ceilings all around, and from the ground up to the windows, (now the windows were covered)*- If parts of the structure were to be made of wood, we wonder whether this was really intended to last for 1000 years, as required by the view that this temple is that of a future Millennial reign of Christ. The 'covering' of the windows could refer to a lattice, or it could imply that from below, they were not seen.

Ezekiel 41:17 *To the space above the door, even to the inner house, and outside, and by all the wall all around inside and outside, by measure*- The 'complete covering' (GNB) with cherubim (:18) reflected the complete and total presence of God and His activity for His people, which is what the cherubim represented.

Ezekiel 41:18 *It was made with cherubim and palm trees; and a palm tree was between cherub and cherub, and each cherub had two faces*- The temple was to have cherubim motifs throughout it- as if to show that the Cherubim of Ezekiel 1 had now 'landed' on the temple at the end of the prophecy. The vision of God's glory entering the temple "was according to the vision… that I saw by the river Chebar" back in Babylon (Ez. 43:2,3). This is the meaning of the fact that cherubim visions both begin and end the prophecy of Ezekiel. The cherubim would move from Judah to Babylon and then back to Judah, to enter into and dwell in the temple. Yet God's glory did not enter the temple which Nehemiah built. This was because the people had not followed Ezekiel's example, they had not identified themselves with the Angelic movements above them, but rather remained dominated by their petty self interests. They never really repented- for Ezekiel 43:11 records Ezekiel being told to only give Judah "the form of the house" and "write it in their sight" only "*if* they be ashamed of all that they have done". There is no record of Ezekiel giving them the promised further plans for the temple- so the wonderful prophecy could not be fulfilled, because they did not repent.

Ezekiel 41:19 *So that there was the face of a man toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side. Thus was it made through all the house all around*- Each cherub had only two of its faces

revealed on the wall. Perhaps the allusion was to the man who was to be the lion of Judah, the Messiah figure who could have arisen at the restoration.

Ezekiel 41:20 *From the ground to above the door were cherubim and palm trees made: thus was the wall of the temple*- The entire wall was covered with this motif.

Ezekiel 41:21 *As for the temple, the door posts were squared; and as for the face of the sanctuary, the appearance of it was as the appearance of the temple*- The emphasis upon the !squared" pattern again connects with the four fold nature of the cherubim vision of Ez. 1. The cherubim of glory had as it were landed permanently in the temple. And all of God's people who identified with His work would likewise come there.

Ezekiel 41:22 *The altar was of wood, three cubits high, and its length two cubits; and its corners, and its length, and its walls, were of wood: and he said to me, This is the table that is before Yahweh*- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:20,22). A wooden altar may seem unsuitable for the task. But the idea of the altar was that it was God's table, at which He as it were ate in fellowship with men. We too sit at such a humanly inadequate table in fellowship with the same God. However a wooden altar may imply this was the altar of incense (Ex. 30:1; 1 Kings 7:48). But again we note a difference with the old system; the dimensions of this altar in the tabernacle were two cubits high and one cubit long and broad.

Ezekiel 41:23 *The temple and the sanctuary had two doors*- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:31-35; 6:32 AVmg.).

Ezekiel 41:24 *The doors had two leaves apiece, two turning leaves: two leaves for the one door, and two leaves for the other*- Considering all the detail given of even the doors, the absence of any mention of an ark of the covenant within them is significant. The glory of God was to dwell there. Or perhaps the details of the most holy place would have been given later, had Judah been responsive to this outline description (Ez. 43:11).

Ezekiel 41:25 *There were made on them, on the doors of the temple, cherubim and palm trees, like as were made on the walls*- Matching Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:32).

And there was a threshold of wood on the face of the porch outside- "Wood" is "thick planks". There are many links between Solomon's temple and that described by Ezekiel. There were "thick planks" upon the porch of Solomon's temple; and the same word is only used elsewhere in describing how this would feature in Ezekiel's temple too (1 Kings 7:6 cp. Ez. 41:25,26).

Ezekiel 41:26 *There were closed windows and palm trees on the one side and on the other side, on the sides of the porch: thus were the side rooms of the house, and the thresholds*- . Even the "windows of narrow lights" of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:4) were to be replicated (Ez. 40:16; 41:16,26). The idea is that the Davidic throne and kingdom was to be reestablished, and we know from Zechariah that this was envisaged as happening at the restoration from Babylon.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 42

Ezekiel 42:1 *Then he brought me forth into the outer court, the way toward the north: and he brought me into the room that was opposite the separate place, and which was opposite the building toward the north*- Earlier we heard of chambers for the officiating priests on the north and south gates of the inner court (Ez. 40:44-46). He now as it were returns to take a closer look at them.

Ezekiel 42:2 *The length of the building whose door faced north was a hundred cubits, and the breadth was fifty cubits*- It was the front length of the cell building to which Ezekiel sees himself brought. The hundred cubits length agree with Ez. 41:13.

Ezekiel 42:3 *Over against the twenty cubits which belonged to the inner court, and over against the pavement which belonged to the outer court, was gallery against gallery in the third story*- No staircase seems mentioned; the focus of the vision is upon the existence of so many rooms; see on :5.

Ezekiel 42:4 *Before the rooms was a walk of ten cubits' breadth inward, a way of one cubit*- The walkways are emphasized. Zech. 3:7-10 encouraged Joshua to be the king-priest of the restored kingdom: "If you will walk in my ways, and if you will keep my charge [as so frequently commanded in Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16 s.w.], then you shall also judge my house (as prophesied in Ez. 40-48), and shalt also keep my courts (so often mentioned in Ez. 40-48), and I will give you places to walk (s.w. Ez. 42:4 about the walkways in the prophesied temple)... hear now, O Joshua". But he didn't. He didn't keep the courts, but allowed Tobiah the Ammonite to set up his office for subversion in the temple chambers.

And their doors were toward the north- Time and again, the new system is described in terms which allude to the bad practices in the old system- e.g. the stress of Ez. 42:4 etc. that the doors of the new chambers were "toward the north" connects with how Ezekiel had earlier seen women weeping for Tammuz "towards the north" in the temple (Ez. 8:14; Ez. 9:2). See on :20.

Ezekiel 42:5 *Now the upper rooms were shorter; for the galleries took away from these, more than from the lower and the middle, in the building*- The huge attention given to the chambers is surely because they would come to represent the places in the Father's house prepared for His people (Jn. 14:1-3), who would all be as it were about the work of His house. And there was a huge number of them, far more perhaps than was required in the restored temple situation. The sheer number of them and attention given to them in the plans was to highlight a symbolic meaning to them, even at the time. For the literal "sons of Zadok" were likely not enough to have lived in or used them all.

Ezekiel 42:6 *For they were in three stories, and they had no pillars like the pillars of the courts. Thus the upper chambers were set back from the ground more than the lower and the middle ones*- The chambers rose in terrace form, each of the upper stories receding from that below it, as was customary in Babylonian architecture. Likewise the form of the cherubim and palm tree motif was similar to what they had seen in Babylon. God in His grace and sensitive understanding was giving the exiles a plan to follow which would have been acceptable to them in accordance with the

culture they had picked up in Babylon. And this thought confirms the impression that the temple was intended for the returned exiles to build, and not far any far later generation.

Ezekiel 42:7 *The wall that was outside by the side of the rooms, toward the outer court before the rooms, its length was fifty cubits*- This "wall" is the word used in Ez. 13:5. Judah had not previously built nor maintained such a wall or fence; and now on return from exile they were to do what they had earlier failed to. The fence was perhaps intended to screen the side windows of the lower chambers from public gaze, since these were to be occupied as robing and disrobing rooms for the priests (Ez. 44:19). This all sounds very much of a human situation, rather than that after the return of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 42:8 *For the length of the rooms that were in the outer court was fifty cubits: and see, before the temple were one hundred cubits*- The chambers whose windows looked into the outer court, projected fifty cubits into the outer court; i.e. this was their breadth or depth from north to south. Those before the temple were an hundred cubits; i.e. the chambers whose windows fronted the temple, were a hundred cubits from east to west.

Ezekiel 42:9 *From under these rooms was the entry on the east side, as one goes into them from the outer court*- This entry ran along the east side of the building, and led from the outer to the temple court. Because the outer court was higher than the temple and could only be reached by steps, "the entry" is represented as lying under the rooms.

Ezekiel 42:10 *In the thickness of the wall of the court toward the east, before the separate place, and before the building, there were rooms*- As noted on :5, there is a huge emphasis upon the rooms, seeing they would come to represent places of personal salvation in Christ. But we reflect that these rooms are places of work and connected to work. Salvation will be about active work for the Lord and not an eternal rest.

Ezekiel 42:11 *The way before them was like the appearance of the way of the rooms which were toward the north; according to their length so was their breadth: and all their exits were both according to their fashions, and according to their doors*- The existence of walkways is stressed in these plans. As explained on Zech. 3:7, these are the "places to walk" which would have become real and actual had the returned exiles responded to this great plan.

Ezekiel 42:12 *According to the doors of the rooms that were toward the south was a door at the head of the way, even the way directly before the wall toward the east, as one enters into them*- See on :11.

Ezekiel 42:13 *Then he said to me, The north rooms and the south rooms, which are before the separate place, they are the holy rooms, where the priests who are near to Yahweh shall eat the most holy things: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meal offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; for the place is holy*- The same words are found in Ezra 2:63 and Neh. 7:65- it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because

there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ez. 13:9: "neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. These were two engraven stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zechariah 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraven stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfil Ezekiel 42:13. In a restoration context, Isaiah 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD". This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zechariah 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and 'bearing the glory', i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was *conditional* on Joshua's obedience: "This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey" (Zech. 6:15). Because Joshua failed, he didn't have urim and thummim, therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the 'Kingdom' prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration feature "the servant"- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Is. 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there". His obedience would enable the peoples' establishment as the Kingdom.

Ezekiel 42:14 *When the priests enter in, then shall they not go out of the holy place into the outer court, but there they shall lay their garments in which they minister; for they are holy: and they shall put on other garments, and shall approach to those things which are for the people*- The LXX gives the sense: "None shall go in thither except the priests, and they shall not go forth of the holy place into the outer court, that they that draw nigh to me may be continually holy, and may not touch their garments in which they minister, with defilement, for they are holy; and they shall put on other garments whenever they come in contact with the people". The language of defilement reads contrasts with the New Testament teaching that defilement has now been ended in Christ; and the veil to the Most Holy was torn at the Lord's death to demonstrate that now, access to the Holiest was possible for "the people". And Hebrews builds on this, showing that all in Christ are now able to enter. It is not therefore good enough to argue that this temple will be built after the Lord's return, and these things will point back to Him as the Mosaic sacrifices pointed forward to Him. The reality is that "the people" can get direct access to the Holiest, and that is now a reality for all time that will not be changed.

Ezekiel 42:15 *Now when he had made an end of measuring the inner house, he brought me forth by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east, and measured it all around*- He now measures the wall which was around the house and its courts. And Ezekiel was apparently led out by the east gate to observe this.

Ezekiel 42:16 *He measured on the east side with the measuring reed five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed all around*- For discussion of the size of the temple,

see on Ez. 45:1. The LXX sees this wall as that of the outer court, and changes the "reeds" into "cubits".

Ezekiel 42:17 *He measured on the north side five hundred reeds with the measuring reed all around*- The temple of Ezekiel was of broadly similar dimensions to that of Solomon, 500 cubits square (see RSV). The Hebrew translated "reeds" is hard to interpret; but many expositors have concluded that "cubits" is meant, amongst them Mark Allfree, *Worship In The Age To Come* and Philip Hinde & Ivan Sturman, *Ezekiel's Last Vision*.

Ezekiel 42:18 *He measured on the south side five hundred reeds with the measuring reed*- The LXX reads "cubits" instead of "reeds".

Ezekiel 42:19 *He turned about to the west side, and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed*- Reading with LXX "cubits" makes more sense. Otherwise there is a huge area of space enclosed for no apparent reason.

Ezekiel 42:20 *He measured it on the four sides: it had a wall around it, the length five hundred, and the breadth five hundred, to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common*- This is alluding back to Ezekiel's earlier lament that Judah had not made that very separation (Ez. 22:26). See on Ez. 44:6. This reflected the difference between God's people, His "sanctuary" (Psalms 114:2), and the surrounding world. But Judah did not 'separate' themselves from the surrounding tribes but instead married them and worshipped their idols (s.w. Ezra 9:1 "The people of Israel... have not separated themselves from the people of the land, doing according to their *abominations*... for they have taken of their daughters for themselves"). The same word for "abominations" occurs in the same context in Mal. 2:11: "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god". Yet it had been emphasized that the temple system Ezekiel described was to be free of all the "abominations" [s.w.] previously committed by Israel (Ezekiel 43:8; 44:6,7,13).

In fact, the account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similar to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Neh. 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated from the surrounding world unto God's law (Neh. 10:28). There was a powerful logic- either separate from the world around, or be separated from the people of God (Ezra 10:8). It's a separation- one way or the other. Judah chose not to make that separation, and so the spirit of the new temple was precluded from coming about in that form at that time.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 43

Ezekiel 43:1 *Afterward he brought me to the gate that looks toward the east*- The same words are translated "prepare the way" in Mal. 3:1 and Is. 40:3 (see too Ez.

43:1; 44:1; 47:2). The way is 'prepared' or 'looks' eastward. This was the way or road over which the glory was to re-enter the restored temple. But Judah didn't rebuild that temple as specified and as Malachi often demonstrates, the priests failed to act as commanded in Ez. 40-48. And so the messenger of the covenant who was to prepare that way likewise failed; but finally the essence of the prophecies will come true through the work of the Elijah prophet and John the Baptist [also a priest] preparing the way of the Lord Jesus, so that His glory and Spirit could enter a spiritual temple of restored people.

Ezekiel 43:2 *Behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east: and His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shined with His glory*- This refers to the cherubim, who made the same sound according to Ezekiel's earlier visions of them.

Ezekiel 43:3 *It was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city; and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face*- The vision of God's glory entering the temple "was according to the vision… that I saw by the river Chebar" back in Babylon. This is the meaning of the fact that cherubim visions both begin and end the prophecy of Ezekiel. The cherubim would move from Judah to Babylon and then back to Judah, to enter into and dwell in the temple. Yet God's glory did not enter the temple which Nehemiah built. This was because the people had not followed Ezekiel's example, they had not identified themselves with the Angelic movements above them, but rather remained dominated by their petty self interests. They never really repented- for Ez. 43:11 records Ezekiel being told to only give Judah "the form of the house" and "write it in their sight" only "*if* they be ashamed of all that they have done". There is no record of Ezekiel giving them the promised further plans for the temple- so the wonderful prophecy could not be fulfilled, because they did not repent.

Ezekiel 43:4 *The glory of Yahweh came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east*- Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Ezekiel 43:5 *The Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the house*- The glory of Yahweh was to fill Ezekiel's temple as it had done Solomon's (Ez. 43:5 cp. 1 Kings 8:10).

Ezekiel 43:6 *I heard one speaking to me out of the house; and a man stood by me*- The references to Yahweh's 'return' to Zion were to be fulfilled in the Angel of His

presence again dwelling there. And this is the Angelic person who is now located within the house and speaks to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 43:7 *He said to me, Son of man, this is the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever*- God's throne was that of David; the restored throne of David is in view.

The house of Israel shall no more defile My holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their prostitution, and by the dead bodies of their kings in their high places- . Judah in the new temple would not "defile" Yahweh's Name any more (:8); but they were lazy to keep the uncleanness laws, they *did* defile Yahweh by touching dead bodied and then offering the sacrifices (Hag. 2:13,14 s.w.), just as Israel previously had been defiled by touching the dead bodies of their kings and then offering sacrifices; but after the restoration, Judah thought they were above God's law, and therefore did exactly the same things which had caused the temple to be destroyed in the first place.

Ezekiel 43:8 *In their setting of their threshold by My threshold, and their doorpost beside My doorpost, and there was but the wall between Me and them; and they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed: therefore I have consumed them in My anger*- We gasp at the closeness of God to men, even before the even greater proximity achieved in the work of Jesus.

Ezekiel 43:9 *Now let them put away their prostitution*- Whilst Ezekiel was prophesying before the return from exile, he speaks as if the temple has been built but Judah are still unfaithful to the covenant. He was inspired to see that the restoration would happen, but the returned exiles would need exhortation to return spiritually to God and not just physically to Zion.

And the dead bodies of their kings, far from Me; and I will dwell in their midst forever- Instead of focusing upon the dead bodies of apostate kings, they should instead look to the restoration of the Davidic line in a Messianic prince. The promise that Yahweh would dwell in the new temple was conditional on them not touching dead bodies; but Hag. 2:13 makes it apparent that they did this very thing at the time of the restoration. The kingdom prophecy of Joel 3:21 could then had had some fulfilment: "I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed; for the LORD dwells [s.w.] in Zion". See on Ez. 47:1.

Ezekiel 43:10 *You, son of man, show the house to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern*- Ezekiel was showing the captives that they would return but would likely fall back into the very "prostitution" to the covenant (:9) which led to their exile; and Ezekiel is as it were asking them to repent ahead of time. Ezekiel shewed Judah the general picture of the temple; if they were obedient, then God promised to give them more details so they could build it in reality (perhaps these would have included details of the contents of the most holy place, of which nothing is said). In the same way as the Angel-cherubim were to be followed back on earth by Judah from Babylon to Jerusalem, so in the same way as the Angel is described as measuring the new temple, so Judah were to "measure the pattern" and build accordingly. But they didn't.

Israel would only be able to build the temple properly if they were "ashamed of their iniquities". This was the tragedy felt by Ezra, when he realized the exiles were not living as they should be: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to

thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased" (Ezra 9:6). And Ezra knew they weren't "ashamed of their iniquities". And thus he sought to take upon himself that shame, believing that God would accept *his* shame on behalf of the people. Note in passing how he speaks of blushing before God. You only blush in someone's presence. And this was how close and real Ezra felt his God to be.

Ezekiel 43:11 *If they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the form of the house, and its fashion, and its exits, and its entrances, and all its forms, and all its ordinances, and all its forms, and all its laws; and write it in their sight; that they may keep the whole form of it, and all its ordinances, and do them*- The fact Ezekiel does make known the form of the house would suggest that a minority amongst the exiles did repent. Or perhaps they didn't, and by grace God all the same revealed to them the wonderful "form" of all the possibilities for them, in the hope that would elicit their repentance. Perhaps this repentance of a remnant explains why in fact the record of Ezekiel's temple was written down at all- for it would be written down *if* Judah were ashamed of their sins. Ezekiel's opening chapters record him being forewarned by God that they would not generally be responsive to his ministry; and yet some like Ezra were (see on :10), and maybe this was eagerly seized upon by God as the basis for allowing the writing down and preservation of the specifications we have in Ez. 40-48.

The temple vision should have made them ashamed of their sins (Ez. 43:10,11). It should have motivated them to live the Kingdom life in their lives: "describe the Temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them match their lives to its pattern". But they didn't. It may have been partly due to lack of familiarity with the text of the prophecy- Ezekiel would have preached it to them, but many of them were too busy with the Babylon life to reflect upon it. Those who returned to the land may well have done so not so much in order to get on with conformity to Ezekiel's vision of the Kingdom, but for other reasons- their family and friends were going back, they felt some vague conscience that they ought to, perhaps their own experience of Babylon life hadn't been positive and they vaguely hoped for something better... and so when they got there, they simply weren't interested in serious conformity to the prophecies about restoration. And in principle, our own lives and apparent commitment before God can be just the same. It is evident that they didn't reflect upon the real implications of the prophecies which they must all have vaguely known. And these weaknesses must serve as the basis for our own self-examination: are we familiar with the text of Scripture, and more so, are we really meditating upon the personal implications for us?

Ezekiel 43:12 *This is the law of the house: on the top of the mountain the whole limit around it shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house*- This is one of the clearest statements that what we have in Ez. 40-48 is command rather than prediction. They were a law, a commandment to be fulfilled. This explains the commandment style of the instructions, e.g. Ez. 44:2: "This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened". The "law of the house" should not be confused with the law of Moses; there are significant differences.

Ezekiel 43:13 *These are the measures of the altar by cubits (the cubit is a cubit and a handbreadth): the bottom shall be a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and its border around its edge a span; and this shall be the base of the altar-*

Ezekiel 43:14 *From the bottom on the ground to the lower ledge shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser ledge to the greater ledge shall be four cubits, and the breadth a cubit*- The impression given by the language is that the altar rises up out of the earth. This is a purposeful juxtaposition with the unusual word used for it in :15, *harel*, "the mount of God". The impression is that arising from the dust on man's side, God meets with man there at His table and fellowships with us in eating together.

Ezekiel 43:15 *The upper altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar hearth and upward there shall be four horns*- "Upper altar" is *harel,* literally "the mount of God". The altar is therefore presented as the pinnacle of mount Zion. The teaching is not so much that sacrifice is the pinnacle of devotion to God, but rather His desire to share a table with man, to eat with man, is the pinnacle. The four horns perhaps connect with the four cherubim, who have as it were landed permanently in the new temple.

Ezekiel 43:16 *The altar hearth shall be twelve cubits long by twelve broad, square in the four sides of it*- This was large, but the twelve square arrangement looked forward to the united twelve tribes of Israel having one altar. The restoration prophecies indicate that there was envisaged a unity between the restored tribes of Israel, centred around a joint experience of forgiveness and desire to worship at the same altar (cp. 2 Chron. 32:12). Ezekiel had earlier seen the altar as the place of Divine judgment for the abuses committed there (Ez. 9:2). Now, the restored exiles were to do better.

Ezekiel 43:17 *The ledge shall be fourteen cubits long by fourteen broad in the four sides of it; and the border about it shall be half a cubit; and its bottom shall be a cubit around; and its steps shall look toward the east*- The altar would have steps leading up to it, whereas this was forbidden in Ex. 20:26. The intended new system would not need to be so concerned about human uncleanness because this had been dealt with under the new covenant offered them.

Ezekiel 43:18 *He said to me, Son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh: These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon*- "In the day..." implies they were not to use it until they had immediately offered a sin offering upon it (:19). That the altar needed cleansing again indicates an abiding imperfection in the whole system which would not be appropriate if this temple is to be built and operated by the Lord Jesus and the redeemed in the future.

Ezekiel 43:19 *You shall give to the priests the Levites who are of the seed of Zadok, who are near to Me, to minister to Me, says the Lord Yahweh, a young bull for a sin offering*- Before we can offer anything to God on His altar (:18), there must be the recognition that we are sinners; what we are offering, therefore, is not in order to obtain forgiveness, but in gratitude for that forgiveness already received. The "you" was addressed to Ezekiel and suggests it could have been built within Ezekiel's lifetime, for he was to give the animals to the sons of Zadok to offer in the temple; Ezekiel was to prepare the daily sacrifice (Ez. 46:13). The Zadok of Ez. 43:19 may well be the Zadok of Neh. 13:13; meaning that although the potential for fulfilment in Ezekiel's lifetime had been missed, the next generation were still capable of fulfilling it.

Ezekiel 43:20 *You shall take of its blood, and put it on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the ledge, and on the border all around: thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it*- Ezekiel himself, as a priest, was to inaugurate the altar by sprinkling blood upon it and making an offering (Ez. 43:20-25). Ezekiel personally was to give the priests a bullock to offer on the new altar and to cleanse it (Ez. 43:19,20)- as if the temple was intended to be built during Ezekiel's lifetime. See on :19.

Ezekiel 43:21 *You shall also take the bull of the sin offering, and it shall be burnt in the appointed place of the house, outside of the sanctuary*- Nehemiah did his very best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. See on Ez. 40:10. He arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31-34 had commanded there to be. He built 'miphkad', "the Muster Gate" (Neh. 3:31 RSV), the "appointed place" [s.w.] of Ez. 43:21.

Ezekiel 43:22 *On the second day you shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering; and they shall cleanse the altar, as they cleansed it with the bull*- Malachi and Haggai so bitterly complain at the way the priests didn't serve God properly in the restored temple. They offered blemished sacrifices, when it had been prophesied / commanded in Ezekiel that Israel were not to do this (Mal. 1:8).

Ezekiel 43:23 *When you have finished cleansing it, you shall offer a young bull without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish*- But they offered blemished animals (Mal. 1:8), because they wanted the nicer meat and more money for themselves- petty materialism stopped the Kingdom experience being realized.

Ezekiel 43:24 *You shall bring them near to Yahweh, and the priests shall cast salt on them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering to Yahweh*- The salt was a sign of covenant relationship (Lev. 2:13). The inauguration of the altar would be a sign of acceptance of the new covenant with the returned exiles which is envisaged in Ez. 20 and Jer. 31. The reality is that they didn't really accept it.

Ezekiel 43:25 *Seven days you shall prepare every day a goat for a sin offering: they shall also prepare a young bull, and a ram out of the flock, without blemish*- The contrast between "you" and "they" suggest that Ezekiel himself is envisaged as acting as a priest. The prophecy could have come true in his life time; the 70 year period of captivity could have been reduced. Instead, it was extended.

Ezekiel 43:26 *Seven days shall they make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it*- There was to be a seven day dedication of the altar (Ez. 43:26) just as had happened in Solomon's time (2 Chron. 7:9).

Ezekiel 43:27 *When they have accomplished the days, it shall be that on the eighth day, and onwards, the priests shall make your burnt offerings on the altar and your peace offerings*- Both Solomon and Ezekiel's temples were to be ready for operation on "the eighth day" after their consecration (cp. 1 Kings 8:66). I suggest that contrary to how it is often presented, Ezekiel's temple was to be of a similar size to that of

Solomon's. Even the statement that finally, the Lord would be there in the temple, is alluding back to how Yahweh came and dwelt in Solomon's temple.

And I will accept you, says the Lord Yahweh- Ezekiel 20 gives the clearest outline of the envisaged sequence of events at the restoration. Verses 3-33 describe Israel's sins up to the captivity; then there is the pleading with Israel in captivity (:35 = Ez. 17:20), with the intention that there in Babylon Israel would repent (:43). Then they would return to their land, build a temple and offer acceptable sacrifices, and be "accepted" (Ez. 20:41). The idea of God 'accepting' Israel is found here in Ez. 43:27; when the temple was built and the sacrifices offered, "I will accept you". If Judah resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel's plan, "I will take pleasure" in it, God offered (Hag. 1:8). The same word is used in Ez. 43:27- *then*, when the temple of Ezekiel was built, Yahweh would "accept / take pleasure in" His people and temple. But because they built and served Him with such a mean spirit, He did not "accept" them at that time (Mal. 1:10,13 s.w.). Note how Hag. 1:8 describes the need to go up onto the mountain and build the temple- as if to recall attention to Ezekiel's opening vision of the temple as built on a mountain. But Judah would not, and therefore the Kingdom blessings of corn, new wine and oil, as well as fruitfulness on the mountains, were all withheld (Hag. 1:11).

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 44

Ezekiel 44:1 *Then he brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which looks toward the east; and it was shut*- The intention was that when the temple was built and functioning as required, operated and used by a repentant Judah, Yahweh's glory would return through the east gate. But in the vision, it was still "shut". The same words are translated "prepare the way" in Mal. 3:1 and Is. 40:3 (see too Ez. 43:1; 47:2). The way is 'prepared' or 'looks' eastward. This was the way or road over which the glory was to re-enter the restored temple. But Judah didn't rebuild that temple as specified and as Malachi often demonstrates, the priests failed to act as commanded in Ez. 40-48. And so the messenger of the covenant who was to prepare that way likewise failed; but finally the essence of the prophecies will come true through the work of the Elijah prophet and John the Baptist [also a priest] preparing the way of the Lord Jesus, so that His glory and Spirit could enter a spiritual temple of restored people.

Ezekiel 44:2 *Yahweh said to me, This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, neither shall any man enter in by it; for Yahweh, the God of Israel, has entered in by it; therefore it shall be shut*- Zechariah labours the paradox of grace- that if Judah returned to Yahweh both physically and spiritually, then He would return to them. But He by grace had already returned, so eager was He for this possible scenario to come about. And He has the same Spirit in dealing with us today. See on Ez. 46:12.

Ezekiel 44:3 *As for the prince, he shall sit therein as prince to eat bread before Yahweh; he shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate, and shall go out by the way of the same*- Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the

envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. See on Ez. 37:25; 46:3.

Ezekiel 44:4 *Then he brought me by the way of the north gate before the house; and I looked, and behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh: and I fell on my face-*

Ezekiel 44:5 *Yahweh said to me, Son of man, mark well, and see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I tell you concerning all the ordinances of the house of Yahweh, and all its laws; and mark well the entrance of the house, with every exit of the sanctuary*- The details of the temple were so detailed- Ezekiel was to "mark well…every going forth"- in order to inspire in Judah repentance for how they had abused the previous temple. Ezekiel's prophecies should have been an inspiration to Israel, that they might be obedient and live out these things as a reality before them, and thereby see other prophecies come true in their own experience. They could have entered upon an upward spiral of spirituality. The form of the house, the very description of it by Ezekiel, should have inspired them to feel that they had had enough of sin.

Ezekiel 44:6 *You shall tell the rebellious house of Israel*- This the same rubric used earlier (Ez. 2:5; 3:26; 12:2,25; 17:12; 24:3). There is a congruence between the style of address found in Ez. 40-48 and the earlier part of the prophecy. See on Ez. 42:20. This is because Ezekiel is addressing the same audience- those who had heard his criticisms and appeals for repentance were the same group who were now being commanded to build a temple according to the dimensions given.

Thus says the Lord Yahweh: you house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations- These plans for the temple were given in order to elicit Judah's repentance. These words are picked up from the LXX by Peter, and applied to all of us in 1 Pet. 4:3: "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles". The same word for "abominations" occurs in the same context in Mal. 2:11: "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and has married the daughter of a strange god". Yet it had been emphasized that the temple system Ezekiel described was to be free of all the "abominations" [s.w.] previously committed by Israel (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13).

Ezekiel 44:7 *In that you have brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to profane it, even My house, when you offer My bread, the fat and the blood*- This could be read as referring to what Judah had done before the exile; they were under the impression, according to Ez. 18, that they were suffering unfairly. But in the attempt at rebuilding the temple, Judah profaned the Sabbath (Neh. 13:17,18), and profaned the temple by their marriage with Gentiles and their "weariness" with the temple ordinances (Mal. 1:12; 2:10,11). They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, and so they had no part in it.

And they have broken My covenant, to add to all your abominations- Judah broke covenant [s.w.] with Yahweh at the time of the restoration by marrying Gentiles and worshipping their gods (Ezra 9:1,14).

Ezekiel 44:8 *You have not performed the duty of My holy things; but you have set performers of My duty in My sanctuary for yourselves*- They had the mentality of

many religious people. They thought their religious structures and leaders could do the work of spirituality for them. We recall how Israel didn't want to hear Yahweh speaking directly to them, but preferred Moses to engage with God for them; and how the spiritually weak asked others to pray to God for them instead of them doing so (Jer. 14:11; Acts 8:24). This is the problem with all organized religion; it tends to take away from personal spirituality and engagement with God.

Zech. 3:7-10 encouraged Joshua to be the king-priest of the restored kingdom: "*If you will walk in my ways, and if you will keep my charge* [as so frequently commanded in Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16 s.w.], then you shall also judge my house (as prophesied in Ez. 40-48), and shalt also keep my courts (so often mentioned in Ez. 40-48), and I will give you places to walk (s.w. Ez. 42:4 about the walkways in the prophesied temple)... hear now, O Joshua". But he didn't. He didn't keep the courts, but allowed Tobiah the Ammonite to set up his office for subversion in the temple chambers.

Ezekiel 44:9 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh, No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into My sanctuary, of any foreigners who are among the people of Israel*- Joel 3 describes how then there would be a great invasion, to be met by Yahweh's intervention and the establishment of the Kingdom. *Then* "So shall you know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no stranger pass through her any more" (Joel 3:17). This is language undoubtedly to be linked with that of Ezekiel 40-48. There we have Yahweh dwelling in Zion, the city named Yahweh Shammah, 'Yahweh is there' (Ez. 48:35). No stranger would pass through Zion, according to Ezekiel 44:7-9.

Ezekiel 44:10 *But the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity*- We notice how the religious leaders and the masses are equally blamed. A population get in the end the leadership they really want and deserve, whether or not they practice a democratic system. The priesthood knew what the people wanted and encouraged them in it, for their own ends.

Ezekiel 44:11 *Yet now*- Having carried the guilt of their iniquity in the exile (:10), they were now to be rehabilitated as ministers again.

They are to be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house, and ministering in the house: they shall kill the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them- The Levites were to "stand before" the people as their inferiors, to serve them, and not as previously, as their controllers and masters.

Ezekiel 44:12 *Because they ministered to them before their idols, and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel; therefore have I lifted up My hand against them, says the Lord Yahweh, and they shall bear their iniquity*- As noted on :11, they were in Ezekiel's time 'bearing their iniquity' in exile, unable to minister to Yahweh in His temple.

Ezekiel 44:13 *They shall not come near to Me, to execute the office of priest to Me, nor to come near to any of My holy things, to the things that are most holy; but they*

shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed- They would be able to "minister" for the people, but not to come near before Yahweh (:15). That would be done by the sons of Zadok.

The people were warned that the temple had been destroyed because of their previous "abominations", and that the rebuilt temple was not to feature any such abominations (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13). "let it suffice you of your abominations" they were told- and then told not to allow the uncircumcised into the temple, as they had been doing Ez. 44:6,9). This sounds as if the prophecy of Ezekiel was more command than prediction- to those of his own day. But they returned, and committed the abominations [s.w.] of the Gentiles (Ezra 9:1,11,14) and married their daughters; to the extent that Malachi commented upon this: "Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination [s.w.] is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (Mal. 2:11).

Ezekiel 44:14 *Yet will I make them performers of the duty of the house, for all its service, and for all that shall be done therein*- Judah were to keep the charges of God relating to His house (Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16). Nehemiah, seeking for Israel's obedience to Ezekiel's vision, tried to get them to "keep the charges" (s.w. Nehemiah 7:3; 12:9,45; 13:20). But soon, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges (Mal. 3:14 s.w.). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God's Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose even the true faith- because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God's law, rather than willingly devoting their way of life to the realization of His vision

Ezekiel 44:15 *But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who performed the duty of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood, says the Lord Yahweh*- We wonder if there was a literal "Zadok" at the time of the restoration whose sons could have literally done this.

Ezekiel 44:16 *They shall enter into My sanctuary, and they shall come near to My table, to minister to Me, and they shall keep My instructions*- Malachi later laments how this table or altar of Yahweh was despised by the returned exiles, offering small quantities of sick animals upon it, and thereby entertaining Yahweh in a paltry manner. They despised it (Mal. 1:7,12), they found it such a weariness. And we too have an attitude to the Lord's table. Paul speaks of us each one partaking of "the table of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:21), a phrase used in the LXX for the altar (Ez. 44:16; Mal. 1:7,12)- the sacrifices whereof only the priests could eat. This would have been radical thinking to a community used to priests and men delegated to take charge of others' religious affairs. Hebrew 3:13 gets at this idea when we read that *we* are to exhort one another not to turn away, situated as we are on the brink of the promised land, just as Moses exhorted Israel.

Ezekiel 44:17 *It shall be that when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come on them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within*- The temptation to wear woolen clothes may have been simply in order to keep warm.

Ezekiel 44:18 *They shall have linen headware on their heads, and shall have linen breeches on their waists; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat*- These people are clearly mortal, as sweat is part of the curse.

Ezekiel 44:19 *When they go forth into the outer court, even into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments in which they minister, and lay them in the holy rooms; and they shall put on other garments, that they not sanctify the people with unclean garments*- We recall how Joshua the high priest was clothed in filthy garments in Zech. 3. The statements in :18-23) may all be hinting that these things *were* done by Israel before the captivity; but they were not to be done in the new temple. There was to be repentance.

Ezekiel 44:20 *Neither shall they shave their heads, nor allow their locks to grow long; they shall only cut off the hair of their head*- They were to be under something like the Nazirite vow.

Ezekiel 44:21 *Neither shall any of the priests drink wine when they enter into the inner court*- These priests are clearly mortal because they are liable to the influence of alcohol.

Ezekiel 44:22 *Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her who is divorced; but they shall take virgins of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest*- These priests are clearly mortal as the immortalized will not marry (Lk. 20:35,36), and we have here a surrounding situation envisaged where there is the possibility of divorce and remarriage. If indeed this speaks of a situation in the supposed Millennium, then we have to accept there will be divorce and remarriage then. But after the Lord's return, surely all that will be part of the tears that are wiped away from our eyes and experience.

Malachi and Haggai so bitterly complain at the way the priests didn't serve God properly in the restored temple. The priests married divorced women (Mal. 2:14-16), even though Ez. 44 commanded they should not do this.

Ezekiel 44:23 *They shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the common, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean*- It would no longer be the duty of the Levites to teach the people as under the Mosaic law; it is envisaged here as specifically the duty of the sons of Zadok. This again confirms the conclusion that we are not reading here of the Law of Moses being reinstituted; but rather a new deal, a new covenant, offered to the returning exiles which had some similarities with the Mosaic law, but which differed from it.

The Levites were to teach Judah and to make others *discern* between good and evil. They should have done this, but instead "ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi" (Mal. 2:7,8). The sons of Zadok were descendants of Eleazer and Phinehas (1 Chron. 6:3-8), and Mal. 2:5 alludes to this: "My covenant was with him of life and peace: and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name" (cp. Ex. 32:28). But Mal. 2:6-8 go on to show that the sons of Zadok, as the descendants of Phinehas, had not lived up to their pedigree; they were making men "stumble at the law". This shows the connection between the Ezekiel prophecies and Malachi's commentary on their failed fulfilment in the hands of men like the sons of Zadok.

Ezekiel 44:24 *In a controversy they shall stand to judge; according to My ordinances shall they judge it: and they shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts; and they shall make My Sabbaths holy*- The existence of controversies is surely inappropriate to any Millenial reign of Christ; and the Sabbath was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. The situation here speaks of a scenario after the restoration from Babylon. The Levites were to judge justly. But Zechariah 7:9; 8:16 [s.w.] had to exhort them to stop judging unjustly.

Ezekiel 44:25 *They shall not go near a dead person to defile themselves; but for father, or for mother, or for son, or for daughter, for brother, or for sister who has had no husband, they may defile themselves*- The priests of this new system would have relatives who died, and the possibility of defilement. Clearly they are mortal and not immortal.

Ezekiel 44:26 *After he is cleansed, they shall reckon to him seven days*- As noted on :25, the possibility of defilement and the need for cleansing speaks of a very human situation at the time of the restoration, and not of the reign of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 44:27 *In the day that he goes into the sanctuary, into the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering, says the Lord Yahweh*- The priests will still be capable of sin and require sin offerings. They are mortal, and not immortal. And the Lord's sin offering on the cross was and is effective for all time, and thereby ended the need for animal sacrifices to atone for sin and defilement.

Ezekiel 44:28 *They shall have an inheritance: I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession*- The GNB grasps the sense: "The priests have the priesthood as their share of what I have given Israel to be handed down from one generation to another". The honour of serving God today should likewise make our material possessions of little moment to us.

Ezekiel 44:29 *They shall eat the meal offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs*- The existence of such offerings clearly speaks of a time prior to the Lord's death, which was the ultimate offering for sin and all trespass and thereby ended the need for any further such offerings.

Ezekiel 44:30 *The first of all the first fruits of every thing, and every offering of everything, of all your offerings, shall be for the priest: you shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, to cause a blessing to rest on your house*- Malachi 3:8 and Nehemiah's record show how these tithes were not given, and what was given was substandard and abused by the priests. This potential scenario didn't come about because we are reading here commands rather than prediction.

Ezekiel 44:31 *The priests shall not eat of anything that dies of itself, or is torn, whether it be bird or animal*- The priests 'ate' the offerings to symbolize God eating with the offerer at His table, the altar. But the returned exiles did offer such animals, according to Malachi; see on :30. The existence of animals who will have been “torn” by other animals seems hard to square with the Kingdom prophecies of Isaiah 9 and

11 about the animals living at peace with each other. It is the restoration from exile which is in view, not the Kingdom to be established by the Lord Jesus at His return.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 45

Ezekiel 45:1 *Moreover, when you shall divide by lot the land for inheritance, you shall offer an offering to Yahweh, a holy portion of the land; the length shall be the length of twenty-five thousand reeds, and the breadth shall be ten thousand: it shall be holy in all its border all around*- The confusion has been in deciding whether to take some of the measurements in reeds or cubits (which are much smaller), seeing that the Hebrew text strangely omits the measurement unit. The "oblation" would be about 60 miles square if we measure it in reeds. This area would encroach either upon the Mediterranean or the Dead Sea, and it seems contextually more likely that a smaller area measured in cubits is intended. If measured in reeds, this large area somewhat disrupts the distribution of land amongst the tribes as detailed later in Ezekiel. If the missing measurement unit here is cubits and not reeds, it is likely that it is in the dimensions of the temple itself. The holy oblation described in Ez. 45:1 is to be "the length of five and twenty thousand". "Reeds" in the AV is in italics. The following verse speaks of *cubits* as the measurement unit. Only the context can decide whether cubits or reeds is meant in many of the Ezekiel passages- although the LXX, RSV etc. give cubits rather than reeds in 42:16 and other passages. If it is going to be thousands of reeds, then it would be over 1 mile square. However, Jer. 30:18 RSV prophesies: "the city shall be builded *upon her own heap*, and the palace shall be *where it used to be*". And passages as varied as Zech. 1, Ps. 68 and Micah 4 all insist that the temple of the restored Kingdom was to built *within* the city of Jerusalem. If the temple is 500 reeds square, there will be no room for a city, assuming the city will be of the same size as the previous old city of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 45:2 *Of this there shall be for the holy place five hundred in length by five hundred in breadth, square all around; and fifty cubits for its suburbs all around*- As noted on :1, the "five hundred" isn't defined.

Ezekiel 45:3 *Of this measure you shall measure a length of twenty-five thousand, and a breadth of ten thousand: and in it shall be the sanctuary, which is most holy*- The sanctuary was in the midst of the tribal allotments (Ez. 48:8). The entire area is described as "the most holy", literally "the holy of holies". The conception of sacred space is challenged in the Ezekiel temple. The most holy in Solomon's temple was 20 x 20 cubits, about 9 x 9 meters. Now, the entire temple area is the most holy.

Ezekiel 45:4 *It is a holy portion of the land; it shall be for the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, who come near to minister to Yahweh; and it shall be a place for their houses, and a holy place for the sanctuary*- The priests were to live in one specific area near the temple, whereas under the Mosaic Law, the priests were given land to live on in each of the various tribes of Israel. And yet the record of the restoration stresses that the priests lived not around the temple, but in various cities throughout Judah (Ezra 2:70; Neh. 7:73; 11:3,20; 12:44). They disobeyed about everything in the regulations of Ez. 40-48.

Ezekiel 45:5 *Twenty-five thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth, shall be to*

the Levites, the ministers of the house, for a possession to themselves, as places to live in- AV "for a possession for twenty chambers". This suggests the number of ministers is relatively small, contradicting the theory of a huge temple for the entire planet. The small size and relatively small number of ministers is far more appropriate to a temple intended to be rebuilt by the returned exiles.

Ezekiel 45:6 *You shall appoint the possession of the city five thousand broad, and twenty-five thousand long, side by side with the offering of the holy portion: it shall be for the whole house of Israel*- Adding the 10,000 reeds of breadth for the Levites' domain, the 10,000 for the priests' land, and the 5000 for the city quarter, makes a total breadth of 25,000 reeds; so that the tract in which all these were included was a square.

Ezekiel 45:7 *Whatever is for the prince shall be on the one side and on the other side of the holy offering and of the possession of the city, in front of the holy offering and in front of the possession of the city, on the west side westward, and on the east side eastward; and in length answerable to one of the portions, from the west border to the east border*- Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. See on Ez. 37:25.

Ezekiel 45:8 *In the land it shall be to him for a possession in Israel: and My princes shall no more oppress My people; but they shall give the land to the house of Israel according to their tribes*- The idea that some prophecies are more command than prediction helps make sense of the prophecy of Ez. 40-48. When we read "my princes *shall* no more oppress my people… the shekel *shall* be twenty gerahs… you *shall* offer an oblation" (Ez. 45:8,12,13), the emphasis needs to be placed upon the word "shall". This was a command to the elders of the people- made explicit in passages like Ez. 45:9: "Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil… you shall have just balances". By failing to be obedient, God's people effectively disallowed the fulfilment of the 'prophecy' that could have come true if they had been obedient to it. "My princes [in this new temple system] shall no more oppress my people" as they did in the recent past (cp. Jer. 22:3; Ez. 18:7,12,16; 22:7,29; Zeph. 3:1, where the same Hebrew word for "oppress" is found). Thus there was to be repentance for the 'oppression' which Ezekiel had earlier had to criticize Israel for. They went into captivity because the princes and priests oppressed the people (Jer. 21:12; 22:3,17); in the new temple, this was not to be so. The princes were to give the rest of the land to the people of Israel. And yet, in Nehemiah's time the princes of the people did again oppress them, e.g. through making them mortgage their lands to them so that effectively they took it for themselves (Neh. 5:3). This is the tragedy of Israel's refusal to learn… The intention was that those hearing Ezekiel's words in captivity would "bear the punishment of their iniquity… *that* the house of Israel go no more astray" (Ez. 14:11).

Ezekiel 45:9 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Let it suffice you, princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute justice and righteousness instead of dispossessing My*

people, says the Lord Yahweh- Nehemiah 5 records that Judah did the very opposite on returning from exile, and Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all record social injustice as being the order of the day at the time of the restoration.

Ezekiel 45:10 *You shall have just balances, a just ephah and a just bath*- They were to have "just" balances, as opposed to the "unjust" [s.w.] balances which they had in the lead up to the captivity (Jer. 22:13, AV "unrighteous").

Ezekiel 45:11 *The ephah and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of a homer, and the ephah the tenth part of a homer: its measure shall be after the homer*- Malachi and Haggai so bitterly complain at the way the priests didn't serve God properly in the restored temple. They were to use just measures (:9-14), unlike what they had previously done. But they robbed God in their sacrifices in the restored temple (Mal. 3:8).

Ezekiel 45:12 *The shekel shall be twenty gerahs. Twenty shekels plus twenty-five shekels plus fifteen shekels shall be your mina*- The standard, defining weights were destroyed during the Babylonian attack, according to Josephus.

Ezekiel 45:13 *This is the offering that you shall offer: the sixth part of an ephah from a homer of wheat; and you shall give the sixth part of an ephah from a homer of barley*- There are intentional differences with the Mosaic requirements. There is probably no great symbolic meaning in the differences, rather is the point being made that acceptance of the new covenant meant effectively that the Mosaic law had been ended. This is evidence enough that the law of Moses was not literally "eternal" but was for that age or *olahm*.

Ezekiel 45:14 *And the set portion of oil, of the bath of oil, the tenth part of a bath out of the cor, which is ten baths, even a homer (for ten baths are a homer)*- This is significantly more than the Mosaic law required, although there was to be only one daily offering in the morning, and not also in the evenings.

Ezekiel 45:15 *And one lamb of the flock, out of two hundred, from the well-watered pastures of Israel for a meal offering, and for a burnt offering, and for peace offerings, to make atonement for them, says the Lord Yahweh*- The Ezekiel temple prophecies may be a purely conditional prophecy, which will not now come true in that Israel were disobedient. This would then allow us to be more comfortable with the passages in Hebrews which speak as if the system of sacrifices has finished for all time. It would also enable us to sit more comfortably with the Ezekiel passages which speak of the sacrifices offered in that temple as actually achieving atonement, i.e. forgiveness of sins (Ez. 45:15,22,25,17). They are not just 'pointing back' as teaching aids to the Lord's work; they are framed as actually enabling, by their blood, forgiveness. It may be, however, that the Ezekiel prophecies had an intended and possible fulfilment at the time of the restoration under Ezra, but this was nullified by Israel's lack of response; and therefore, at least in principle, the prophecies had their fulfilment delayed until the second coming. The lesson that comes out of all this is the extent to which God is willing to work with us, to tailor His purpose according to how far we are prepared to work with Him, and in that sense to allow Himself to be limited by us. There could be no greater inspiration to a maximal commitment to His purpose and His work.

Ezekiel 45:16 *All the people of the land shall give to this offering for the prince in Israel*- "The people of the land" were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Judah intermarried with them, learnt their language, and were dragged away from true Yahweh worship by them at the time. The later separation from the 'Samaritans' was only after a few generations from the restoration. But Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not. Is. 56:6 defines what is meant by "a house of prayer for all nations"- it is for those of all nations who "join themselves to the Lord, to serve him and to love the name of the Lord... every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and *taketh hold of my covenant*".

Ezekiel 45:17 *It shall be the prince's part to give the burnt offerings, and the meal offerings, and the drink offerings, in the feasts, and on the new moons, and on the Sabbaths, in all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering and the meal offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel*- It was this which in principle inspired Nehemiah to generously provide food to God's people and the local people of the land (Neh. 5:17). "The prince" here is presented as also a priest; and Zech. 6 presents the possibility of a king-priest arising as leader of the returned exiles. But it never came about, and so these things have their spirit fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, although not the exact letter of them.

Ezekiel 45:18 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the first month, in the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish; and you shall cleanse the sanctuary*- We wonder why the Lord Jesus and His assistant priests would need regular cleansing in the age to come. The entire situation presented here clearly applies to mortal, sinful people and priesthood, which could have arisen at the time of the restoration.

Ezekiel 45:19 *The priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering, and put it on the door posts of the house and on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the posts of the gate of the inner court*- This alludes to the Passover, which under Moses' law was to begin on the tenth day of the first month. But this was to be done on the first day of the first month (:18). The differences seem intended to underline the fact that the Mosaic law was over. But Judah refused to accept this revision of the Passover law, and to this day keep the Mosaic law rather than that laid down here.

Ezekiel 45:20 *So you shall do on the seventh day of the month for everyone who errs, and for him who is ignorant: so you shall make atonement for the house*- This appears to be a revised form of the day of atonement. We note that sins of ignorance still require atonement. This ought to humble us, realizing that ignorance is no excuse. We are saved by grace rather than specific repentance and obtaining of forgiveness for every sin.

Ezekiel 45:21 *In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten*- There is no Day of Atonement mentioned in Ezekiel's new system, because the exiles were to have repented and been forgiven on a more permanent basis than under the Mosaic system.

Ezekiel 45:22 *On that day shall the prince prepare for himself*- That the "prince" needed to prepare for himself a sin offering is surely evidence that the Lord Jesus is not in view; not only does He need no sin offering, but He was Himself the sin offering. "The prince" must refer to a prince of the restored line of David at the time of the restoration, although as I have explained on Zechariah, the various possible candidates all dropped the baton.

And for all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering- See on :16; "the people of the land" refer to Gentiles who were envisaged as accepting Yahweh in this new system. This is a revised form of the Passover legislation; but Judah didn't accept it and continued to attempt to keep the Mosaic legislation. And so the envisaged system didn't come about.

Ezekiel 45:23 *The seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt offering to Yahweh, seven bulls and seven rams without blemish daily the seven days; and a male goat daily for a sin offering*- This differs from Mosaic legislation; see on Ez. 46:4. Moses' law required 1 lamb, (daily for 7 days, 2 bulls burnt, 1 ram burnt). There were to be more bulls and rams offered in this new system; perhaps to suggest a greater level of dedication.

Much thinking about the temple seems to have gotten confused because of an assumption that Ezekiel's temple will be in order to observe parts of the Mosaic law. But consider the following studied differences between the two. Clearly the system described by Ezekiel implied a change of the Law at the re-institution of the temple; the temple he speaks of was not in order to obey the *Mosaic* Law:

Sin offering:

- Ez. : blood daubed, parts burned outside, day 1-1bull, days 2-7-1 kid, 2 bulls, 1 ram
- Law: blood poured, parts burned inside, day 1-1bull + 2 rams, days 2-7-1bull

Sabbath offering:

- Ez. : 6 lambs, 1 ram (gate open)
- Law: 2 lambs

New Moon offering:

- Ez.: 1 bull, 1 ram, 6 lambs
- Law: 2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs

Daily sacrifice:

- Ez.: 1 lamb (in a.m.)
- Law: 2 lambs (1 a.m., 1 p.m.)

Passover:

- Ez.: 1bull, (daily thru 7 days: 7 bulls burnt, 7 rams burnt), 1 kid? (sin offering)
- Law: 1 lamb, (daily thru 7 days: 2 bulls burnt, 1 ram burnt), 1 kid? (sin offering)

Feast of Booths:

- Ez.: 7 bulls + 7 rams (burnt daily, 7 days), 1 kid
- Law: day 1: 13 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs, 1 kid; day 2: 12 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs, 1 kid; The number of bulls is reduced by 1 each day...day 7: 7 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs, 1 kid

Ezekiel 45:24 *He shall prepare a meal offering, an ephah for a bull, and an ephah for a ram, and a hin of oil to an ephah*- This clearly differs from the Mosaic law (Num. 28:19-22).

Ezekiel 45:25 *In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, in the feast, shall he do the like the seven days; according to the sin offering, according to the burnt offering, and according to the meal offering, and according to the oil*- Zechariah 7:5 criticized the Jews for keeping this feast only externally, but not "unto me". Hag. 2:1 records how on the 21st day of the 7th month- i.e. once the seven day feast that began on the 15th had finished- Haggai was sent to rebuke "the prince", Zerubbabel, for being so slack in fulfilling Ezekiel's vision. Even by the time of Nehemiah 8:14-17, it was so that the feast of the 7th month had not been kept by Judah since the time of Joshua. They subconsciously switched off to Ezekiel's words; just as we can all do. They reasoned that "the time" of which he spoke hadn't come- even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Isaiah 45:13 "not for price nor reward"). They felt that all the prophecies were "marvellous" in the sense of something incapable of concrete fulfilment in their experience (Zechariah 8:6). This is why Hag. 1:2 rebuked them for saying "the time is not come…that the Lord's house should be built". They didn't want the prophecy to be fulfilled, because it would mean 'going up' from their ceiled houses- both in Babylon and in the farmsteads they had built in Judah- to build the temple.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 46

Ezekiel 46:1 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: The gate of the inner court that looks toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the Sabbath day it shall be opened, and on the day of the new moon it shall be opened*- Whatever the Messianic implications of this, Malachi lamented that the returned exiles wouldn't even open the gates unless they were paid; or some translations suggest that nobody at all would open or shut the gates (Mal. 1:10). By not opening or closing the gates, the entrance of the Messianic prince was precluded.

Ezekiel 46:2 *The prince shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate outside, and shall stand by the post of the gate; and the priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate: then he shall go forth; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening*- Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. See on Ez. 37:25. His standing by the post of the gate records David's royal descendants doing so (2 Kings 11:14; 23:3). The impression is given

that the prince is a restored Davidic ruler at the time of the restoration of the temple. But we note that he must remain at the gate whilst the priest prepares the offerings. This again reads strangely if we are to interpret the prince as the Lord Jesus, for He is both a prince and priest, after the order of Melchizedek.

Ezekiel 46:3 *The people of the land shall worship at the door of that gate before Yahweh on the Sabbaths and on the new moons*- Instead, "the people of the land" hung around the gates of the city on the Sabbath in order to do some trading of goods (Neh. 13:19,20). Judah intermarried with them rather than leading them to worship Yahweh at the temple on the Sabbaths. Those who insist that these prophecies speak of the future Kingdom of God on earth would have to therefore admit that the Sabbath will be reinstituted. But the New Testament is clear that the Sabbath has been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 46:4 *The burnt offering that the prince shall offer to Yahweh*- According to Zech. 3 and Zech. 6, we can understand "the prince" as primarily referring to Zerubbabel or Joshua the High Priest (see on Ez. 37:25; 44:3). Under Joshua, the iniquity of the land could have been removed, and "ye shall call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree" (Zech. 3:8-10). The Messianic Kingdom could have been brought in, the new covenant accepted by Israel. It could have been Eliashib- but despite his apparent enthusiasm, he didn't even build the wall outside his own house (Neh. 3:20-22), and arranged for his grandson to marry Sanballat's daughter (Neh. 12:10,11). It is evident from Ez. 46:3 and Ez. 44:3 that the promised Messiah figure was to be both a king and a priest- which would fit Joshua. He is described as a crowned High Priest, called "the branch", who would build the temple and reign as "a priest upon his throne". But this didn't happen. Because Zechariah concluded this prophecy with the comment: "And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord" (Zech. 6:10-15). Joshua-Jesus didn't live up to it. And Zerubbabel never ruled in Jerusalem- he returned to the soft life in Babylon after the temple was rebuilt. But the prophecies suffered a deferral. They will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the branch.

Shall be on the Sabbath day six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish- Two lambs were required under Mosaic law. This temple whilst based upon Solomon's was not an exact replica, just as the regulations for sacrifice are similar but differ from those of the Mosaic law. See on Ez. 41:4; 45:23. Perhaps the greater number of lambs was to teach the exiles the weight of their sins. Seven lambs weren't required, but six- perhaps hinting that the complete and perfect lamb [seven] was yet to come. But see on :6.

Ezekiel 46:5 *And the meal offering shall be an ephah for the ram, and the meal offering for the lambs as he is able to give, and a hin of oil to an ephah*- The Mosaic law required less; whereas it required more than Ezekiel's system for the new moons in :6.

Ezekiel 46:6 *On the day of the new moon it shall be a young bull without blemish, and six lambs, and a ram; they shall be without blemish*- This contrasts with the Mosaic law which required 2 bulls, 1 ram and 7 lambs. See on :4. It almost seems that the regulations are purposefully intended to signal a difference with the Mosaic law.

Ezekiel 46:7 *And he shall prepare a meal offering, an ephah for the bull, and an ephah for the ram, and for the lambs according as he is able, and a hin of oil to an ephah*- "As he is able" suggests serving God within the limitations of what is available to us. This cuts across all legalism, reflecting God's earnest desire for fellowship with man in all his limitations. It is also a rather strange thing to read if indeed these words speak of fulfilment of in God's future Kingdom on earth.

Ezekiel 46:8 *When the prince shall enter, he shall go in by the way of the porch of the gate, and he shall go out by its way*- It seems the east gate is in view (:1,2). This is in contrast to how the people were to enter by one gate and leave by another (:9). See on :10.

Ezekiel 46:9 *But when the people of the land shall come before Yahweh in the appointed feasts*- "The people of the land" were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. The scenario of Zech. 14, with Gentiles coming to Zion to keep Tabernacles, was also potentially possible at the restoration.

He who enters by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he who enters by the way of the south gate shall go out by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate by which he came in, but shall go out straight before him- We noted earlier the design of the gatehouses and barriers to facilitate crowd control (Ez. 40:12), and this one way system appears to be reflective of a perceived need to control the crowds. This all seems rather human if we think that this scenario is intended for fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. The language of going "straight before him" is another example of how there are continual allusions back to the cherubim visions. The straight feet and path of the cherubim was to be replicated in the path of God's people on earth (see on Ez. 1:7).

Ezekiel 46:10 *The prince, when they go in, shall go in with them; and when they go out, he shall go out*- He enters and leaves by the east gate (:1,2,8). The idea may be that when the people enter by the north or south gates (:9), he enters; and he leaves as they leave. The idea is that the worship of the prince is not separate from that of the ordinary people. There was to be a unity between prince and people, despite his evident superiority to them; and this looks forward to the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 46:11 *In the feasts and in the solemnities the meal offering shall be an ephah for a bull and an ephah for a ram, and for the lambs as he is able to give, and a hin of oil to an ephah*- The lack of specific definition of the amount of meal offering required with the lambs is typical of God's open ended relationship with us. We are to respond as we can. And perhaps it is the lack of legalistic legislation which inspires us to greater generosity and devotion than within a more circumscribed system.

Ezekiel 46:12 *When the prince shall prepare a freewill offering, a burnt offering or peace offerings as a freewill offering to Yahweh, one shall open for him the gate that looks toward the east; and he shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, as he does on the Sabbath day: then he shall go out; and after his going forth one*

shall shut the gate- Malachi and Haggai so bitterly complain at the way the priests didn't serve God properly in the restored temple. The priests were to shut the gates (Ez. 44:2; 46:2,12); but they refused to do this unless they were paid for it (Mal. 1:10). Again we note here how the prince was also able to act as a priest in some feasts. Zech. 6 taught that just such a figure could have arisen at the restoration.

Ezekiel 46:13 *You shall prepare a lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering to Yahweh daily: morning by morning you shall prepare it*- The "you" was addressed to Ezekiel and suggests this system could have been built within Ezekiel's lifetime, for he was to give the animals to the sons of Zadok to offer in the temple (Ez. 43:19); Ezekiel was to prepare the daily sacrifice.

Ezekiel 46:14 *You shall prepare a meal offering with it morning by morning, the sixth part of an ephah, and the third part of a hin of oil, to moisten the fine flour; a meal offering to Yahweh continually by a perpetual ordinance*- The continual burnt offering under Moses' law was to be made morning and evening (Num. 28:3); now the evening sacrifice is abolished. We note the change of pronouns. "The prince" has been in view in :13; now "you", perhaps Ezekiel personally; and then "they" in :15. It is as if Ezekiel is being addressed as representative of the priests; another indication that the prophecy was intended for fulfilment in Ezekiel's time by people then known to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 46:15 *Thus shall they prepare the lamb, and the meal offering, and the oil, morning by morning, for a continual burnt offering*- "Morning by morning" appears to stress that the evening offering was now no more.

Ezekiel 46:16 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: If the prince give a gift to any of his sons, it is his inheritance, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance*- The idea is that it could never again revert to the prince. This seems to safeguard against the prince making gifts to his sons and then demanding them returned to him; any attempt to interpret the prince as the returned Lord Jesus runs into major difficulty here, as the legislation is designed to keep the prince from being fickle and manipulative with his wealth.

Ezekiel 46:17 *But if he gives of his inheritance as a gift to one of his servants, it shall be his to the year of liberty; then it shall return to the prince; but as for his inheritance, it shall be for his sons*- He is subject to death (Ez. 46:17,18); and has a wife and sons (Ez. 46:16) who will succeed him (Ez. 45:8). Clearly the prince is mortal, and not the immortal Lord Jesus. "The year of liberty" could refer to the year of Jubilee, or possibly the seventh year release of slaves from their bondage to a particular master. Although here it is the return of property which is in view, so the reference is more likely to the year of Jubilee.

Ezekiel 46:18 *Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by thrusting them out of their possession; he shall give an inheritance to his sons out of his own possession, that My people not be scattered every man from his possession*- This and the surrounding verses are admittedly hard to understand if they really are to be literally fulfilled in relation to Jesus at His second coming. For this legislation seems to guard against the prince abusing the people, as if he is prone to such sin. But it is so understandable within the framework of interpretation here advocated. They

had gone into captivity for these kind of abuses, they had indeed been scattered from their possessions; now they were to return and rebuild the temple after the pattern of Solomon's, repent of their sins, and live righteously, and they would have the possibility of bringing in the Messianic Kingdom. But they chose to be satisfied with a semi-revival, a quasi repentance- just as we can be so easily. And Nehemiah records how the princes *did* oppress the people, taking their land / possessions away from them. They had 'thrust out' their brethren before the captivity (Jer. 22:3; Ez. 18:7,12; 22:7,29 s.w.), and so had been themselves 'thrust out' (Jer. 25:38 s.w.).

Ezekiel 46:19 *Then he brought me through the entry, which was at the side of the gate, into the holy rooms for the priests, which looked toward the north: and behold, there was a place on the hinder part westward*- There were to be "holy chambers" in the temple for the Levites (here and very often in Ezekiel 40-48). The uncircumcised Gentiles were not to be brought into the sanctuary (Ez. 44:7). It was God's intention that when Judah returned from Babylon, the uncircumcised would not come into Zion (the temple), and the Kingdom would be established (Isaiah 52:1,11). There was to be no Canaanite in the house of Yahweh (Zech. 14:21). But Tobiah the Ammonite was given a chamber in the temple for him to use as an office for undermining God's people (Neh. 13:7-9).

Ezekiel 46:20 *He said to me, This is the place where the priests shall boil the trespass offering and the sin offering, and where they shall bake the meal offering; so that they do not bring them into the outer court, to sanctify the people*- The clear distinction between the inner and outer court (Ez. 44:19) seems inappropriate now, when the veil of the holiest has been torn down and as Hebrews emphasizes, all can freely enter the presence of God Himself.

Ezekiel 46:21 *Then he brought me into the outer court, and caused me to pass by the four corners of the court; and behold, in every corner of the court there was another court*- The "Behold" suggests surprise on Ezekiel's part; because this temple whilst based upon Solomon's was not an exact replica, just as the regulations for sacrifice are similar but differ from those of the Mosaic law.

Ezekiel 46:22 *In the four corners of the court there were enclosed courts, forty cubits long and thirty broad: these four in the corners were of one measure*- Great detail is given about these kitchens, whereas there is nothing at all about what was within the most holy place. The difference in detail is striking and highlights the emphasis of the vision upon the work which God's restored people were intended to do.

Ezekiel 46:23 *There was a wall around in them, around the four, and boiling places were made under the walls all around*- This "wall" could be no more than a low wall with shelves on appropriate for the kitchen utensils or storage.

Ezekiel 46:24 *Then he said to me, These are the boiling houses, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifices of the people*- The portions of the people's offerings which were to be eaten by the priests were to be boiled in these kitchens.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 47

Ezekiel 47:1 *He brought me back to the door of the house; and see, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward (for the front of the house was toward the east); and the waters came down from under the right side of the house, on the south of the altar*- The holy waters start from the altar- not from the threshold of the house, as Henry Sulley's view requires. His claim that the city will be built 30 miles away from the temple is another example of pure imagination which just doesn't fit the text. This is the situation of Joel 3:18 “a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD”. Joel's kingdom prophecies likewise could have had some fulfilment in the restoration from Babylon. See on Ez. 43:7,9. So far in the temple prophecies, we have been given the impression of a very human situation. Much detail has just been given about the kitchens, regulations limiting the prince from abusing the people and about his children, of priests who sweat and must therefore wear appropriate clothing, of guardhouses with crash barriers to enable the smooth flow of people through the temple etc. Now in Ez. 47 and 48 we have prophecies which are clearly more miraculous in nature. They are alluded to in Revelation and John's Gospel and given a clearly figurative application, and yet the material is clearly based upon a literal depiction of a situation replete with fishermen fishing, a healed Dead Sea etc. I suggest that had Judah been obedient to the vision and repented as required, then these more miraculous things such as a river of living water would also have come about. The description of the course of the new river requires that the temple structure be built to accommodate it, but there is no evidence that Judah even attempted this at the rebuilding under Ezra and Nehemiah. And so again, the great possibilities in the Divine program for the restored exiles didn't come about. But the prophecies were not thereby falsified; in spiritual essence, they will come true at the Lord's return and even in this life, although maybe not in every literal, physical detail.

The enigmatic Jn. 7:38 alludes here: "He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly ("innermost being", NIV) shall flow rivers of living (Gk. spring) water". What "scripture" did the Lord have in mind? Surely Ez. 47:1,9, the prophecy of how in the restored Kingdom, rivers of spring water would come out from Zion and bring life to the world; and perhaps too the references to spring water being used to cleanse men from leprosy and death (Lev. 14:5; 15:13; Num. 19:16). The water originated from the sanctuary; and that most holy place is now the "innermost being" of the believer. The literal possibilities in Ez. 40-48 didn't come about, but the essence of it all, although not the physical detail, will be fulfilled in spiritual terms. Out of the innermost being of the true believer, the spring(ing) water of the Gospel will *naturally* spring up and go out to heal men, both now and more fully in the Kingdom, aided then by the Spirit gifts. The believer, *every* believer, *whoever* believes, will preach the word to others *from his innermost being*, both now and in the Kingdom - without the need for preaching committees or special efforts (not that in themselves I'm decrying them). The tendency is to delegate our responsibilities to these committees. There is no essential difference between faith and works. If we believe, we will do the works of witness, quite spontaneously. And note how the water that sprung out of the Lord’s smitten side is to be compared with the bride that came out of the smitten side of Adam. We, the bride, are the water; thanks to the inspiration of the cross, we go forth in witness, the water of life to this hard land in which we walk.

Ezekiel 47:2 *Then he brought me out by the way of the north gate, and led me round*

by the way outside to the outer gate, to the gate that looks toward the east; and, there ran out waters on the right side- The same words are translated "prepare the way" in Mal. 3:1 and Is. 40:3 (see too Ez. 43:1; 44:1). The way is 'prepared' or 'looks' eastward. This was the way or road over which the glory was to re-enter the restored temple. But Judah didn't rebuild that temple as specified and as Malachi often demonstrates, the priests failed to act as commanded in Ez. 40-48. And so the messenger of the covenant who was to prepare that way likewise failed; but finally the essence of the prophecies will come true through the work of the Elijah prophet and John the Baptist [also a priest] preparing the way of the Lord Jesus, so that His glory and Spirit could enter a spiritual temple of restored people.

Ezekiel 47:3 *When the man went forth eastward with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the ankles*- This man with the measuring line is the same Angel of Zech. 2:1, who was enabling the restoration of Zion at the time of the returned exiles; but they refused to make use of the potential.

Ezekiel 47:4 *Again he measured one thousand, and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the knees. Again he measured one thousand, and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the waist*- As explained on :1, there is a miraculous element in this. A water course does not increase in depth so consistently unless other rivers or sources of water enter into it. But these waters increase in depth in a miraculous way. For this was to be no ordinary water, which always naturally finds a consistent level. The idea is that the water is not water as we know it, but has unique properties.

Ezekiel 47:5 *Afterward he measured one thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass through; for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed through*- "Passed through" is the term used in Is. 33:21 of how no ship or boat would pass through or along the new "broad rivers and streams" in the restored Kingdom. But the returning exiles could miraculously pass through this river with God's miraculous help (s.w. Is. 43:2).

Ezekiel 47:6 *He said to me, Son of man, have you seen this? Then he brought me and caused me to return to the bank of the river*- The question seems to imply that Ezekiel had failed to notice something, and so he had to return to the riverbank.

Ezekiel 47:7 *Now when I had returned, see, on the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other*- Rev. 22:2 quotes this but in a very symbolic context. This will come true at the Lord's return, but in a figurative sense; for Rev. 22 is not at all literal but symbolic. These things could have literally come about at the restoration from Babylon, as God's miraculous response to their obedience. But they didn't, because Judah were not switched on to the huge Divine potential which there was.

Ezekiel 47:8 *Then he said to me, These waters issue forth toward the eastern region, and shall go down into the Salt Sea Arabah; and the waters of the sea shall be healed*- The healing of saltiness, a symbol of bareness, will not be complete in the area (:11). This seems somehow inappropriate to the Kingdom to be established by the Lord Jesus in the future; but it rings true for a scenario at the restoration whereby Judah's

repentant obedience to the plans of Ez. 40-46 would have been rewarded by God making miraculous things happen. The same words are used in 2 Kings 2:21,22 of the healing of salty waters by Elisha. Such things had been done by God's power earlier in human history, and could have been repeated at the restoration.

Ezekiel 47:9 *It shall happen, that every living creature which swarms, in every place where the rivers come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish; for these waters have come there, and the waters of the sea shall be healed, and everything shall live wherever the river comes*- The plural "rivers" may just be an intensive plural referring to 'the great river'. Malachi had likewise foreseen a situation at the restoration where "in every place" Gentiles would have been spiritually healed and turned to Yahweh (Mal. 1:11). "Every living creature which swarms" is the language of creation, as if a new creation was going to come about in that local area. The river of living water, as explained on :1, refers now to the Spirit which is given to us and flows from us. Wherever we go, there should be healing- not just dissension, theological controversy and factionism, but real healing for those who hitherto had not had spiritual life. The great multitude of fish is again alluded to in John's Gospel, where the miracles of catching fish are used as symbolic of how the Lord's people would "catch men" in the Gospel's net. The physical realities didn't come about at the restoration, but the essence of them now comes true in the lives of Spirit filled believers.

Ezekiel 47:10 *It shall happen, that fishermen shall stand by it: from En Gedi even to En Eglaim shall be a place for the spreading of nets; their fish shall be after their species, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many*- The two locations mentioned are at the north and south of the Dead Sea. The "fish... after their species" could mean 'every kind of species of fish'. And again we have a connection to the miraculous haul of 153 fishes. As explained on Jn. 21:11, this was the number of species of fish which were then thought to exist. Every species of fish was caught in the net, with the incident clearly speaking of the universal appeal of the Gospel, saving some from all nations. The stress upon "exceeding many", also in :9, connects with the huge number of the seed of Abraham, the converts to the Gospel.

Ezekiel 47:11 *But its muddy places and its marshes shall not be healed; they shall be given over to salt*- This rings somewhat strangely if we insist this prophecy must have a fulfilment in the Kingdom of God on earth. See on :8. The idea is that not all would respond, even if the water of life came to them. For the marshes and muddy places were clearly reached by the water flowing from the temple.

Ezekiel 47:12 *By the river on its banks, on this side and on that side, shall grow every tree for food whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall its fruit fail: it shall bear new fruit every month, because its waters issue out of the sanctuary; and its fruit shall be for food, and its leaf for healing*- Rev. 22:2 interprets this in a clearly symbolic way with reference to the situation which will come about at the return of the Lord Jesus to Zion. Perhaps the trees with leaves that don't wither are to be seen as representative of the righteous (Prov. 11:30; Ps. 1:3). Those who respond to the water of life will grow thereby to provide the fruit of the tree of life to others. And that is true in this life too, as Prov. 11:30; Ps. 1:3 make clear.

The reference may be to the amazing fertility around Jerusalem that could have come if the exiles had focused upon rebuilding the temple, rather than upon their own farmlands. See on Hag. 1:9.

Ezekiel 47:13 *Thus says the Lord Yahweh: This shall be the border, by which you shall divide the land for inheritance according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions*- The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to "inherit" the land; yet the same word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing Israel to "inherit" the land again after their return from "the north country" (Zech. 2:12; 8:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the "north country", then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized "throne of the Lord" (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn't even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

Ezekiel 47:14 *You shall inherit it, one as well as another; for I swore to give it to your fathers: and this land shall fall to you for inheritance*- This is the language of the tribal lots distributed under Joshua when the people first entered the land from the wilderness journey. It all has deep appropriacy to the giving of the land to the exiles now returning from Babylon, also involving a desert journey. All Judah were to inherit the land, "one as well as another"; whereas in reality at the restoration, Neh. 5 records how some grabbed the land of others. If the land was for an inheritance there could be the implication that those who were given it would die and then pass it on as an inheritance- again, appropriate to a restored kingdom at the time of the restoration, but not to the day of the eternal Kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 47:15 *This shall be the border of the land: On the north side, from the great sea, by the road to Hethlon, to the entrance of Zedad*- Num. 34 and Josh. 15 had defined the land in the order south, west, north, and east. But there the order is north, east, south, west. Perhaps this was because in Joshua's time Israel came from the south into the land; whereas now they were to return from the land of the north. We marvel at God's sensitivity to our contexts and situations on earth. See on :17.

Ezekiel 47:16 *Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer Hatticon, which is by the border of Hauran*- The whole style of Ez. 40-48 would appear to be relevant to Ezekiel's own time- note how the borders of the land are described as "Sibraim, which *is* between the border of Damascus… on the north northward *is* the border of Hamath" (:17). These geographical notes only made sense in Ezekiel's time.

Ezekiel 47:17 *The border from the sea, shall be from the sea to Hazar Enon at the border of Damascus; and on the north northward is the border of Hamath. This is the north side*- There appears to be a double reference to the northern border; as explained on :15, perhaps this was because in Joshua's time Israel came from the south into the

land; whereas now they were to return from the land of the north. We marvel at God's sensitivity to our contexts and situations on earth.

Ezekiel 47:18 *The east side, between Hauran and Damascus and Gilead, and the land of Israel, shall be the Jordan; from the north border to the east sea you shall measure. This is the east side*- The Jordan river was to be the eastern border. Yet the territory promised to Abraham extended to the Euphrates. God was making concessions to their weakness by giving them at this stage a more limited area. But the territory in Gilead east of the Jordan river was also envisaged as being possible for their possession (Mic. 7:14; Zech. 10:10). These varying definitions of the promised land are of themselves evidence that God's purpose with His people is elastic. We can be sure that at the return of the Lord Jesus, the full territory promised to Abraham will be given to Israel, right up to the Euphrates; for God's promise to Abraham shall surely be fulfilled. So this scenario here in Ez. 47 is not that of the future Kingdom after Christ's return.

Ezekiel 47:19 *The south side southward shall be from Tamar as far as the waters of Meriboth Kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, to the great sea. This is the south side southward*- Tamar was apparently at the southern end of the Dead Sea. There would therefore be a diagonal line drawn from there to the "brook of Egypt". As noted on :18, this was a new definition of the promised land. It was intended for the time of the restoration, as in the full Messianic Kingdom, the entire territory promised to Abraham will be inherited.

Ezekiel 47:20 *The west side shall be the great sea, from the south border as far as over against the entrance of Hamath. This is the west side*- This is the Hamath of :17. This coastal area included the territory possessed by the Philistines which had always been problematic for Israel. It would've all seemed too incredible for the exiles to believe; that powerful local peoples and the empire of Babylon and Persia would not get in the way of these promises being fulfilled. We too can look at present realities and baulk at the possibility of them all being swept away in order to fulfil the promises within the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Israel who returned instead focused on establishing their own farmsteads, getting a reasonable harvest, getting along with the local tribes, and a religion of external obedience, rather than seeing the huge possibilities open to them. We too face this same temptation.

Ezekiel 47:21 *So you shall divide this land to you according to the tribes of Israel*- Which were twelve tribes according to Ez. 48. The prophecies of the restoration envisaged both the ten tribes and Judah returning together. But most of them preferred to remain in the lands of their captivity.

Ezekiel 47:22 *It shall happen, that you shall divide it by lot for an inheritance to you and to the aliens who live among you, who shall father children among you; and they shall be to you as the native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel*- This would have been very hard for the exiles to accept. Ezra and Nehemiah document all the conflicts with the local people who "live among you". To give them a place in the new system would run counter to the core of Judah's self perception. The idea of course was that these "aliens" would convert to the God of Israel and become joined to natural Israel as His covenant people. But instead the Jews despised them, later terming them 'Samaritans',

refusing to accept them; and initially intermarrying with them and accepting their gods.

Ezekiel 47:23 *It shall happen, that in what tribe the foreigner lives, there you shall give him his inheritance, says the Lord Yahweh*- The commandments about giving the Gentiles inheritance amongst the tribal cantons are understandable in the light of the fact that the Samaritans were living in the land at the time of the restoration. Even within Ezekiel, as well as in Malachi, Israel are criticized for oppressing the stranger / Gentile who lived with them (Ez. 22:7,29); and now they are told that in the new temple system, the stranger must be generously given an inheritance in the land, he must be counted as actually belonging to one of the tribes. But the subsequent history of the returned exiles reveals their development of a xenophobic attitude to Gentiles.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER 48

Ezekiel 48:1 *Now these are the names of the tribes: From the north end, beside the way of Hethlon to the entrance of Hamath, Hazar Enan at the border of Damascus, northward beside Hamath, (and they shall have their sides east and west)*- The initial audience would have balked at the mention of Damascus. It would've seemed impossible to establish a new kingdom bordering on such a powerful city. These descriptions of the borders of the land and the inheritances were therefore a huge challenge to faith, just as the message of a future Kingdom is to us today, surrounded by the seemingly permanent and powerful structures of this world.

Ezekiel 48:2 *By the border of Dan, from the east side to the west side, Asher, one portion*- By the time of Revelation, the tribe of Dan isn't mentioned in Rev. 7:5-8. But this was not the case at the time of the restoration. This is another reason to understand the entire potential scenario here as relevant to the restoration but not to the return of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 48:3 *By the border of Asher, from the east side even to the west side, Naphtali, one portion*- The tribal allotments are all equal in size, and the borders as it were imagined as straight lines. But this would have been unworkable in practice due to issues of topography; greater definition was needed to enable this to be practically done. The implication is that had Israel repentantly returned and responded to the plans of Ez. 40-46, then more detail would have been given. This is exactly as stated in Ez. 43:11.

Ezekiel 48:4 *By the border of Naphtali, from the east side to the west side, Manasseh, one portion*- The inheritance of Manasseh east of the Jordan is now ignored, and in order to be given parallel swathes of territory, this would meant Naphtali giving some of its former territory to Manasseh.

Ezekiel 48:5 *By the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west side, Ephraim, one portion*- Ephraim as the largest tribe of the ten tribes is still given the same inheritance size. It could be that with the loss of the genealogical records at the destruction of the temple, the captives were not strongly aware of what tribe they came from. And so effectively a new Israel was being declared.

Ezekiel 48:6 *By the border of Ephraim, from the east side even to the west side,*

Reuben, one portion- The inheritance of Reuben east of the Jordan is now ignored; perhaps because effectively their separation there from the rest of Israel had not been to their spiritual good.

Ezekiel 48:7 *By the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west side, Judah, one portion*- The exiles of Judah returning from Babylon would have expected a larger portion, but this was not to be. A new Israel was envisaged here. This division of the land between the tribes was designed to take away any sense of parochialism and superiority based upon previous history.

Ezekiel 48:8 *By the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the district which you shall set apart, twenty-five thousand cubits in breadth, and in length as one of the portions, from the east side to the west side: and the sanctuary shall be in its midst*- If the sanctuary was to be strictly in the midst of a swathe of land running from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, then this position would not coincide with mount Zion. Perhaps this was intentional- to as it were relocate Zion, perhaps due to topographical changes God would have brought about. But "in its midst" need not be so literally interpretted. The Hebrew can as well be translated "within it".

Ezekiel 48:9 *The district that you shall offer to Yahweh shall be twenty-five thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth*- The holy district had to be consciously 'offered' to God by the tribes. This suggests that the scenario in this chapter is more command than prescription of what God would force to come about. Ez. 45:1 seems to envisage a ceremony at which the returned exiles formally divided up the land according to these borders and also offered the district to the Lord. But they never did this.

Ezekiel 48:10 *This holy district shall be for the priests: toward the north twenty-five thousand in length, and toward the west ten thousand in breadth, and toward the east ten thousand in breadth, and toward the south twenty-five thousand in length*- This area was to be consciously given to the priests; see on :9. Hence LXX "Out of this shall be the first-fruits of the holy things to the priests".

And the sanctuary of Yahweh shall be in its midst- See on :8.

Ezekiel 48:11 *It shall be for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My instruction, who didn't go astray when the children of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray*- But there is no record of the sons of Zadok keeping separate from the apostasy of the Levites in the time before the exile. We can conclude that they did have some faith, and this was counted to them for righteousness; hence "Zadok" means 'righteousness'. The sons of Zadok would sanctify others to work as priests, presumably because at the time of the restoration they were so few. Ezra struggled hard to get any Levites to return with him. And there is no evidence that the sons of Zadok ever did this at the restoration.

Ezekiel 48:12 *It shall be to them an offering from the offering of the land, a thing most holy, by the border of the Levites*- GNB "So they are to have a special area next to the area belonging to the Levites, and it will be the holiest of all". Again we see the intentional usage of the language of "the holiest of all" used about areas other than the most holy place. The impression given is that holiness will abound, and not be

confined to a tiny area of 9 square meters; Zech. 14:20 likewise speaks of holiness abounding in the restored temple system. As noted on :9, this area was to be consciously given to the sons of Zadok; hence LXX "And the first-fruits shall be given to them out of the first-fruits of the land, even a most holy portion from the borders of the Levites". But this simply wasn't done at the restoration.

Ezekiel 48:13 *Opposite the border of the priests, the Levites shall have an area twenty-five thousand cubits in length, and ten thousand in breadth: the entire length shall be twenty-five thousand, and the breadth ten thousand*- The division between sons of Zadok, priests sanctified by the sons of Zadok and Levites all seems to contradict the idea that the faithful are and will eternally be 'king-priests' (see on Rev. 5:10). We conclude therefore that this situation describes what could have happened at the restoration, and not in the future Kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Ezekiel 48:14 *They shall sell none of it, nor exchange it, nor shall the first fruits of the land be separated; for it is holy to Yahweh*- The situation envisaged is where sale and exchange of land is possible, although the Levites must not do so; which hardly sounds appropriate to the Lord's future Kingdom on earth. The original text is unclear regarding the "first fruits". The GNB offers: "none of it may be sold or exchanged or transferred to anyone else". The Levites were to be provided for, but did not own anything of themselves. And we in this age are to live in the spirit of priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5).

Ezekiel 48:15 *The five thousand that are left in the breadth, in front of the twenty-five thousand, shall be for common use, for the city, for dwellings and for suburbs*- Ezekiel had earlier explained that Judah went into captivity because the priests made no difference between the holy and the "common" (Ez. 22:26 s.w.). The restored system was to correct that and maintain the separation. But Malachi makes clear that they did not do so.

And the city shall be in its midst- See on :8. There could be here the implication that the exiles had a choice as to where to build the city. Perhaps a new Zion was in view.

Ezekiel 48:16 *These shall be its measures: the north side four thousand five hundred, and the south side four thousand five hundred, and on the east side four thousand five hundred, and the west side four thousand five hundred*- The style here is alluded to in the description of the four square city of God in which there is no temple in Rev. 21:13. The idea seems to be that the essence of these prophecies will come true in a spiritual and eternal sense, but without the literal temple system (Rev. 21:22).

Ezekiel 48:17 *The city shall have suburbs: toward the north two hundred and fifty, and toward the south two hundred and fifty, and toward the east two hundred and fifty, and toward the west two hundred and fifty*- Whilst the Levites and sons of Zadok lived in the area around the sanctuary, it seems there were to be no other tribes living there. Judah, in whose territory Jerusalem previously stood, had a separate swathe of territory as an inheritance. To as it were lose Jerusalem would have been unattractive to the people of Judah who were in captivity hearing these words for the first time. See on :18.

Ezekiel 48:18 *The remainder in the length, alongside the holy district, shall be ten*

thousand eastward, and ten thousand westward; and it shall be adjacent to the holy district; and its increase shall be for food to those who labour in the city- Revelation alludes to these prophecies, and effectively speaks of "the city" as being "the temple" (Rev. 3:12; 21 cp. Is. 66:6). "Them that serve the city" could refer to the Levites, who were "to serve the tabernacle" (Num. 4:24, 26; 18:6), which was now the temple / city. But the restored exiles considered that it was vain to serve God (Mal. 3:14,18), and so this just didn't come about at the restoration.

Ezekiel 48:19 *Those who labour in the city, out of all the tribes of Israel, shall cultivate it*- I suggested on :17,18 that nobody actually lives in the city; all the tribes have their inheritances elsewhere. The servants of the city may be the Levites. In this case we are to imagine them as under the Mosaic system, scattered throughout the tribes of Israel teaching there, and coming up by groups to work at the temple. One of their jobs will be to grow food for those working in the temple.

Ezekiel 48:20 *The entire district shall be twenty-five thousand by twenty-five thousand: you shall offer the holy district foursquare, with the possession of the city*- Again we note that the returned exiles were to consciously offer this area to God (Ez. 45:1); see on :9.

Ezekiel 48:21 *The residue shall be for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy offering and of the possession of the city; in front of the twenty-five thousand of the offering toward the east border, and westward in front of the twenty-five thousand toward the west border, answerable to the portions, it shall be for the prince: and the holy offering and the sanctuary of the house shall be in its midst*- Had Judah repented at the time of the restoration, a Davidic ruler would have been raised up, Zerubbabel is the most obvious candidate (see on Zech. 6). He would have reigned "for ever", for an age. But he dropped the baton, or at least Judah were unwilling for this scenario. And so the prophecies were reinterpreted and rescheduled for total and eternal fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. "The prince" of the envisaged restored temple in Ez. 40-48 refers to this same individual. See on Ez. 37:25.

Ezekiel 48:22 *Moreover from the possession of the Levites, and from the possession of the city, being in the midst of that which is the prince's, between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin, it shall be for the prince*- This is the territory which Ez. 46:18 says could be passed on by the prince to his sons for a lasting inheritance. But there is no legislation about how his sons could pass it on; over time, the area would have become endlessly subdivided between the prince's descendants. This is one of the many practical issues which arise in studying these records, just as the division of the land into horizontal swathes along straight lines requires more definition in order to be practically done. As noted on Ez. 43:11, had the returned exiles been obedient, then more details would have been given.

Ezekiel 48:23 *As for the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west side, Benjamin, one portion*- Dt. 33:12 had stated that Benjamin would dwell close to Yahweh, and his portion is directly next to the sanctuary area. Jerusalem was originally situated on the border between Benjamin and Judah, although Judah took over Benjamin's territory at that point and effectively Jerusalem was considered as within Judah. But now, the tribal allotments were such that Jerusalem clearly

belonged to neither of them. Such petty squabbles were to be forgotten in the restored kingdom.

Ezekiel 48:24 *By the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west side, Simeon, one portion*- Simeon's original territory was surrounded by Judah; now they were to be as it were given territory which was once Judah's, and Judah was given an inheritance to the north of where they had previously inherited. This would have been hard to accept for the men of Judah to whom Ezekiel was preaching. But all sense of pride and clinging on to the once significant things of this life is to be subsumed in the realities of the restored Kingdom. And we can learn a lesson from that.

Ezekiel 48:25 *By the border of Simeon, from the east side to the west side, Issachar, one portion*- Issachar had previously inherited to the far north of the land. Now they were in the far south. All we once held so dear is to be completely inverted in the inheritance prepared for us in God's Kingdom.

Ezekiel 48:26 *By the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west side, Zebulun, one portion*- Likewise Zebulun had previously inherited to the far north of the land. Now they were in the far south. Those who simply wanted to return to what they had once known were to be disappointed. See on :27.

Ezekiel 48:27 *By the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west side, Gad, one portion*- This area would have been desert, as was the area promised to Issachar. To achieve an equality and fairness in the distribution of territory, there must be the implication that the climate and even topography would be changed. The restoration prophesies are full of promises of abundant harvests and blessing upon the physical land. But unless they were believed, Zebulun would have considered that this was not a good deal, and that the good news of this new kingdom held nothing much for them. And so it is with us. The promise of the Kingdom is only meaningful and good news for us if we have the faith to believe that things shall radically change on this earth, and the promised Kingdom will not simply be a return to how we have known secular life in this world; the old and familiar, like the previous inheritance and homesteads of Gad before the exile, will not be returned to us. Something far better is in store.

Ezekiel 48:28 *By the border of Gad, at the south side southward, the border shall be even from Tamar to the waters of Meribath Kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, to the great sea*- Tamar was apparently at the southern end of the Dead Sea. There would therefore be a diagonal line drawn from there to the "brook of Egypt". As noted on Ez. 47:18, this was a new definition of the promised land. It was intended for the time of the restoration, as in the full Messianic Kingdom, the entire territory promised to Abraham will be inherited.

Ezekiel 48:29 *This is the land which you shall divide by lot to the tribes of Israel for inheritance, and these are their individual portions, says the Lord Yahweh*- It was Ezekiel, as he sat with the exiles in Babylon, who was to divide the land by lot unto the various tribes. The tragedy of all the details recorded in Ezekiel 40-48, and the very reason for their being preserved to this day, is to show us to what great extent God has prepared potential things for His people, and yet they can be totally wasted if we don't respond. In fact according to Mic. 4:10, it was God's purpose to exile His people to Babylon, "and there shalt thou be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem

thee from the hand of thine enemies". And yet they preferred to side with their enemies and to prefer non-deliverance from Babylon. The tragedy of it all is almost unthinkable, and yet this is what we do if day by day we chose the things of this world against the deliverance from this world which there is in Christ.

Ezekiel 48:30 *These are the exits of the city: On the north side four thousand five hundred reeds by measure*- "Exits" is literally 'goings out', the word used of Israel's going out from captivity in Egypt and Babylon. The association is in the fact that if they had truly gone out from Babylon, spiritually as well as literally, then this wonderful city would have been built.

Ezekiel 48:31 *And the gates of the city shall be after the names of the tribes of Israel, three gates northward: the gate of Reuben, one; the gate of Judah, one; the gate of Levi, one*- Nehemiah did his very best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. See on Ez. 40:10. He arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31-34 had commanded there to be. The twelve gates with the names of the tribes of Israel are spoken of in Rev. 21:12; but the language there is completely figurative. Seeing Judah had not built the city commanded in Ezekiel, it would as it were descend ready made from Heaven. But this is all figurative language. Seeing the literal fulfilment had been precluded by Judah's disobedience, God would fulfil the essence of it in spiritual terms.

Ezekiel 48:32 *At the east side four thousand five hundred reeds, and three gates: even the gate of Joseph, one; the gate of Benjamin, one; the gate of Dan, one*- Ez. 48:31-34 envisaged the 12 gates of Jerusalem being named after the 12 tribes of Israel. But it seems no accident that twelve separate gates of the city are mentioned in the restoration record- but they weren't renamed after the tribes of Israel. But the names of the city gates in Nehemiah were: valley (Neh. 3:13); horse (Neh. 3:28); east (Neh. 3:29); Miphkad (Neh. 3:31); water (Neh. 8:16); dung (Neh. 12:31); fountain (Neh. 12:37); Ephraim, old, fish, sheep and prison gates (Neh. 12:39). No wonder some wept when the rebuilt temple was finally dedicated- the pattern of Ezekiel's vision hadn't been followed, even on such basic matters as the names of the twelve gates of Jerusalem. The prophetic intention was that both the ten tribes and the two tribes would be restored. Hence the intended naming of the gates after all twelve tribes. But the ten tribes didn't return, and those of Judah and Benjamin who did still felt superior to the ten tribes, and didn't want the gates of their city named after them. And so petty factionism yet again precluded God's people from achieving their potential.

Ezekiel 48:33 *At the south side four thousand five hundred reeds by measure, and three gates: the gate of Simeon, one; the gate of Issachar, one; the gate of Zebulun, one*- The division of the tribes into four groups of three in a square formation recalls the cherubim visions of Ez. 1. The cherubim speak of the action of God on behalf of His people, and those who wished to could identify themselves with that work. The cherubim could have returned to Jerusalem and been manifested in the twelve tribes of a restored Israel. But this was precluded at the time by their disobedience and simple disinterest.

Ezekiel 48:34 *At the west side four thousand five hundred reeds, with their three*

gates: the gate of Gad, one; the gate of Asher, one; the gate of Naphtali, one- There is no reason to think [*contra* Henry Sulley in *The Temple of Ezekiel's Prophecy*] that there will be eleven gates on the West side. This is merely the fantasy of an architect.

Ezekiel 48:35 *It shall be eighteen thousand reeds around: and the name of the city from that day shall be, Yahweh is there*- Jerusalem was to be renamed "Yahweh is our righteousness" (Jer. 33:16 RV)- Ez. 48:35 likewise is a command rather than a prediction, that the city should be called "Yahweh is there". The cherubim of glory would have returned; but as Zechariah makes clear, Judah had to return to God, not just physically returning to Judah and making the motions of worship, but in repentance. The idea that Jerusalem will become the city where "the Lord is there" must be connected with Ezekiel's early use of the phrase to describe how the Lord "was there" in the land of Israel before the Babylonian invasion (Ez. 35:10); all these details could have come true in Ezekiel's time; but they did not. When they do so in the last days, the glory will visibly enter by the east gate in the person of the Lord Jesus. Using the prophetic perfect, God had prophesied that at the time of the restoration, He would come and dwell in rebuilt Zion (Zech. 8:3)- just as Ezekiel's prophecy had concluded: "The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there" (Ez. 48:35). Clearly, Ezekiel's prophecies could have been fulfilled at the restoration; God was willing that they should be. But human apathy and self-interest stopped it from happening as it could have done.

They should have been more committed to building the temple "that I may appear in my glory" (Hag. 1:8 RSV). The glory of Yahweh as described at the end of Ezekiel could have appeared in Haggai's time- but this wonderful possibility was held back by Israel's petty minded, self-satisficing laziness.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: DANIEL

DANIEL

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become

obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

DANIEL CHAPTER 1

Dan 1:1 *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Jerusalem, and besieged it*- This means that Daniel would have been within the very first wave of captives taken into Babylon; he would have experienced the arrival of others over the next few years, all telling an increasingly bad story of the situation in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar was not at this point "king", he was regent, although *melech* could apply to any such leader as he was at the time. This explains the possible chronological problem in Dan. 2.

Dan 1:2 *The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God-*

God would give *the land and people of Judah / Israel* "into the hand of" the king of Babylon (Ezra 5:12; Ps. 106:41; Jer. 20:4,5; 22:25; 32:3,28; 34:2,20,21; 44:30; Ez. 16:39; 39:23). Within the book of Daniel the point has been made; for the book opens with the statement that the king of Judah has been 'given into the hand of' the king of Babylon (Dan. 1:2). The entities described in Dan. 2 are therefore mentioned from the perspective of their reigning over the land and people of Yahweh.

Nebuchadnezzar put Yahweh's temple vessels in the house of his god as a sign that he considered that his god had vanquished Judah's. But in fact it was Judah's God who had given His people and temple into the hand of the Babylonians. He is all powerful. Daniel thus opens with what will become a major theme: That those who consider themselves, and are considered, the mighty and powerful in this world… are in fact not so, but are raised up and used by the one true God of Israel. But as God "gave" Jehoiakim into the

hand of his enemies, so God would "give" [s.w.] Daniel grace in the eyes of his captor (:9) and "gave" wisdom to the group of young Jews (:17). Yahweh was and is pulling all the strings in personal and international politics. This is to be a theme in Daniel; that all such apparent disasters have God in control of them. The remainder of the vessels were taken in later waves of the invasion (2 Kings 24:13; 2 Chron. 36:18), confirming that Daniel was taken amongst the very first wave of captives (:1). Babylon's original plan seemed to have been to make Judah a tributary state, taking away the leadership and seeking to make the youngsters like Daniel completely Babylonian, with a view to them returning and governing Judah. Hence only part of the vessels were initially taken. But this changed to a policy of complete destruction.

And he carried them into the land of Shinar to the house of his god: and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god- The captives were paralleled with the temple treasures; they were taken into the temple as evidence that Yahweh and His people had now been apparently dominated. But Isaiah had prophesied that Bel would be rendered helpless and judged (Is. 46:1,2). The faithful captives would have remembered that, even when it seemed their chips were down.

The mention of "Shinar" surely points us back to the tower of Babel / Babylon, and its inevitable fall. The "them" who were brought to the temple differs from the vessels brought into the treasury. GNB clarifies: "He took some prisoners back with him to the temple of his gods in Babylon, and put the captured treasures in the temple storerooms". The exiles were brought into the temple of Bel, and the changes of names were therefore conscious statements about the supposed vanquishing of Yahweh, as the Babylonians saw it. The exiles were made to bow before the gods of Babylon at this point, for this was typical behaviour of the victors. They saw victory as a case of their gods having defeated those of their enemies. There is no note to the effect that Daniel and his friends objected. The Babylonian Chronicle reports how after such victories, "everyone must swear a loyalty oath to [the king] by bowing down and paying homage to his gods. He commanded that everyone [of the vanquished] had to worship them". We can safely assume this was done by Daniel and his friends; and we are left to infer their later spiritual growth.

Dan 1:3 *The king spoke to Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring in some of the Israelites, those of the seed royal and of the nobles*- This fulfilled the prophecy to Hezekiah: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (2 Kings 20:17,18). This would mean that Daniel and his friends may well have been castrated. There is no mention of Daniel ever getting married or having

children. So we are to imagine these young men looking forward to a rather bleak life; and they instead put their energy into devotion to their God and separation from the evil empire which has seeking to psychologically dominate them. So whilst Daniel's devotion to Yahweh is to his credit, it is also psychologically understandable given this background. If Daniel and his friends were "of the seed royal", they would not have been 'well brought up' in spiritual things. They would have seen the tragedy which occurred because attention had not been paid by their families to God's word; and they were determined to do better. Josephus claims Daniel was in fact a son of Zedekiah.

Dan 1:4 *Youths in whom was no blemish*- Both Xenophon and Plato record that the three year program began at age 14. Nebuchadnezzar presents as an anti-God figure, demanding the best for his service rather than God's. For "without blemish" is the language of the sacrifices (Lev. 22:19-21) and priests (Lev. 21:16-24). These young men were to be trained up in the culture and religion of Babylon. There is a specifically spiritual aspect to the intention to educate them, so that the princes of Judah become princes of Babylon, with loyalty wholly to Babylon and her gods, and not Judah and Yahweh. There was therefore heavy pressure on these young men, with the intention of effectively brainwashing them into a totally different worldview, so that Judah would have no princes loyal to her any more.

But handsome, well educated, knowledgeable- They were to be "wise", that is, made wise, in the wisdom of Babylon. "The wise" in Daniel however are those who reject this and are wise in Yahweh's ways (Dan. 11:33,35; 12:3,10).

Understanding science, and such as had the ability to stand in the king's palace; that he should teach them the learning and the language of the Chaldeans- There is an intended echo here of Moses' experience in Egypt; situations repeat within and between the lives of God's people, that we might learn from Biblical history and from the experiences of our brethren contemporary with us. Daniel and his friends surely saw and were inspired by the similarities with Moses. They would later see the similarities with Joseph.

The learning and speech refers to the alphabet and language of the Babylonians. Akkadian was the language of Babylon and it had an alphabet of nearly 700 symbols. It was a complete change of culture for these young people. The stress on the alphabet may also be because the books of magic were written in a unique form of Cuneiform script, and they were to study these books, or clay tablets as they were in reality. "The Chaldeans" in this context refers to a specific type of magician, rather than an ethnic group. Their "tongue" or alphabet and language refers to the thousands of clay magic tablets written in a specific style of Cuneiform. These tablets contained total nonsense about the gods influencing man, demons, omens, potions, curses and how o avoid

them. These things were the very opposite of the monotheism of Yahweh worship, and the visions of Daniel deeply and fundamentally deconstruct them. But God gave Daniel understanding and excellence in his studies of these things. On the other hand, Jeremiah had taught Daniel's generation: "Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jer. 10:2). Yet God gave Daniel success in learning that "way", although also teaching Daniel that God's "way" and wisdom was infinitely higher than that of the heathen. And insisting that Daniel had to stand up and be counted for Yahweh's wisdom over that of the world. We marvel at the complex weaving God makes in human lives.

Dan 1:5 *The king appointed for them a daily portion of the king's dainties, and of the wine which he drank, and that they should be trained for three years; that at its end they should stand before the king-*

It was a compliment to send anyone a portion of food from the table of a king or great man (Gen. 43:34; 2 Sam. 11:8; 2 Kings 25:30). We can feel the same at the breaking of bread. Daniel's objection was not because the food was unclean- that is specifically not mentioned. And whether it had been offered to idols or not was not of itself defiling, as we will discuss later. His conscience was apparently impacted by the idea of eating a "portion" from the king, as if it were an act of fellowship with him which he objected to. The word "portion" is repeatedly used here (Dan. 1:5,8,13,15,16). The root word is used in the phrase "piece [portion] of bread" in Gen. 18:5; Jud. 19:5; 1 Sam. 2:36; 28:22; 1 Kings 17:11; Prov. 28:21), almost sounding like our 'breaking of bread' communion service. Here in Dan. 1, the "portion" of food / bread occurs three times together with reference to 'the wine of his drink' (Dan. 1:5,8,16). It all sounds an allusion to some religious fellowship, presumably vicariously partaking in an idol feast. And that is exactly what Paul teaches is wrong. We are not to have fellowship with idols in this way. We note that the king of the South in Dan. 11:26 is destroyed by those he assumed were loyal to him because they ate his portions: "they who eat of his dainties shall destroy him". We note that later, Daniel did eat meat and wine (Dan. 10:3). His refusal of this meat and wine was therefore not due to any issue with the meat and wine of itself, but with what it represented in this context.

We note the allusion to the manna, "a daily portion so that I may test them" (Ex. 16:4). The daily "portion" of the king's meat was rejected by Daniel in favour of "seeds", which he set up as a "test". We recall the manna was like coriander seed (Ex. 16:31). Perhaps Daniel perceived this; because he perceived that Babylon with all its grandeur was but the desert, part of his wilderness journey, out of the Egypt of Babylon back to the promised land. And we think of how the purpose of the manna was to humble Israel and make them realize that man lives by every word of God (Dt. 8:3), and Daniel was a man devoted to that word. He saw the truth of Dt. 8:16: "He fed you with manna in the

wilderness, unknown to your fathers, in order to humble you, and in order to test you to bring about good for you in the end".

"Delicacies" is literally an offering. This is a classic case of meat offered to idols. And yet Paul argues that since an idol has no real existence, he who rejects idolatry can freely eat such food. He only must pay attention to not making others stumble. Daniel however displays a finely tuned conscience, over and above what the law required. For there was no Mosaic precept forbidding eating such meat, if it was not done as a conscious form of personal idol worship.

To "stand before the king" doesn't mean they would just come before him. It is a technical term referring to his senior attendants, (Dt. 1:38; 1 Kings 10:8; 12:8). The Persians and Babylonians typically trained such candidates intensely for three years from the age of 14. We can assume that this was the age of Daniel and his friends when they first made their stand for principle. Food and wine had religious significance. They were being made to participate in the king's idolatry. For his table was seen as the table of the gods he worshipped. Right at the start of the book, we are introduced to the idea of a daily sacrifice- this pagan one mimicked the true daily sacrifice of the temple.

Dan 1:6 *Now among these were, of the Judeans, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah*- All these names had the name of God in them, either as *el* or *Yah*. They were perhaps from amongst the minority influenced by Jeremiah's attempted reformation on the eve of the Babylonian victory against Jerusalem. Or perhaps these were names they gave themselves, for Semitic peoples often are given or give themselves names appropriate to their belief system or life experience. "Daniel" is 'God is judge', the idea being that although Babylon had judged Jerusalem, God was the ultimate judge who had merely used Babylon; and Babylon would be judged too. "Hananiah" is "Whom Yah has favoured", and this word is used of how God would "favour" Judah with restoration (Ps. 123:2,3; Is. 30:19; 33:2; Mal. 1:9). "Mishael" is from the two words *misha* ['who is like'] and *el*, 'God'. These same two words are used in the classic restoration prophecy of Is. 40:18 and Mic. 7:18, the idea being 'Who is like the God who restores Judah'. 'Who is like God!' was the commentary upon God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 15:11). "Azariah", 'help of Yah', is likewise a term associated with God's promise to "help" Judah in restoring them (s.w. Is. 41:13,14; 44:2; 49:8; 50:7,9). So I suggest these young men chose their names in hope, in faith and in defiance of where they were being taken.

Jewish tradition claims that he was of the royal family, and was descended from Hezekiah. In this case we would have the fulfilment of Is. 39:7: “Of your sons which shall issue from you… shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon". Daniel was a young man who had been castrated and had lost all his hopes of a life and career in his homeland. It speaks volumes that he retained his faith

in Yahweh and was so sensitive in conscience for Him. As we learn from Ezekiel, so many of the exiles were bitter with God and felt they were unjustly suffering for the sins of their fathers.

Dan 1:7 *The prince of the eunuchs gave names to them: to Daniel he gave the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego-*

"Gave names to" is literally 'determined', and the same word occurs in :8 where Daniel equally 'determined' in his mind not to be defiled by Babylon. The determination of the world, the evil empire, is matched by his determination not to let them defeat him. And he won. Just as we are in a similar spiritual battle of determination.

As noted on :6, the names of these young men all spoke of their faith and hope in the restoration of the Kingdom, and they may have chosen them in defiance of where they were being taken and the unashamed program of brainwashing they were now subject to. The names they were given were an intentional subversion of Yahweh worship. "Belteshazar" is "Keeper of the hid treasures of Bel". The treasures of Yahweh's temple had been transported to the temple of Bel in Babylon, and Daniel was likewise transported.

The intention in each case was the obliterating of the name of God: Daniel, ‘God is my judge’; Hananiah, ‘Yah is gracious’; Mishael, ‘Who is what God is?’; Azariah, ‘Yah has helped'.

Belteshazzar was the name of the personal God of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:8 "Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god"). Apparently Daniel was singled out to have the most Babylonian name, "the wisdom of Bel". The king found Daniel full of wisdom (:20), so we can take that as referring to his name, the wisdom of Bel. The implication is that Daniel trotted out the wisdom of Bel just as a Christian might trot out answers in a science exam that he doesn't personally agree with. Indeed he was called later "Master of the magicians". Yet he knew that the wisdom of Babylon had perverted her and would be the cause of her downfall (Is. 47:10 "Your wisdom and your knowledge has perverted you"). The magic arts of the Babylonians are specifically condemned in Is. 47:9,11-13. And yet Daniel excelled in them and it seems was given fluency in them by Yahweh. There was a fine line between believing the information studied, and seeing it merely as false information to be regurgitated on demand. So it is with we who are to use this world but not abuse it. We note therefore his bravery in repeatedly stating that wisdom belongs to Yahweh (Dan. 2:20,21,23,30) and he himself had no true wisdom. Matters of conscience are a major theme in Daniel. Although he bowed to Bel initially, and could well expound Babylonian

magic, he was led by God to positions where he had to nail his personal colours to the mast. We are all led over time to come out publicly for our faith.

"Shadrach" is "Filled with the spirit of the sun god". Hananiah was amongst those to be trained as Babylonian astrologers, and according to the Babylonian understanding, to do his job he would have to live up to his name, and be "Filled with the spirit of the sun god".

Mishael was tweaked to Meshach, alluding to Misha-Aku, 'Who is what Aku is?'. The first syllable was retained, but *el* was replaced with Shak, the goddess of Babylon, also called Sheshach (Jer. 25:26; 51:41), which also means Venus, the goddess of love and mirth. But that goddess and the attempt to make Mishael into Meshach was subverted by the fact that it was during her feast that Cyrus took Babylon. Or we could see a similarity with Akkadian mesaku, "I am of little account". In this case we see how the evil empire was doing down the people of God, just as the world does to us. Likewise "Shadrach" may be the Akkadian Sliduraku, "I am very fearful". We too can be dumbed down by society to consider ourselves of little account and fearful. But we are to see ourselves as God sees us, just as Daniel and the friends clearly retained their Hebrew names.

Azariah became "Abednego", "servant of Nebo", the god of wisdom, or "servant of the fire god". This was subverted wonderfully when Azariah was put in the fiery furnace, sacrificed to Nego, and yet survived thanks to Israel's God. The psychological pressure consciously exerted upon these young believers was huge, and matches that which we all live under in this latter day Babylon. Is. 46:1 was a prophecy surely known to the young men; that Nebo would bow to Yahweh.

Dan 1:8 *But Daniel determined*- Although all his surrounding circumstances were changed and pressured him into conformity, Daniel's heart was devoted to God. "Determined" is the same word translated "gave the name to..." in :7. Babylon was determined to rename him, but he was determined not to give in to this brainwashing. He sets an example to all youngsters.

Not to defile himself- Daniel is the more commendable in this because the other captives didn't have the same sensitivity of conscience; and he is mentioned alone as the initiator in this refusal, with the three friends only coming in afterwards. The same word is used of how the later restored exiles did pollute themselves (Mal. 1:7,12; Ezra 2:62; Neh. 7:64). It is so much harder to take a stand for things when others amongst God's people don't do so.

With the king's dainties, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself-

It could be argued that to eat defiled food in captivity was part of Judah's prophesied punishment: “And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them" (Ez. 4:14); “they shall not dwell in the Lord’s land, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt; and shall eat unclean things in Assyria” (Hos. 9:3). Paul seems to argue that eating food offered to idols is not wrong in itself, seeing an idol "has no real existence" and in any case, "there is nothing unclean in itself". His objection to doing so was because in the local context of the church in Corinth, doing so might make other Christians stumble. There was no Mosaic command about this matter. And we can't assume that Daniel refused the food for kosher reasons; for he refused the wine, which was not a forbidden drink under the law of Moses and there was no kosher issue with it. To eat such food was not in itself an act of idol worship, whereby food was eaten as part of the worship ceremony. Of course the diet was part of the attempt to immerse the young Jews in Babylonian culture, just as the British fed local recruits in the Indian Army bacon and sausages at breakfast and roast beef for dinner, in order to deculturize both Hindu and Muslim.

The objection was not so much because of unclean food or the nature of its preparation, but because Daniel perceived that eating meat offered to idols was purposefully intended by the Babylonians to make these young Jews effectively part of idol worship in every meal they ate. Paul's reasoning in 1 Corinthians is based upon this; to partake in food knowingly offered to idols, when your eating was perceived as idol worship, was wrong. "The king's dainties" is better "the king's portion of food", the food that had been placed upon the idolatrous table of the king; and it is used in Dan. 11:26 to describe those on the king's side, his fellow worshippers.

Dan 1:9 *Now God made Daniel to find kindness and compassion with the prince of the eunuchs-*

On one hand, God's intention was to destroy Judah in captivity. On the other, He promised to make their captors show them pity and kindness (1 Kings 8:50; Ps. 106:46). Here we have an example of that grace shown to Daniel, just as Hatach showed it to Esther, the king did to Nehemiah (Neh. 1:11 "Give success to your servant today and grant him compassion in the sight of this man!") and the prison keeper did to Joseph (Gen. 39:21 "the Lord was with Joseph and showed him grace; he gave him favour in the sight of the chief jailer"). Why would this man risk his life for the sake of the foibles of a teenage captive? He had no good reason for doing so, there was nothing in it for him. The answer is that here as in the other cases of Esther, Nehemiah and Joseph, God worked on his heart, as He will on the hearts of those in our lives, even if they themselves aren't believers.

We could read :9 as a summary of what happened, and then we read of how it happened. Or it could be that God intervened in the heart of this man in :9, he resisted

somewhat, and then God's intervention achieved the required end in :16. Thus there was a gap between Divine intervention in a man's heart and the achievement of the required outcome. And such gaps are ongoing all the time in our lives and in the lives of those around us. During those gaps we have to exercise trust / faith in His work. But during the gap, Daniel had to make some human effort. The "prince of the eunuchs" basically said "no" to Daniel in :10, but Daniel then approaches another man, "the steward whom the prince of the eunuchs had appointed over Daniel" (:11), and he agrees. And presumably it was that steward who persuaded his master, "the prince of the eunuchs" whose heart God had already touched, to allow Daniel's request.

Finding *chesed* kindness and compassion was the language used of finding such mercy from God. But God had shown it to Daniel through the prince of the eunuchs. Dt. 13:17 had used the term in explaining that if none of the unclean things of the gentiles defiled God's people, then Yahweh would show His people mercy and compassion. Daniel was not willing in his heart to be thus defiled, and so God showed him this promised "kindness and compassion". But how, mechanically, did it work out? We wonder if this man who was himself a eunuch may have been homosexually attracted to Daniel, who was a handsome young man and also a eunuch. "Compassion" is AV "tender love". I am not suggesting that they had a homosexual affair, but possibly the prince of the eunuchs had a homosexual attraction to Daniel and did him a favour because of it. God works in all manner of ways to bring about His purpose and work in the lives of those faithful to Him. The Hebrew however has the idea of "pity", and is the word used in Ps. 106:46: "He made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captives".

Dan 1:10 *The prince of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I fear my lord the king who has appointed your food and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse looking than the youths who are of your own age? Do you really want to endanger my head with the king?-*

We meet here for the first time in Daniel the theme of risking death in order to disobey the king. This theme is a significant one throughout the book. Daniel here disobeys the king, as does the prince of the eunuchs, but in secret. For the king never finds out. But this quiet disobedience and willingness to potentially lose life becomes developed by God. For Daniel will later have to openly disobey the king and accept loss of life as a threatened consequence. We see how God leads us so gently, by incremental steps and experiences. We are also here introduced to the irony of how the apparently omnipotent king was disobeyed by the friends, but then chooses and congratulates them. Human power is shown to be manipulated by the Divine hand and His servants, embedded as they are within those human power systems.

We sense this man had indeed "tender love" (:9 AV) towards Daniel but naturally feared the consequences. We also have here a window into the despotic manner of

Nebuchadnezzar, who beheaded his servants for the slightest perceived lack of obedience and servitude towards him. Daniel and his friends grew up as teenagers within the threat of instant death hanging over them. It seems the king personally had come up with this idea of making the young Jews eat and drink what had been offered to idols upon his personal table; he had a personal interest in breaking the culture of Yahweh worship which these youngsters had.

Dan 1:11 *Then Daniel said to the steward whom the prince of the eunuchs had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah*- It seems Daniel didn't respond directly to the prince of the eunuchs but to the steward, AV "Melzar". It seems those four had one "steward" responsible for them; with only four charges under his control, he would have observed them carefully and known them well.

Dan 1:12 *Test your servants, I beg you, for ten days; let them give us vegetables to eat, and water to drink*- "Ten days" is elsewhere a period of testing (Rev. 2:10 etc.). "Vegetables" is more correctly 'seeds', that is, pulse (:16). This, along with water, was exactly the food Ezekiel had eaten "daily" before the exiles [in Daniel's youth?], in order to 'bear their iniquity', to take away their sins: "wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt" (Ez. 4:9,11). It could be that Daniel had this in view, and wished to "daily" eat such food rather than fine food and wine. He wanted to suffer as he knew God's people should suffer for their sins, in order that the punishment would be experienced by him and thus the people freed from punishment.

Dan 1:13 *Then let our faces be looked on before you, and the faces of the youths who eat of the king's dainties; and as you see, deal with your servants*- "Faces" or 'appearance' is the word specifically used in Daniel of the "visions" about the ending of gentile power over Israel. The idea could be that this was a hint that those looking after them were invited to look upon the later visions and judge for themselves.

Dan 1:14 *So he listened to them in this matter, and proved them ten days*- The Hebrew is literally 'He heard / obeyed them in this word', the phrase so often used in appealing to people to hear God's word. Those in charge of Daniel are presented as spiritually perceptive. We observe how Daniel was allowed to follow his religious conscience rather than just assuming that it was going to be impossible to do so. Likewise it seems he was well known for praying towards Jerusalem with his windows open. And probably it was known that he had written down his visions. All these acts were contrary to the spirit of the empire, with its demand for total loyalty to the current regime. He somehow was allowed to 'get away with it'- despite in the course of his life serving under six Babylonian and two Medo-Persian kings. God will find a way...

Dan 1:15 *At the end of ten days their faces appeared fairer, and they were fatter in flesh, than all the youths who ate of the king's dainties*- Or, "the king's portion". There was a fair chance of word getting out about Daniel and his friends, but the men in charge of their feeding took that chance. "Fair and fat" is the very Hebrew phrase used about the seven fat ears of corn in Pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41:5). There are so many echoes of the Joseph story in Daniel. We are to understand that it served as a Divine template for the situation Daniel found himself in; and our familiarity with God's word coupled with sensitivity and self-examination enables us to discern such templates working out in our own lives. "Zaphnath Paaneah", the name given to Joseph, can mean 'interpreter of dreams'; and Daniel's interpreting the king's dreams, at one stage being summoned out of obscurity to do so, is so clearly based upon Joseph's experience. Man is not alone- in that no experience is without Biblical precedent, in essence. For other connections with Joseph, see on Dan. 1:19.

Dan 1:16 *So the steward took away their dainties, and the wine that they should drink, and gave them vegetables*- This was all the same a great risk, to disobey the king, and not give "the king's portion" ("dainties") when he had specifically stipulated it should be given them. The steward had sympathy for them.

Dan 1:17 *Now as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams*- The intention was that they should obtain such learning and wisdom from their education in the school of Babylonian mythology; interpretation of dreams was specifically connected with idolatry. Hence the emphasis that Israel's God gave them wisdom. Daniel's wisdom was proverbial throughout the empire (Ez. 28:3). The language recalls how Bezaleel was "filled with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge" (Ex. 31:2,3) in order to build the tabernacle; these young men were given wisdom to effectively lead to the rebuilding of the temple. God is shown here to be able to operate directly on the human heart by His Spirit; and He can do so to this day (James 1:17; Eph. 3:15-22). We don't read here that Daniel and the four youths got wisdom from their own unaided Bible reading; rather, God gave them knowledge.

Dan 1:18 *At the end of the days which the king had appointed for bringing them in, the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar*- The King wanted to see how far they had progressed out of the Yahweh cult, as he would have seen it, into the Babylonian mindset. The fact he was impressed with them was a result of the wisdom given to them and probably various providential situations which enabled them to answer his questions in an impressive way. Dan. 2:1 says that Daniel interpreted

Nebuchadnezzar's dream in his second year, so it's possible that this examination ceremony was actually after that; chapter 2 is explaining, in this case, how the huge reputation of Daniel had been built up. However, the commentaries all give various suggestions about the chronological issues in Daniel and there are other apparently valid ways of understanding it.

Dan 1:19 *The king talked with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore they served the king*- The other young Jewish men had compromised their faith in order to gain acceptance with the king; but their efforts somehow failed. "They served the king" is literally 'they stood before [the face of] the king", and the same term is used of Pharaoh being brought before Pharaoh and his 'standing before [the face of]' that king (Gen. 41:46). As noted on Dan. 1:15, this is another background allusion to Pharaoh which sets up the similarities with Joseph. Both of them interpreted dreams three times when the wise men couldn't do so, both were cast into a pit to die. Both are described as having "the spirit of God / the gods" (Gen. 41:44; Dan. 4:5). Their exaltation in reward is very similar; Daniel's exaltation by Nebuchadnezzar matches that of Joseph by Pharaoh: "Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.' Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand.... He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command". Joseph's ministry started at age 17 and ended with his death at 110, a total of 93 years (Gen. 37:2; 50:22). Daniel's ministry may likewise have been 93 years: twenty years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign until the fall of Jerusalem (his accession year plus the 19 years of 2 Kings 25:8), seventy years of exile (Dan. 9:2) and three years of king Cyrus (Dan. 10:10). See on Dan. 2:1.

Dan 1:20 *In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters who were in all his kingdom*- They were not only better than the other Jewish youths, but ten times better than the existing Babylonian magicians. "Ten times" may connect with the ten days testing which they initially gave their steward (:14). Already the seeds of jealousy were sown; these young foreigners were found to be so far ahead of their teachers. It was thereby obvious that they had access to a wisdom far beyond that of their teachers.

The mention of the "wise" shining for ever in Dan. 12:3 forms an inclusio with the opening of the book of Daniel. Daniel is presented as the truly wise man because he has God's wisdom in contrast to the wise men of Babylon, who are shown to be fools. Daniel is thus presented as typical of the entire class of those who will be saved. He is our pattern. His wisdom was not in all the human wisdom which he was taught and even excelled at, according to Dan. 1. It was in using *God's* wisdom to turn many to righteousness.

Dan 1:21 *Daniel continued up to the first year of king Cyrus*- This may refer to the length of Daniel's uninterrupted court service. The first year of Cyrus was when the command was given to allow the Jewish exiles to return and rebuild the land. This isn't necessarily when Daniel died, but the point is being made that he lived to see that significant moment. Some Jewish traditions claim Daniel returned to Judah at that time, but then went back to Babylon to die there. The idea is that Daniel outlived the apparently immortal Babylonian empire. He lived to see the prophecy of Dan. 2 begin to come true. We note Dan. 11:1 LXX "The first year of Cyrus".

DANIEL CHAPTER 2

2:1 The Image of Daniel 2

Daniel chapter 2 begins the Aramaic section of the book. Although God can inspire and use who He wishes, it has been argued that Daniel would have known both Hebrew and Aramaic fluently. And God clearly used that. The section concerns the future of the Gentile nations with respect to Israel; the fact Daniel spoke or wrote it in Aramaic was because he wanted to witness to the world around him in their language. He wanted to tell them their destiny, with the implication that they should repent. Another reason for this Aramaic section may simply be to the as it were bind the two halves of Daniel together, as suggested by Collins in his commentary on Daniel (*Collins, John J. (1984): Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, Eerdmans) p. 31*:

PART I: Tales (chapters 1:1–6:29)

- 1: Introduction (1:1–21 – set in the Babylonian era, written in Hebrew)
- 2: Nebuchadnezzar's dream of four kingdoms (2:1–49 – Babylonian era; Aramaic)
- 3: The fiery furnace (3:1–30 – Babylonian era; Aramaic)
- 4: Nebuchadnezzar's madness (3:31–4:34 – Babylonian era; Aramaic)
- 5: Belshazzar's feast (5:1–6:1 – Babylonian era; Aramaic)
- 6: Daniel in the lions' den (6:2–29 – Median era with mention of Persia; Aramaic)

PART II: Visions (chapters 7:1–12:13)

- 7: The beasts from the sea and the Son of Man (7:1–28 – Babylonian era: Aramaic)
- 8: The ram and the he-goat (8:1–27 – Babylonian era; Hebrew)
- 9: Interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy weeks (9:1–27 – Median era; Hebrew)
- 10: The angel's revelation: kings of the north and south (10:1–12:13 – Persian era, mention of Greek era; Hebrew)

Daniel chapter 2 contains an outline of the powers who were to dominate the people of Israel within the land of Israel; that is the *eretz* / earth / land which is in view, not the whole planet. One popular schema is that it begins with a head of gold (Babylon), then breast and arms of silver (Persia), thighs of brass (Greece), two legs of iron (the two halves of the Roman empire) and then feet part of iron, part of clay. Each part of the image corresponds in proportion to how long each empire dominated the land of Israel and the Jewish people- thus the legs were longest because the Romans dominated the land for longest. After AD70, the Jewish state ceased to be a nation. But now, it is once again, for the first time in nearly 2000 years. The final part

of the image therefore represents a group of nations (perhaps divided into two groups, symbolized by the two feet) who will dominate Israel in the last days. A stone cut out of a mountain without hands (representing the Lord Jesus Christ) then hits the image on its feet, growing into a mountain which fills the earth. The interpretation is given, and it clearly refers to the second coming of Christ to destroy the kingdoms of men who have dominated His land and His people, and to establish God's Kingdom on earth: "In the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people; it shall crush to powder and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44). The vision requires that the image stands complete in order to all be destroyed together. The latter day entity represented by the feet will also be headed up by a latter day Nebuchadnezzar, and will comprise elements of all the previous entities which have dominated God's people.

And yet there is another view possible. Bible prophecy is often conditional. At Daniel's time, there was the possibility that in some sense, a Messiah figure could have appeared and re-established Israel as God's Kingdom on earth. Many of the prophecies we understand as referring to the establishment of the Kingdom on earth at the Lord's return could have then been fulfilled. Ez. 40-48 is the clearest example; the returning exiles were intended to build a temple of the dimensions given, replete with a Messiah figure. But most remained in the soft life of Babylon, and those who did return were disobedient to the Kingdom potential, as prophets like Malachi, Haggai and Zechariah make clear. Daniel's prophecies likewise outline a possible scenario which could have led to the re-establishment of the Kingdom; but it didn't happen, because of men dropping the baton, missing the opportunities, refusing to use the potential of the Spirit.

Understanding Daniel 2 is programmatic to making sense of Bible prophecy about the last days. The beasts of Daniel 7 are clearly an extension and development of the four metals of the Daniel 2 image, and those beasts morph into the beasts of Revelation, where we find them presented with various aspects and with additional details. As to why the beasts morph over time, I would suggest that this is because Bible prophecy is conditional. What could have come true e.g. in Daniel's time, did not- because of the indolence of God's people and the lack of repentance amongst the Gentiles. And so the prophecies morphed into another form, and then another, meaning that the essence of God's prophetic word will still come true, even if the form of fulfilment is not that which was initially or ideally intended. Daniel 2-7 are written in Aramaic [Chaldee], not Hebrew. The section has a concentric structure, in which the visions of chapters 2 and 7 form the opening and concluding parts. They are clearly to be related to each other:
Daniel 2- Vision of empires
Daniel 3- Deliverance of three Jews from death
Daniel 4- God's discipline of the king
Daniel 5- God's discipline of the king
Daniel 6- Deliverance of Daniel from death
Daniel 7- Vision of empires

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was given a dream which Daniel interpreted. He saw an image comprised of various materials, in the form of a man. Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold, followed by the breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, two legs of iron, and finally two feet [10 toes] made from a brittle

mixture of iron and clay. A stone cut out from a mountain without hands then struck the image on its brittle feet, and destroyed the gold, silver, brass, iron and clay. A whirlwind carried them all away, and the stone grew into a mountain which filled the earth and will never pass away as the previous kings and kingdoms passed away. This is interpreted as the establishment of God's eternal Kingdom on earth (Dan. 2:44). The stone is a fairly common symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ps. 118:22 cp. Mt. 21:42-44; Acts 4:11; Is. 8:14; 28:16; Rom. 9:32,33; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4,6-8), the Messiah of Israel (Gen. 49:24; Zech. 3:9; 4:7,10), the begotten Son of God, cut out without human hands.

Bible prophecy can be understood on a number of levels. It would be legitimate to see these four empires as referring to the succession of kingdoms which had dominion over "all the earth". We must remember that the Bible was written in Hebrew, Greek and Chaldee. We read through the mask of translation. The Hebrew word and concept of *eretz*, translated "the earth", can refer either to the whole planet, or specifically to the land promised to Abraham, between the Nile and the Euphrates. The word is used in modern Hebrew to refer to *eretz Israel*, the state of Israel. Clearly enough, the domination of "all the earth" (Dan. 2:39) doesn't mean the entire planet. It surely refers to domination of the land promised to Abraham, and the people of that land, i.e. Israel. Likewise Babylon is described as being ruler over "wherever the children of men dwell" because they had been "given into your hand" (Dan. 2:38). This isn't speaking of a literal dominion over every human being on the planet. The reference was to the way that Babylon had scattered the Jews amongst the various areas of the *eretz* [land promised to Abraham] under its control. The very same words for 'give into the hand' are used of how God would give *the land and people of Judah / Israel* "into the hand of" the king of Babylon (Ezra 5:12; Ps. 106:41; Jer. 20:4,5; 22:25; 32:3,28; 34:2,20,21; 44:30; Ez. 16:39; 39:23). Indeed, within the book of Daniel the point has been made; for the book opens with the statement that the king of Judah has been 'given into the hand of' the king of Babylon (Dan. 1:2). This is all quite some emphasis- the people 'given into the hand' of Nebuchadnezzar do not refer to all people on the planet, rather are they specifically the Jewish people. Likewise, the earth / land which is in view isn't the whole planet, but rather the land promised to Abraham. Note too that 'the earth' [*eretz*] is often understood as the people of Israel within their land. Thus: "Concerning Samaria and Jerusalem… hear, all you people; hear, O earth [*eretz*] and all that therein is" (Mic. 1:2). Frequently, the physical land of Israel is addressed by the prophets, when clearly it is the people of the land which is in view. Ezekiel 6 is full of this: "Set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places... I will cast down your slain before your idols… I will scatter your bones around your altars… your works wiped out… and you shall know that I am the LORD" (Ez. 6:2-7). Therefore the domination of the land / *eretz* can be understood specifically as the domination of the people of Israel within that land. This would explain why there is an apparent gap in fulfilment of the Daniel 2 and 7 visions- the historical fulfilment appears to stop once Rome was no longer dominating Israel, and then restarts in the very last days, in the period of the ten toes / horns. This would be because there was no land / state / people of Israel in their land to dominate.

After Babylon's domination of the land, there followed the Medo-Persian empire (breast and arms of silver), then the Greeks (belly and thighs of brass), followed by the Roman empire, divided as it was into Western and Eastern parts, symbolized by

the two iron legs. Out of this arose the two feet with their ten toes. But after the Roman empire, the people of Israel were exiled from their land, only becoming a nation again in 1948. The two feet with their ten toes would then represent a brief period of mixed domination of the land, under a confederacy of ten groups broadly divided into two camps. I say 'brief' because in proportion to the size of the image, the feet are not very large. The proportions of the different parts of the body match the length of time over which the various empires dominated Israel. Thus Babylon dominated Judah for 70 years, and they are represented by the head, which is not a large part of the human body.

The prophecy of Daniel goes further to provide more details of this series of empires. Daniel 7 describes the same succession in terms of four beasts, which also represent the same empires as the metals in the image of Daniel chapter 2. The fourth beast has ten horns, corresponding to the ten toes of Daniel's image; and out of them, one particular horn is prominent. This beast becomes the prototype for the beasts we encounter in the book of Revelation, who likewise dominate God's people and will be destroyed by Christ's return.

Radical Islam and the Land Promised to Abraham

Radical Islam has a lot to say about the land promised to Abraham- what the Bible prophecies refer to as the *eretz* or land / earth. Radical Islamist groups such as The Islamic State and al-Nusra Front have spoken much about it; their definition of the Levant or Sham is pretty much that of the land promised to Abraham. 'Nusra' is an acronym standing for the Front for the Defense of the Levant. They claim to be fighting to prepare the way for the coming of the Mahdi to establish God's Kingdom worldwide; they call the land promised to Abraham "Land of *Malahim*," or "epic battles", and they expect there to be the *al-Malhamah al-Kubra*, the "Great Battle of the last hour", at Jerusalem. This is what the Bible calls Armageddon. When the true Jesus appears in Jerusalem, all nations in the earth / land will be gathered together to battle at Jerusalem. And the jihadist theology is preparing them for this. They consciously speak of their caliphate as being extended over the land promised to Abraham, and they are urging people to leave their native lands as Abraham left his, and journey to live in the caliphate, comprised as they wish it to be, of the territory promised to Abraham. They call their caliph or leader 'Caliph Ibrahim / Abraham', and urge migration or *hijrah* to the land promised to him. The pieces are all falling into place to fulfil the Biblical pictures of the last days. Jihadist theology makes much of 'signs of the times', leading up to the coming of the Mahdi and the final battle against the antiChrist. These 'signs of the times' they look for are often the same signs which are to be found in the Bible, e.g. the re-establishment of Israel as a nation before Armageddon. So as they apparently come true, Islamists are the more convinced that antiChrist [who they call *Dajjal* and understand to be a Jew] is about to appear in Jerusalem, and they must fight him in the last great battle, in order to enable the Mahdi to return. Who they consider to be the antichrist will in fact be the true Christ. They will rush to fight Him, believing Him to be the antichrist they are expecting. Their destruction by Him will presage the establishment of God's *true* Kingdom on earth, the revived and restored kingdom of Israel. This would explain why many Biblical terms used about the very last days are also found in Jihadist theology. They speak of the events of the very last days before the Mahdi returns as being "the hour"; and yet Revelation speaks of how the kings of the earth / land will have power for "one hour" and be destroyed likewise in "one hour" (Rev. 17:12; 18:10,17,19). These similarities are unsurprising because Mohammed clearly plagiarized the Bible and Judaism for his teachings.

The changing of times and laws by the antichrist figure of Dan. 7:25 sounds like the radical Islamist desire to impose the Islamic calendar and *sharia* law in the land promised to Abraham, which they see as their caliphate; and for sure, if Israel becomes part of an Islamic state, then the keeping of the Jewish calendar will be outlawed. The implementation of *sharia* law and changing legal structures to reflect it, is a major theme in their program. It's clear that the three and a half year domination of Jerusalem and changing of the Jewish law and calendar had an initial fulfilment in the abuses of Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated the temple. There was a three and a half year period from the edict of Antiochus in June 168 BC to the rededication of the temple in December 165 BC. The little horn of Daniel 8 comes out of the Greek kingdom, but the horn of Daniel 7 out of the fourth kingdom. I suggest that this is because the prophecy could have been fulfilled totally at the time of Antiochus- Messiah could have come and destroyed him. But the various required preconditions weren't met, and so there was another possibility of it coming true out of the Roman kingdom [another possibility is that the four beasts and metals refer to Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece rather than Babylon-Medo Persia-Greece-Rome]. Revelation uses the same imagery to describe the antiChrist of the last days, who will incorporate some elements of the previous historical fulfilments of the little horn in men like Antiochus Epiphanes.

Issue number 3 of the Islamic State magazine *Dabiq* frequently talks of the call to follow Ibrahim [Abraham] in making *hijrah* [migration] to the land promised to him: "Islam in the end of times will be more manifest in Shām... So the best of the people on the earth in the end of times will be those who keep to the land of Ibrāhīm's hijrah, which is Shām" [Majmū'ul-Fatāwā]. Ibn Taymiyyah (rahimahullāh) also said, "So he informed that the best of the people on the earth are those who keep to the land of Ibrāhīm's hijrah, in contrast to those who pass through it or leave it. The land that Ibrāhīm made hijrah to is Shām... the land of Ibrāhīm's hijrah... And the land of Ibrāhīm's hijrah, has been made for us equal to the land of our Prophet's hijrah. The best people on earth will be those who keep to the land of Ibrāhīm's hijrah". Note how the theology of these jihadists effectively replaces the land of Saudi Arabia and the city of Mecca with that of the Levant, the territory promised to Abraham; and Mecca is replaced in their focus by Jerusalem. With Saudi Arabia now supporting the Western coalition against radical Islam, such a shift in emphasis isn't surprising. But it means that all is being prepared for the last days- for the Bible prophecies focus upon the domination of the land of Israel and Jerusalem in particular. It's significant that the Caliph of the Islamic State Caliphate is referred to by his followers as Caliph Ibrahim / Abraham; the idea is that the faithful will follow him in migrating from their homelands to the land promised to him- which is the very same *eretz* which is the focus of the Bible's latter day prophecies, and which is to be dominated by an antiChrist figure and his beast.

The Image Stands Complete in the Last Days

The image of Daniel 2 must stand complete in the last days- the whole image, not just the toes, are to be broken in pieces "together". This feature of the prophecy is crucial to correct interpretation. Babylon, the head of gold, must therefore rule over the system which the image represents. The image is a man- let's not forget that. The head is Nebuchadnezzar. The entity which will be destroyed by the Lord's coming is therefore headed up in an individual; and there are other Bible themes and specific predictions which flesh out the picture of this anti-Christ of the last days.

According to the interpretation given in Dan. 2:38-40, the first kingdom (Babylon)

was destroyed by the second (Medo-Persia), and the second was destroyed by the third (Greece); but we read that the iron (Roman) kingdom would break in pieces all the previous empires, not just the Greek empire: “iron breaks in pieces and subdues all [these]; and as iron that crushes all these, shall it break in pieces and crush them” (Dan. 2:40). This was achieved in the sense that there were elements of the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires in the Greek empire which Rome crushed; as Keil puts it in his commentary, “the materials of the first two kingdoms were comprehended in the third”. And likewise there are elements of the iron in the last part of the image- for the feet are made of iron mixed with clay. On this basis we can conclude that the final part of the image, the feet of iron and clay, will incorporate elements of all the previous empires which dominated Israel.

Apart from the head of gold, all the metals / beasts have a strange feature in common- they subdue three previous powers. The second beast has three ribs in its mouth` (Dan. 7:5)- speaking of three powers subdued by the Persians. The third entity, Greece, subdued “three… even four” kings of Persia (Dan. 11:2). I suggest this is a Semitism which effectively means ‘three very great ones’- cp. “for three transgressions and for four” in Amos 1, “three things… even four” (Prov. 30:15,18,21,29). The fourth entity, the legs of iron (Dan. 2) and the terrible fourth beast (Dan. 7) devoured, broke in pieces and stamped upon the remnants of the preceding three beasts / powers (Dan. 7:19). The little horn roots up three of the ten horns [cp. the ten toes], meaning that “he shall subdue three kings” (Dan. 7:24). Clearly the final phase of the kingdoms of men will include this feature which was in all the preceding ones. We should look, therefore, for a system which subdues three other kings or kingdoms.

If you tried to build a replica of the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar, with human dimensions and the same metals, it would not stand up. The relative gravity of the materials is such that it would be pulled over by the weight of its head. Gold has a specific gravity of 19.6, and the other materials have progressively lower gravities- clay has only 1.8 [silver 11, brass 8.5, and iron7.8]. Specific gravity refers in layman’s terms to the tendency of the material to fall to the ground. The whole image is pulled down to the earth by the weight of the head of gold. The specific individual heading it up therefore has an overpowering effect upon the whole entity. This of itself indicates not only how fragile are the Kingdoms of men, but how a specific individual, the latter day head of gold, will bring the image down. The whole colossus of humanity is actually kept standing by God- because the image as it is described could not stand. God is in history, He was and ever shall be and will bring it all down at the appointed time. This of itself is great comfort, as we feel dwarfed by the seeming inexorability of historical event and the apparent colossus of human corporation and empire.

Some of the words used about the behaviours of the elements of the image are elsewhere used specifically about the persecution of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar, and indeed the other empires, are described as 'ruling' over the earth / land (Dan. 2:38 etc.), but the equivalent Hebrew word is used specifically about how the enemies of the Jews sought to rule over the Jewish people. The word is used of how Haman the Agagite [the man of Gog] sought to "have power over" [s.w.] the Jews (Esther 9:1). Likewise, the word used for how the iron would 'subdue' (Dan. 2:40) is only used elsewhere of how the Israelites were subdued or 'made feeble' by their Egyptian persecutors (Dt. 25:18). The iron would "break" all beneath it, and this word is used of Esau [forefather of the Arab Moslem peoples] 'hurting' Jacob (Gen. 31:7), the Egyptians breaking Israel in Egypt (Ex. 5:22,23; Num. 20:15; Dt. 26:6), the Assyrians

'breaking down' the land of Judah (Is. 24:19) and the Babylonians breaking down Jerusalem (Jer. 25:29; 31:28). God's Kingdom will "consume all those kingdoms" (Dan. 2:44), using the same word as used about the 'consuming' of all things *upon the land of Israel*, both Gentile dominators and the apostate within Israel (Zeph. 1:2,3).

So much of God's prophetic word had some initial fulfilment and relevance to its first audience. But always we are left with the sense that the fulfilment was only partial. The prophecies of Israel's restoration from Babylon did indeed have a fulfilment in the return of the exiles, as did those of Babylon's judgments, but clearly the major and complete fulfilment is yet to come. And thus it will be in the last days and in the return of Christ to earth that the entire prophetic word has its complete fulfilment. The word will take on the full flesh of reality in a way it has never done previously. The fulfilments and applications of Revelation's prophecies about the beast over history are but a prelude to that which is yet to come. We are seriously mistaken if we think that because we can discern a historical application of these prophetic words, therefore there is no future fulfilment. The schema of the image in Daniel 2 visually demonstrates this; the sequence of empires which can be discerned is not the main fulfilment of the prophecy. Rather is the ultimate and main fulfilment in the way that the image stands complete in the last days and is destroyed by Christ's return to earth. Likewise all the beasts exist at the coming of Christ (Dan. 7:12). The arising of four beasts from the sea doesn't mean they had to arise at different times; they are a parody of the four beasts representing God's Angelic organization. John describes these in Rev. 4:7; clearly he saw them all at the same time: "The first creature was like a lion, the second creature like a calf, the third creature had the face of a man and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle". Because the continuous historical application is true as far as it goes doesn't preclude the main fulfilment of the prophecy in a rather different way in the very last days. And thus the book of Revelation too can have discernible historical applications over history, but throughout the book there is the strong impression that the prophecies speak of situations immediately before Christ's return, appeals and judgments which are urgently poured out immediately prior to 'the end'- and in that sense He is spoken of as coming "soon" (Rev. 2:16; 3:11; 22:7,12,20), in that the ultimate message of the book is for the generation who will be alive at the Lord's coming.

The complete image will have elements within it of the previous entities who dominated God's people in their land. But it's also possible that for the image to stand erect there will be four entities dominating the *eretz*, represented by the four beasts and four metals, with one of them sprouting ten toes / horns and an antichrist figure. This scenario would explain how after the fourth beast is destroyed the other three beasts have their dominion taken away (Dan. 7:11,12).

The Head of Gold

Nebuchadnezzar was given a kingdom of power, strength and glory (Dan. 2:37 LXX). Biblically, this is *God's* Kingdom, which at that time was Israel. The animals and birds given into his hand (Dan. 2:38) surely refer to those of the land promised to Abraham, rather than literally the whole planet. For in what sense were the birds of the Amazon or Australian kangaroos given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar? The phrase 'beasts of the field and birds of Heaven' is repeatedly used to represent the 'wild' nations living in *eretz* Israel, from the Euphrates to Egypt. It is they who were at one time protected by the great empires and then turned against them (Ez. 29:5; 31:6,13; 32:4); they are used as symbolic of the nations in the invasion of Ezekiel 38:20, and of Israel's neighbouring enemies (Ps. 79:2; Hos. 2:18). It was *these* which were given into Nebuchadnezzar's hand; and later in Daniel we read that the birds and

beasts represent the nations dominated by Babylon (Dan. 4:2,21). Clearly Nebuchadnezzar's dominion was not global, and I submit that the only other clearly definable domain for 'the entire earth' is the earth / land promised to Abraham. God is said to have 'given' the beasts and birds 'into the hand' of Nebuchadnezzar. This exact phrase is used of how God gave the people of Israel into his hand (Ezra 5:12). It is so often stated that God would give His people into Babylon's hand (Jer. 20:4,5; 22:25; 32:3,28; 34:2,21). Clearly it is the Jewish people in their land who are in view. As Babylon reigned over them as the head of gold, so the succeeding empires likewise would reign over them, and the entire image would stand therefore upon the land and people of Israel in the last days. Nebuchadnezzar was "made ruler over all"; but the "all" requires definition. I suggest it means all the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and all God's people within it. The same word is used of how the Persians wished to ruler over / have power over God's people (Esther 9:1). The 'all the earth' over which these kings / kingdoms had power (Dan. 2:39) is not referring to the entire planet, but specifically to the land promised to Abraham and God's people within it.

The whole intention of the vision was to "make known to the king what shall be in the latter days" (Dan. 2:28). Now that of course can simply mean 'in the future' ("hereafter", Dan. 2:29). But "the latter days" is a term often used in the Bible regarding 'the last days'- the period directly prior to the return of Christ to earth. So we are invited to see the entire prophecy of the image standing complete and being broken as speaking of events to happen directly prior to the Lord's return. This requires the image to stand complete, and for the entire prophecy to have a primarily latter day fulfilment. The form of the entire image was "terrible" (Dan. 2:31), and this is the language of the last beast which would exist at the time of Christ's return (Dan. 7:7,19 s.w.). That beast, which is the basis of the beasts we meet in Revelation, is a summary of all the components of the image. The stone cut out without hands (Dan. 2:34) must be connected with the way in which the antiChrist figure of the very last days will stand up against the Prince of Princes [Christ] and be broken "without hand" (Dan. 8:25), just as the stone quarried without hands would 'break' the entire image. The individual of Dan. 8:25 is therefore the embodiment of the entire image of Daniel 2; the entity represented by the image will be incarnated in its individual leader, who will exist at the very time of the Lord's coming. And the language of Dan. 8:25 is clearly picked up in the prophecy of the "man of sin" in 2 Thess. 2, who will challenge the Lord Jesus and be destroyed by the brightness of His second coming.

The Feet of Iron and Clay

The ten toes are split into two groups, represented by the two legs. This could refer to the deep division between Sunni & Shia Islam, or to the latter day entity having two foundations within the land of Israel- in the West Bank, and in the Gaza Strip. Imagine the image standing with its two legs standing on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with Jerusalem in the middle; if the image is facing East, it would be looking precisely towards Mecca, as if it is an observant Moslem. Or it could be that there will be ten leaders, or ten groups, within the land promised to Abraham. Another consideration is that the "emirate" of the IS claimed to be headed by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and his "cabinet" of ten "ministers".

The cementing together of the iron and clay recalls the words of the Koran in Surah 61:4: "Truly Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure". And yet the prophecy requires that they will be mixed together, but will not cleave with each other. And this will be the basis of their destruction, just as the disunity between Israel's historical enemies was the basis of

their destruction. Ps. 60:8 and 108:9 predict that God will triumph over Philistia- literally, He will split, divide them. But their own internal divisions are effectively their own judgment. And this is how God so often works.

The military arm of Hamas is the Qassam Brigades; *kassam* in Arabic means 'divider', another allusion to the feet part of iron and part of clay, when the Kingdom of Israel's oppressors shall be "divided" (Dan. 2:41). *Hamas* means 'strong', and the Gaza strip / Hamas controlled area will be part of the final strong / weak, iron / clay entity that briefly dominates the land according to Daniel 2. The uniting of the disparate elements in the ten toes is matched by the great emphasis in the Moslem world upon unity. We read of "King Hussein's plan for the establishment of a so-called United Arab Kingdom" (Y. Harkabi, *The Palestinian Covenant And Its Meaning* (Totowa, N.J: Valentine, Mitchell & Co., 1979) p.135). This sounds exactly like the 'uniting' of the iron and clay in the entity of the last days which will dominate Israel. "The Palestinian National Authority will strive to achieve a union of the confrontation countries [i.e. "all nations around about" Israel- D.H.]… or a step along the road to comprehensive Arab unity" – Political Programs of the P.L.O., Article 8. "The Arab 'nation' is made up of 'peoples' and the (one) Arab homeland comprises the national homeland of these peoples… the relationship of the people and the individual to the overall Arab homeland and nation is called in modern Arabic *Qamwiyya* (nationalism)… like the trunk of a tree that branches off into offshoots of local patriotism…the splitting up of the Arab region into separate states carved out by the colonial powers. However, once Arab unity is achieved and the frontiers wiped out…" (Y. Harkabi, *The Palestinian Covenant And Its Meaning* (Totowa, N.J: Valentine, Mitchell & Co., 1979) p. 31).

There is a gap in historical fulfilment between the end of the iron legs, the Roman empire, and the brief time of the iron and clay [the feet are a small proportion of the image of a man]. This need not concern us unduly. It could be that this is because there was no nation dominating Israel in the land promised to Abraham, because the Jews were in dispersion from Roman times until the 20th century revival of the state of Israel. This period may be what Jesus had in mind when He spoke about "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24). Or it may be that indeed the prophecy had a possible fulfilment in the first century, or even earlier, that didn't happen- and so the fulfilment was delayed, resulting in this apparent gap in fulfilment. We encounter a similar gap at the end of Daniel 11, when the fulfilment jumps from the time of the Greek empire to the last days; likewise Daniel 8 makes the very same jump. And the 70 weeks prophecy in Daniel 9 seems to require a similar jump from the time of Jesus to the last days. Another possibility is that the entire thrust of the Daniel 2 prophecy is indeed, as Daniel said, to show what shall be in the last days. The fulfilment over history is not exact and is only a dim primary fulfilment of the vision.

Muslim Unity and Disunity

The entire image with all its component metals is "broken to pieces *together*" by the little stone (Dan. 2:35). The Chaldee word translated "together" is the equivalent of the Hebrew *echad*, one. The various metals, along with the feet or iron and clay, may not naturally cleave to each other and yet in another sense they are one. And this is exactly the scenario we see developing- bitter intra-Islamic rivalry, whilst united passionately. The only commonality they all have is their joint hatred of Israel and desire to destroy the Jewish people and dominate their land. The same word is found, almost untranslated, in Dan. 2:31, where we read that the king saw *a* great image. The "a" translates the same original word which is translated "together" in :35. The image was not just 'an' image, but a together, united image, "one" image. The different

metals were united together in one form and person, as a conscious imitation of Nebuchadnezzar and ultimately, Mohammad, whom the IS and the jihadists claim to embody. Remember article 8 of the Hamas Covenant: "Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model". Recall too that the IS developed out of the *Tawhid wa al-Jihadi* group, meaning 'Unity & Jihad'. Unity is such a major and recurrent theme in the founding documents of so many jihadist groups, not least the IS [ISIS] and Hamas.

The 'Palestinians' were historically destroyed not by Israel but by the king of the north: "Howl, gate! Cry, city! You are melted away, Philistia, all of you; for smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in his ranks" (Is. 14:31). Historically, God seems to prefer to provoke division and confusion amongst Israel's enemies so that they turn on themselves and self-destruct. The horns hate the whore riding the beast, and there are many other hints at such a scenario in the last days. The King of the North, a re-formed Babylon, or Assyria *redivivus*, will likely end up conflicting with Hamas, or the final rulers of Gaza, and likewise destroying them.

Intermarriage of the Clay and Iron?

But Biblically, the potter's clay is Israel. They and the Arabs do not mix with each other. The strong iron, fragments and elements of the iron legs, the fourth beast system, will be mixed with them but they will not cleave to each other. Hamas / Gaza, the strong ones ['Hamas' and 'Gaza' both mean 'strong'], will be mixed with a weak remnant of Israel within the land- and the whole entity will be destroyed by the Lord's coming. Iron and clay don't cleave or marry to each other (Dan. 2:43). The same word for "cleave" is used about marriage in Gen. 2:24. They are mixed with each other- and the Hebrew and Chaldee words *arab* are used here. Clay is a symbol for Israel (Is. 64:8; Jer. 18:6). The Jeremiah 18 reference is significant in that God says that Israel are as clay and He will break them in pieces because they didn't respond to His appeals. The very same image is used of the destruction of the feet of clay in Daniel 2. The clay is specifically "potter's clay" (Dan. 2:41). And that is really the key to the interpretation, because Jeremiah 18 speaks of Israel as the clay in the hands of the Divine potter. The iron in the toes is clearly to be connected with the iron of the legs, which corresponds to the terrible fourth beast with iron teeth (Dan. 7:7,19). The dominators of Israel in the last days will seek to cleave [in marriage] to the clay, Israel. The clay is called "the seed of men" (Dan. 2:43), recalling the descriptions of Israel as "the seed of the Jews" (Esther 6:13). Mingling with the men of the seed would certainly suggest marriage. Is this a reference to a future Islamic domination of Israel unsuccessfully forcing the remaining Jews to marry Moslems? The iron and clay are "mixed" with each other; and the same word is used in Ezra 9:2 of how the people of Judah "mingled themselves" in marriage to the peoples of the land. The suggestion is that the iron and clay 'marry' but do not cleave to each other in that relationship. This is a feature of radical Islamist domination of territories. In Tunisia and other areas brought under Moslem domination, the Jews there were either killed or, if they were women, forced to marry (polygamously) Moslem men. It would not be out of character with the IS if those they conquer [Israel in particular] were given the same choice.

Religious Hypocrisy

The image is clearly presented as an idol- this is how the word translated "image" is usually used in the Old Testament. The chief deity of Babylon was Marduk who was considered to be the "god of gold". Herodotus described the image of Marduk as a golden statue seated upon a golden throne before a golden table and a golden altar.

Pliny also notes that the robes of Marduk's priests were interlaced with gold. The word used for the breaking in pieces of the image (Dan. 2:34) is that used frequently about the breaking in pieces of idols (Ex. 32:20; Dt. 9:21; 2 Kings 23:6,15; 2 Chron. 34:4). The sequence of metals (gold, silver, brass and iron) is found again in Dan. 5:4,23 in describing the materials used by the Babylonian kings for their idols. It's as if they wanted to show that actually all the metals of the image were comprehended within their empire- and they would last for ever. The latter day entity will be distinctly religious, too. The IS, as Sunni Moslems, are passionately against any idols or memorials, hence their destruction of any Shia shrines they take control of. But in a turn of irony which can only be Divine, their religious system is of itself an idol, which is to be destroyed by the Lord's second coming. The entity represented by the image of Daniel 2, which I suggest refers to an Islamic state established in the land promised to Abraham, is destroyed by the return of Christ as of a stone cut out without hands. But the Kaaba stone, the black stone of Mecca which is the central point of the grand mosque in Mecca towards which Moslems pray, is believed by Moslems to have been cut out without human hands and to have come to earth from Heaven, and will reappear at judgment day (1). And yet this stone, which serves as the focal point of Islam, will be shown to be but a parody of the ultimately true stone cut without hands, the Lord Jesus, who will return from Heaven as the stone to smash the image.

We can likewise observe that the description of the beast in Rev. 17 is very un-Islamic- in fact, the very opposite. The beast is ridden by a prostitute who is drunk- both abominations to radical Islam. The woman has a golden cup- drinking from golden cups is specifically forbidden to Moslems by the Quran. The cup is full of idolatry- and Sunni Islam particularly is passionately against any idolatry or worship of anything apart from God. An image is set up to the beast and worshipped- also abomination for Moslems. The false prophet does miracles- whereas Moslems claim that Mohammed did no miracles and the Quran itself is the one supreme miracle of Islam. The gawdy decoration of the beast and whore of Rev. 17 is far from the sobriety of jihadist Islam. Why the apparent contradictions? The similarities with what Islam is *not* are so pronounced that a point is surely being made. The beast of Revelation is how God views the Islamic State and radical Islam. From His perspective, they are the very and exact opposite of all they are claiming. And as has often been observed, the supposed 'religion of peace' is responsible for huge destruction and mass murder. Another possibility is that the more opulent descriptions of the beast actually match well with the Islamic conception of Paradise- as defined, e.g., in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Article 'Jannah'): "One day in paradise is considered equal to a thousand years on earth. Palaces are made from bricks of gold, silver, pearls, among other things. Traditions also note the presence of horses and camels of "dazzling whiteness", along with other creatures. Large trees are described, mountains made of musk, between which rivers flow in valleys of pearl and ruby". It may be that the radical Islam will seek to portray their caliphate as paradise come on earth.

The Destruction of the Image

The 'breaking in pieces' of the colossus is described using the same word as is used about how Israel will break in pieces their latter day enemies (Is. 41:15; Mic. 4:13). Whilst God ultimately will do this, it may be that He uses the tiny, ragged, repentant remnant of natural Israel to do so in the last days, achieving the most humanly unlikely, David versus Goliath victory of all human history. For it is God's style to always work through some human mechanism in achieving His judgments. The

destruction of the nations will be as the wind blowing away the chaff from the threshing floors at harvest time (Dan. 2:35). But God usually works through a mechanism. It is a repentant Israel who will be Yahweh's threshing instrument and who will trample their enemies to pieces and destroy them as chaff (Is. 41:15; Mic. 4:13- very much the language of the destruction of the image in Daniel 2). Thus again we have the picture of the tiny, now faithful remnant of Israel being mightily used by the Lord to destroy their oppressors. And yet unbelieving Israel are described as chaff (Is. 5:24; 33:11; Jer. 23:28; Hos. 13:3; Zeph. 2:2). Those Jews who come into covenant with the oppressors will be treated as them and share their judgment, just as those who do not come out of Babylon will share in her plagues, and the unfaithful Christian believers will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). The work of the Elijah ministry will culminate in the Lord Jesus appearing on earth in order to destroy the chaff (Mt. 3:12). So we can infer that the work of the Elijah prophet in appealing for Israel's repentance occurs at the same time as Israel's domination by the oppressors. For both activities culminate in the Lord Jesus destroying the chaff.

The image of threshing definitely connects with other prophecies describing the judgment process at the Lord's second coming as being a threshing. Mic. 4:11,12 predict that the nations will be gathered against Jerusalem in order that they may be threshed there. Jerusalem has been the attraction for these peoples- and Islam so strongly desires it. Those who are threshed are the ten toes of the image of Daniel 2, the 10 horns of the beast of Daniel 7. These therefore represent nations who desire to take Jerusalem. It is Babylon who will be threshed in the last day (Jer. 51:33), so we can understand these collected together nations as all under the control of Babylon. Which is what the image requires, because it was what Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon effectively saw as it were in the mirror, it was him, with his face. Joel 3:2,12 envisages these nations being gathered into the valley of Jehoshaphat as a result of a holy / sanctified war which they have declared, a jihad (Joel 3:9), where God will first plead with them to repent (Joel 3:2) and then judge them at the harvest (Joel 3:12,13). The Joel 3 passage is developed in more detail in Revelation 16, where we read that once the Angels restraining the forces of evil at the Euphrates release them, the kings of the East will come charging towards God's people. And the hordes of Islamic fundamentalists are currently gathered at the Euphrates river. But this will in reality be a gathering of them together unto Armageddon, meaning a heap of sheaves in a valley. Still within this same metaphor, Daniel 2 describes the threshing process, resulting in the wind blowing away the ground up peoples like chaff.

The image of a nation being threshed into dust is used in 2 Kings 13:7 of how the Syrians did this to an apostate Israel- inviting us to see the feet of iron and clay as having at least some reference to Israel. "The precious sons of Zion" are likened to potters' clay being smashed by the Babylonian invasion (Lam. 4:2); and the toes are of potters' clay (Dan. 2:41). The imagery suggests the destruction of an apostate Israel by a latter day Syrian / Babylonian. The stone which does the destruction is the Lord Jesus, but it is He working through the enemies of Israel to do this, just as God did so many times in judging His people historically.

Notes

1. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh *Some Religious Aspects of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1981) pp. 120–124.

Conditional Prophecy in Daniel

The Olivet prophecy quotes and alludes to various parts of Daniel's prophecy, and yet the Olivet prophecy's intended fulfilment in AD70 didn't happen as was potentially possible, and was rescheduled. This therefore implies that Daniel's prophecies, which are alluded to, are thereby capable of a similar more elastic fulfilment. And looking in more detail at Daniel, this does indeed seem to be the case. Daniel prophesied whilst Judah were in captivity, and the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are full of potential prophecies of how the Messianic Kingdom could have been established at Judah's return after 70 years in Babylon. Ezekiel's conditional prophecy of the temple system is a parade example, although this was more commandment than prediction. I have discussed this in great detail in *The Exiles*. I suggest that like the Olivet prophecy, the prophecies of Daniel were an outline of a potential schema of events that could have taken place, leading up to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. But due to Judah's overall preference to remain in Babylon, and the lethargy of those who did return, that schema was rescheduled and was given a longer term application over history, culminating in the events of [our?] last days and the final, inexorable establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth.

As is well established, Daniel's prophecies are interrelated. The metals of the opening vision in Daniel 2 develop into the beasts of Daniel 7, and the other prophecies give more details of potential fulfilments and developments of the beast systems, culminating in the war between the Kings of the North and South and the final revelation of Israel's triumphant Messiah and the resurrection in Daniel 12. The sequence of metals in the image of Daniel 2 speak primarily of four kings, each having a king-dom, a dominion over which they reigned. The word translated "kingdoms" can as well be rendered "reigns", or effectively, "kings". And they all form part of the image of an individual *man.* Nebuchadnezzar personally, rather than the Babylonian empire, was represented by the head of gold (Dan. 2:38). The ten toes of the image represent “kings” (Dan. 2:44 “in the days of these kings”). The prophecy started to be fulfilled- for in Daniel’s lifetime, the head of gold, Nebuchadnezzar’s dynasty, gave way to Darius the Mede (Dan. 5:31), and still in Daniel’s lifetime, to Cyrus the Persian (Dan. 6:31). Daniel immediately perceived that it was about a succession of kings, not kingdoms (Dan. 2:21). But even that sequence need not have happened the way it did if Nebuchadnezzar had repented more quickly; if he had, there would have been a “lengthening of your tranquility” (Dan. 4:27). If he had, perhaps the next metal of the image would have followed him directly, rather than following his son. The time period intended for him could have been changed. The same word translated “lengthening” occurs only again in Dan. 7:12, where we read that the beasts had their “lives *prolonged* for a season and time”. Their intended time periods were added to. The setting up of God’s Kingdom on the earth / land of Israel was exactly what had been prophesied in Jeremiah and Ezekiel as happening once the captivity in Babylon had ended; at that time, the stone could have hit the earth and destroyed the situation envisaged in the image of Daniel 2. But this intended sequence of four kings followed by ten kings didn’t come about as intended. Ezra lamented the intermarriage of the Jews with the surrounding peoples, but even that could have been the fulfilment of the iron and clay mingling themselves with the seed of men (Dan. 2:43); but still the Kingdom was not established. The attempted reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi didn't bear enough fruit; and the potential Messiah figures such as Joshua and Zerubbabel all failed.

The captivity was intended to last for 70 years, but in reality it lasted longer- hence Daniel's confusion and pleading with God in Daniel 10 to do what He had promised. And yet his prayer of Daniel 9 suggests that he realized Judah's sins were such, and their lack of real repentance in Babylon was such, that the restoration program had been delayed. His response to understanding the 70 year period is to pray to God admitting Israel have sinned and are still impenitent- as if he realized this was why the period had been extended (Dan. 9:2,3). In Dan. 9:19 he asks for God to forgive, to accept his repentance on Judah's behalf, and therefore not to "defer" or delay any longer. Clearly he saw that the intended 70 year period had been extended, because Israel had not repented as required. It seems to me that this was the same reason for the 'delay' in Christ's second coming; the bridegroom does indeed "delay", the same word translated "tarried" (Mt. 24:48; 25:5). It didn't happen in the first century as planned but was delayed, just as the coming of the Messianic Kingdom was delayed in Old Testament times.

The beasts of Daniel 7 are based upon the four metals of the image in Daniel 2, with the feet and ten toes of iron and clay matched by the horns upon the fourth beast. The first beast was given a man's heart and stood up looking like a man, showing it represented a personal king (Dan. 7:4). Dan. 7:9 speaks of how "the thrones were cast down" and then the last judgment sat. The beasts are therefore kings or "thrones"; their casting down is the same as the smashing of the metals of the image. My point is that the beasts were initially intended to be seen as kings, individuals rather than empires. Dan. 7:17 is clear: "These great beasts, which are four, are four kings which shall arise out of the earth / land". Likewise "the ten horns… are ten kings" (Dan. 7:24). We are so familiar with the rescheduled, long term application of the prophecies, rolling through the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, that we can overlook the simple fact that the intended fulfilment was in a swift succession of kings after Nebuchadnezzar which would conclude with the return from exile and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom upon the ruins of the Babylonian kings. When it became clear that there would be some delay, Daniel was given the vision of Daniel 8, in which another version of the horns on the fourth beast was given. In this vision, a ram with a great horn spawned four leaders, out of whom came another horn, which persecuted Israel and defiled the sanctuary for 2,300 days, placing the desolating abomination (Dan. 8:13). This time period has no obvious fulfilment. But this very verse is quoted by the Lord Jesus in the Olivet prophecy; and clearly it has the capacity for various potential fulfilments which can be rescheduled if human repentance and response is inadequate. Dan. 8:20-22 says that the two horns on the goat represented the kings of Media and Persia- both of whom Daniel served under (Dan. 5:31; 6:31). After them, four kings could have arisen, followed by a charismatic leader who would conflict with "the prince of princes" [Messiah] and be "broken without hand" (Dan. 8:25) just as the little stone cut out without hands would destroy the image of Daniel 2. Such a situation could have happened in Daniel's time, or at least in the time of Alexander the Great. But it didn't. Firstly, in Daniel 2, he saw a succession of four kings. But then, after the second king, he has a vision of another four kings needing to arise; in other words, another element has been added to the sequence, delaying the fulfilment somewhat. Daniel's response was feeling depressed (Dan. 8:27)- because obviously he wanted the fulfilment as soon as possible.

In Daniel 9, Daniel pleads for the prophecy of restoration to be fulfilled, recognizing that the 70 year period had been extended; he is recorded as repenting on behalf of

Judah, and asking that God will not further delay the fulfilment (Dan. 9:19). The answer is the prophecy of the 70 *weeks*. This could mean that 70 *weeks* were going to be added to the 70 *years*. This could have meant a literal 70 weeks from the time of Daniel's prayer, or the seventy sevens could be a total of 490 day / years. Despite many ingenious attempts, there is no persuasive interpretation of the 70 weeks prophecy. It could be that it is a series of potential possibilities; seven literal weeks from the commandment to restore Jerusalem unto Messiah, and then 62 weeks from Messiah's coming to His 'cutting off'. But then the prophecy speaks of how the city and sanctuary would again be destroyed and the destroyer then himself destroyed. This would've been most discouraging for Daniel, who was expecting and hoping for the immediate restitution of the temple.

Then in Daniel 10, Daniel was told that the appointed time had been made longer (Dan. 10:1 Heb.). This was in the third year of Cyrus, when according to the earlier prophecies, Daniel was looking for a new king to arise (Daniel 2), or four kings (according to the sequence of Dan. 8). Seeing Daniel had lived through the reigns of at least three kings, he likely expected the reign of these kings to be very brief, so that he might see the coming of the restored Kingdom. But now he is told that the time period has been extended. No wonder Daniel mourned this vision for three weeks (Dan. 10:2). Daniel then symbolically dies and resurrects; the comfort being that he would ultimately be resurrected to the life eternal, but the sadness being that he must die because "the vision [i.e. its fulfilment] is still for many days" (Dan. 10:14). His praying and weeping for those three weeks had not brought about a reverting of the time period back to that originally planned- it was yet or still for many days. In the spirit of Moses, Daniel had tried to change God's will. All we learn at least from this is that prophetic time periods are open to change. The Olivet prophecy speaks of how "the days", and the context suggests the 'days' of Daniel's prophecies were in view, will have to be shortened otherwise even the elect will fall away (Mt. 24:22). Dan. 11:2 went on to explain to Daniel that now another series of four kings was envisaged, this time all Persian kings, in contrast to the idea of four *Greek* kings arising in Daniel 8; and this would culminate in two leading kings, of the North and South, who would have a series of conflicts climaxing in the temple being captured again, and conflict with Messiah leading to the resurrection (Dan. 11:40-12:2). This scenario also didn't happen- and it would explain why no very credible interpretation has been found for Daniel 11. When we read allusions to these prophecies in the Olivet prophecy, and perceive that the Lord had in mind fulfilling them in the first century but later rescheduled that, we must remember that those prophecies had already had various potential fulfilments which had not worked out because of the lack of repentance within Israel. This is the all important sign of fruit on the fig tree, and an encouragement to give highest priority to preaching to Israel.

Daniel's response is to ask "How long to the end of these things?" (Dan. 12:8 Heb.). He's given various time periods of days, but told that these do not concern him, for he is to fall asleep in death, and then stand again "at the end of the days" (Dan. 12:13), however many they were, whether shortened or extended, "the end" would come all the same, and he would be resurrected then. And this is the great comfort to all of us as we reflect whether we will live to see the Lord's coming or not.

Dan 2:1 *In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar*- The miserable critics point out that Daniel and his friends were tried for three years by

Nebuchadnezzar when he was apparently already king (Dan. 1:18,19). In a book as subtle and carefully internally coherent as the Bible, it beggars belief that such an obvious mistake would be made by some conman author. I suggest the opposite is true; someone who was writing the truth and who had lived close to the situation would write things which may appear contradictory to those reading from a distance. The four Gospel records are another example. And so here, at the time of Dan. 1 Nebuchadnezzar ruled as regent or subordinate to his father, Nabopolassar; whereas "the second year" refers to Nebuchadnezzar's sole sovereignty. Jer. 25:1 likewise uses the idea of "the first year" of Nebuchadnezzar to refer to the first year of his sole reign. Or we can go with the alternative textual readings, which offer "the twelfth" for "the second year". Another option is to understand Daniel 1 as summarizing how Daniel and his friends came to be so highly acceptable to Nebuchadnezzar after three years; and the events of chapter 2 explain how that came about. This kind of literary device is common in the Bible.

Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams; and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep went from him- There are so many similarities with the young, handsome, captive, faithful Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dreams and getting rewarded; here the connection is with Gen. 41:8.

They are both described as good looking (Gen. 39:6; Dan. 1:4), given new names, taken into captivity as 'boys' (Gen. 37:30; Dan. 1:4) but are promoted to the helm of Gentile power after interpreting a king's dream. As noted on Dan. 1:9, "God made Daniel to find kindness and compassion with the prince of the eunuchs" just as the prison keeper did to Joseph (Gen. 39:21 "the Lord was with Joseph and showed him grace; he gave him favour in the sight of the chief jailer"). The parallels are particularly strong between Daniel 2 and Genesis 41. The records both begin with a two year period (Gen. 41:1; Dan. 2:1). Both times, the king is described as agitated (Gen. 41:8, Dan. 2:1) because neither he nor his assistants can interpret the dream (Gen. 41:8, Dan. 2:1-11). Both Joseph and Daniel have someone at court who presents them as a Hebrew to the Gentile king (the cupbearer in Gen. 41:9-13, Arioch in Dan. 2:25). They both say that the interpretation of dreams is with their God (Gen. 40:8; Dan. 2:28), not with them, and that God makes known the future and it is certain of fulfilment (Gen. 41:25,32; Dan. 2:28,45). The Gentile monarch is delighted with the message and rewards the Israelite by giving them gifts and promoting them. The similarities are such that we can assume that Daniel based his words upon those of Joseph, perceiving the similarity of situation. Just as we are to allow ourselves to see the parallels between our life situations and the essence of such situations in the lives of faithful Biblical characters; and act like them. "Zaphnath Paaneah", the name given to Joseph, can mean 'interpreter of dreams'; and Daniel's interpreting the king's dreams, at one stage being summoned out of obscurity to do so, is so clearly based upon Joseph's experience. Man is not alone- in that no experience is without Biblical precedent, in essence.

The parallels continue beyond Daniel 2. Thus in Dan. 4:8,9 the foreign monarch realizes that the spirit of God is in Daniel, just as Pharaoh did with Joseph. The reward for telling the vision is a gold chain in both Gen. 41:42 and Dan. 5:7,16,29. Daniel's words to Nebuchadnezzar are clearly inspired by Joseph's example. He perceived the similarities between his situation and that of a Biblical precedent- and spoke and acted accordingly. Truly a pattern for every Bible reader. Both of them interpreted dreams three times when the wise men couldn't do so, both were cast into a pit to die. Both are described as having "the spirit of God / the gods" (Gen. 41:44; Dan. 4:5). Their exaltation in reward is very similar; Daniel's exaltation by

Nebuchadnezzar matches that of Joseph by Pharaoh: "Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’ Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand... He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command". Joseph's ministry started at age 17 and ended with his death at 110, a total of 93 years (Gen. 37:2; 50:22). Daniel's ministry may likewise have been 93 years: twenty years of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign until the fall of Jerusalem (his accession year plus the 19 years of 2 Kings 25:8), seventy years of exile (Dan. 9:2) and three years of king Cyrus (Dan. 10:10).

We note though that Daniel is presented as a greater than Joseph. He not only interprets but recalls the king's dream; the dream is of far greater and eternal moment than those which Joseph interpreted; and Daniel is presented as more prayerful and more eager to give glory to Israel's God for the interpretation. Indeed Joseph is never once recorded as praying. Moses and Daniel are presented as resisting assimilation, whereas Joseph assimilates into the Gentile world. Daniel states clearly and more bravely than Joseph, that this Gentile monarch is given his power by God alone. Daniel is repeatedly critical of the impotence of Gentile wisdom, unlike Joseph. And it could be argued that the Gentile king was finally converted to Israel's God by Daniel's interpretations, whereas that isn't said of Pharaoh.

Dan 2:2 *Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the enchanters, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, to tell the king his dreams*- Babylon was deeply religious; the real leaders were the religious leaders, and the sorcery for which Babylon was infamous was a large part of their religion. Hence "the Chaldeans" refers to Babylonians generally, as well as to this class of religious leaders. They were the quintessence of all Babylon was. For them to be exposed as fraudulent failures was therefore a blow to Babylon's entire religious structure, just as the dreams of Pharaoh and later the plagues struck at the very core of Egypt's religious beliefs.

So they came in and stood before the king- Perhaps in the middle of the night; see on :3.

Dan 2:3 *The king said to them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream*- The implication of :1 could be that the king couldn't get back to sleep, and so he called the magicians immediately, at night. It could even be that the king commanded them to be killed immediately (see on :5), and the executioner then went to the house of Daniel to kill him too. But that same night Daniel went to the king (:16) and assured him that he would find the interpretation; he returns to pray, goes to sleep [despite all the pressure and drama], and in a night vision, perhaps later that very same night, receives the answer (:19). If something like this scenario is correct, then time was of the essence. Daniel would have wanted an immediate answer from God; but he had to exercise faith in going to the king and asking for time for the answer to come. And he went to see the king that night knowing that he had a death penalty upon his head. The heads of his department [as it were] had just been condemned to death; and he the very junior underling now goes to the king to ask for more time. Then he comes home, chats with his friends and prayers with them about the matter and goes to sleep in peace; and that night, he gets a vision which is the answer. This is all typical of the deep faith and peace which we sense in Daniel.

Dan 2:4 *Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in the Syrian language, O king, live forever: tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation*- The group are summarized as "the Chaldeans". As noted on :2, "the Chaldeans" refers to

Babylonians generally, as well as to this class of religious leaders. They were the quintessence of all Babylon was. For them to be exposed as fraudulent failures was therefore a blow to Babylon's entire religious structure, just as the dreams of Pharaoh and later the plagues struck at the very core of Egypt's religious beliefs. That they spoke in Syrian may seem unsurprising, but perhaps the idea is that as this part of Daniel is written in Aramaic ["Syrian"], we are reading the very words they actually spoke.

Dan 2:5 *The king answered the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me-*

A case could be made that Nebuchadnezzar was paranoid that the Chaldees / magicians were seeking to overthrow him. Dan. 2:9 uses the word for 'conspiracy' about them: “For you have agreed together ['conspired'] to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed”. For such rebellions led by this group were not unknown. His dream was a reflection of those fears. The text never says he forgot the dream- if we interpret :5 as meaning "The thing [command to kill you] is gone from me" unless you interpret the dream to me. This would make sense of his otherwise unreasonable demand, that they recall the dream as well as interpret it. He was seeking for an excuse to kill them. This approach makes better sense of the otherwise strange statement: “Tell me the dream that I may know that you can declare to me its
interpretation” (Dan. 2:9 NASB). He knows the dream, but asks them to tell him what he dreamt, so that he can then trust their interpretation of it. And why would a king be worried silly about a dream he said he had forgotten? How do I know I had a terrible dream last night if I have forgotten it? The awfulness of the image would surely have remained in the king's mind; it is surely stating too much to claim he remembered absolutely zero about this dream. If he had indeed had a dream about his future, including his apparent destruction, he would be desperate to understand it. And that is exactly the scene we have. This would make sense of Daniel saying that he would make known to the king "the thoughts of your heart". And Nebuchadnezzar saying that “My spirit was troubled to know / understand the dream” (Dan. 2:3), as if it was the interpretation aspect which bothered him rather than the lack of recall.

We note that Nebuchadnezzar had only recently won the victory against the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish, whilst his father was still on the throne. This hugely extended Babylonian power and made Nebuchadnezzar some kind of a hero. And he naturally internally wondered what would be his future; and whether the forces of jealousy within Babylon would be his end. Jer. 46:2-12 had prophesied this battle and his victory, but stating that Nebuchadnezzar was merely Yahweh's agent. If Nebuchadnezzar was aware of that prophecy, he would naturally have wondered about his role and relationship with Yahweh. His victory there was huge and he lost very few men compared to the complete destruction of massive Egyptian forces. He must have surely seen some higher hand at work. That was just two or three years previous to him having become king; for soon after the battle he became king on his father's death. And his reign began with rebellions in Media and Persia; and the growth of powerful competitors in Greece. Truly "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown" (Shakespeare, Henry IV). His dream and paranoia is absolutely psychologically credible.

It's unclear whether "the thing" refers to the dream, which had gone from him in the sense of forgetting it, "the thing" is the same word translated "matter" in :8,23; or whether the reference is to the decree which he intended sending out to kill the

Chaldeans unless they recalled his dream for him and interpretted it. The same word for "thing" is translated "commandment" in Dan. 3:22,28 when the king again commands the death of his wise men. And it is translated "word" in Dan. 4:31; 6:12: “the word still (being) in the mouth of the king”, clearly referring to a command from the king. A similar phrase is “the commandment came forth” (Dan. 9:23). Surely the king would have referred to the dream as a "dream" and not a thing / word. I suggest that if the reconstruction of events offered on :3 is correct, then "the thing" refers to the command to kill the wise men unless the dream was retold an interpretted. The reasoning in :8 confirms this. The magicians wanted to "gain time" not because the dream had gone from Nebuchadnezzar, but because the decree to kill them had gone forth from him.

If you don’t make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a compost heap- The cutting in pieces is to be connected with how the stone was to break the image in pieces, including the head of gold which represented Nebuchadnezzar. He was to be taught that it was not for him to arrogate to himself such power of condemnation. For contrary to what he liked to imagine, he was not eternal, nor was he God. Rather, he was under Divine judgment.

Dan 2:6 *But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore show me the dream and its interpretation*- This is the language of a man who considers that he has the power to give any reward in his kingdom, which he considered to be the kingdom of a divine being, of God. The gifts and rewards given to Daniel were of political power within the kingdom. "Receive" is elsewhere used in Daniel of receiving the kingdom; and yet ultimately it is the people of God who would receive or "take" the Kingdom (Dan. 7:18 s.w.). "Great honour" is the word elsewhere translated "glory"; it was this glory which was so prideful and which led to Nebuchadnezzar's downfall (Dan. 4:30,36). The glory of the Kingdom was to be finally given for ever to God's people (Dan. 7:14 s.w.). So it was precisely the attitude Nebuchadnezzar had at this point, considering that all reward and glory in the Kingdom of God was *his* to distribute at will, which had to be taken away from him. He was playing God, and this is so unacceptable to Him.

Dan 2:7 *They answered the second time and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation*- Their humanity is being taught to both them and the king. The idea was that they had special dialogue with the gods which others didn't have, and therefore could give interpretations. But their limitations are apparent; it was God's attempt to teach all of them, and the king, that their religion was woefully weak and they should accept the one true God. The whole scene here parallels Joseph before Pharaoh, and that was also the intention then. We marvel that God would make such effort to convert the likes of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, the very types we would have passed over and ignored as unsuitable candidates for any evangelism attempt.

Dan 2:8 *The king answered, I know of a certainty that you would gain time, because you see the thing is gone from me*- The king is suspicious that they were not who they claimed to be, because they could not tell him what he had dreamt. The thing that went from him sounds like the command to kill them (see on :3,5). The king's sensitivity to any appeal for extra time therefore made Daniel's approach to request

just that all the harder and more dangerous; although :16 could suggest Daniel as it were booked an appointment with the king, whilst as yet he had no answer. He was so sure that prayer would be answered and he would have an answer to give.

"To gain the time" meant they wanted time because they were going to try to flee and escape. This explains why the command to slay them was hastily executed, before they could escape. This makes Daniel's request for more time even more amazing, seeing the king wanted to kill the magicians quickly. It shows his trust in prayer, and shows that prayer isn't instantly answered. Surely here we have a prime case when immediate answer to prayer would've been appreciated. But that wasn't God's way. As it often isn't today.

Dan 2:9 *But if you don't tell me the dream, there is but one law for you; for you have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, until the time be changed*- The magicians had presumably come out with some airy words and were begging for more time, in the hope that the death penalty would be lifted. "Words" is the same word as "matter" in :10; perhaps they had come up with some dream which was not the word or matter which the king had dreamed. But Nebuchadnezzar had to be taught that God alone can 'change the times'; Daniel uses the same phrase in :21. The lives of the magicians were held in his hand as if playthings; but he was to learn that his life was in God's hand in just the same way. It was God through His people who could change the king's word of command (Dan. 3:28), which was supposedly unchangeable.

"Until the time be changed" is the idea behind Daniel's later marvel in :21 that God changes times and seasons and sets up and removes rulers. The king appears paranoid that being in such a hopeless position, his magicians were now plotting a changed time, an overthrow of his kingdom. Subconsciously he was clearly worried about his future, as he later admits. There is irony yet again, for Daniel gives the interpretation that effectively, the king would be overthrown or pass from power; and is gloriously rewarded by the king for stating that which he feared.

Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation- He perceives that the dream and its interpretation cannot be separated; the magicians were making a difference between the two, but the king was not going to be fooled. If they truly had Divine powers, then they would know what he had dreamed. His test of them was to ask them to tell him what he had dreamed, and this would then confirm to him that their interpretation was correct. He knew what he had dreamed, or else this test had no power. Clearly he perceived from the dream that his time was limited, and he feared that the Chaldeans were behind this and would interpret the dream as meaning that he must lose or abdicate from power. If the idea was that the king had forgotten his dream, then the Chaldeans could presumably have made up any dream and interpreted it to him.

Dan 2:10 *The Chaldeans answered before the king and said, There is not a man on the earth who can show the king's matter, because no king, lord or ruler has asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter or Chaldean*- By saying this they were admitting that they were merely men upon earth. They reasoned that there was no historical precedent for such a request. And yet they were setting themselves up to have to make an exception to all their received wisdom; the one true God could inspire one man upon the earth, and show the matter.

Dan 2:11 *It is an unusual thing that the king requires, and there is no other who can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh*- They were

admitting that they were not in fact in contact with the gods, although this was what their profession was supposedly all about. And they were setting up an acceptance that therefore Daniel was God manifest in flesh.

Dan 2:12 *Therefore the king was angry and very furious, and he commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed*- As noted on :11, they had effectively admitted that they had no connection with the gods; they were fakes, and may as well be fired from their jobs and "destroyed". The same word is used of how the power of destruction is ultimately with God alone (Dan. 7:11,26). Again, the king is portrayed as playing God, and being educated as to his error.

Dan 2:13 *So the decree went forth that all the wise men were to be slain; and they sought Daniel and his companions to be slain*- I suggested on :3 that this all happened the same night. Perhaps the more prominent wise men were indeed slain, leaving their posts open for Daniel and his friends to replace them. Indeed we can translate to the effect "the decree went forth, *and* the wise men were slain"; the LXX supports this ["The decree went forth, and they began to slay the wise men; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to slay them"]. This is why Arioch, the chief of the executioners, was sent to the wise men. But circumstances again repeated. This servant of the king, like Melzar, 'for some reason' took pity upon Daniel and let him have a few hours respite in order to pray to God. We note God didn't give an instant answer, for Daniel surely prayed immediately about the matter. Momentary prayer isn't always what He seeks, but intense and extensive prayer lasting hours.

Dan 2:14 *Then Daniel returned answer with counsel and prudence to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, who was gone forth to kill the wise men of Babylon*- We imagine Arioch coming to Daniel, sword in hand. "Arioch" may well be a title for the court executioner.

Dan 2:15 *He answered Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so urgent from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel*- As suggested on :3, this may have been very late at night.

Dan 2:16 *Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would appoint him a time, and he would show the king the interpretation*- The king had made it clear that there was to be no playing for time. If they were indeed in contact with the gods, he expected an immediate answer. But Daniel asks for time because he has to contact the one true God and wait for an answer. But it could be that although Daniel had not received any revelation at this point, he was certain he would; and he made the appointment to see the king in absolute faith that it would be given to him. Again we sense the calmness and faith of Daniel, reasoning as if what he did not then have, he effectively did have. See on :25.

We know from the story of Esther that access to kings was not quickly nor easily given. I will suggest on :25 that actually Arioch never went to the king and asked for this extension of time- the king was clearly not in a mood to give it. If however we read the text on face value, that an extension of time was given, then this was remarkable. Perhaps [depending how we read the chronology here] the king recalled Daniel had great ability with dreams (Dan. 1:19,20). Or he was impressed that Daniel's offer was to recall and not just interpret the dream, reflecting thereby his extreme anxiety about the dream. But above all these things there would have been

the influence of God's Spirit directly on the mind of this man.

Again we marvel that God did not immediately grant Daniel insight. Daniel's faith in intense prayer was being tested, and for all time we are taught that God doesn't always give instant answers to prayer on demand. For surely Daniel had tried momentarily begging God for the answer. In the age of instant access and impatience with delayed response, we have a powerful lesson. Daniel was confident the answer would come, but recognized it wouldn't come immediately and that intense prayer requires time. He was so persuaded of this that he asks the king to give him time [see AV] so that he could receive the answer to his prayers for the interpretation to be given him. He does this aware that the king has ordered the deaths of the other magicians because he thought they were trying to 'buy time' (:8). So his request for more time was the more audacious and driven by absolute need and conviction that prayer is answered, but, it takes time.

Dan 2:17 *Then Daniel went to his house, and told Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions*- As suggested on :3, this was in the middle of the night. "Companions" suggests those he was joined to, through sharing covenant relationship with Yahweh. Perhaps there were no others amongst the young exiles whom he felt were abiding in the covenant. As noted on :30, this is why Daniel later says that the dream was revealed to him simply so that he and his three friends might be saved from death at that time.

Dan 2:18 *That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; so that Daniel and his companions should not die with the rest of the wise men of Babylon*- Daniel realized that his own prayers might not be enough, and so he awoke his friends late at night (see on :3) with the request that they join in prayer about the matter. "Mercies" is better "pity". Their motivation was admittedly to save their own skins. Daniel's request to his friends to pray for him as he went before the king (Dan. 2:17,18), so that they should not die, contrasts with Esther asking her friends to simply fast for her- with no reference to God (Esther 4:16).

Dan 2:19 *Then was the secret revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven*- Effectively, Daniel dreamed the same as Nebuchadnezzar did, making him effectively equal to the king who thought he had no equal. And because he remembered the dream and the interpretation, he was thereby declared greater than him. The night vision reflects the fact that Daniel could sleep under the threat of execution the next day, rather like Peter in prison, all reflects the depth of his faith. See on :3. Daniel's first response was to thank God for the answer, rather than to race off to the king.

Dan 2:20 *Daniel responded, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are His*- Daniel had been shown that the Kingdom of God was to be on earth "for ever and ever", and he envisages praise to God for eternity. The required wisdom was of God, and not of Daniel; this is a major theme in Daniel's speech to the king, but it reflected how he felt within himself; for his spontaneous prayer of thanks recognizes it. "For wisdom, and might are *His*" surely stresses the "His". Seeing Daniel had been trained in all the wisdom of Babylon and excelled at it.

Dan. 2:20-23 are in fact a carefully crafted poem or hymn. There are two verses or strophes, the lines of which clearly relate to each other:

"Let the name of God be praised for ever and ever" = "You God of my fathers I honour and praise"
"wisdom and strength" = "for wisdom and strength you gave to me"
"He is the one who reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness and light dwells with him" = "You have made known to me what we asked from You; the dream of the king You have made known to us".

Higher critics would claim that this therefore was composed by an editor well after the event. But another option is that instead of rushing off to the king with the interpretation, as we may well have done, dominated by the fear of death, the executioner knocking at the doors and with not a moment to [apparently] lose... Daniel not only uttered a few words of praise, but deeply reflected on God's grace to him. And ended up composing this brief poem or hymn, there and then. Such composition requires a focus of mind; and he would have had that focus despite all the pressures of the moment. A fine example to us, not to be dominated by the urgencies of the moment, but to retain calm spirituality throughout it all. This is what we see exemplified to the ultimate in the Lord's endurance of eight hours of torture on the cross.

Dan 2:21 *He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings, and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have understanding*- The whole prophecy of the image was to result in God's praise and glory (:20). The challenges of working out the symbolism and its correspondence to geopolitics should not lead us to forget that. Daniel was faced with a "time" and commandment for his own death, made by a despot who considered his own word unchangeable. But for God to change that was a small matter (:9 s.w. "changed"), for He changes the times and seasons of the world powers. "He gives wisdom to the wise" is not Daniel being self congratulatory. Rather he accepts that he and his friends had retained their spiritual wisdom and understanding of God's ways, and it was in response to that, that he had been given the required insight. The four beasts were "changed" from each other, AV "diverse one from another" (Dan. 7:3 s.w.). This is saying that the changes between the metals of the image and then the beasts of Dan. 7 were all orchestrated by God. Daniel understood the image as referring to a succession of kings, not kingdoms; as suggested on :1, this was the primary potential of the prophecy. There would have been a series of kings after Nebuchadnezzar, which would have ended with the mountain of Judah's kingdom being re-established on earth upon their ruins.

Daniel marvels that God "changes", not just coordinates, the "times and seasons". This could be a reference to the various potential fulfilments of the prophecy- in Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty, in the Greek empire, in the first century Roman empire, and finally in our last days. The phrase "times and seasons" is used of the times relating to the Lord's return (Acts 1:7; 1 Thess. 5:1). We are to understand therefore that these times and seasons are variable, due to the conditional and potential nature of such prophecies. Although just as there were four seasons, so there would be four reigns manipulated and brought about by God rather than man. Which again raises the questions of whether Nebuchadnezzar was the first reign, and whether the feet or iron and clay are a fifth empire or entity. The allusion to four seasons could suggest that 'the end' could potentially have come before that.

Dan 2:22 *He reveals the deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him*- If as suggested on :3 all this happened in one night, then these allusions to light and darkness make the more sense. The future is

"darkness" to us, but God reveals the essence- that the process of human history will climax in the establishment of His Kingdom.

Dan 2:23 *I thank You, and praise You, You God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might, and has now made known to me what we desired of You; for You have made known to us the king's matter*- The reference to his "fathers" must be meshed with Ezekiel's observation that the exiles tended to blame their fathers for their predicament. Daniel instead sees that Yahweh had still been the God of his apostate fathers, even if they had denied that relationship. "Made known to *us*" reflects Daniel's solidarity with his friends. Daniel's praise is not that God has hereby saved his life by revealing the vision; but rather praise of God's wisdom and the glory of His workings amongst men.

Dan 2:24 *Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon and said this: Don't destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show to the king the interpretation*- The command to kill them had been issued in the middle of the night (see on :3), and so we envisage Daniel walking or running through darkened streets to find Arioch. We note too that the wise men owed their lives to Daniel. And yet in Dan. 6 they sought to kill him. This is the power of jealousy; it so often develops from an arrogant refusal to be grateful to a person for the grace of God to us which was manifested through them.

Dan 2:25 *Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said: I have found a man among the captives of Judah who will make known to the king the interpretation*- this appears to conflict with the impression given on :16 that Daniel had gone in to the king; but it seems that :16 means that he made an appointment to see the king and tell him the dream, seeing it was now the dead of night. Arioch's reference to "the captives of Judah" heightens the sense that Babylonian religion and wisdom was being overturned. And Arioch himself seems confident that Daniel has really been given the answer.

"I have found a man..." definitely appears to contradict the apparent agreement from the king to give Daniel time to find the answer. See on :16. Perhaps Arioch had not in fact asked the king for the delay. And now Arioch takes the glory by claiming he is responsible for finding the answer. He has great faith Daniel really has got the answer, but wants to take credit for that. Again, what seems so bad- that Arioch never actually asked the king for more time- is turned to good under God's hand.

Dan 2:26 *The king answered Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?*- The king addressed Daniel as Belteshazzar, a reference to the god Bel. Daniel responds by saying immediately that it is the one God of heaven, not Bel of Babylon, who had provided the answers.

Dan 2:27 *Daniel answered before the king, and said, The secret which the king has demanded can neither wise men, enchanters, magicians, nor soothsayers, show to the king*- We would likely have answered the king's question by saying "Yes, sir!". But Daniel is so awed by Yahweh's majesty that he loses no chances to emphasize that this revelation from Yahweh was an effective trashing of all Babylon's religious leaders; for the "wise men" were the religious leaders. If I were Daniel I would have just blurted out the dream and the interpretation. But Daniel sought to convert

Nebuchadnezzar and to bring glory to Yahweh. And so he begins by rubbishing all Babylonian wisdom. A brave thing to do before the king of Babylon. Daniel was effectively stating that all his knowledge and success in the wisdom of Babylonian dream interpretation was meaningless.

Dan 2:28 *But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head on your bed, are these*- The Babylonians thought that their god Bel lived in Babylon. Daniel stresses therefore that His God is in Heaven. Cyrus later defines Yahweh as "Yahweh, the God of Heaven" (Ezra 1:2). The God of or in Heaven was therefore a known title for Israel's God. "The latter days" is a term which refers both to the final end time, when Messiah shall destroy the image as it stands complete in the last day; and also to the general 'future' immediate to Nebuchadnezzar.

"The latter days" could refer just generally to the future; or there may be a specific reference to the end times. LXX has “at the end of the days”. What was to happen in those latter days was that the stone was to hit and entire image, destroy it, and become God's eternal kingdom on earth. Possibly the vagueness of the phrase is because Nebuchadnezzar's repentance could have brought about a totally different outworking of things. The 'last day' could have come in the immediate future at that point. Constantly, we see flexibility in the possible outworkings of things.

Dan 2:29 *As for you, O king, your thoughts came into your mind on your bed, what should happen in the future; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what shall happen*- 'Those who reveal secrets' were the magicians and wise men; but Daniel says that it is God alone who reveals secrets, through his agency. I would have been tempted to just blurt out the dream and its message, knowing that the king was wary of the slightest attempt to delay, and had ordered my execution by Arioch, who was presumably standing next to Daniel at the time. Just one irritation of the despotic king could lead to Daniel's head being severed from his shoulders. But still he stresses the glory of Israel's God before he reveals the dream.

Dan 2:30 *But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but to the intent that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart*- "But to the intent that the interpretation may be made known to the king" is AV "But for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king". Daniel wishes to connect his friends to himself in this matter. He is saying that he has been chosen to reveal the secret just so that Daniel and his friends would not be executed. And yet there were many other young exiles from Judah with them at the time; Daniel seems to count them as not really within the covenant (see on :17).

Dan 2:31 *You, O king, saw, and behold, a great image. This image, which was mighty*- The original states that the image was "one". And it was an image, whose head was that of Nebuchadnezzar. It was united, "one", and thus the entire entity was destroyed at one time. The clear implication is that the whole image was Nebuchadnezzar. The obvious interpretation is that it refers to his dynasty, the three kings who followed him, all progressively weaker: Amel-Marduk, Neriglissar, and Nabonidus [who may or may not be the same as the Biblical Belshazzar]. These three rose and fell within just a few years after Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was

initially succeeded by his son, Amel-Marduk, but Amel-Marduk's reign only lasted for two years before Neriglissar usurped the Babylonian throne and put him to death. Neriglissar ruled four years before dying and being succeeded by his son Labashi-Marduk. The Uruk King List says Labashi-Marduk reigned only three months before being usurped by Nabonidus; and then killed either by Nabonidus or his son Belshazzar. It's unclear if Nabonidus and Belshazzar were the same person. The later brief rulers of Babylon were seen as either legitimate or illegitimate according to whether they were married in to the descendants of Nebuchadnezzar or his wives. This would explain the allusion to marriage in :43 "the rulers of that empire will try to unite their families by intermarriage" (GNB). And this is the snug fit interpretation of the fact that the head of gold is Nebuchadnezzar personally, according to Daniel's own interpretation. We note the parallel four beasts of Dan. 7 are interpreted as "four kings" (Dan. 7:17). All the 'empires' interpretations have to make the head of gold mean Babylon rather than Nebuchadnezzar personally. They are never going to be a snug fit on that point.

In this case, the best fit interpretation would be:

Gold = Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC)
Silver = Amel-Marduk (562-560 BC)
Bronze = Neriglissar (560-556 BC)
Iron = Nabonidus (556-539 BC)

The "mixed with clay" period would then refer to Nabonidus' coregency with Belshazzar, weakening the kingdom. We note that Nebuchadnezzar is repeatedly called the father of Belshazzar (Dan. 5:17,22 especially). This wasn't strictly the case. But if the image prophecy had an initial possible fulfilment in the immediate dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar, ending in Belshazzar, all is clear. This would explain why Belshazzar is described as the "son" of Nebuchadnezzar when he was a descendant but not his literal son. "Son" can legitimately be used of any descendant. We also note the opinion of several scholars that "Belshazzar" was Nebuchadnezzar's son Evil Merodach. The fall of the Babylonian empire and Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty was therefore the fall of Nebuchadnezzar, seeing the whole image represented him. For he was the head of it. This is why Jer. 25:12 speaks of the downfall of Babylon after 70 years as if it would be the fall of Nebuchadnezzar personally: "It shall happen that when seventy years are accomplished, then I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, says Yahweh, for their iniquity". "The king of Babylon" in the context is Nebuchadnezzar. And yet Nebuchadnezzar personally could have repented and not sinned... and in this case another possible scenario would have worked out.

The stone could have hit the image at that point, if the Jews had obeyed the calls of Haggai and Zechariah to rise up against the Babylonians and re-establish the Kingdom. They didn't, and so the image prophecy had other potential fulfilments. Likewise Cyrus of Persia could have been the Messiah figure, as Isaiah makes clear- but he failed that potential. These likewise didn't happen, because the fulfilment of prophecy in this context required human freewill input which wasn't provided by the Jews. The other potential fulfilments were never the snuggest fit interpretation. But finally the essence of the image prophecy will be fulfilled in the Lord's return to earth and destruction of the beast system which is the summation of all the metals. But it all could've happened so much earlier.

In Dan. 4:10, Nebuchadnezzar sees himself as a tree that is felled. God was again trying to get Nebuchadnezzar to see the truth of the image prophecy of Daniel 2. For a tree was seen as symbolic of a man. "Trees have toe-like roots, arm-like branches and

stand upright from root to crown, between earth and heaven". This confirms that the initial application of the image with Nebuchadnezzar's face was to Nebuchadnezzar himself and his immediate dynasty.

The end of the exile and the restoration was the time when the prophecies of Jeremiah about 70 years would be fulfilled. It should be noted that Jer. 25:11 specifically states that the 70 years would be the length of the Babylonian kingdom: "And those nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years". Jer. 29:10 is explicit: "When Babylon's seventy years are over". I suggested on Dan. 2 that the initial possible fulfilment of the image prophecy was in the Babylonian kingdom from Nebuchadnezzar onwards until its fall. The beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign is often dated to 605 BC; and so the defeat of Babylon in BC 538 roughly 70 years later would mean that Darius was Cyrus, and this was when the Jews were intended to return. But Cyrus failed to be the intended Messiah figure and the Jews generally preferred the soft life in Babylon rather than the restoration of Zion. And so there had to be the prophecy of Daniel 9 to provide another path forward.

The parallel vision in Dan. 7 is clear and specific that the four beasts "are four kings [*melek*- individual human beings] which shall arise out of the earth" (Dan. 7:17). The "kingdoms" of Dan. 2 translate a word that can as well mean "kings" or better "reigns". This interpretation didn't come about because the Jews refused to return and establish the Kingdom of God, precluding the fulfilment of the prophecies about them destroying Babylon and Persia in order to reestablish God's Kingdom. The image vision doesn't specifically mention that the feet had ten toes, whereas the fourth beast specifically has ten horns. Possibly the ten toes aren't mentioned because the initial possible scenario was within Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty, and the simple point was that fourth generation after him would be very weak and divided, but with elements of the strength of the third generation in it.

Matthew Henry notes: "Nebuchadnezzar was an admirer of statues, and had his palace and gardens adorned with them; however, he was a worshipper of images, and now behold a *great image* is set before him in a dream". He was being shown that all his worship of images was effectively a worship of himself. And so it can be with all religion; we can think we are doing God service when in reality we are merely using it as a channel for worshipping ourselves. The only other time we encounter the sequence of gold, silver, brass and iron in Daniel is when we read that the idols of the Babylonians were made of these very metals (Dan. 5:4,23), as are the idols of the latter day Babylon (Rev. 18:12). The image reflected back to Nebuchadnezzar how he saw himself.

And whose brightness was excellent, stood before you; and its aspect was awesome- The "brightness" of the entire image is the word used in Daniel of the glory of Babylon; "the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and brightness" (Dan. 4:36), and again of the brightness of the last king of Babylon being changed (Dan. 5:6,9). Again, the natural primary application is to Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty. "Stood before you" is a little detail added to show that the entire edifice was an "image" of Nebuchadnezzar.

"Brightness" was associated with the cherubim, symbols of God's glory, which were to return from Babylon to Judah (Ez. 1:4,27,28); "brightness" was to be a feature of God's restored Kingdom in Judah (Is. 59:9; 60:3,19; 62:1). It is very much the language of theophany (Ps. 18:12; Hab. 3:4) and the return of Christ (2 Thess. 2:8), and therefore the impression is given that this is a fake Kingdom of God, an anti-Christ, a system which appeared as the true when it was the false. As noted often so far in this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar was playing God. Daniel concludes with a picture

of how the brightness of God's people shall be eternal, as opposed to the fading brightness of the image (Dan. 12:3).

"Stood before you" implies 'rose up before you'. It is the same word used of how God raises up kings (2:21), "another kingdom shall *arise* after you" (2:39), "the God of Heaven will *set up* a Kingdom" (2:44). The king was being enabled to see himself from outside himself. It is used eight times in Daniel 3 to describe how Nebuchadnezzar defied this revelation by 'setting up' another image, purely of gold, as if to say that his kingdom would in fact be eternal; he refused to accept that others would 'arise' after him.

The face of the image is emphasized in Dan. 2:31. The AV reads "His brightness was excellent", but the Chaldee word translated "brightness" is the same word translated "face" in describing how the face of the ruler of Babylon was 'changed' as the sequence of empires had its fulfilment (Dan. 4:36; 5:6,9,10). The entity represented by the entire image is focused upon the face of the man heading it up. That face was notable and awesome, just as the fourth beast entity was "strong exceedingly" (Dan. 7:7,19 s.w. "excellent"). The entire image stood "before you", i.e. Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:31). The Hebrew idea of *q'bel* suggests that the image stood there opposite Nebuchadnezzar 'on his behalf', as a reflection of himself. The image is of course a person; the entity represented by it in its complete form is a reflection of a person, modelled after the king of Babylon. This all suggests that the entity which the image represents will be a personification of someone. That individual would be the caliph or prince which governs it, to whom the entity swears loyalty. And the Islamists insist that loyalty be sworn to their caliph, who in turn is seen as the incarnation of the [false] prophet Mohammed. It is this individual who is the antiChrist of the last days. The appearance of the image of the man was "terrible" (Dan. 2:31), it struck fear into the heart of the viewers. And this is the effect of the Islamic extremists on those beholding them. But we can expect more emphasis to be given to their leader, with greater prominence accorded to loyalty to him and an aura of fearfulness emanating from him. The same word translated "terrible" is used of how all nations "trembled and feared" before Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 5:19), and of how uniquely and unsurpassedly "terrible" was the fourth beast (Dan. 7:7,19) whose leader is an embodiment of it. The Chaldee word *resh* used for the "head" of the image is also translated 'the sum'. The head, the man whose face was on the image, was the sum of the image, he was the embodiment of it in a person.

The head was of "fine gold", and the equivalent Hebrew words are found in Gen. 2:12, where we read that "the gold of that land was good ['fine']". Which land? "Havilah", according to Gen. 2:11. Perhaps the leader of the entity will therefore be from Havilah. But there are various options in seeking to identify this area. Keil and Delitzsch in their commentary on Genesis opt for a location in the Caucasus mountains- and many of the Islamic fighters are from there, especially from Chechnaya. Other arguments would place it in Yemen or Saudi Arabia, which is where much of the financial and logistical support for the Islamic extremism is currently coming from, seeing they too are Sunni Moslems. Another line of enquiry is suggested by the way that "fine gold" is used to describe what was used in Yahweh's temple (2 Chron. 3:5,8; Lam. 4:1). And where did Solomon get that from? Solomon constructed the finer details of the temple from materials prepared by his father David (1 Chron. 22:14). And David received that fine gold as a present from Tou, king of Hamath (1 Chron. 18:9,10). Hamath is in Syria. Perhaps Syria is another possible source of origin for the head of the Islamic image. The true Christ will be "more

precious than fine gold" (Is. 13:12); He will thus stand in opposition at the last day to the head of "fine gold" which heads up the latter day Islamic state. The manifestation of God in Christ is presented in visual form in Daniel 10:6 "His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude". This vision has outline similarities with the image of a man explained in Daniel 2. The two 'men' will face off against each other in the last days; and Jesus wins. That, in the end, is the simple message of all prophecy, especially the book of Revelation. The "head" of the image uses the same equivalent Hebrew word *rosh* as we find in the Ezekiel 38 description of ten nations being lead against Israel by a *rosh*, a leader, a prince, what the Arabs would call a caliph. Again and again, we find a specific figure being identified as the leader of the latter day invaders. The interpretation that Nebuchadnezzar was a "king of kings" (Dan. 2:37) was surely understood by him to mean that he was in some sense king over the other kings which featured in the image. Perhaps God graciously inserted this element in order to preserve Daniel's life before the king. But it will come true in the final erection of the image upon earth, in that the component nations of the image will be headed up by an individual who is effectively a Nebuchadnezzar-like figure for them all, Babylon personified in a single man.

2:32 *As for this image, its head*- Literally, the *rosh*, the great leader, of the image, the same *rosh* spoken of in Ez. 38 as leading a latter day invasion of Israel. The image is of a man; a latter day Nebuchadnezzar. For he was the head of gold.
We note that the value of the metals decreases with distance from the head of gold. Dreams reveal our subconscious thoughts and value systems; Nebuchadnezzar saw himself as most important, and as he speculated about the future, those furthest from him in time seemed less important and valuable. But that illusion was shattered by the idea of the Jewish Messiah, the little stone, destroying the image and becoming an eternal mountain on earth. We need to learn the lesson, valuing the Kingdom perspective far above our immediate prospects. It's worthy of note that the other empires, especially Medo-Persia and Rome, had far greater dominion and extent than Babylon ever had- both geographically and culturally. And yet from Nebuchadnezzar's perspective, they were inferior and insignificant simply because they were far away from him in time. The dream was in a sense *his* dream, which is why the empires are described as "inferior" to him; this is how it was from his perspective. But the interpretation was from God, and the twist in the tail is that all these kingdoms of men are to become as nothing before the Kingdom of the God of Israel to be established on earth.

The increasing inferiority of the metals refers to how the power of the king / emperor decreased. Nebuchadnezzar was absolute, whereas as Daniel's history itself shows, the Medo-Persian kings couldn't even change their own laws and were bound by their courtiers. The Greek rulers over the land / *eretz* were weaker still, because the power of Alexander the great was shared between his four generals, who often controlled him. And the Romans delegated power to local governors, rather than the Caesar himself dominating the land of Palestine from Rome. This serves to demonstrate that the primary intention of the vision was to present a series of kings, rather than kingdoms, which would arise after Nebuchadnezzar, climaxing in the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom. But that potential was not realized, and so it was delayed and the fulfilment extended.

Was of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of brass- The metals decrease in value. And there is progressive disunity; from one head, to two arms, two thighs, two legs, and then very divided feet. The Persian empire was more extensive than Babylon; the degeneration was perhaps in Nebuchadnezzar's own mind. And the image represented kings or kingdoms who dominated the *eretz* promised to Abraham. How extensive their dominion was elsewhere isn't therefore germane to the vision. It could be argued therefore that Babylon had the tightest control over the land; and the powers which followed had less control and allowed more autonomy. This declining value of the metals has its best fit interpretation in the initial fulfilment that was possible in Nebuchadnezzar and his immediate dynasty. The other interpretations fail to maximize on this obvious feature. The sequence of metals (gold, silver, brass and iron) is found again in Dan. 5:4,23 in describing the materials used by the Babylonian kings for their idols. It's as if they wanted to show that actually all the metals of the image were comprehended within their empire- and they would last for ever. This again suggests that the most natural, immediate fulfilment of the image was in Nebuchadnezzar and his dynasty.

Dan 2:33 *Its legs of iron, its feet part of iron and part of clay*- The legs of iron more comfortably represent the latter part of the Grecian monarchy, the two empires of Syria and Egypt, the former governed by the family of the Seleucidae, from Seleucus, the latter by that of the Lagidae, from Ptolemaeus Lagus . The idea that the two legs represent Eastern and Western Rome [centered in Constantinople and Rome] is problematic, in that these areas were not part of the land promised to Abraham. The image prophecy speaks specifically of kingdoms reigning over “the earth”, the land of Israel. Turkey [Constantinople] and Italy [Rome] were not part of that land. And they will have their revival in the last days in the form of the feet and ten toes- split between two groups, two entities which between them dominate the land promised to Abraham. As explained on :43 and :1, the prophecy had a number of potential fulfilments; one of which was that the Messiah figure could have re-established Israel's Kingdom during the time of the Greeks, or in the immediate aftermath of the conflict between the kings of the north and south described in Dan. 11. These two kings, the two sections of the Greek empire which affected Israel, were matched by the two legs of the image.

The feet of clay stood on the ground, but Babylon was built on clay. This is why the city was built primarily with mud-bricks made from clay, as there was not much stone nearby. The image is therefore presented as having feet of clay which were part of the clay beneath them. It was grounded on the earth. The significance of Babylon being built on clay, and the image standing therefore upon clay, is that clay is a symbol for Israel (Is. 64:8; Jer. 18:6). The Jeremiah 18 reference is significant in that God says that Israel are as clay and He will break them in pieces because they didn't respond to His appeals. The very same image is used of the destruction of the feet of clay in Daniel 2. The clay is specifically "potter's clay" (Dan. 2:41). And that is really the key to the interpretation, because Jeremiah 18 speaks of Israel as the clay in the hands of the Divine potter.

2:34 *You saw until*- The original here is quite complex; the GNB does well with "While you were looking at it...", and this forges the connection with Nebuchadnezzar's sudden fall as he looked at great Babylon which he had built, in pride and surety that it would stand for ever (Dan. 4:29-31). This was a primary fulfilment of the image being toppled; it was evidence even during the period

contemporary with Daniel that the image prophecy would come true. And his humiliation in Dan. 4 need never have happened had he accepted the teaching of the image of Dan. 2 as God's word to him.

A stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces-

The image was an idol, clearly made with human hands. It is in contrast to this stone made without hands. Initially, the reference is to Nebuchadnezzar subconsciously worshipping himself. Literally, “a stone was cut out which was not in hands". The idea is that it was not thrown by hands but had its own energy and moved at its own impetus, or thrown by an unseen hand. The same unseen Divine hand that was to write upon the wall later. This would speak of the potential possible for the exiles to have been filled with the Spirit in order to overthrow the great mountain of Babylon. The grinding to powder uses the same word as in Is. 41:15: “you shall thresh the mountains [the one great mountain, of Babylon] and beat them small and will make the hills like chaff. You will winnow them, and the wind will carry them away, and the whirlwind will scatter them". This clearly connects with the destruction of the image in Dan. 2. But the Jews preferred to flunk the challenge and potential. The stone first hits the feet, breaks them, and then breaks the rest of the image. The ten toes may have had an initial possible fulfilment in the Jewish exiles slaying the ten sons of Haman, recorded in such detail in Esther 9. Quite possibly, with Mordecai the Jew and Esther the Jewish queen effectively governing Persia, the little stone could have become the mountain of God's Kingdom. But the Jews failed to live up to that potential.

The 'breaking in pieces' of the colossus is described using the same word as is used about how Israel will break in pieces their latter day enemies (Is. 41:15; Mic. 4:13). Mic. 4:11,12 predict that the nations will be gathered against Jerusalem in order that they may be threshed there. It is Babylon who will be threshed in the last day (Jer. 51:33), so we can understand these collected together nations as all under the control of Babylon. Which is what the image requires, because it was what Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon effectively saw as it were in the mirror, it was him, with his face. This again shows that the best fit initial application of the entire image is to Babylon headed up by Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews refused to be God's threshing instruments, and so Babylon was not threshed at this time in this intended way. And so the longer term applications unfolded, as the kaleidoscope was again turned to present another possible picture. We note that unbelieving Israel are described as chaff (Is. 5:24; 33:11; Jer. 23:28; Hos. 13:3; Zeph. 2:2)

These words are quoted specifically about the final judgment of the Lord Jesus in Lk. 20:18: "Everyone who falls upon that stone will be broken in pieces; but upon whomsoever it falls, it will grind him to powder". Although this doesn't preclude other earlier potential applications. The Lord at His return will do what Israel ought to have done earlier. Just as the suffering servant was initially intended to be Israel, but was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus who was the true, ultimate Israel. The Lord Jesus surely alluded to this in saying that His resurrection would be a rebuilding of the temple “without hands” (Mk. 14:58). It could be that He perceived the possibility of the smiting of the image as being fulfilled in His resurrection. Thus the vision had several potential fulfilments which were not realized. This would explain the gap in fulfilment between the end of the iron leg domination of Israel and their land, and the latter day existence of the ten toes / horns. This apparent awkwardness in the symbology can be explained by Israel not being in their land from then until our last days; but it can also be understood in terms of a reworked fulfilment, after the earlier

possible fulfilments were disallowed by Israel's lack of response. The breaking in pieces of the feet appears to be separate to the breaking in pieces of the rest of the metals ["then...", :35]. This could speak of two stages of judgment at the Lord's return.

But as explained on :1, the initial, potential fulfilment was in the remnant of Judah who "broke lose" (GNB) from the mountain of Israel in Babylon, and who could have broken up the hotchpotch of nations then dominating the land, and re-established the Kingdom.

2:35 *Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors-*

We note the inverse order of the metals, repeated in :45, possibly speaking of the order of their destruction. The point is laboured in :44 that the stone "will crush all these kingdoms". They all have to exist in some form together. The four beasts of Dan. 7:11,12 likewise have their dominion taken away but their lives are prolonged for a time. They are all in existence together. Any continuous historical interpretation has to struggle to offer a snug fit interpretation of this. The point is stressed that the metals are "broken to pieces *together*" by the little stone. The image was not just 'an' image, but a together, united image, "one" image (:31). The different metals were united together in one form and person, as a conscious imitation of Nebuchadnezzar. The best fit interpretation is that the image refers to Nebuchadnezzar and his immediate dynasty.

"To pieces… like the chaff" suggests a breaking up into fine parts. Combining the visual images of Daniel 2 with those of the beasts in Daniel 7, we see a progressive sense of breakup. Babylon was headed by one king, Medo-Persia is presented as a divided kingdom, split between the two arms of the Medes and Persians; then the third Kingdom is likened to a leopard with four heads, referring to the four states that came after Alexander the Great. The fourth empire was divided into two legs (in Daniel 2), and in Daniel 7, it has ten horns, who have conflicts with each other. These are the equivalent of the ten toes, which don't mix with each other. Then, the entire image is ground to pieces and becomes like tiny pieces of chaff. And the ultimate unity of God's Kingdom on earth is then established. We see in society generally, and especially in the territory of the land promised to Abraham, a progressive breaking up. And this will continue, until it is confirmed by the Lord's return breaking into even smaller pieces.

And the wind carried them away, so that no place was found for them-

The Aramaic word for "place" is used in :39 "And after you", 'in your place'. Nebuchadnezzar too was not to have any "place". The various metals were all left with no "place"; but this is the very word repeatedly used in the Aramaic section of Ezra to describe the "place" of the temple (Ezra 5:15 "the house of God built in its place"; Ezra 6:3,5,7). The focus of the image is therefore upon Jerusalem and the temple mount. We note too that an unhewn stone is an altar stone (Ex. 20:25); again the hint is that the stone becomes an altar, grows to be a temple, a Kingdom... and then fills the earth. The mountain of Yahweh's house will thus be established, as Isaiah had prophesied.

The stone was taken from one mountain and became another mountain. As Is. 2:2 foresaw, "the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be established on the top of the [other, pre-existing] mountains". Elsewhere in Daniel, the mountain is defined specifically as Jerusalem: "Your city Jerusalem, even Your holy mountain" (Dan. 9:16). The Babylonian kingdom could have been overthrown by the exiles as a stone cut out from that mountain, as Haggai and Zechariah envisioned; establishing themselves there as an independent kingdom and then using the instability at the end

of the Babylonian empire and start of the Persian empire to overthrow the Babylonian - Persian empires. And re-establish God's Kingdom.

The idea is that there was no evidence for their existence in the place where they had once stood so proudly. And that is the end of man and all his power, wealth, possessions, career, family, science and achievement. Ultimately, it will disappear without a trace. Nobody and nothing will be remembered eternally for its greatness, erudition or achievement. All will be subsumed beneath God's Kingdom. This phrase is quoted in Rev. 20:11, where the "heavens and earth" at the time of the Lord's coming are likewise carried away and no place found for them. This means that the "heavens and earth" in view at the end of Revelation is the colossus of Daniel 2, the image represents the system which shall dominate the land promised to Abraham in the last days. Here conclusively we see that the main thrust of the prophecy is not some continuous historical account of world history, but rather a depiction of the latter day entity which will dominate the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham at the time of the Lord's return. The prophecy insists that the image stands complete when it is struck.

And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth- This is the picture of the "whole earth" / *eretz* / land of Israel being filled with God's Kingdom. This is the time of Is. 2:2,3; Hab. 2:14 and other Kingdom prophecies about the mountain of Yahweh being established on the temple mount and growing from there, not least Is. 11:8,9 which speaks of the earth / land being filled with Yahweh's glory at the time when His Kingdom, His "holy mountain", is established. But the rock / stone is laid by Yahweh in Zion, as a cornerstone upon which the returned exiles would build His temple (Is. 28:16,17). The LXX, quoted in the New Testament, speaks of this stone as a person ("He who believes in *Him...*"), and the NT applies it to the Lord Jesus. He is the rock / stone rejected by the builders etc. of Ps. 118:22. The stone from the mountain comes to the plain and destroys the image, and becomes a great mountain centered on and beginning from that point. The prophecy is about Babylon's dominion over God's land and specifically Jerusalem; it is as it were upon Jerusalem that the image stands, and the stone hits the image at that point. Zech. 3:8-10 is very clear about the connection between Messiah and the stone which is to be laid in Zion, the temple mount: "I will bring forth My servant, the Branch. For, behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes: behold, I will engrave its engraving', says Yahweh of Armies, 'and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day', says Yahweh of Armies, 'every man will invite his neighbour to come under his vine and under his fig tree'". The stone / rock is Messiah, the seven eyes which are the engraving may refer to the seven letters in the Hebrew "Holiness to Yahweh" which was inscribed upon the High Priestly mitre, and leads in the Messianic Kingdom when every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree.

The "great mountain" of God's Kingdom fills the whole earth, but the mountain initially begins at one point on the planet. Elsewhere in Daniel, the mountain is defined specifically as Jerusalem: "Your city Jerusalem, even Your holy mountain" (Dan. 9:16). The toes are therefore specifically dominating Jerusalem at the initial point of impact of the stone upon the land. And this is what we would expect from an Islamist confederacy dominating the land of Israel- Jerusalem is the key issue for them. And we know from Zechariah 14 that "the city shall be taken".

I suggest that the primary interpretation refers to the remnant of Judah, the mountain of God's Kingdom, which returned to the temple in Jerusalem at the time when it was dominated by a brief coalition of peoples sent there by the Babylonians,

some strong and some weak. Being cut out without [human] hands means that it was of God; and Ezra and Nehemiah continually speak of how it was the hand *of God* which enabled the restoration. "The mountain" so often refers to the Kingdom of God in Israel ruled by a Davidic king, and particularly to the temple mount (Dt. 33:19; Ps. 30:17; 48:1; 78:54; Is. 2:2,3; 11:9; 25:6-10; 40:9; 56:7; 57:7,13; 65:11,25; 66:20; Jer. 31:23; Ez. 20:40; Zech. 8:3 etc.). The restoration prophecies are full of pictures of the restored Zion at the time of the restoration as a huge mountain dominating the *eretz*. The mountain of Babylon was to be burnt and replaced with the mountain of Yahweh's restored Kingdom (Jer. 51:25; Zech. 4:7). It was the returned remnant who were to destroy this mountain (Is. 41:15,16 "You will thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and will make the hills like chaff. You will winnow them, and the wind will carry them away"); they were to be the little stone. Having spoken of Babylon as a mountain to be destroyed, we then read that it was a little stone which was to bring Babylon down (Jer. 51:25,63 "Behold, I am against you, destroying mountain... I will make you a burnt mountain... when you have made an end of reading this book, that you shall bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates: and you shall say, Thus shall Babylon sink"). Restored Jerusalem was to become the stone (Zech. 12:3 "I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all the peoples"). That stone was to as it were grow, stone by stone, as the walls and temple were rebuilt (Hag. 2:15). This is the significance of the enigmatic little stone which was to bring about the restoration of the Kingdom at the time of Zech. 3:9; 4:7,10 ("the stone that I have set before Joshua... Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain; and he will bring out the capstone [cp. the stone] with shouts of ‘Grace, grace, to it!’").. I have suggested that the command to rebuild the temple according to the specifications of Ez. 40-48 was a conditional prophecy of what the exiles could and ought to have achieved. The scenario there is all about a mountain (Ez. 40:2; 43:12). This is why Daniel prayed for the restoration of the mountain of Yahweh (Dan. 9:20)- i.e. for the vision of the mountain in Dan. 2 to come true in his time. But this was disallowed by the refusal of the exiles to follow the path of the Spirit, and all these prophecies of the mountain being established have been rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord's return (Rev. 21:10). Judah were not the little stone; the prophecy is to come true in the stone of the Lord Jesus, cut out without hands by God through the virgin birth. We are so familiar with this application that we can overlook the initially intended potential application to the Judah of Daniel's day.

Note that the stone was cut out of a mountain, but after hitting the image, it becomes a mountain, filling the whole earth. This second mountain is interpreted as the Kingdom of God coming on earth. Biblically, mountains represent people. The equivalent in Daniel 7 is that the kingdoms of the world are given to "*the people* of the saints of the Most High" (Dan. 7:27). The first mountain likewise, therefore, refers to people. Out of the mountain of humanity, or perhaps the mountain of the Hebrew people (Ex. 15:17; Ps. 48:1; Is. 2:2 "the mountain of Yahweh's house / family / people will be exalted"), the Lord Jesus as the stone was cut out without human hands, born through the virgin birth. But the people of God will finally all become like Him. He as the stone becomes them, the mountain. We will finally manifest the Lord Jesus in totality, eternally. And if I am correct in understanding "the mountain" as specifically referring to God's people Israel, then the second mountain, the Kingdom of God on earth, is in fact the eternal and glorious re-establishment of the Kingdom of God as it was in the form of Israel. And this is indeed Bible teaching elsewhere (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:7 and see more evidence in my *Bible Basics* chapter 5).

Dan 2:36 *This is the dream; and we will tell its interpretation before the king*- Again Daniel speaks of how "we" will give the interpretation. He was not only trying to get a good deal for his friends. He clearly saw that although he was the front man, the answer was given as a result of their prayers and he was intensely aware of this. He considered those who pray for something to be part and parcel of the fulfilment, and worthy of reward for the fulfilment. A great encouragement to those who pray but are not apparently in the front line of action. The "we" reflects how Daniel was eager to save his three friends. He had asked them for their prayers, and therefore although the answer was given specifically to him, he felt that it was effectively given to them all. Daniel has expressed in :23 that God "has now made known to *me* what *we* desired of You; for You have made known to *us* the king's matter". This is the unity which prayer develops. It could be that the friends came with Daniel, and that this incident is what brought about the situation in Dan. 1:20,21, where Daniel and his friends are found far superior than others in the matter of interpreting dreams.

And yet there is another possibility. Daniel has emphasized how the words he is speaking are not from himself, but from God, who has given the interpretation through Daniel. The "we" could therefore refer to God and Daniel, reflecting the closeness Daniel felt to God.

Dan 2:37 *You, O king, are a king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the strength, and the glory*- The dream of Daniel 2 ascribes to Nebuchadnezzar "the Kingdom, power, strength and glory" (Dan. 2:37), but this is exactly the language of *God's* kingdom. The emphasis of passages like 1 Chron. 29:11 is that *Yours* is the Kingdom, power, strength and glory (as in Ps. 145:11; Mt. 6:13). Nebuchadnezzar is thus presented as an anti-Christ and the Kingdoms of men as a fake imitation of *God's* Kingdom. By saying that God had given Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom, Daniel was bravely undercutting Nebuchadnezzar's idea that he had attained it by his gods and by his own strength. Until the time of Nebuchadnezzar's father, Babylon had been beneath Assyria. Babylon at this point, very early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign, was not so widely powerful. But it was powerful over Israel, and that was the point and focus of the prophecy. And the proportions of the image are appropriate to the length of domination over Israel.

The head of gold specifically represented Nebuchadnezzar, whose empire ended 23 years later. He was ruler of the neo-Babylonian empire; "Babylon" as an empire had been around a long time before him. But the Medo-Persian empire did not come into the ascendency until many years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar. And Babylon and Media co-existed for some time. Contrary to the diagrams of the image with clear cut off points between the empires, Persia became the dominant regional power before Babylon fell. This is an example of where the four empires approach doesn't fit as snugly as the idea of Babylonian kings. The subsequent kings or kingdoms were to be "inferior" to Babylon, and that fits best with the idea of the Babylonian kings after Nebuchadnezzar, and not with the four empires theory. The best 'snug fit' of the prophecy to interpretation would be if after three generations or kings from Nebuchadnezzar, the little stone of Israel destroyed their Gentile dominators and established God's Kingdom on earth, the mountain of Yahweh's house expanding ever outwards from Jerusalem. This would have been at the end of the 70 years prophesied for their exile. And Haggai and Zechariah definitely speak of the destruction of the mountain of Babylon by the exiles, and the subsequent re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

Nebuchadnezzar was not the first king of Babylon; but he was the "head" / rosh of Gentile dominion over the land when Israel had been "removed" (cp. Jer. 15:4; 24:9; 29:18). The kingdoms all existed before the next one and overlapped with each other, becoming absorbed into the next one, But what is in view is their domination of the land and people of God and Jerusalem specifically, that was to become the great mountain. This fits most snugly with the dream being about the immediate dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar.

The dream deeply worried him and arose from his concern about what would happen to him. His murder of the wise men betrays his insecurity regarding an internal putsch, and he clearly worried about external factors taking over his empire. The statue was 'him', with his face, but reflected his own fear that he had feet of clay and that he was deeply divided within himself.

Dan 2:38 *Wherever the children of men dwell, the animals of the field and the birds of the sky has He given into your hand, and has made you to rule over them all: you are the head of gold*- The parallel vision of Nebuchadnezzar as a great tree in Dan. 4 states that the tree was in sight of "all the earth". Darius wrote to all the earth about the greatness of Daniel's God. But certainly not to New Zealand... All attempts to interpret the "earth" or sphere of domination as "the known world" or "world empires" have to fail here. "The known world" of course depends where on the planet you are standing! Clearly "the earth" is not planet earth, but a more local territory- and the land promised to Abraham is the obvious and Biblical answer. The allusion is to the Jeremiah passages which speak of Nebuchadnezzar as having been placed over the Jews and their land; they were given 'into his hand'. This confirms our thinking that the image is specifically about kings and kingdoms who dominate God's people and their land.

The allusion is clearly to Jer. 27:5-7: "I have made the earth [land- of Israel], the men and the animals that are on the surface of the earth / land, by My great power and by My outstretched arm; and I give it to whom it seems right to Me. Now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the animals of the field also have I given him to serve him. All the nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the time of his own land come". This prophecy foresaw Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty lasting another 2 generations. This would fit the idea of the image referring to his immediate dynasty; although it seems the image added another phase or two to this schema. "The time of [judgment of] his own land" was clearly variable. The same is found in Is. 14:22 where God says that He will "cut off from Babylon name and remnant and son and grandchild". And yet he himself failed to remain humble to the God of Israel, made an image entirely of gold in rebellion against the image prophecy, and was made like an animal rather than continuing to rule over the animals (Dan. 4:29,30). He like Adam was set up as ruler over the land and animals, but failed. He should have accepted that the image of Dan. 2 was himself, for it was common to represent a dynasty as an image of that nature. But he wanted it to be all about himself personally.

The animals and birds were even under Babylon's control, according to this; although as Babylon was the great first beast of Dan. 7, these lesser animals likely refer to the peoples of the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. If Babylon reigned over "wherever the children of men dwell" it is clear that the "earth" and "children of men" have a limited, local definition; for Babylon didn't reign over all the earth. But it is the beasts and birds of the sky who later are prophesied as feasting upon Babylon (Rev. 19:17). This is the equivalent of the horns on the beast hating the whore of Babylon who rides it (Rev. 17:16); the destruction of the Babylon system will ultimately be

more by Moslem infighting than direct bolts of destruction from God. Indeed, this was historically God's preferred method of destroying Israel's invaders in Old Testament times. The head or *rosh* of gold strictly referred to Nebuchadnezzar personally rather than the kingdom of Babylon; as explained earlier, the prophecy had a potential fulfilment in a series of kings who would arise, culminating in the restoration of Israel's kingdom under Messiah. But this fulfilment was deferred until the last days, when the image shall stand complete, headed up by an individual, a *rosh*, "the king of the north" of Dan. 11, the same *rosh* who leads the confederacy of ten nations against the Lord Jesus in Ez. 38.

The language here recalls what happened to Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 5:21; he was driven from "the children of men" instead of reigning over them, and became like the animals and birds he was intended to reign over. The idea would be that he had been "given" by God such dominion, but it was taken away from him even during his lifetime. This was an attempt to get him to realize that indeed his kingdom would pass from him to another, he was not immortal; but he was given a wonderful preview of this whilst he was still alive, so that he would repent and accept the import of this vision. We marvel at how God tries to save even people like him and Pharaoh, whom we would likely consider not worth even approaching with the Gospel of God's Kingdom.

"You are the head of gold" surely suggests that the king saw his own face in the head of gold. The whole image was him; but he had feet of clay, was top heavy, and was only standing upright by some other power- the God of Israel. Just as he was represented by the entire tree in Dan. 4:8 with all the animals beneath it (Dan. 4:9, just as in Dan. 2:39)- and the whole tree was chopped down, just as the whole image was shattered.

The prisms of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal found at Nineveh portrayed the kings as statues of themselves, made “out of silver, gold and shining copper”. Clearly Nebuchadnezzar had in mind to do the same. And he does so in Daniel 3. But Daniel was bravely showing him that he had feet of clay and would be destroyed- unless he humbled himself. The dream was indeed the thoughts of the king's own head. And yet he found the image of himself terrifying. It was dead and lifeless as it stood, and being top heavy, was likely to fall at any moment.

Such images made of precious metals, with gold on the head, were typical of large idols. There are multiple descriptions of them in inscriptions. Idols made of gold or silver were often in human form just like the image seen, as confirmed in Ps. 115:4-8: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands; they have mouths, but they don’t speak, they have eyes, but they don’t see. They have ears, but they don’t hear, they have noses, but they don’t smell. They have hands, but they don’t feel; they have feet, but they don’t walk, neither do they speak through their throat. Those who make them will be like them; yes, everyone who trusts in them. Israel, trust in Yahweh!". We note the reference to the same metals in Dan. 5:23: "the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone". Yet this idol was headed up by the face of Nebuchadnezzar. And he repeats the idea by then creating an image purely of gold, as if to say that he as the head of gold would last for ever- in contrast to the Daniel 2 image. Nebuchadnezzar was being presented with the fact that he had set himself up as an idol. But he had feet of clay and the passage of time would reveal his folly and replacement by God's eternal King [the stone] and Kingdom [the mountain]. For Nebuchadnezzar was effectively worshipping himself. Daniel was so brave to give the interpretation- for the connection between Nebuchadnezzar and the image was clear.

Dan 2:39 *After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you; and then a third kingdom of brass, which shall rule over all the land*- The second kingdom is almost glossed over, which would be appropriate if the reference is to Media, rather than Medo-Persia. We should not assume that there are no other possibilities apart from the sequence Babylon- Medo-Persia- Greece- Rome. Each kingdom is to reign over the earth / land of Israel. The second and third kingdoms could refer to Media and Persia; and the fourth kingdom to the Greeks, split into the two parts of the empire which affected Israel- the kings of the north and south of Daniel 11, i.e. the Syrian [Seleucid] part of the Greek empire and the Egyptian [Ptolemaid] part of it. These potential possibilities are because God's purpose is relatively open ended; the Messiah and the restoration of Israel's Kingdom could have come at any point in the sequence, and the ideal initial scenario was that there would be a sequence of kings [not kingdoms] after Nebuchadnezzar which would climax in the Kingdom of God and Messiah's coming. All these potential fulfilments were disallowed by Israel's lack of repentance. The next kingdom was to be "inferior"; but Persia was greater than Babylon in territory and other ways. The inferiority may have been in that their rulership over the Jews was not as powerful as that of the Babylonians, even allowing the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem. However, the Chaldee for "inferior" is identical to the word used for "land" in this same verse. The idea is better that this second kingdom is a kingdom [a king having dominion over] the land [promised to Abraham]. The third kingdom rules over "all the land", perhaps paralleling the idea of the second kingdom being king over the land / *eretz*. Perhaps the idea was that the third kingdom would rule over all the territory promised to Abraham; from the Euphrates to the Nile. This would have been true of the Persian and Greek empires but not strictly of Babylon nor of Media. The Babylonians didn't rule the area of Arabia eastward from the Euphrates, but only the fertile crescent; whereas the Persians did. This would make the second kingdom Media, and the Persians the third with the Greeks as the legs of iron, the two legs representing the kings of north and south as explained in Dan. 11. But this is only in the continuous historical fulfilment, which is not that significant compared to the intended latter day fulfilment, when the entire image stands complete, to be destroyed by the Lord's return.

We also observe that the book of Daniel itself provides some history. There are four kings specifically named in Daniel: Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian. This must be significant. It presents a sequence of three kingdoms: Babylon (Dan. 1–5; 7:1, 8:1), Media (Dan. 6:1; 9:1) and Persia (Dan. 6:29; 10:1). This sequence is presented after Dan. 2 (in Dan. 6:1,29), and also after the similar vision of the beasts in Dan. 7 (in Dan. 8:1; 9:1; 10:1). It is always preferable to match Bible prophecy against the history presented and contained within the Bible itself, rather than having to totally depend upon access to extra-Biblical history. The LXX has the chapters of Daniel in a slightly different order, but more clearly following this sequence of Babylon-Media-Persia: 1–4 about Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; 7–8 about Belshazzar of Babylon; 5 about the end of Belshazzar's reign; 6,9 about Darius the Mede; 10–12 about the first year of Cyrus of Persia. A prophet was shown to be true if his predictions came true; therefore prophets had to have prophecies which fulfilled in some form in their lifetime. Daniel met this admirably. The sequence of empires would then be Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece. The divided state of the toes would then represent the confused situation after the death of Alexander the Great, and the two legs would represent the two halves of the Greek empire. In this case, the stone could have destroyed the image and established God's Kingdom in their time. The real possibility of fulfilment at the time of the Greeks

would explain why the visions of Daniel are written in Aramaic, the language of the Greeks, and not Hebrew. It was primarily relevant for their time. It has been argued that Aramaic would not have been spoken in Babylon at Daniel's time, so this makes it all the more amazing. I have no problem in believing God could inspire Daniel to record visions in a language he didn't personally understand. The potential Messiah at the time may have been Judas Maccabaeus in his struggle against the Greek Antiochus IV Epiphanes. But he too failed to be the Messiah figure. But this didn't happen, even though the post exilic prophets [Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi] all definitely present this possibility, of the coming of Messiah and re-establishment of the Kingdom of God. But that scenario was then readjusted to the possibility of the sequence being Babylon-Medo Persia-Greece-Rome. But that also didn't work out; Messiah didn't come because the required preconditions weren't met. And so there are other scenarios possible, expanded upon by the transference of the metals of the image to the various beasts of Daniel 7, which are then developed further into other scenarios in Revelation.

In the Antiochus context, it could be argued that the accounts of the behaviour of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius all mention things which Antiochus Epiphanes did: Despoiling and blaspheming the temple (1:2), threatening Jews with death (2:12-13), erecting idols (3:1), suffering from madness (4:30), blaspheming the Jewish religion (5:2), prohibiting Jewish religious practices and usurping Divine prerogatives (6:8-10). In this case we could then understand the image of Dan. 2, which was of Nebuchadnezzar, coming true in the person of Antiochus. And he could have been the one felled by the stone, had the Jews been willing.

The kingdom was to "arise", to 'stand up', to 'begin to exist'. The sudden existence of other kingdoms doesn't fit history, unless we interpret the dominion of the empires as being specifically Jerusalem or God's people or land. And yet the initial immediate possibility was that the metals were indeed literal "kings" who would follow Nebuchadnezzar, culminating in the appearance of a Messiah figure, the destruction of Babylon and the re-establishment of God's Kingdom. Just as spoken of in Haggai and Zechariah. This has the obvious advantage of Nebuchadnezzar heading up the image, as if the entire image is Babylon. If he is the head, then he has some relation to the rest of the image- it is logically his body politic, his dynasty of the next three or so generations. This makes more natural sense of the reference to "kings", even though the term can legitimately be understood as 'kingdoms'. If solely 'kingdoms' or empires were primarily in view, then a different word would have been used to "kings". And there were other kings of Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar; the 'four empires' view requires that Medo-Persia came immediately after Nebuchadnezzar. He personally was the head of gold, not the empire of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's successors were progressively inferior to him. This alone makes sense of the decreasing values of the metals in the image. And there was no very clear break between Babylon and Medo-Persia as required by the traditional view. Likewise there was still a Babylonian kingdom under the Greeks [Seleucids], paying lip service loyalty to the Seleucids. The little stone cut out without human hand is the very phrase used of the destruction of Antiochus Epiphanes, who "shall also stand up against the prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand" (Dan. 8:25). Clearly there was a possible potential fulfilment of the Dan. 2 prophecy at his time. But again, it didn't happen and the prophecy was again reapplied and reinterpreted.

But the potential initial fulfilment didn't happen. The later possible fulfilments, and the final fulfilment in the last days, are all not ideal fits to the initial prophecy. We have to accept that the essence of the prophecy and not the details was fulfilled,

with aspects of the initial prophecy being reworked and reapplied to the later potential fulfilments so that there is not a 'best fit' between the fulfilment and the original detail. This can be seen in so many other prophecies, especially those of the potentials possible for the return of the exiles and their re-establishment of God's Kingdom under a Messiah figure.

Dan 2:40 *The fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, because iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things; and as iron that crushes all these, shall it break in pieces and crush*- This was not the general attitude of the Romans to the earth / land of Israel, although it has some relevance to the Greeks under Antiochus (see on :39). Such a cruel destruction of the land looks ahead to some future, last day fulfilment, when the image stands complete upon the land promised to Abraham. "Crush" is the equivalent of the Hebrew *raah*, "evil"; this system was to be the embodiment of the evil determined against God's people, which is how "evil" is usually used in the prophets. The fourth kingdom, like the fourth beast of Dan. 7, is to break in pieces those on the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham. But in turn, the little stone will "break in pieces and destroy" the fourth kingdom along with the entire image, represented by how the bones of Daniel's persecutors were broken to pieces[s.w.] by the lions. The connection demonstrates that the judgments paid out by the latter day abusers of God's people will in turn be given to them at the Lord's return. They will be judged by the Lord as they judged. This is a major theme of Revelation, which describes how the judgments upon the land poured out by the latter day beast are in turn meted out to the beast system in the same territory. This is all foreseen here in Daniel; those who break in pieces the land are to be broken in pieces.

John Drake has some interesting comments here: "If you take the time to look at the history of the middle east you will find that the empires that succeeded Greece and the division into the Seleucid and Ptolemaic Empires was not Rome but the Parthians, then the Sassanids and then Islam. It was Islam that overthrew the Eastern Roman Empire in Byzantium. Rome never fulfilled the requirements of Daniel 7:23 and Dan 2:40 in crushing breaking and trampling all the others. Rome was able to conquer less than 1/3 of the Seleucid Empire (have a look at history). The Roman Empire does not qualify as the Empire of Iron in Nebuchadnezzar's dream because it did not successfully conquer and crush Babylon, Persia and Greece. It left Babylon untouched, could not conquer Persia, and its own culture was subservient to Greek culture and language. Rome did not crush any of other three empires. On the other hand Islam was "different from all the other kingdoms" Dan 7:23. It has one culture (Islam), a different language (Arabic and Farsi in Iran) and one religion. The other empires had multiple gods, cultures and language, as did Rome.

The divided nature of Islam is very evident in the Sunni and Shia factions of Islam and fits well with the iron legs and the divided nature of the feet. They are one in purpose – the expansion of Islam to rule the world together with the destruction of Israel. The fourth beast of Daniel is the same beast that John sees in Revelation. It is made up of components of the first three beasts. It like a lion (Babylon), looked like a bear (Medes and Persians) and looked like a leopard (Greece). This surely indicates that the beast must be identified with the same geographical areas as those in Daniel and that was Mesopotamia. Bear in mind also that the vision of Dan. 2 was given to Nebuchadnezzar, not Daniel and not Israel. It was about Babylon and kingdoms that would arise in Mesopotamia.

The mountains upon which the harlot of Revelation sits represent seven kings. Five are fallen. One is and one is yet to come. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece fell before the time of John. The one that existed at the time of John was Rome and one was to come. The one that came was Islam and later the Ottoman Empire. Muslims worldwide and particularly Turkey now seek to revive the caliphate and this I believe is the eighth head of the beast represents the 7 previous empires and it will have dominion over the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece as represented by the leopard, bear and the lion".

The language used about the iron is exactly that used of the effect of the little stone: "Iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things; and as iron that crushes all these, shall it break in pieces and crush", GNB "shatter and crush all the earlier empires" (:40); "It shall crush to powder and consume all these kingdoms... the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold" (:44,45). Note the repetition of "all these [kingdoms]". What are we to make of this obvious connection? The iron legs could have destroyed all the previous empires or kings, but they didn't; because the little stone does this, and also breaks the iron and crushes it to powder. Here is where the popular idea that the legs = Rome is hardly a snug fit interpretation. Because in what sense did Rome crush Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who was represented by the head of gold? And why is it that the little stone does to the iron and all other metals what the iron was supposed to have done to them? We are surely forced to accept the idea of possible, potential fulfilments. And the iron, whatever it represents, didn't achieve what it could have done. Or we could see irony here in the connection between the destruction caused by the iron, and that caused by the little stone. As if to say that the little stone *actually* does what the iron wanted to do or claimed to do.

The possibility of fulfilment at the time of the Greeks is specifically taught in the vision of Dan. 8, which is interpreted for us as referring to the Greeks and how the empire would be split between various "horns". One of them would be a "king of fierce appearance" who would persecute God's people and then be destroyed by the coming of Messiah- described in the very language of Dan. 2:44 about the stone without human hand: "he shall also stand up against the prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand" (Dan. 8:25). These things, Daniel is told, are specifically about "the latter time... it concerns the appointed time of the end... the vision concerns the time of the end" (Dan. 8:17,19). But this "end" was envisaged as the Messianic destruction of the aggressive Greek horn, Antiochus Epiphanes. But that didn't happen. Not because prophecy failed, but because God's people failed to rise up their potential. And prophecy almost has to be like this, a conversation, a dialogue, between God and man, taking into account human freewill. For otherwise, the existence of prophecy [in the sense of prediction] would mean God's dominance of human freewill to make things work out as He predicted. Even the predictions concerning the Lord Jesus were of a potential nature- for He had freewill, and as we see in Gethsemane, was capable of disobedience and not going the Father's way. He did, and so the prophecies were in fact fulfilled in Him. But their fulfilment in Him was not totally certain, in that He had freewill and the possibility of failure and disobedience.

The two legs in their Greek application would refer to the kings of the north and south, the kingdoms of the Seleucidae and Lagidae, in Syria, and Egypt. We have their history recorded in detail in Dan. 11. The ten toes would then refer to the

confused reigns that immediately followed Alexander. And Daniel 11 explains those weaknesses in detail.

The legs of iron are repeated in the vision of Daniel's fourth beast with ten horns. The fulfilment requires that there should have ten kings reigning either simultaneously or consecutively; three of them must be overthrown by an eleventh king, who is far greater than the other kings. This 11th king is to be cruel and blasphemous against the Jewish people, and will be destroyed by the coming of Messiah and direct conflict with Him. These requirements [except destruction by Messiah] simply don't fit the situation at the end of the Roman empire, unless we cherry pick the history. But it does fit the Greek empire, with the 11th cruel king clearly referring to Antiochus Epiphanes. And the vision of Daniel 8 is absolutely clear about this. Daniel 8 is a clear prophecy, with specific interpretation relating to Greece attached to it, which is much neglected by those who simply repeat the hackneyed interpretations of Daniel 2 and 7. Antiochus is clearly the "little horn" of Daniel 8, but this is the same little horn which arises from the fourth beast in Dan. 7. Consider the similarities: Dan. 7:8= Dan. 8:23; Dan. 7:20 = Dan. 8:9; Dan. 7:21,25 = Dan. 8:10; Dan. 7:25 = Dan. 8:11,25; Dan. 7:25 changing times and seasons = Dan. 8:11,12, and 1 Macc. 1:44-51 records how Antiochus forced the Jews to stop offering the daily sacrifice and Jewish feasts, and desecrated the altar with pigs' blood. The period in which the daily sacrifices were stopped is described as 2300 mornings and evenings (Dan. 8:13,14), that is 1150 days when the twice daily [morning and evening] sacrifices were stopped. This is the exact period between when Antiochus began forbidding the daily sacrifices in Autumn of BC167 to the day of his death in the spring of BC163. There is no other very compelling fulfilment of the 2300 mornings and evenings. Indeed we could argue that on some days, there were more daily offerings made, because of the feasts etc. And that would make 2300 evening-morning sacrifices come to about 1260 days, the figure elsewhere used for the period of domination by the fourth beast / little horn. Antiochus would be destroyed "without hand" (Dan. 8:25), the same language of the image being destroyed without human hand. Thus the fourth beast from which the horns come, i.e. the legs of iron, is clearly interpreted in Dan. 8 as Greece. Antiochus Epiphanes came from the northern half of the Greek empire i.e. the Seleucids. He displaced three Seleucid rulers: Heliodoris [driven out], Antiochus son of Seleucis [murdered] and Demetrius, whom he usurped. The other seven horns would then match the seven Seleucid kings: (1) Seleucus Nicator (312-280); (2) Antiochus I, Soter (279-261); (3) Antiochus II, Theos (260-246); (4) Seleucus II, Callinicus (245-226) ; (5) Seleucus III, Ceraunus (225-223); (6) Antiochus III, the Great (222-187); (7) Seleucus IV, Philopator (186-176). These ten horns of the beast are then the ten toes of the image, which are strangely described as being mixed / married with the seed of men; and indeed the weakness and strife amongst the Seleucid rulers was because they intermarried with the local population and were not pure Greeks.

So Antiochus Epiphanes was a fairly good, snug fit fulfilment of the 'little horn' of Daniel 7 and 8, the 'desolator' of Daniel 9, and the 'king of the north' of Dan. 11.21-45. The problem of course is how Antiochus and the final rulers of the Greek empire were destroyed by Messiah's coming. It could be argued that there is a gap between the toes / horns being developed, and the image being hit by the Jewish Messiah. Just as there is a gap in the fulfilment of the Lord's Olivet prophecy, jumping from the destruction of the temple in AD70 to His coming in the last days. Yet Daniel 11 outlines the conflict between the two halves of the Greek empire, and goes on in Daniel 12 to say that "Michael shall stand up" and destroy the king of the north, and

then there will be the resurrection and eternal reward of the faithful Jews. This didn't happen. Nor was Antiochus Epiphanes destroyed by the Lord's coming, even though Daniel 8 is at pains to stress that this will be "the time of the end". Not just the general future, "the last days", but the specific "time of the end". I suggest that only the concept of conditional prophecy can explain this. A Messiah could have come at the end of Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty and the Jews could have destroyed Babylon / Persia, the great mountain would have become a plain before Zerubbabel, and re-established God's Kingdom, replete with the Messianic temple of Ez. 40-48. But as Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi lament, they failed to live up to this potential. And so another potential was revealed; a Messiah could have arisen at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8), destroyed the invasion of "the king of the north" and saved God's people, leading to the resurrection and re-establishment of the Kingdom (Dan. 11 and Dan. 12). But this too didn't happen. Likewise there are differences between Dan. 7 and Dan. 8 regarding the number of horns; thus the little horn of Dan. 8 does not uproot three horns as in Dan. 7. The little horn of Dan. 7:8 arises amongst three other horns already there, whilst the little horn of Dan. 8:9 arises from one of four horns. These may simply be different takes on the same situation, giving different aspects; or they may reflect various potential possible scenarios. The 2300 morning-evenings [i.e. 1150 days] of Dan. 8 differ from the 1260 days of Dan. 7; but that may be because we are being given the information that of the 1260 days persecution, 1150 days would involve the stopping of the daily sacrifices. Or perhaps the time periods were and are open to varying fulfilments in accordance with human freewill factors. Clearest of all, Dan. 8 envisages three empires before the coming of Messiah and final conflict with him at "the time of the end". Dan. 7 and Dan. 2 envisage four such empires. The language of the little horn from the fourth beast in Dan. 7:25 is applied to the little horn of the Greek empire, the third empire, in Dan. 8:13,14. We have here a kaleidoscope of images- because the three empire scenario could have worked out. But it didn't, because no Messiah figure arose, Israel were not obedient to their potential mission. And so the possibilities merged into a four empire scenario. And so even in the potential 'Antiochus' fulfilment, we see nuances of different possible potential fulfilments. The strong possibility [potentially] of fulfilment at the time of the Greeks is surely reflected by the fact this is the only part of the Old Testament written in Aramaic and not Hebrew. But all this failed, in that Judas Maccabeus was not a Messiah as God required. Just as Saul, Solomon, Hezekiah and others were set up as potential Messiahs but failed. And so the more familiar scenario became possible- that the metals of the image and their associated beasts refer to the nations who dominated Israel in their land, with the legs of iron / fourth beast representing Rome. Indeed the Lord uses language of the fourth beast from Daniel and applies it to AD70; the "abomination of desolation" (Mt. 24:15) and the "son of man coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 24:30). His language of Himself as the falling stone in Mt. 21:44 surely alluded to Dan. 2:44,45. And yet Paul also quotes the same material about a future situation to his time, the second coming, when "that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4,5). Clearly the prophecies have flexible fulfilment.

This is what leads to the impression that whilst Israel were out of their land, there was a great hiatus until the situation of the last days, when a 10 horned beast entity will again briefly dominate the land. The beast entity of Daniel 7 is developed further in the beast visions of Revelation, where it is shown as incorporating all the elements

of the previous beasts. And will be destroyed by the return of the Lord Jesus from Heaven, to establish God's Kingdom permanently on earth. But the latter day horns which are "from" the beast are hard to interpret if we see the beast as Rome. The fit is not very snug. But this is typical of how so many prophecies are reapplied and reinterpreted- because the initial intended fulfilment was precluded by human lack of response.

If the fourth beast is Greece, the belly and thighs of brass are the Persians, the third beast like a leopard, the ram with two unequal horns of Dan. 8. The "dominion given" to it (Dan. 7:6) clearly matches the language of God's giving dominion to Cyrus (Is. 41:1-4). The silver breast and arms then refers to the Medes, matching the bear with three ribs in its mouth (Dan. 7), the first and shorter horn on the ram of Dan. 8. Another possible sequence is Babylon- MedoPersia- Greece- The Seleucids- The divided state after the Seleucids.

The Roman application is always difficult in demonstrating that the ten horns arise out of the fourth beast of Rome. The relationship between the little horn and the three horns it uproots defies legitimate interpretation within the Roman context. And their 1260 days domination is impossible to persuasively demonstrate. Suggestions about the "temporal power of the papacy" all came to an end in the 19th century- and the Lord didn't return then. Likewise the "little horn" is an individual, not a kingdom. Attempts to apply it to "the pope" seem difficult because the obvious question is "Which pope?". Daniel's consternation at the radically different nature of the fourth beast also doesn't fit the Roman empire, which was not so totally different to the empires which preceded it. We note that the Romans didn't “crush and break” the previous three kingdoms (Dan. 2:40 “will crush and break all the others”)- but Greece did. Antiochus is a snug fit with the descriptions of the little horn abuser, and subdued three other horns—Heliodorus, Demetrius Soter and the junior Antiochus. There's no compelling figure in Roman history that matches this. The seven "heads" of the fourth beast are hard to interpret because it depends which Roman emperors are chosen to fit them. Those pushing the "Roman" view tend to just cherry pick the history, naming seven emperors but ignoring the others. Indeed Rome had no king at the time it took over from Greece, being a republic until 27 BC. Nor did Rome take over the areas of eastern Greece. It's just not true that 'Greece ruled over all the known world and then their territory was taken over by Rome'. The Greeks dominated Persia, Media, India and Babylon, whereas the Roman empire never took over all that vast territory. These territories turned into independent states rather than being conquered by Rome. The Greek approach means that any revived fourth empire should be looked for from the area of the Seleucid empire, the middle east, rather than from Europe where Rome was dominant.

Dan 2:41 *Then you saw the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, that shall be a divided kingdom; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, because you saw the iron mixed with miry clay*- The coming of Christ is described in Is. 41:25 as: “I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come; from the rising of the sun, one who calls on My name; and he shall come on princes as on mortar, and as the potter treads clay”. This connects with the "potters' clay" here. And Is. 41 was potentially about the restoration from Babylon. The “princes” are surely some of the ten kings represented by the ten toes (Dan. 2:44). Note that Israel’s latter day invader is described as one “from the north”; this person will be an imitation of Christ, the ultimate One from the north. His coming will be as “the rising of the sun” (Mal. 4:2), just as that of the antichrist will be. The coming of Christ upon princes who are as

clay therefore connects directly with the language of Daniel 2. Habakkuk 2:6 speaks of the latter day Babylonian antichrist figure as one who “lades himself with thick clay”, to be destroyed by the Lord’s coming and the Kingdom of God, when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord” (Hab. 2:14). The “clay” would then refer to the same more lowly components of the feet part of iron and clay.

However it is perhaps wrong to imagine bits of iron mixed with clay. It has been commented: "Ancient iron production was by subjecting the ore to intense heat and afterwards driving out the clay by beating. When the latter was done imperfectly the result was "slag" in which iron and clay was mixed". The idea is that the situation was brittle and not strong, even if it appeared strong as iron visually. This will be of great comfort to those persecuted by the ten toe / ten horn system; powerful as it will seem, it is actually very brittle and prone to sudden destruction.

The point is emphasized here and in :43 that the clay was not baked into earthenware but was muddy, soft, so weak and unable therefore to make the image stand. It was an incredibly weak foundation. The fragility of the two feet after the two iron legs is demonstrated for us in Daniel 11, describing all the tensions between the kings of the north and south- the two halves of the Greek empire, the north [Seleucids based in Syria] and the south [Ptolemies, based in Egypt]. The Greek kingdom was divided into satrapies, or provinces, governed by the Diadochi, Alexander’s generals, bodyguards, governors and friends. Fighting among the Diadochi would fulfil the divided situation of the image's feet. But the language of Dan. 11 has many connections with how that section of prophecy continues in Dan. 12. The language of "the time of the end", an abomination that makes desolate, the purifying of God's people etc. occurs throughout it, including the time clearly relevant to the conflicts between the Seleucids and Ptolemies (e.g. "At the end of years... he shall come on at the end of the times, even of years... the end shall be at the time appointed... the latter time... the time of the end... until the indignation be accomplished" (Dan. 11:6,13,27,29,35,36). And this is all picked up in Dan. 12, applying it to the time of resurrection and final judgment. Clearly "the time of the end" could have been at the end of the Greek empire, just as Dan. 8 clearly states. Up until Dan. 11:39, there is a clear fulfilment of all the details in the history of the interactions between the kings of the north and south. From Dan. 11:40, there is no fulfilment. Antiochus didn't meet his end “between the sea the beautiful holy mountain”. I suggest therefore that this was the potential possible for fulfilment, resulting in the king of the north taking Jerusalem and being destroyed by the Lord's coming and the resurrection of the dead. And that didn't happen, although the essence of it will come true in the final latter day fulfilment through a different "king of the north". The reason was that God's people were not sufficiently faithful. And so Dan. 11:14 explains that the vision was "not established": "the children of the violent among your people shall lift themselves up to establish the vision; but they shall fall". The Lord says that "the abomination that makes desolate" spoken of by Daniel must come at some point after His words in the first century: "they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate" (Dan. 11:31). But the initial application of those words was to the time of the wars between the kings of north and south during the Greek empire. He reinterpreted and reapplied the prophecy in another context. Likewise the predictions concerning Antiochus in Dan. 8:25 are clearly applied to the events associated with the coming of the Messiah in Dan. 9:27 to stop the desecration of the temple mount. But that didn't happen- at that time. We note Daniel 8 ends with the comment that Daniel didn't understand that prophecy. That's understandable, because the references to the Greeks would have

been very foreign to him, and extended the Divine program far beyond the 70 years' exile which he correctly understood to have been the precursor to the Kingdom's re-establishment. But as was explained to him, the program was delayed. And in fact, it was delayed even further, beyond the Greeks and Romans, until our last days.

Dan 2:42 *As the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken*- If the two legs correspond to the two parts of the Greek empire which were relevant to Israel, this divided kingdom would refer to the dismemberment of Alexander's empire. The ten toes of the image correspond to the ten horns on the beast, one of which was far stronger than the others, and uprooted some of the weaker ones. "Broken" is the same idea in the feet and the whole image being "broken to pieces" by the Lord's return. The idea may be that some elements of the final stage of the colossus are already broken in judgment, by each other. The breaking in pieces of the former kingdoms by some of the later kingdoms, as explained in Dan. 8 and Dan. 11, was really a foretaste of the final judgment upon them all. The same word is used of how Cyrus of Persia would break in pieces Babylon (Is. 45:2). Isaiah 45 seems to be saying that it was God's intention that Cyrus would break Babylon in pieces, convert to Him and be Israel's salvation. Just as it was His intention to convert Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh. But this didn't happen, and so the prophecy was delayed in fulfilment until our last days. Revelation likewise presents the scenario of the warring factions of the last days destroying or judging each other, before the final destruction of them all by the Lord's coming.

Dan 2:43 *Whereas you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men*- "Mingle themselves" is used of intermarriage at the time when the Kingdom could have been re-established (Ezra 9:2). If the two legs represent the Syrian and Egyptian sides of the Greek empire, then we see here a picture of the breakup of that situation; and Dan. 11:6,17 predicts the intermarriage between the Seleucids and Ptolemies which would not succeed and which would lead to its destruction. The GNB has it right: "This means that the rulers of that empire will try to unite their families by intermarriage, but they will not be able to, any more than iron can mix with clay". Antiochus Theos, king of the North [Syria], married both Laodice and Berenice, daughters of Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of the South [Egypt]. Antiochus Magnus, king of the North [Syria], gave his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy Epiphanes, king of the south [Egypt]; but these marriages failed to achieve unity and only led to more disunity. Daniel 11 at various points describes the ending of the Greek kingdom in language appropriate to the Lord's return and the destruction of the image in Dan. 2 (Dan. 11:22,36,37). As noted on :1, the image prophecy had various potential fulfilments, and one of them was in the coming of a Messianic figure at the end of the Greek kings to re-establish God's Kingdom. But that too didn't happen, and the fulfilment was delayed.

The prophecy may also have had a potential fulfilment in the situation around AD70. The metals represent kings; the Caesars were partly strong and partly weak in the lead up to AD70, with three emperors in the year AD69 alone (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius). The Lord could have come in AD70 and established the Kingdom; but His coming to do so was delayed because of Israel's lack of repentance.

But they shall not cling to one another, even as iron does not mingle with clay- Who, then, are these nations who were represented by the feet partly of iron and partly of clay? Some will be strong, others weak. “Then you saw the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, that shall be a divided kingdom; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, because you saw the iron mixed with miry clay. As

the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. Whereas you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cling to one another, even as iron does not mingle with clay" (Dan. 2:41-43). One only has to look at the various groups currently fighting in the Middle East to see how deeply divided is the Islamist group.

The situation could actually lead to a fragmentation of the established territories in the Middle East into groups of smaller states, all united under the *Al-Sham* concept and a desire to drive Jews out of Israel. The same is true for Iraq and other Muslim states bordering Israel. Writing on the *Al Jazeera* website in May 2013, Murtaza Hussain wrote a penetrating article "Iraq, Syria and the death of the modern Middle East". The following sounds exactly like the ten toes of Daniel's image, formed out of larger powers but now weak and yet united against Israel:

"The countries of Syria and Iraq, formerly unified Arab states formed after the defeat of their former Ottoman rulers, exist today only in name. In their place what appears most likely to come into existence - after the bloodshed subsides - are small, ethnically and religiously homogenous statelets: weak and easily manipulated, where their progenitors at their peaks were robustly independent powers".

We of course are reading the Bible through translation. But take a closer look at the original Hebrew and Chaldee translated "they shall *mingle* themselves" (Dan. 2:43). They were to be a mingled people- and that's exactly who the nations of '*Al Sham*' are. The original word translated 'mingle' is *arab*. One easy way to check that is to use an online concordance to poke under the surface of Dan. 2:43. And you will see it- Strong's number H6151. *Arab*. Surely there is a reference here to the Arab peoples!

The 'feet and toes' section of the image is proportionally not a very long part of the body. The domination of Israel by this group will not be for long- perhaps the three and a half year period which occurs in several latter day prophecies.

Dan 2:44 *In the days of those kings*- "In the lifetime of those kings" suggests that the primary interpretation is of kings who will rule over God's land within their normal life spans. "Those kings" more naturally refers to the entire image than to the feet and toes. The phrase is parallel to the stone breaking in pieces "all these kingdoms" represented in the image. This suggests the kings / kingdoms all exist within the same lifetime and will be destroyed by the coming of the stone. The "stone" could have come and the Kingdom of God been established during the lifetimes of the kings of the image, if we interpret the metals as primarily referring to the kings who would rule over Jerusalem after Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's own lifetime saw this progression of kings, so we again have the history provided within the book of Daniel. But the Jews didn't want to destroy the kingdoms of men; they didn't even want to all return to Jerusalem when encouraged by Cyrus. And so the [to us] more familiar extended interpretation came into play. But the further we get from the initial intended fulfilment, the less snug is the fit of the interpretation to the prophecy. The full existence of the image at the time it is hit by the stone is an example of this not so snug fit. If the image represents the Babylonian kings / reigns following Nebuchadnezzar, then the image as a whole represents the Babylonian empire, to be destroyed by the little stone of the exiles. The exiles didn't live up to this potential, and so all the later possible interpretations struggle with fitting this requirement of the image standing complete and being destroyed together.

"The days of these kings" suggests they will all be in power at the same time and not consecutively. The "these kings" could refer to the Seleucids [king of the north] and Ptolemies [king of the south]; they were the part of the image on which the stone fell (Dan. 2:34). The kings may refer to the ten toes; but it could equally refer to the situation when the image stands complete in the last days. And we would again see that the primary intention of the prophecy was to describe a sequence of individual kings, rather than kingdoms, which would follow Nebuchadnezzar and be brought to an end by the re-establishment of Judah's mountain or kingdom.

Shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people; it shall crush to powder and consume all these kingdoms- The location of God's Kingdom is therefore going to be in the same arena as earthly political kingdoms, here on this earth. There is no reference therefore to any kingdom of God in heaven, nor any spiritual kingdom in human hearts. We note that the feet of the image are already divided into small parts, as iron and clay; the Lord's judgment only confirms their own situation by breaking them into pieces. Parts of the feet are already 'broken [to pieces]' [s.w. "crush to powder"] when the Lord's return hits them (:42); they have already experienced judgment.

The grinding to powder of the nations dominating Israel could have true in the time of the restoration, according to Hag. 2:7: “And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory". That never happened because the Jews didn't respond to the potential, as Haggai laments. Another restoration prophecy in Is. 60:17 uniquely repeats the sequence of gold-silver-brass-iron: "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron". The initial allusion is to how the restored temple would replace the brass, iron, wood and stones of Solomon's destroyed temple with something far grander. And that is the initial possible fulfilment of the image in Daniel 2. A new image would be established, again with gold-silver-brass-iron. It would be a temple but in the form of a man, that would spread throughout the land promised to Abraham. A glorious man who is also a temple clearly speaks of Messiah.

And it shall stand forever- This is the same word used of how the entire image "stood" (:31), and of how Nebuchadnezzar blasphemously set or stood up another image all of gold, representing himself (Dan. 3:1,2,3,5,7,12,14,18), as if the image he saw would not have its fulfilment, but he would last for ever. The entire image therefore represents the kingdoms of men which are to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15). The same word is used throughout Dan. 7 concerning how the various beasts all 'stand', as if on their legs as men, but are brought down to nothing.

Dan 2:45 *As you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall happen hereafter: and the dream is certain, and its interpretation sure-*

The gold in the image represented Nebuchadnezzar personally. But Daniel was so very brave to give the interpretation- that the gold would be crushed and blown away (Dan. 2:45). Indeed the entire image would be destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar would not last for ever. His worst fears, which led to his dream, were justified. Daniel surely risked death by telling him this; and for all time is a great example of speaking God's word even when we know we risk our own lives, at least our social lives, and relationships. Nebuchadnezzar was known [as were other kings] for executing

messengers who brought bad news. Yet he was deeply impressed that Daniel knew what he had dreamed, and rewarded him for that. His subsequent making an image entirely of gold reflects his subsequent reflection and deep dislike of the interpretation. Later, Daniel is fearful to tell Nebuchadnezzar an interpretation which means the king's downfall; indeed he was visibly distressed by the prospect of having to do so, going into a panic attack: "The king answered, Belteshazzar, don't let the dream, or the interpretation, trouble you. Belteshazzar answered, My lord, the dream is to the side of those who hate you, and its interpretation to your adversaries" (Dan. 4:19). Possibly he had lost some of his youthful faith and bravery by this point.

Note the order of the metals differs slightly from :32,33. Here the order is iron, brass, clay, silver, gold. This may reflect yet another possible potential fulfilment. We note the clay is out of sequence, placed in the middle- as if to show that the weakness of the clay, the earth of which man is made, was right at the core of the whole colossus. The strong, expensive metals were all the same shown to be centred around clay.

The things of God, of Heaven, the things done by Him, are those "not made with hands" (Job 34:20; Lam. 4:6; 2 Cor. 5:1; Heb. 9:24). "Stone" is also "rock", and there are so many connections between the rock and Messiah, the Lord Jesus. The connection between God and a rock cannot be doubted. The figure speaks of God's manifestation through His Messiah figure. This could have happened at various points in the various potential possible fulfilments of the prophecy.

The stone is taken from one mountain but then becomes another mountain. Mountains represent kingdoms. "The mountain of humanity" is not a Biblical figure. The initial application was to the exiles being miraculously taken out of the condemned mountain of Babylon, returning to their land and developing into God's re-established, eternal Kingdom. The parallel to the stone hitting the image is the final form of the beast system being destroyed, and the Kingdom being given to Israel: "judgment was given to the saints of the Most High, and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom... the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High" (Dan. 7:22,27). "The saints" initially refer to Israel, God's people; or possibly to the Angels who oversee Israel, who are thereby "the people of the saints" (Dt. 33:2; Zech. 14:5; Ps. 89:5-7 and consider how within Daniel, Michael is specifically called the Angel who stands for Israel in Dan. 9:21; 12:1). It is the people of Israel who were persecuted by the beast, who "shall wear down the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time" (Dan. 7:25). Again we marvel at Daniel's bravery, as a Jew, in speaking these things publically.

Rom. 3:16 speaks in the Greek of 'a dashing to pieces' of the wicked, perhaps an allusion to how the stone of Messiah's second coming would dash the kingdoms of men to pieces at His return (Dan. 2:45; Rev. 2:27). But sinners are going now in way of such destruction. Damnation begins now- in the way of life people chose to live.

The stone was cut out of a mountain and in turn becomes a mountain which fills the whole *eretz*, the territory promised to Abraham, where all the elements of the image had once dominated. This of itself suggests that the most natural interpretation of the metals refers to nations located within that territory- including Babylon, Media and Persia. We are so familiar with the interpretation which includes Greece and Rome that we can overlook this. Those four kings, not kingdoms, could have arisen and then been broken by the fragment of the mountain which comes into the territory and then becomes a mountain. I suggest that the primary interpretation refers to the

remnant of Judah, the mountain of God's Kingdom, which returned to the temple in Jerusalem at the time when it was dominated by a brief coalition of peoples sent there by the Babylonians, some strong and some weak. Being cut out without [human] hands means that it was of God; and Ezra and Nehemiah continually speak of how it was the hand *of God* which enabled the restoration. "The mountain" so often refers to the Kingdom of God in Israel ruled by a Davidic king, and particularly to the temple mount (Dt. 33:19; Ps. 30:17; 48:1; 78:54; Is. 2:2,3; 11:9; 25:6-10; 40:9; 56:7; 57:7,13; 65:11,25; 66:20; Jer. 31:23; Ez. 20:40; Zech. 8:3 etc.). The restoration prophecies are full of pictures of the restored Zion at the time of the restoration as a huge mountain dominating the *eretz*. The mountain of Babylon was to be burnt and replaced with the mountain of Yahweh's restored Kingdom (Jer. 51:25; Zech. 4:7). It was the returned remnant who were to destroy this mountain (Is. 41:15); they were to be the little stone. Having spoken of Babylon as a mountain to be destroyed, we then read that it was a little stone which was to bring Babylon down (Jer. 51:25,63). Daniel knew these prophecies, and surely perceived this. He was extremely brave to come out with all this to the king, as a Jew under threat of being killed.

We recall Moses speaking of God's relationship to Israel as "the Rock who became your father" (Dt. 32:18). They were quarried from the rock, which is a common symbol for God, and not humanity generally. The exiles are urged in Is. 51 to listen to / obey the word of restoration, and to accept they had been hewn and quarried out [as a stone] to be used for the restoration. But they refused to "listen" and ignored their having been hewn out from Abraham: "Listen to Me, you that want to be saved, you that come to Me for help. Think of the rock from which you came, the quarry from which you were cut. Think of your ancestor, Abraham, and of Sarah, from whom you are descended. When I called Abraham, he was childless, but I blessed him and gave him children; I made his descendants numerous. I will show compassion to Jerusalem, to all who live in her ruins. Though her land is a desert, I will make it a garden, like the garden I planted in Eden". But they refused to "listen to Me", and did not act as those hewn from Abraham (Is. 63:16; Jn. 8:40). So they were not the stone they could have been. Restored Jerusalem was to become the stone (Zech. 12:3). That stone was to as it were grow, stone by stone, as the walls and temple were rebuilt (Hag. 2:15). This is the significance of the enigmatic little stone which was to bring about the restoration of the Kingdom at the time of Zech. 3:9; 4:7,10. I have suggested that the command to rebuild the temple according to the specifications of Ez. 40-48 was a conditional prophecy of what the exiles could and ought to have achieved. The scenario there is all about a mountain (Ez. 40:2; 43:12). This is why Daniel prayed for the restoration of the mountain of Yahweh (Dan. 9:20)- i.e. for the vision of the mountain in Dan. 2 to come true in his time. But this was disallowed by the refusal of the exiles to follow the path of the Spirit, and all these prophecies of the mountain being established have been rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord's return (Rev. 21:10). Judah were not the little stone; the prophecy is to come true in the stone of the Lord Jesus, cut out without hands by God through the virgin birth. We are so familiar with this application that we can overlook the initially intended potential application to the Judah of Daniel's day.

Note that the stone was cut out of a mountain, but after hitting the image, it becomes a mountain, filling the whole earth. This second mountain is interpreted as the Kingdom of God coming on earth. Biblically, mountains represent people. The equivalent in Daniel 7 is that the kingdoms of the world are given to "*the people* of the saints of the Most High" (Dan. 7:27). The first mountain likewise, therefore, refers to people. Out of the mountain of humanity, or perhaps the mountain of the Hebrew

people (Ex. 15:17; Ps. 48:1; Is. 2:2 "the mountain of Yahweh's house / family / people will be exalted"), the Lord Jesus as the stone was cut out without human hands, born through the virgin birth. But the people of God will finally all become like Him. He as the stone becomes them, the mountain. We will finally manifest the Lord Jesus in totality, eternally. And if I am correct in understanding "the mountain" as specifically referring to God's people Israel, then the second mountain, the Kingdom of God on earth, is in fact the eternal and glorious re-establishment of the Kingdom of God as it was in the form of Israel. And this is indeed Bible teaching elsewhere (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:7 and see more evidence in my *Bible Basics* chapter 5).

Dan 2:46 *Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an offering and sweet incense to him*- This involuntary falling down of Nebuchadnezzar was in fact a fulfilment of the prophecy, that ultimately he would fall before Israel's God. For surely he saw in the head of gold his own face. The image was in that sense his body. Daniel's Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, could have meant something like "Protect his life" or if Akkadian Balat-sarri-ussur, "Protect the life of the king". And here he was prophesying the fall of the king. Nebuchadnezzar surely reflected upon how he had collapsed at Daniel's feet... because in Dan. 3 he makes an image entirely of gold and forces everyone to bow before it. This was surely his way of hitting back at Daniel and the friends. Possibly Daniel foresaw this and resigned from his post, hence he is not found in Dan. 3. Again we marvel at Daniel's bravery in speaking forth God's word, surely guessing the consequences as he saw Nebuchadnezzar doing what that man had surely never done- groveling prostrate on the floor before one of his junior servants. As he watched the king before him, Daniel was surely thinking, correctly, "This isn't going to end well for me". Even though it was a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies of the prostration of foreign rulers before the Jewish exiles (Is. 45:14; 49:7,23; 60:14). Those prophecies were all of the restored Kingdom- again we comment, that it could have happened then. Had the exiles risen up as required as the little stone, or if Nebuchadnezzar had remained humble. As noted on Dan. 3:1, this was the humility and repentance of a moment. Nebuchadnezzar tried to demonstrate through his golden image that this dream would not come true. He was then humbled again in Dan. 4. We too have moments of humility, before God's word or circumstances brought into our lives, and then our pride so often returns. The offering and incense were typically offered to a god or idol and not to a man (Ezra 6:10), but the king recognized the intense degree to which God was manifest in Daniel through Daniel's revelation of God's word. We too in our witness are the manifestation of God and His Son to men in a very intense identification. All people see of the Father and Son are what they see of us.

Dan 2:47 *The king responded to Daniel and said, Of a truth your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you have been able to reveal this secret*- As noted on :46, there was a very intense association and identification between God and His servant Daniel who manifested Him through the preaching of His word. Daniel was likely expecting to die for having come out with this interpretation, which went so directly against the king's pride and obvious desire to endure for ever. Nebuchadnezzar's recognition that Yahweh was "Lord of kings" was effectively a recognition of Yahweh as his lord; although as we will see on Dan. 3:1, he failed to maintain this intensity of devotion. The "kings" he had in view were the kings of the vision; another indication that the primary potential fulfilment of it was in a series of kings rather than kingdoms which would terminate in the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom as the eternal Kingdom of God. Inscriptions have

been found using these very words about Marduk (Merodach), the idol of Nebuchadnezzar. For him to now apply these words to Yahweh was effectively a renunciation of Marduk. It's so sad that Nebuchadnezzar failed to maintain his commitment; and this is a disappointing feature of our lives, moments of devotion and realization, followed by a slump back into pride and the old and familiar patterns of thinking. Only the Spirit will empower us not to be like this.

However, I would suggest that these words imply that the king was simply amazed that Daniel had been able to recall his dream and reveal the mystery: "since you have been able to reveal this secret". He was more impressed with this, than with the content of the dream. We read 13 times in Dan. 2 of the "interpretation". Dreams were thought to be dangerous if you didn't have the interpretation to them; and Daniel demonstrated to the king that he was a legitimate dream interpreter by being able to tell the king his dream. Yet according to his behaviour in Dan. 3, the king came to strongly object to the interpretation itself. The job of a dream interpreter was to dispel or remove the evil consequences of such a dream by magic. But Daniel offers none of this. And that is significant. He was so brave to pass no comment as to how the apparent catastrophe could be altered. Nebuchadnezzar's humility at this point was perhaps all that was required to avert his personal destruction which was clearly implied. But he didn't retain his humility of that moment, just as we often don't. We thereby note Daniel's courage in stating God's word to the king, knowing the king wouldn't like it- and he didn't. Dream interpretation always involved a suggested course of action or magic to avoid the ill omen or consequence of the interpreted dream. Daniel offers no such remedy. And he was the braver for all the same telling the meaning of the dream. The king makes no comment about his predicted future loss of power, nor the evident failure of his gods and their servants to predict his future. Isaiah is full of criticisms of Babylon's gods, especially their inability to predict the future; Is. 41:23 is one of many: "Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods". The king at this point fails to engage with this. All those polemics of Isaiah against Babylon's gods surely allude to Daniel's powerful and correct prediction of Babylon's future, on behalf of Yahweh.

Dan 2:48 *Then the king made Daniel great, and gave him many great gifts, and made him to rule over the whole province of Babylon, and to be chief governor over all the wise men of Babylon*- Comparing with :49, we sense that Daniel was exalted even higher than rulership over the province; he was in the king's gate, one of his close personal advisers. The word of 'making a great man' is used of how Nebuchadnezzar had been made a great man (Dan. 4:11,20,22), made by God a ruler. It is a classic piece of human psychology that now Nebuchadnezzar wants to do to another what he perceived had been done to him by God's grace. The Biblical record throughout has the ring of psychological and internal credibility in a way in which the uninspired histories of the time simply do not. We note that the "wise men" were effectively the political governors too. Religion and politics were totally connected in Babylon; for Daniel and his friends to be made governors, to be given political power when they had a different religion, was a radical thing for the king to do. And it set them up for the later conflicts we read of in Daniel. Like all of us, they were in an impossible situation. Daniel later rejected all such reward for telling dreams, but I will suggest on :49 that at this point, Daniel's motivation for accepting it and getting his Jewish friends into power was because he entertained the possibility that all Babylon might be brought to the true God. We too should set our sights high in our preaching work, not content with mere 'witnessing' for the sake of relieving our conscience, with no

great hopes for conversions. The enduring legacy of Daniel is reflected in the fact that centuries later, it was magi, "wise men" from the east, who came to worship the infant Jesus, realizing that his birth was the fulfilment of some of Daniel's prophecies.

Dan 2:49 *Daniel requested of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel was in the gate of the king*- Daniel clearly did this for the sake of ensuring a good deal for the Jews there, and perhaps also in line with the Divine intention that Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon repent and come to the true God. Just as Isaiah 45 seems to envisage the possibility of Cyrus king of Persia becoming Israel's saviour after coming personally to Israel's God. There was likewise an attempt to convert even Pharaoh. These ancient monarchs would have seemed to us not worth wasting effort with; but God did try. And we likewise should consider nobody as just not worth the effort when it comes to our work of witness.

In Ez. 14:14, Ezekiel [already in exile] mentions Noah, Daniel and Job as well known righteous men who saved others. The prophecy in chapter 14 was in the sixth year of Jehoiachin's exile (Ez. 8:1) and before the capture of Jerusalem five years later (Ez. 14:21). Daniel went into exile in the third year of Jehoiakim's 11-year reign (Dan. 1:1), which was followed three months later by the beginning of Jehoiachin's exile (2 Kings 23:34). This would mean that Ezekiel mentions Daniel after Daniel had been in Babylon for 14 years. His example as a young man soon became legendary amongst the exiles; although the book of Daniel doesn't mention this.

DANIEL CHAPTER 3

Dan 3:1 *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits, and its breadth six cubits*-

The LXX adds a time note, "In his eighteenth year", suggesting this was done just after he had conquered Jerusalem. Dan. 4:22 LXX adds: "Your works were seen, how you ravaged the house of the living God pertaining to the sins of the sanctified people". The chief deity of Babylon was Marduk who was considered to be the "god of gold". Herodotus described the image of Marduk as a golden statue seated upon a golden throne before a golden table and a golden altar. Pliny also notes that the robes of Marduk's priests were interlaced with gold.

The statue seems out of proportion of a man, as the height is so much greater than the width. But we could deduce from this that the human figure was therefore presented seated on a throne. Nebuchadnezzar was presenting himself as the eternally enthroned ruler. The 60 cubits breadth figure recalls the size of the temple, as also recorded in Chaldee in Ezra 6:3: "Let the house be builded, the height thereof threescore cubits, and the "breadth" thereof threescore cubits". We get the impression from this that Nebuchadnezzar was purposefully trying to subvert Yahweh worship, and his proclamation was surely intended to expose the Jews. For all other pagans felt free to worship other gods in a situation like this. Only the Jews were exclusive about whom they worshipped.

To be made of gold, the statue was either hollow, or made of wood with gold plating. Both options reflect the hollowness of Nebuchadnezzar. Six is the number of man [man was created on the sixth day]. The dimensions reflect how Babylon used a sexagesimal system [counting based around sixes] rather than a decimal one [based around tens]. The figure 666 in Rev. 13 therefore points us to a figure who epitomizes

Babylon. The breadth is out of proportion to its height [human beings are usually about 5 or 6 times their breadth, but here the proportion is 1:10]- like the kingdoms and glory of men it symbolized, it was fragile and unstable, and easily toppled. He was attempting to deconstruct the image made of various metals, insisting that he as the head of gold would in fact be eternal and not followed by other kingdoms. What he did therefore reveals his humility before Daniel in Dan. 2 as just the passing humility of a desperate moment. We too have seen this in our own lives; humility before God and His people is soon replaced by a return to visions of our own strength. This image becomes the prototype for "the image of the beast" to be established in the last days by a latter day Nebuchadnezzar (Rev. 13:14,15; 14:9,11). Those of the last days who are victorious over the beast and his image are therefore represented by the three friends (Rev. 15:2). They are to be no mere Sunday School story for us, but real and actual prototypes of us all in the last days.

He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon- This is the same word used of how the entire image "stood" (:31), and of how Nebuchadnezzar blasphemously set or stood up another image all of gold, representing himself (Dan. 3:1,2,3,5,7,12,14,18), as if the image he saw would not have its fulfilment, but he would last for ever. The entire image therefore represents the kingdoms of men which are to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15). The same word is used throughout Dan. 7 concerning how the various beasts all 'stand', as if on their legs as men, but are brought down to nothing. The apocryphal book of Judith claims Nebuchadnezzar at this time attempted "to destroy all the gods of the land, so that all nations should worship Nebuchadnezzar only, and all their tongue and tribes should call upon him as god" (Judith 3:8).

"Set up" is same word used of how God would set up or "make arise" another kingdom after Nebuchadnezzar, and finally "set up" His eternal Kingdom (Dan. 2:39,44). Nebuchadnezzar clearly wanted to show that he didn't believe this. He didn't want the Jews nor anyone else to use the Dan. 2 image dream as encouragement to overthrow him. No fewer than eight times is the word used of the image which Nebuchadnezzar set up (Dan. 3:1,2,3,5,7,12,14,18). And it is used of how Babylon would be removed "and shall not arise" (Jer. 51:64) because they had stood up or arose against Yahweh (Jer. 51:1 s.w.). This was part of the oracle which Jeremiah had given Seraiah to pronounce in Babylon, and surely news of it had reached Nebuchadnezzar's ears. Setting up or making to arise his own image was his vain answer to it.

There are clear similarities with the making of the tower of Babel, also on a "plain" in Babylon (Gen. 11:1,2). The connection shows that Nebuchadnezzar's image was likewise a brazen defiance of Yahweh. As the peoples of "the whole earth" were gathered in the plain Gen. 11:1, so the peoples of all the earth / land were gathered together to the image in the plain, quite possibly the same plain (:2).

Dan 3:2 *Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up*- "Rulers of the provinces", implying a gathering of the leaders of the entire empire. This was how insistent Nebuchadnezzar was to demonstrate on a huge scale that he as the head of gold would in fact be immortal; his idea was that he would not be destroyed nor cede power to another empire, as the vision of Dan. 2 required. He would be the entire image; and he wished to make that point to all levels of society. For "governors" LXX gives 'chiefs of the nationalities', as if Nebuchadnezzar was gathering together representatives of all ethnic groups, and

thereby proclaiming himself worthy of their praise. Clearly he was presenting himself as Yahweh. The idea of "dedication" definitely has a religious connotation (Num. 7:10,84,88; 2 Chron. 7:9; Ps. 30:1). He was setting himself up as a god, to be worshipped. This is why every time when the golden image is mentioned, the king is mentioned with it (Dan. 3:13,5,7,10,12,14,15,18). Repeatedly we are told in these verses that it is Nebuchadnezzar who made or set up the image. He is so emphasized. "Nebuchadnezzar" occurs in verses 1,2 (2X),3 (2X),5,7,9,13,14,16,19,24,26,28 – 15 times; and "the king" in verses 1,2 (2X),3,5,7,9 (2X) ,10,12,13,16,17,18,22,24 (3X),28,30 – 21 times. It was all about him. He assembled representatives from throughout the empire and basically demanded them to take an oath of loyalty to him. This could well reflect his paranoia about losing power or disloyalty, as discussed on Dan. 2 in considering why he was suspicious of the wise men and so eager to kill them. The Babylonian Chronicle records various rebellions against Nebuchadnezzar. Clay tablets have been uncovered which record the execution of people for disloyalty and attempted insurrection. All this fear of losing power reflects his lack of acceptance of the Divine plan- to remove him and all men from power, and replace them with His eternal kingdom. There is no mention of any priests nor sacrifice at this event; which strengthens the impression that it was a demonstration of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar personally, who saw himself as the epitome of his own gods.

Jer. 51:59-64 records how Zedekiah king of Judah was summoned to Babylon, presumably to declare or demonstrate his loyalty to Babylon. He went there along with Seraiah, who was commanded to read out a condemnation of Babylon by Jeremiah and then throw it into the Euphrates. Quite possibly Nebuchadnezzar was aware of this, and was now seeking to ensure that the Jews were actually loyal to him: "The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah... when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign... Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come on Babylon... Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words, and say, Yahweh, You have spoken concerning this place to cut it off, that none shall dwell therein, neither man nor animal, but that it shall be desolate forever. It shall be, when you have made an end of reading this book, that you shall bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates: and you shall say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again because of the evil that I will bring on her". In Jer. 28, just a year or so after Zedekiah's visit to Babylon, Hananiah gave his false prophecy that the Jewish exiles would return from Babylon within 2 years. This must have seemed credible, and it was credible because of the evident weaknesses within Babylon. And these scared Nebuchadnezzar.

Dan 3:3 *Then the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up*- This gathering together of people from throughout the empire would have taken time; and so the three friends had plenty of opportunity to plan their course of action. Their devotion was therefore not the zeal of a moment, but a consciously planned willingness to lay down their lives for the one true God. The fact they alone of all the Jews did so makes their bravery the more significant; for it is hard to live on a high level of dedication when our brethren consider it unnecessary and foolhardy. The same had happened over the matter of refusing the king's meat.

Dan 3:4 *Then the herald called aloud, To you it is commanded, peoples, nations, and languages*- The assembled crowd were told to bow down to it whatever nation or language they were from. The idea was that the local rulers of the provinces from throughout the empire may have been local men; and that perhaps there was to be a moment of bowing down observed throughout the empire. This was not merely a local event in the province of Babylon. The idea of a herald calling out a call to worship to all "peoples, nations and languages" is similar to the heralding of the Gospel of the true Kingdom of God to all peoples. Nebuchadnezzar was a fake God, an imitation Christ, a prototype of the latter day antiChrist.

Dan 3:5 *That whenever you hear*- "Whenever" suggests the call to worship was not just a one time event; to build a huge image for just one usage would not be justifiable. There was to be a period of regular worship of this image, perhaps throughout the empire.

The sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up- This combination of instruments suggest that the music was associated with religious ritual. The latter day demand to worship the image of the beast will likewise be a specifically religious matter, and it will be consciously designed to deconstruct the claims of the God of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar had fallen down and worshipped Daniel (s.w.) in Dan. 2:46; now he commands everyone to fall down and worship himself. He was perhaps now angry with Daniel because of the interpretation given. "Fall down" is 'to serve'. The phrase 'serve and worship' occurs repeatedly (:5,6,7,10,15) and clearly alludes to the command not to serve and worship idols (Ex. 20:4-6; Dt. 5:8-10). The young men were aware of the acute conflict between Nebuchadnezzar's command and that of God, hence they reply “Our God *whom we serve* is able to deliver us” (:17). The king recognized this when he says they were “servants of the Most High God [who therefore refused to] serve or worship any god except their own” (:26,28). He recognized that his god was pitted against theirs, and their God had one. He had various options open to him at this point [he could have written off what happened as a trick, as the Jews did concerning the empty tomb of Jesus], but commendably he chose the humblest option.

Dan 3:6 *And whoever doesn’t fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace*- Remains of such a furnace have been found in the plain of Dura; it was a kind of 'Gehenna', a burning place for rubbish, and again Nebuchadnezzar is set up as an anti-God, an anti-Christ, playing God, assuming the power of condemnation for not worshipping him. However, it has also been noted that in Babylon, death by burning was uncommon at the time. Although in their mythology, "fire was used in Persia to test the truth of a religion and its followers, as in Zoroaster’s walk through fire". And so Nebuchadnezzar's theology was turned against itself, for the friends came through the fire unharmed and thereby vindicated their God. It seems this was a specially built furnace- the heat and fire of which reflected Nebuchadnezzar's internal anger. He was furious with the implications of the Dan. 2 vision. And again we note the bravery of Daniel in telling him the interpretation, knowing this would be his likely reaction. It also points up how his humility before Daniel was the humility of a moment. And his gratitude and respect were because Daniel knew his dream, rather than because of the interpretation. The

interpretation was in fact obvious... and I have suggested that the king knew the dream and had not in fact forgotten it at all.

Burning with fire so far in the Bible has always been for sexual matters- Tamar's presumed prostitution in Gen. 38:24; for prostitution (Lev. 21:9) and incest (Lev. 20:14). Nebuchadnezzar was apparently considering that any worship of any other god was the vilest perversion. And he is alluding to how his god Marduk supposedly burnt his enemies in fire. In Dt. 4:20, 1 Kings 8:51 and Jer. 11:4, Egypt is metaphorically an “iron blast furnace”. Perhaps this connection was perceived by the friends, and the Divine deliverance from Egypt encouraged them to believe they could likewise be saved from this literal furnace. Faith is so often based upon such reasoning from Biblical precedent. In this faith comes by hearing the word of God, and we find indeed that whatever was written before was that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. And in turn, the friends became representative of all God's people. For the prophets of the time spoke of how all Israel in exile were to be "tested you in the furnace of adversity” (Is. 48:10), seeing that His anger is presented as a smelting process to refine His people (Ez. 22:18,20,22). Likewise Is. 31:9, in which Yahweh’s “fire is in Zion” and His “furnace is in Jerusalem”. Yahweh’s anger is a “smelter.”

Dan 3:7 *Therefore at that time, when all the peoples*- LXX "all the nations". The impression is given of Nebuchadnezzar seeking to preside over an imitation Kingdom of God, comprised of peoples from all nations; his proclamation to worship his statue, presenting himself as the eternal Kingdom, then would become a parody of the proclamation of the good news of the true Kingdom to "all the nations". We note here how "all the nations" means 'representative people from all nations', and this is how we are to understand the language of preaching to "all nations", and "all nations" coming before the judgment seat.

Heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up- The record of their obedience to the commandment exactly matches the record of the commandment. This kind of total obedience to "the image of the beast" is to be seen in the last days too. The AV correctly excludes the last instrument, the "dulcimer" (AV; NEV "pipe") of :5, or bagpipe. It could be argued that they could have used the fact the bagpipe ["dulcimer"] didn't sound as an excuse not to fall down and worship. But, as we should, they didn't make excuses. They did the right and transparent thing in their conscience, despite possible opportunity to rationalize it. Likewise when the king enquires whether their failure to bow down was on purpose... he was giving them a get out, which they refused.

Dan 3:8 *Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and brought accusation against the Jews*- The Chaldeans were the supposed interpreters of dreams, bitter and jealous that they had been unable to interpret the dream of Dan. 2. Instead of being grateful to their Jewish saviours, as often happens when we do good to others, they wanted to spite them. They wanted to support the king's position that in fact the interpretation of the image had in fact been faulty, because the head of gold was going to last for ever.

We note the strong similarities between the friends being "cast" into the fiery furnace, and Daniel being "cast" into the den of lions. In both cases they had disobeyed an edict from the king that demanded false worship. In both cases they are

reported to the king by jealous contemporaries and "accused" (Dan. 3:8; 6:25). In both cases, an Angel saves them (Dan. 3:28; 6:23). Those who try to harm them are harmed in that same way [death by lions / fire]. Both kings (Nebuchadnezzar and Darius) rise in alarm (Dan. 3:24; 6:20), approach the place of destruction (Dan. 3:26; 6:21), address the Jews by their names, and then use the same term to describe them: "servants of the Most High God" (Dan. 3:26) and "servant of the living God" (Dan. 6:21). The kings both command the Jews who had survived death to then come out and approach them. We naturally enquire why there are these parallels. It could be that Daniel had somehow saved himself from having to stand up for his faith in the events of Daniel 3, for Daniel's absence from the story is strange. But he was made to fellowship the sufferings of his friends in a remarkable way.

Dan 3:9 *They answered Nebuchadnezzar the king, O king, live for ever*- This was no formal greeting; the message of the all gold image was that the head of gold (Nebuchadnezzar) would last for ever. And they supported this.

Dan 3:10 *You, O king, have made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image*- The recorded Biblical history of the restoration often records how the rulers made decrees. Those decrees were considered to be effectively the word of a divine being, unable to be altered, and absolutely certain. But the record shows the tension between the word of the true God, and that of men. The changing of those decrees, or issuing decrees which superseded them, all indicates that their claim to being the Divine word was simply untrue.

Dan 3:11 *And whoever doesn't fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace*- This is a similar idea to how the beast of the last days is to be destroyed and his "body destroyed and given to the burning flame" (Dan. 7:11). Clearly, what the beast seeks to do to God's people shall be done to it. This is why the series of judgments recorded in Revelation are so similar, e.g. the seals and vials. The idea is that what the latter day abusers do to God's people is done to them; they are punished with their own judgments.

Dan 3:12 *There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not respected you. They don't serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up*- The bitterness of the Chaldeans or magicians / dream interpreters is again apparent. The three Jews had been placed over Babylon as reward for interpreting the dreams which the Chaldeans had been unable to interpret, and so these failed men were jealous and bitter. "Have not respected you" is a three word phrase used again in the accusation against Daniel in Dan. 6:13: "That Daniel, who is of the captives of Judah, doesn't respect you, O king, nor the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day". It seems that he went through the very same experience in essence. Perhaps he sought to discreetly and tactfully get himself out of the situation; but maybe he later regretted it, and so the hand of providence enabled him to pass through the same situation in essence in the events of Dan. 6.

Dan 3:13 *Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king*- "Rage" is only once used elsewhere, again in a restoration context, regarding the rage of God at

Judah's disobedience and unfaithfulness to Him (Ezra 5:12). Nebuchadnezzar was again playing God, as if obedience to *him* was critical, and he had the right to judge as God. The original word for "fury" is likewise used of God's fury against Judah at the hands of the Babylonians (Is. 51:17; Dan. 9:16).

Dan 3:14 *Nebuchadnezzar said to them, Is it on purpose, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you don't serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?*- "Is it on purpose?" supports the suggestion on :28 that the friends purposefully made some sign of worship of their God instead of bowing to the image. Presumably the other Jews, and perhaps Daniel, had been tacitly allowed by the king to be absent; but these three were "on purpose" making a point, and that was what so irritated the king. We can debate the extent to which we too should 'make a point' regarding our separation from the world, or act like the other Jews and possibly Daniel did at this time. The case of John the Baptist rebuking Herod for his marriage would be another analogous situation to consider. And we should entertain the possibility that Daniel at this point was weaker in faith than his friends, and symbolically went along with it all. And yet when the decree was given forbidding prayer, Daniel like the friends, and doubtless inspired by their example, chose to 'make a point' by opening his windows and praying towards Jerusalem in full view of his critics. We see here how faithful examples do inspire others to act likewise, at later points in their lives.

Dan 3:15 *Now if you are ready whenever you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music to fall down and worship the image which I have made, well: but if you don't worship, you shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that god that shall deliver you out of my hands?*- The list of musical instruments is repeated four times (:5,7,10,15). It's hard to understand why there is this emphasis, but one suggestion is that all those instruments being played at the same time would not have produced a pleasant symphony of sound but rather a cacophony of confused noise. Possibly the instruments were chosen as representative of all the ethnicities gathered to swear loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar. He had declared Israel's God as "God of gods" in Dan. 2:47, but he assumed now that he was more powerful than any god, including Yahweh, and no god could save a person from the fiery furnace. The Babylonians worshipped fire, and Nebuchadnezzar is arguing that the God of Israel was no match for the gods of fire. The king's anger was doubtless because he had promoted these Jews, despite this being an affront to Babylonian culture and religion; and now they had apparently betrayed his trust. He therefore gave them a second chance, because he maybe didn't want to destroy them immediately, despite his anger.

Dan 3:16 *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter*- The idea is that they weren't interested in the offer of a second chance; it had taken time to gather together the leaders of the empire, and they had in that period made their minds up and would not flinch from the possible consequences. "In this matter" may stress the "this". They would be obedient in any other matter but not this. Just as we are to obedient to all we're asked to do, so long as it doesn't conflict our conscience to the Lord. "We have no need / we aren't careful to answer you" reflects how utterly confident they were of their position, holding it without any internal wranglings of conscience nor interpretation.

They say there is no need to reply; because the reasons were obvious. The king knew the answer in his heart. They were servants of Yahweh, and that is an exclusive relationship. The Lord likewise was silent before Pilate. He gave no answers, yet thereby witnessed a good confession, Paul says. The Lord likewise declined to give specific answers in Jn. 18:21; He tells the disciples that they know where He is going and the way there, even though they were claiming not to know those things (Jn. 14:4). Or Jn. 7:28: "Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, You both know me, and you know whence I am: and I am not come of myself". When they had lifted up the Lord in crucifixion, "then shall you know that I am he" (Jn. 8:28). But they denied that knowledge. Peter made the point that "you already know" the word of the Gospel (Acts 10:37). "As you yourselves know", he adds in Acts 2:22. And in his letters he argues that "you, my friends, already know this..." (2 Pet. 1:12; 3:17). "As you know..." is a phrase that occurs over 20 times in Paul's letters. As Peter put it, he was bringing to their minds what they already passively knew (2 Pet. 1:12). And there are other examples. The point is that men know the truth of God in their consciences, and saying 'yes' to the Gospel is really just accepting what we subconsciously know is the Truth. For God has set eternity in human hearts. Our witness of the Gospel needs to bear this in mind. It is only human pride that leads to men claiming they don't agree with or understand our message.

Dan 3:17 *If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king*- The essence of their faith was that "God is able", whether or not He chose to exercise His power in the matter at that time in that way. And they would still serve a God who doesn't always do what He is able to do, and what we would wish Him to do in the immediacy of the moments of trial. Their words are cited back to them by the king in :29 when he recognizes that indeed, their God "is able to deliver" in a way no other deity could.

The friends speak of two deliverances- from the furnace, and from the king. "One of the goals of burning is the absolute annihilation of a person; not only is their body destroyed, but as smoke they cannot enter and rest in the netherworld". In *The Epic of Gilgamesh* Gilgamesh asks, “Did you see the man who was burnt to death?”. Enkidu replies that he did not, because the spirits of those burned with fire are not in the netherworld. The friends are surely saying that their God will in fact "save" them. Even if they are not saved from the hand of the king.

The two deliverances however can be read as them saying that God will deliver them from the furnace, in that He will resurrect them. And He can deliver them from the king in that He might also save them immediately from death in that furnace. Whether or not God saved them ultimately, or whether or not He saved them from the furnace, they would still serve Him in this life. And that is a powerful challenge. Even if we are not to be saved ultimately, we still love and serve God now.

Dan 3:18 *But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up*- Even if God doesn't 'come through' as we expect and believe, all the same, we are to live by His principles and serve Him alone. Even if He slays us, we are to trust in Him (Job 13:15). "Though the fig tree doesn’t flourish, nor fruit be in the vines" (Hab. 3:17), if the promised blessings for obedience don't come through, still we are to rejoice in Him. The worship of the image was more than a merely symbolic gesture; it was somehow connected with serving the king's gods. He obviously thought that the version of history suggested by Israel's God in chapter 2 was going to be overthrown by the power of his gods, who

would make him, the golden head, have an eternal kingdom. So to worship the image was to accept servitude to the king's gods.

God's forgiveness and salvation can never be presumed upon; even if we are genuinely repentant. For the wages of sin has always been death (Rom. 6:23); we as sinners have no right to life. This is a theme stamped right across the Old Testament. Consider: "You have sinned a great sin. Now I will go up to Yahweh. Perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30). "Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts. It may be that Yahweh, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Am. 5:15). “Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious... Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him?” (Joel 2:13,14). "Let them turn each one from his evil way... Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" (Jonah 3:8,9). Possibly we could add Esther 4:14 to this list: "Who knows if you haven’t come to the kingdom for such a time as this?". This is why Daniel's friends can reason: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods" (Dan. 3:17,18). They believed in Yahweh's salvation, but were quite prepared not to receive it. They knew that His ability to dramatically save them at that moment was not at all certain of fulfilment for them. The same words "is able" and "save" are used by Darius in Dan. 6:21 when he again expresses a doubt as to whether God is able to save in this case: "Was the God whom you served so regularly able to deliver you from the lions?". Against all this we must balance the fact that those in Christ have been given the "right" to be God's children (Jn. 1:12). But the bold confidence we have in the Lord Jesus must somehow never fail to be nuanced by an awareness of our total unworthiness and inability to presume upon God's forgiveness.

Dan 3:19 *Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and his face changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*- This could mean that his face was filled with rage. But to change face toward someone means to change attitudes. This king had promoted these men on the basis of their part in obtaining the interpretation of the dream in Dan. 2. And the king appears to have liked them; but all that changes now. His respect for them turns to burning anger. The friends didn't fear his fury, and the restored Judah collectively are urged not to fear the fury [s.w.] of their oppressor but rejoice that God will enable the restoration of Israel's Kingdom (Is. 51:13). The friends are set up as the pattern for all God's people.

Therefore he commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated- LXX "until it should burn to the uttermost". Fire burning to the uttermost is the picture of Divine wrath in judgment. Again, Nebuchadnezzar is portrayed as setting himself up as God, feeling that he alone was responsible for human condemnation, instead of continuing to be humbled by the vision of Dan. 2. There was no way of measuring how much a furnace had been heated before, nor of accurately multiplying that by seven. So we can assume this is an example of numbers being used in a non-literal sense; although the allusion may be to the Babylonian belief in seven gods and seven planets. Again, the king would be saying that the faithful three were to experience the full wrath of the Babylonian gods. The incident therefore reveals the triumph of Yahweh over all their false gods, which would explain the king's proclamation concerning the supremacy of Israel's God.

His rage and fury increased from :13, and this was reflected in the raging furnace with its greatly increased heat. As God saved them from that, thus He saved them from the intense fury of the king.

Dan 3:20 *He commanded mighty men who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to throw them into the burning fiery furnace*- The dragon, symbol of the latter day entity persecuting God's people, is to be bound and thrown to condemnation (Rev. 20:2). What was done to God's people is to be done to them, which explains the similarities between the seals [what was done to God's people] and vials [poured out upon their persecutors] in Revelation. See on :22.

Dan 3:21 *Then these men were bound in their trousers, their tunics, and their mantles, and their other garments, and were thrown into the midst of the burning fiery furnace*- Perhaps the function of the text's stress upon their clothing was because it was untouched by the fire, and this was in reality the most convincing proof of their deliverance (:27).

Dan 3:22 *Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent*- LXX "Forasmuch as the king's word prevailed". The prevailing of the king's word could suggest that there was some opposition generally to the idea. This is the background for the comment in :28 that the friends "changed the king's word" (AV). The king's word was pitted against God's word, and God's word prevailed.

And the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego- We noted on :20 that what was done, or intended to be done, to God's people is what happens to their abusers. This is a major theme in the prophets, and will be the basis for the nature of the Divine judgments upon the latter day beast.

Dan 3:23 *These three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace*- Like us at times, they were *in* the fire but not consumed by it, not even their clothes; recalling the burning bush unconsumed. We have here a primary fulfilment of Is. 43:2: "If you go through fire, you shall not be burned; the flame shall not burn you". This is in the context of a prophecy of how the Jews could have been restored from Babylon, and the Kingdom of God re-established as Israel's kingdom, replete with a Messiah figure. But the Jews generally preferred to remain in Babylon; what happened to the friends could have developed into a total restoration of Israel. But the potential prophecy didn't come true because of Israel's indolence, and so the ultimate fulfilment has been delayed until our last days.

Dan 3:24 *Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste*- LXX "And Nabuchodonosor heard them singing praises". The LXX includes the prayer of praise of Azarias. We recall how the prison keeper heard the praises sung by Paul and Silas. To praise God in the face of suffering and death is surely the ultimate reflection of faith in Him and loving trust in Him. Perhaps their example inspired Paul and Silas, just as faithful examples may inspire later believers to act likewise.

He spoke and said to his counsellors, Didn't we throw three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered the king, True, O king- "We throw" shows the king's total identity with the men who had actually throw the friends into the furnace. But those men had been slain by the flames.

Dan 3:25 *He answered, Look, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are unharmed; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods-* This was an Angel, and not the Lord Jesus personally; see on :28. The LXX gives *aggelos*, "Angel". I have noted several times on this chapter that the Babylonian belief in the god of fire was being deconstructed; and "Son of the gods" could in fact be a reference to Iz-bar ["*bar*" = "son"], the god of fire. In this case, the allusion would reflect how in fact the god of fire was under Divine control and rendered powerless to destroy the Jews. The persecution of the Jewish men here in Dan. 3 is very similar to the account of Daniel likewise being dobbed in by jealous courtiers, and thrown to the lions- and likewise being delivered, and the king pronouncing blessing upon Israel's God (Dan. 6). The parallel to this "son of the gods" who appears in the place of intended death is there an Angel; and :28 describes this being as an Angel. It was not the Lord Jesus.

Dan 3:26 *Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace: he spoke and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the midst of the fire-*

"Abednego" means 'servant of Nego', the fire god. The irony is that the king recognizes that in actuality, this man is a servant of the most High God- not Nego. The renaming hasn't worked, nor has it broken Abednego's relationship with his own God.

This coming out of fire is the historical pattern for the statement that "Your people shall be delivered" (Dan. 12:1); again, the friends are set up as the pattern for God's people of the latter day tribulation. "The most high God" is quite an admission from Nebuchadnezzar. He is recognizing that whether or not his gods really existed, without doubt the God of Israel was the highest. It was God's intention that this man should indeed come to recognize that He is the most high (Dan. 4:17). But again, Nebuchadnezzar's appreciation of this was only momentary, for he needs to be taught this reality again by his illness and humiliation. When we are brought to such deep spiritual realizations, we must pray earnestly that we continue in them and not experience them as merely passing moments.

Dan 3:27 *The satraps, the deputies, and the governors, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, that the fire had no power on their bodies, nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their clothes changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them-* Sulphur or pitch was likely used to heat the furnace, which would have left a very strong smell on the clothing of anyone who came near the furnace [including the king]. As they had been "gathered together" to the image, now they were "gathered together" to see these men. Perhaps the function of the text's stress upon their clothing in :21 was because it was untouched by the fire, and this was in reality the most convincing proof of their deliverance. The Babylonians worshipped the gods of fire, and so the stress that the fire had no power was effectively revealing the bankruptcy of their entire belief system. That no "smell of fire" was upon them would then speak of their total disassociation with the Babylonian religious system. Again, the friends are held up as our pattern for faith in Heb. 11:34- by faith they quenched the violence of fire.

Dan 3:28 *Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach,*

and Abednego, who has sent His angel- This shows Nebuchadnezzar recognizing that an Angel had been physically sent to Daniel and his friends in the fiery furnace. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10. The Lord Jesus was not an Angel, as Heb. 1 demonstrates at length; the one like a son of the gods was therefore an Angel and not the Lord Jesus personally, who wasn't then in existence.

And delivered His servants who trusted in Him, these who have set aside the king's command, and have yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God- LXX "Changed the king's word", just as Daniel did to him (Dan. 2:21). This repetition of situation was surely in order to get Nebuchadnezzar to repent; we marvel that God made such efforts to convert this man, as He did with Pharaoh, when we would likely have considered such a person just not worth the effort in trying with. It would seem that the friends went beyond simply not bowing down to the image, but instead yielded their bodies to Yahweh and made some act of homage towards Him, perhaps like Daniel later, praying toward Jerusalem rather than falling before the image. They did this on purpose (:14), to make a point. "Set aside" can also mean "to despise", as the Peshitta renders it. The king is therefore accepting that his word had been despised, and Yahweh's word had prevailed. He reaches an impressive point of humility, although as we learn in Dan. 4, he didn't remain at that level but returned to pride. Just as we too so often experience humility as only a passing condition, in time of crisis, when it ought to remain a permanent characteristic.

The same word for "change" [NEV "set aside"] is found in :27, where their coats were not "changed" by the fire. Likewise because they "yielded their bodies" to Yahweh, the fire "had no power on their bodies" (:27). As ever in Daniel, we see the theme of total contrast and conflict between the believer and the world. Rom. 6 surely alludes here in saying that we are to yield our bodies to God as His servants and not to the flesh. Those brave men are every man in Christ.

Isaiah 43 is a mockery of Babylon's gods, and urges all God's people to pass through the fire, knowing God is with them (Is. 43:2; Ps. 66:12). All the exiles, indeed all God's people, are to in essence pass through that the friends did. And be delivered. The whole incident in Dan. 3, especially references to fire, is full of connection with the prophecies of later Isaiah. This part of Daniel is written in Aramaic, a form of Hebrew mixed with Greek. Perhaps it was translated especially for the Jews suffering under Antiochus. He built a statue of and an altar for Zeus Olympios in the Jewish temple, and forced the Jews to worship it. They are being encouraged to resist, through the distribution of Daniel's prophecy in their common language. Significantly, there were eight copies of Daniel found in the Qumran discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls. It was a book much in demand.

Dan 3:29 *Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak anything evil against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a compost heap; because there is no other god who is able to deliver after this sort*- The Babylonian gods were not saviours; Nebuchadnezzar here recognizes that the God of Israel is essentially a saviour, and we see that supremely articulated in His work through His Son Jesus, Yah's salvation. The same word for "able" is later used to Nebuchadnezzar in warning him that God is "able" to abase him if he continues in pride (Dan. 4:37). We marvel at God's continued and constant efforts to convert the king; He taught Nebuchadnezzar

that He was indeed "able" to do all things; and then goes on to warn him that He therefore is "able" to abase him, if he continues in pride.

Dan 3:30 *Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon*- LXX adds: "And gave them authority to rule over all the Jews who were in his kingdom". The ministers for Jewish affairs were themselves Jews.

DANIEL CHAPTER 4

Dan 4:1 *Nebuchadnezzar the king, to all the peoples, nations, and languages, who dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to yo*u-

We could perhaps note a wider ranging humility in these words than in Dan. 3:4 which addresses all "peoples, nations, and languages"; now the phrase "in all the earth" is added. Likewise "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego" (Dan. 3:28) is extended to "I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured the one who lives for ever" (Dan. 4:34,35). The God of the captives becomes "the most high", and he is to be praised "for ever", i.e. even after Nebuchadnezzar's time. Progressive humility and desire to give God ever wider glory are all part of spiritual growth.

Here we have "all the earth" defined as the area governed by Babylon, and not the entire planet. This assists in our interpretation of the dominions of Dan. 2. Clearly Europe and any area beyond the Middle East is not in view. This proclamation is that made after his humiliation. His response to that humbling was to spread the good news of God's Kingdom, rather than his own, to every aspect of humanity which he could reach. We too have been given the great commission to do likewise, and we obey it in the humility which comes from having been convicted of our sin and pride.

Nebuchadnezzar's multi-lingual preaching of the greatness of God's Kingdom "to all nations" can easily be read unappreciated. But it must have been quite something, involving translating the Gospel of the Kingdom of God into many languages; and it incorporated a very humble expression of his own failures, a recognition of his foolish pride and lack of repentance. And maybe this is exactly why he was the one used by God to make the widest and greatest Old Testament witness to the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Dan 4:2 *It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked toward me*- The content of Gospel preaching is the message of God's Kingdom and His Son. But it is also a reflection of our personal experience of how "God has worked toward me". This is what gives our message credibility. The 'signs and wonders', a phrase used of miracles, refer to the psychological and spiritual miracle worked upon Nebuchadnezzar, a man otherwise specifically condemned to eternal destruction for what he did to Yahweh's temple and people.

Dan 4:3 *How great are His signs! How mighty are His wonders!*- These miraculous signs and wonders surely refer to how "God has worked toward me" (:2), for they have no other referent. The way God tirelessly works to humble us and lead us to accept *His* Kingdom and renounce our own is nothing short of major, dramatic psychological miracle.

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation- Nebuchadnezzar had rejected the teaching of the previous revelation to him in Dan. 2:44, that God's kingdom alone is everlasting, and will not pass to

another. He had built an image of gold, as if to say that he the head of gold would in fact last eternally. And now he realizes how wrong he had been. It's interesting to compare Nebuchadnezzar's doxologies at the end of Dan. 2, in Dan. 3 and now in Dan. 4:3. He seems to be growing in his appreciation of the eternity of God's Kingdom. Indeed he appears to be quoting Ps. 145:13: “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations”. Humility before God's sovereignty is a major theme in Daniel; and Belshazzar is condemned for not learning the lesson of humility from his ancestors: "You, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this" (Dan. 5:22). The implication is that his ancestor or father did learn the lesson, but he didn't.

Dan 4:4 *I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace-* "Flourishing" is the language of a tree, which he will be likened to in the vision he now saw. Again he shows humility by recognizing the truth of the Divine vision concerning him.

Dan 4:5 *I saw a dream which made me afraid; and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me-* This is the language of his earlier experience in Dan. 2:1,29. Circumstances repeat in our lives. If he had humbly accepted the Divine word to him in that first dream, he wouldn't have needed this further dream and humiliation. The way situations and feelings repeat in our lives is therefore a great encouragement that man is not alone, abandoned in this world; instead we are sure that God is working with us, to humble us that we might be exalted in due time.

Dan 4:6 *Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might explain to me the interpretation of the dream-* As noted on :5, this was just what he had done in Dan. 2. He ought to have guessed that the outcome would be similarly bad for his pride, and the message of God's Kingdom would again prevail over him.

Dan 4:7 *Then came in the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers; and I told the dream before them; but they did not explain to me its interpretation-* Again, as noted on :5 and :6, the situation in Dan. 2 was repeating. He ought to have learnt the lesson then, but he didn't; and he failed his second chance too, with the dream of the tree, but it seems he learnt his lesson finally and became one of the most remarkable converts to the things of the Kingdom. Surely both the magicians and the king himself knew what the dream meant. The interpretation was obvious. Daniel is again to be commended for his bravery in stating the obvious to the king- that which nobody else dared say. And we will find ourselves in similar life situations. Daniel doesn't offer any interpretation of the tree’s central position in the earth; its great height, nor the fact that there was “food for all” on it. He knew that the king knew what this meant. It was so obvious. Indeed there was virtually no interpretation necessary...

Dan 4:8 *But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar-* Nebuchadnezzar ought to have perceived the inability of his magicians to interpret dreams; he ought to have gone to Daniel first rather than "at the last". But he learnt his lesson right at the end, although requiring a terrible humiliation. Daniel being called "at the last" may well have been because he had moved himself away from all the great promotions he had been given, and eagerly slipped into the twilight, out of the

deep conflicts between his conscience for Yahweh and the requirements of the Babylonian court life. We too at times need to reverse the effects of promotion in secular life, that we might be separate for our God.

According to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and I told the dream before him, saying- Nebuchadnezzar proclaims Yahweh as the supreme God. So he may here be admitting his own foolishness in having Bel as his god, and perhaps we are to read in an ellipsis: "In whom [as I mistakenly thought was] the spirit of the holy gods". For he goes on to make it clear that Daniel's God is the greatest.

Dan 4:9 *Belteshazzar, master of the magicians*- As noted on :8, Daniel had perhaps distanced himself from the magicians, or had been demoted. And so the king is accepting that Daniel was far greater than them all.

Because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you- This is the language used of Joseph in a similar situation (Gen. 41:38). Not only did situations recur within the experiences of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, but between the lives of Joseph and Daniel. Daniel would have been encouraged that he was no treading a unique path, but that the same loving Divine hand was at work according to a broadly similar pattern.

And no secret troubles you, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation- The book of Daniel goes on to record that Daniel was indeed troubled by some secrets and visions which he never understood precisely. It's as if Daniel's humility was such that he wished this to be recorded.

Dan 4:10 *Thus were the visions of my head on my bed: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth*- In Dan. 4:10, Nebuchadnezzar sees himself as a tree that is felled. God was again trying to get Nebuchadnezzar to see the truth of the image prophecy of Daniel 2. For a tree was seen as symbolic of a man. "Trees have toe-like roots, arm-like branches and stand upright from root to crown, between earth and heaven". This confirms that the initial application of the image with Nebuchadnezzar's face was to Nebuchadnezzar himself and his immediate dynasty.

A tree represents a kingdom, e.g. Assyria (Ez. 31:1-18) or the Kingdom of God (Mt. 13:31,32). Nebuchadnezzar as a person was intimately associated with his kingdom, hence he transformed himself from being the head of gold to being the entire image in the statue which he made. It is a human tendency to so identify ourselves with our kingdom, be it our career, family or firm we founded... that we cannot extricate ourselves to stand alone before God. And Nebuchadnezzar needed immense humiliation before he made that separation. Being "in the midst of the earth" may be a reference to his capture of Jerusalem, as the central point of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. This was his deepest sin, and what he was wrongly glorified for. It was the seed of Abraham who were to grow into God's Kingdom "in the midst of the earth" (Gen. 48:16), and not the people of Babylon.

And its height was great- The king of Babylon is pictured as having done this specifically in connection with his intention to conquer Jerusalem: "You said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north" (Is. 14:13). As noted above, it was Nebuchadnezzar's prideful attitude against Israel and Jerusalem in particular which was at the root of his sin.

Dan 4:11 *The tree grew, and was strong, and its height reached to the sky, and its sight to the end of all the earth*- "The earth" is clearly not the entire planet. The way it was seen throughout the empire referred to how Nebuchadnezzar exalted himself personally and was looked towards by all; it alludes to how he had built the image of himself in Dan. 3. He "reached to the sky" in terms of his pride and playing God. The growth of the tree refers to the growth in the king's pride; he said "in his heart" that he would grow as high as heaven (Is. 14:13).

Dan 4:12 *The leaves of it were beautiful, and its fruit much, and in it was food for all: the animals of the field had their shadow under it, and the birds of the sky lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it*- This is the language of God's Kingdom (Ez. 17:23; Mt. 13:32,33). His kingdom had been a fake kingdom of God. This repeats the language of Dan. 2:37,38, which in turn alludes to Adam: "the God of heaven has given beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all... have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds
of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen 1:26). The one who was given the animals to rule over becomes an animal. We will comment later that Nebuchadnezzar is a man, created to be as Adam. But he acts like an animal and so he is made like an animal, in order that he might become "the man" God intended. “And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox” (Dan. 4:32) recalls “you shall eat the plants of the field” (Gen. 3:18). We note that Adam's eating the “plants of the field” brings him closer to the animals to whom God gave “every green plant” (Gen. 1:30) for
food. This is exactly what we see with Nebuchadnezzar. He was a man but was given an animal's heart (Dan. 7:3); like Adam, instead of ruling over the animals he became like one. "His spirit was hardened that he dealt proudly" (Dan. 5:20 R.V.), he was confirmed in the mind he chose to have. And yet like Adam he was given the path to restoration. The account of Nebuchadnezzar's glory returning to him is similar to the description of man's final end in Ps. 8:5-9: "You crowned him with glory and honour. You make him ruler over the works of Your hands. You have put all things under his feet: all sheep and cattle, yes, and the animals of the field, the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes through the paths of the seas. Yahweh our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!". "The son of man" is referenced in Dan. 7, and he appears as having dominion over the four wild animals that appear. This is surely not without reference to what we learn in Dan. 4- that the king was to pass through the experience of Adam, at his creation, his fall and future restoration.

Dan 4:13 *I saw in the visions of my head on my bed, and behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from Heaven*- The watcher even a holy one [one Angel, not two] had already been revealed to Nebuchadnezzar when he observed the Angel with the friends in the fiery furnace. He almost didn't need Daniel to explain it all. God was constantly working with him to help him, nudge by nudge, come to fully accept Him.

The Angels are 'watchers' in the sense that they 'watch over' God's word to perform it in practice; God would 'watch over' His words of condemnation of Babylon to fulfil them, and likewise 'watch over' His word of restoration toward Judah (Jer. 31:28; 44:27 etc.). See on Dan. 9:14. Nebuchadnezzar appreciated that Daniel had the spirit of the "holy ones", and yet he saw a "holy one" come from Heaven. He thereby was being taught that Daniel was in league with God and the court of Heaven, and the

Angels were able to fulfil the prophetic words Daniel was uttering. See on 2 Sam. 23:1-3.

Dan 4:14 *He cried aloud, and said thus: Cut down the tree, and cut off its branches, shake off its leaves, and scatter its fruit: let the animals get away from under it, and the birds from its branches-*

"He cried aloud" means really 'mightily', as in Dan. 3:4. Nebuchadnezzar is recognizing that just as he had cried aloud for all men to worship him, so now God had called loudly for his own demise.

This is a command to the animals and birds, rather than just a prediction of the disintegration of the Babylonian empire. We can infer that the intention was that Nebuchadnezzar preached this message, bringing about the demise of his own empire, inviting the tributary peoples [especially Judah] to leave the empire and regain their freedom. But Nebuchadnezzar wouldn't do so. Perhaps if he had done so, then the restoration of Judah could have begun.

The imagery of cutting down a tree has been used about what Nebuchadnezzar had done to Assyria. God used him to "lop the boughs with terrifying power; the tallest trees will be cut down, and the lofty will be brought low" (Is. 11:33). The same language of Nebuchadnezzar cutting down a tree is used of what he did to Egypt in Ez. 31:2-14. What Nebuchadnezzar had done to others was to be done to him. This experience is all part of what it means to be made human as God intends. To have humanity, to feel for others and empathize with them.

Dan 4:15 *Nevertheless leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of the sky: and let his portion be with the animals in the grass of the earth-* The stump of the roots was therefore representative of Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom; for it was he personally who had his portion with the animals. Iron and brass were metals in the image of Dan. 2 which were to come after Nebuchadnezzar. He was to be cut down, and bound by the fact that other kings were to arise after him and take away his dominion. The vision of Dan. 2 was indeed going to come true, much as he had struggled against it through building the state of gold in Dan. 3.

The idea of a stump and roots remaining is surely that the tree will have a sprout from it and grow again. The words for root and stump are found in Is. 11:1, where the Jewish Messiah is the shoot that grows from the root and stump. This is the language of Zerubbabel. I suggest that there is a hint here that Nebuchadnezzar's repentance could have led to the Messiah figure appearing. But Zerubbabel and other related options failed at that time. As discussed on Dan. 2, the kaleidoscope of images had to be turned again, to come up with another fulfilment.

Dan 4:16 *Let his heart be changed from man's, and let an animal's heart be given to him-*

We have to make the connection with Dan. 7:4 "The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I saw until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand on two feet as a man; and a man's heart was given to it". This is the equivalent of the head of gold in Dan. 2, which we are specifically told was Nebuchadnezzar, "you, O King"... Not Babylon generally. For Nebuchadnezzar was only king at the end of Babylonian dominance, in fact only over the neo-Babylonian empire. So this lion with a changed heart is Nebuchadnezzar. Whatever political, historical fulfilments we wish to see in Dan. 7:4, we must surely accept that primarily

it refers to Nebuchadnezzar personally. Dan. 7 doesn't describe him doing anything aggressive, unlike the other beasts mentioned. His claws grew like eagles'; and he frequently depicted himself as a winged lion. The bricks of the great Babylon be built had lions on them to symbolize himself. So there is a double heart transplant operation here. Again we see that God can give man another heart, as He did to Saul, and as He can do today through the work of the Holy Spirit on human hearts. He was a proud man, given an animal's heart and then given a human heart, as he became man as God intended. Humbled before God, abased and living in hope of eternal restoration by God's grace.

Man is but as the beasts that perish in his death (Ps. 49:20). Nebuchadnezzar had the idea that he was somehow divine, that he as the head of gold would in fact continue and never give way to others- hence his deconstruction of the Dan. 2 image by his own image of total gold in Dan. 3. But he had to be made to realize that he was not divine, he was human, and human nature is animal nature. The Father works with us likewise for decades to help us realize these same truths, so that we might fully grasp the good news of His Kingdom and eternity. For many it may take the loss of strength and faculty that comes with old age before they finally realize this.

And let seven times pass over him- The closer one looks, the more conditional prophecies and Divine statements there are. The statement that Nebuchadnezzar would be humiliated for seven times *could* have been changed by his repentance (cp. :27-29). "Seven times" may not have to be seven years; the number seven is so often symbolic. The idea could be that a significant, defined period would pass over him so that he might thereby be perfected, literally 'seven-ed'. Israel too were to suffer "seven times" of judgment for their sins (Lev. 26:18,21,24,28), seventy sevens (Jer. 29:10), and Nebuchadnezzar had played his part in bringing them about. He was now to realize how he had treated God's people, suffering the same essential judgments he had poured out- not simply as a 'measure for measure' judgment for the sake of it, but in order to elicit in him repentance.

Dan 4:17 *The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, and the judgment decision by the word of the holy ones*- Although this "sentence" had been 'decreed' by the watching Angels, it was open to negotiation. For Daniel urges Nebuchadnezzar to repent and show grace, with the implication that the terrible decree for him might not have to necessarily come into reality. This is surely the force of the "therefore..." (:27). Nebuchadnezzar was told that the destruction of his power was a “matter by the decree of the watchers [i.e. Angels, the eyes of the Lord], and the demand by the word of the holy ones” (Dan. 4:17). The Chaldee words translated “matter, “decree” and “demand” are all legal terms, implying a legal answer / response, “a judicial decision” as Strong defines “the demand”. The book of Daniel often records the kings issuing decrees; but they are nothing compared to the decrees of Heaven. Something came before the court of Heaven- presumably the matter in question was Nebuchadnezzar’s pride and his position on the Jews. Daniel’s advice in 4:27 to shew mercy to the poor may be a reference to what the King should’ve been doing to the Jews- perhaps by enabling their return to their land. And a ‘judicial decision’ was made and “a watcher and a Holy One came down from Heaven” to operationalize it (Dan. 4:13). If this is the extent of Angelic attention to the heart of a Gentile king- how much more earnestly are they debating the states of our hearts and our actions, and issuing decrees for action accordingly?

Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation was "by the demand of the word of the holy ones". Was it that the Angels had noticed this man's awful pride, reported it to God Himself in the court of Heaven, and then been empowered to carry out his demise? The same context reminds us that God does according to *His* will in the army of Heaven (Dan. 4:35). And yet His purpose is to some extent moulded by them. And we are led to ask, how much influence do *we* His beloved children have upon His actual purpose? In the context of Daniel, one observes that a "herald" cried aloud to peoples of all nations and languages, and bid them worship the Babylonian image, on pain of being cast into a fiery furnace (Dan. 3:4 ff.). And yet in Rev. 14:6, an Angel cries to all nations and languages, warning them that if they *do* worship the image, they will be cast into the lake of fire. The Angels had observed Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance and defiance, and many centuries later they will work out their way of parodying it in their future proclamation. The point is, they have the power to work out their way of operation in accordance with their perceptions and understandings; in this we see the "freedom of the spirit" which is now and shall be ever accorded to Yahweh's elohim.

To the intent that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will- The Divine intention at this time was that all the Babylonian empire would come to accept the truth of the message of the Kingdom as explained in the image of Daniel 2. The interpretation is that "till *you* know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom He will". Yet Nebuchadnezzar is made representative of "the living"; he is every man. Dan. 2:30 uses "the living" for all men; Daniel says he is not wiser "more than any living". See on :34. Nebuchadnezzar uses the same word in saying in response that he honours Yahweh who "lives" for ever (:34). The idea surely is that "the living" are to realize that they will not "live" for ever, but God will. Nebuchadnezzar came to this realization "at the end of the days" (:34). Whilst that refers initially to the days of his humiliation, it clearly has hints of the last day. It is at that day that man shall be humbled and see himself as he is; but the challenge is to live like that now.

And sets up over it the most abased of men- Everyone would have known the strange abasement of Nebuchadnezzar. The fact he was restored to his throne, rather than being deposed during his incapacity, was therefore an amazing and most unusual object lesson- before exaltation over God's Kingdom there must come humility and abasement. The Lord seems to allude to this in teaching that he who abases himself the most shall be exalted the highest in God's Kingdom (Mt. 18:4; Lk. 14:11). The Lord clearly had Himself in view, and Phil. 2 confirms this- He was the most abased, that He might be the most highly exalted.

The Angel required that Nebuchadnezzar be "abased" (have humility) and Daniel advises Nebuchadnezzar to show righteousness and mercy. These are related to humility. We find the same three ideas together in Micah: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8). This suggests that Nebuchadnezzar is indeed every man, every mortal, "the living". This is the same idea as in 1 Cor. 1:28 which surely alludes here and makes Nebuchadnezzar as every man. The 'base things' are what God uses. For man to be abased is to become man as God intends.

Dan 4:18 *This dream I, king Nebuchadnezzar, have seen; and you, Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able; for the spirit of the holy gods*

is in you- 1 Cor. 1:21 may allude here: "the world by wisdom knows not God". This is no mere ancient history; the principles apply in all ages and situations. Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that his "wise men", whose supposed wisdom was intimately connected with their pagan religious beliefs, were powerless. He tacitly admits that they don't possess the spirit of the gods which they claimed to. Remember that the text we are reading was part of the proclamation made by Nebuchadnezzar after his humiliation.

"But you are able" contrasts with his earlier words to Daniel: "Are you able [to interpret my dream]?" (Dan. 2:26. We are being presented with the gradual spiritual development of the king. We wonder why he didn't immediately ask for Daniel's interpretation; and we suspect it was because he knew anyway what the interpretation was, and he knew Daniel knew...

Dan 4:19 *Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was stricken mute for a while, and his thoughts troubled him. The king answered, Belteshazzar, don't let the dream, or the interpretation, trouble you. Belteshazzar answered, My lord, the dream is to the side of those who hate you, and its interpretation to your adversaries*- This is the classic encouragement to all of us when we fear to speak forth God's word, scared of how our audience will receive it. This verse is still part of the proclamation made by Nebuchadnezzar throughout his realm, he wished to show everyone what had transpired. The fact he didn't have Daniel immediately slain is to his credit; Daniel was fearful because he knew just how proud Nebuchadnezzar was, and how the king had railed against Daniel's interpretation of the Dan. 2 dream by building an image of gold, subverting the idea that the head of gold was to pass away. He was likely encouraged by the Biblical examples of young Joseph and Samuel speaking forth God's word to men whom they knew would not welcome their message. The haters and adversaries of Nebuchadnezzar were symbolized by the brass and iron which bound the stump; the metals of the Dan. 2 image which were to supercede Nebuchadnezzar.

The gold in the image represented Nebuchadnezzar personally. But Daniel was so very brave to give the interpretation- that the gold would be crushed and blown away (Dan. 2:45). Indeed the entire image would be destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar would not last for ever. His worst fears, which led to his dream, were justified. Daniel surely risked death by telling him this; and for all time is a great example of speaking God's word even when we know we risk our own lives, at least our social lives, and relationships. Nebuchadnezzar was known [as were other kings] for executing messengers who brought bad news. Yet he was deeply impressed that Daniel knew what he had dreamed, and rewarded him for that. His subsequent making an image entirely of gold reflects his subsequent reflection and deep dislike of the interpretation. Later, Daniel is fearful to tell Nebuchadnezzar an interpretation which means the king's downfall; indeed he was visibly distressed by the prospect of having to do so, going into a panic attack: "The king answered, Belteshazzar, don't let the dream, or the interpretation, trouble you. Belteshazzar answered, My lord, the dream is to the side of those who hate you, and its interpretation to your adversaries" (Dan. 4:19). Possibly he had lost some of his youthful faith and bravery by this point.

However, we should consider the alternative translation: "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!" (ESV). Just as Daniel urged the king to repent and show grace to the poor [perhaps specifically the Jews], so that his kingdom and life would be extended; so here, Daniel seems to see the possibility that the dream need not come true for Nebuchadnezzar, but could

be reapplied by God to his enemies. Here we see the open nature of these prophecies; which is what makes it too simplistic and inappropriate to insist upon them having only one intended meaning and fulfilment.

Dan 4:20 *The tree that you saw, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached to the sky, and its view to all the earth*- "Which grew" translates the same Hebrew term translated "made [Daniel] a great man" (Dan. 2:48). Daniel had eased himself out of that exaltation; whenever he was exalted, he seems to have slipped out of the limelight, for the next time he's needed, he has to be searched for. But Nebuchadnezzar hadn't yet learnt that true greatness is not in this life. "Height" is the same word used in Dan. 5:20 for how his heart was "lifted up"; as noted on :22, it was the state of his heart which was of such critical importance to God. And therefore the king uses it in :37 to say that now he extols or lifts up the one true God- rather than himself. To repent of pride is very difficult, and Nebuchadnezzar sets a great example- although it was only achieved by grace alone, and repeated Divine efforts and a huge abasement.

Dan 4:21 *Whose leaves were beautiful, and its fruit much, and in it was food for all; under which the animals of the field lived, and under whose branches the birds of the sky had their habitation*- The similarities with imagery of God's Kingdom are clear (Mt. 13:31,32). On one level, Babylon was a pseudo kingdom of God with Nebuchadnezzar as a fake God and Messiah. But the similarities perhaps also point to how that if Nebuchadnezzar had repented and his people accepted his testimony about God's Kingdom, his kingdom could have become part of the revived kingdom of God in Israel. The submission of all animal life to Nebuchadnezzar is after the pattern of Adam in Eden; and his pride led him to a fall after the pattern of Adam.

Dan 4:22 *It is you, O king, that has grown and become strong; for your greatness is grown, and reaches to the sky, and your dominion to the end of the earth*- "Strong" is the word for "hard"; it is used again in Dan. 5:20 "his mind was hardened in pride". This prophecy about the king is therefore specifically about his heart; this is the essential nature and indicator of a person before God. Nebuchadnezzar's empire was largely inherited, and even Babylon was glorious when he came to the throne; he rebuilt parts of it and made cosmetic improvements. So the astounding growth depicted here refers more to the growth of his own glory within his own proud mind. "It is you" focuses the interpretation upon Nebuchadnezzar as a person, but clearly the language of :20,21 is about his kingdom. He was his kingdom, just as the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus is within or amongst people; *He* is the One in view, the king is so identified with His Kingdom (Lk. 17:21).

Dan. 4:22 LXX adds: "Your works were seen, how you ravaged the house of the living God pertaining to the sins of the sanctified people". See on Dan. 3:1.

Dan 4:23 *Whereas the king saw a watcher and a holy one coming down from Heaven and saying, Cut down the tree, and destroy it; nevertheless leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field, and let it be wet with the dew of the sky: and let his portion be with the animals of the field, until seven times pass over him*- See on Jer. 23:18,22. "And destroy it" is added here; in contrast with how God's Kingdom shall never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). Nebuchadnezzar had tried to deconstruct that image by making an entire image of

gold. And yet the leaving of the stump in the earth showed that he could still have hope of life even after that.

Dan 4:24 *This is the interpretation, O king, and it is the decree of the Most High, which has come on my lord the king*- This contrasts with :17 "the decree of the watchers"; the one and only Most High God is to be accepted rather than the king's vague idea of Divine "Watchers". Again we see the Father's patient efforts to spiritually educate this proud man whom we would likely not have bothered preaching to. "Which *has* come" reflects on one hand the prophetic perfect, that God's word is as good as done once spoken. And yet there is also a gap between the proclamation and the fulfilment, during which men like Nebuchadnezzar could repent and change the outcome of that apparently totally certain Divine word. We see these two movements or strands so clearly in this case of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel's appeal for him to repent. Indeed he was given 12 months to repent and change the outcome.

Dan 4:25 *That you shall be driven from men, and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field, and you shall be made to eat grass as oxen, and shall be wet with the dew of the sky, and seven times shall pass over you; until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will*- The king was initially like a tree with all the animals of the field beneath him, and now he was to be made like one of them. Every sin is in some form an essential replication of that of Adam and Eve. They passed through the same. Nebuchadnezzar's conversion to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God involved recognizing that man is but as the beasts which perish, mortal and not immortal. Only when he recognized that he didn't have a kingdom, was he given the kingdom again. Similar language is used of God's efforts to get Pharaoh to "know" Him (Ex. 7:5,17; 8:10; 9:29). We marvel at God's great efforts with men whom we would rather assume were not worth trying with. "Until you know that the Most High rules..." shows that there was a condition set upon the ending of this humiliation. And yet a time period of "seven times" was also mandated. But that time period was therefore also flexible, for the duration depended upon the king's humility or otherwise.

Dan 4:26 *Whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree; your kingdom shall be sure to you, after that you shall have known that the Heavens do rule*- We are guided in understanding the meaning of the stump by Job 14:7, which seems to be saying that a tree whose stump is left at least has the hope of sprouting again, which Job understood as meaning resurrection. Tree stumps are not usually bound with brass and iron; such bonds would not stop the tree sprouting again. The point is that the root was not removed. I suggest that Nebuchadnezzar was being taught that his earthly kingdom would indeed end and the kingdoms of brass and iron would play a part in that, as taught by the Dan. 2 image vision. But if he redefined *his* kingdom as the Kingdom of God, which is eternal, then his kingdom, which would be God's Kingdom when the kingdoms of this world become those of God (Rev. 11:15), would indeed be eternal. And there is every reason to think that Nebuchadnezzar was finally converted to this good news of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is only "made sure" to anyone by resigning our own kingdoms and making God's Kingdom ours.

Dan 4:27 *Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you, and break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if there may be a lengthening of your prosperity-*

The job of a magician or dream interpreter was not just to interpret the dream, but to then suggest rituals or sacrifices which would negate the negative parts of the dream. Daniel had been schooled in all this and exceled in knowledge of Babylonian magic rituals. But he speaks the truth, unpopular as it is- that the only reversal of this is through the king's personal humility and repentance.

And yet Daniel does give Nebuchadnezzar some specifics as to how to reverse the curses. "Righteousness" is literally 'almsgiving'. But how can any act of righteousness or generosity to the poor somehow buy forgiveness? Possibly the idea is that sin is a debt. We are forgiven that debt by God, and our response is naturally to forgive others their debts to us. And to show grace to others as God showed to us. The Lord's parable of the forgiven debtors is clear about this. So although almsgiving and generosity to the poor cannot of themselves buy our forgiveness, it is also so that the man who has experienced forgiveness by grace will show that generosity of grace to others. The grace of all this is that Nebuchadnezzar refuses to repent and do what he can to put right his sins against Judah and the temple. He is punished, yet repents in that abasement. And is accepted. And yet Babylon was to be destroyed for desecrating the temple: "Gather the shields: the Lord has raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for His device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of His temple" (Jer. 50:28). But this was deferred, and didn't happen to Nebuchadnezzar. Because he repented and humbled himself.

The prophecy about his humiliation need not have come true if he had repented; just as the statement that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days didn't come true because of the Ninevites' repentance. But like us, Nebuchadnezzar had to be an empirical learner, rather than humbling himself before the word of God and just obeying it. The "righteousness" and "mercy to the poor" may have specifically referred to his allowing the restoration of God's Kingdom in the form of the kingdom of Judah. "Righteousness" is a favourite theme of Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration (Is. 45:8; 54:14; 56:1; 63:1 etc.). "Mercy to the poor" is the word used of how God would "favour" Zion at the restoration (Ps. 102:13,14; Is. 30:19). "The poor" is literally 'the afflicted ones', a term used of Judah afflicted by the Babylonians (Ezra 8:21; Is. 60:14; Lam. 5:11).

"Break off" is a term used of removing the yoke upon captive Judah (Ps. 136:24; Lam. 5:8; Ez. 19:12); and "sins" may be an intensive plural for his one great sin, which was the holding of Judah in captivity. All this could be reversed by Nebuchadnezzar repenting of his pride, handing his kingdom over to Yahweh, and allowing the Jews to return and re-establish the Kingdom of God in Judah.

The allusion is surely to Dt. 17:20, which uses the equivalent Hebrew word to speak of how if the chosen king was obedient to God's word and had a humbled heart, he would "lengthen / prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children". Had Nebuchadnezzar humbled his heart, then his kingdom would have been prolonged and his children would have continued his dynasty. The language of the image in Dan. 2 need not have come true. Again we see the open, flexible nature of Bible prophecy. Like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:27), Solomon could have prolonged his days as king over Israel if he walked in the ways of David (1 Kings 3:14), which we are specifically told he did not. Seeing Solomon reigned 40 years, this promise of prolonged days surely implied supernaturally prolonged life, beyond usual human

lifespans. Indeed the term is used of how the Lord Jesus "prolonged his days" eternally (Is. 53:10). Hence Solomon twice uses the word to speak of how wise rulers could prolong their reigns (Prov. 28:2,16). He surely has himself in view; but failed to realize this potential. Indeed he cynically uses the word in Ecc. 7:15; 8:12 in claiming that it is the wicked and not the obedient who have their days prolonged.

Dan 4:28 *All this came on the king Nebuchadnezzar*- This is tantamount to saying that he did not accept Daniel's plea for his repentance in :27.

Dan 4:29 *At the end of twelve months he was walking in the royal palace of Babylon*- So often, God makes a statement of judgment, but there is a gap between the statement and the fulfilment. We all are located within that gap until we die. But there are specific matters over which we may be given a period of time to repent of. Nebuchadnezzar was given twelve months. And he didn't. But there was a plan D for him still, involving serious humiliation. And it seems he responded to that. We have such things going on in our lives, although they are seen clearer in the lives of others. We think of the Lord giving the apostate "space to repent" which they declined (Rev. 2:21).

Dan 4:30 *The king spoke and said*- These words may well have been simply his innermost thoughts. But as the Lord makes clear, the thoughts of the heart are read by God as our words. He apparently said or thought these things whilst viewing the city, so he would have been on a rooftop, the place of solace and meditation (cp. 2 Sam. 11:2).

Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?- Nebuchadnezzar realized after his humbling that one of his reasons for pride had been due to him not realizing the extent to which the "great Babylon which (he) had built" and the Kingdom he had gained were in fact the total result of the work of the Angels; "He does according to His will in the army of Heaven (the Angels), and among the inhabitants of the earth" (:35). The bricks of ancient Babylon all have Nebuchadnezzar's name on them. Pride in our own homes, or our kingdoms no matter how small or great in secular terms, can be the same essential sin. A sense of God's kingdom majesty and power is essential if we are to avoid this temptation to glorify our own power and apparent kingdom majesty. And much of that apparent majesty is anyway in our own eyes only, as it was for Nebuchadnezzar; for Babylon was already great when he became king, and all he did was to rebuild parts of it and make cosmetic improvements.

An inscription from the period of Nebuchadnezzar records him saying: "I have made Babylon, the holy city, the glory of the great gods, more prominent than before, and have promoted its rebuilding. I have caused the sanctuaries of gods and goddesses to lighten up like the day. No king among all the kings has ever created, no earlier king has ever built, what I have magnificently built for Marduk. I have furthered to the utmost the equipment of Esagila (the great temple of Marduk), and the renovation of Babylon more than had ever been done before". His building of Babylon was therefore directly related to his continued idolatry and rejection of Yahweh, despite all he had been shown and taught earlier.

Dan 4:31 *While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from Heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken-*

The 'falling' of the voice from Heaven surely connects with the Angels 'coming down from heaven' (:23 "Whereas the king saw a watcher and a holy one coming down from Heaven and saying, Cut down the tree..."). The Angels and the word are connected. God's word is operationalized by the Angels who watch over its fulfilment 'coming down' from the court of Heaven to fulfil it, given the fulfilment of preconditions here on earth. In this case, the precondition was Nebuchadnezzar's failure to repent after a 12 month period.

See on 2 Pet. 2:10. I suggested on :30 that his statement may have been simply in his own heart, but it was counted as being a word in his mouth by the God who considers thoughts to be words. His word and the Divine word are here contrasted.

The kingdom has departed from you- The same word is used of how the Dan. 2 image vision meant that God "removed" (s.w. "departed") kings, including Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:21; 7:12). He ought to have continued believing in that Divine word; but he had to be brought to accept it through this deep humiliation, when he could have avoided that by simply accepting God's word as it is. And it's the same for us. This is why attitude to God's word, rather than simply reading it, is so critically important in human life. It is why acceptance that the Bible is the inspired word of God has such endless implications in human life. We note however the flexibility of interpretation. The kingdom "has departed". But by the end of the chapter, it was restored. According to Dan. 2:21, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was to be removed. And it was, for "seven times", until he repented and then he claims that again "I was established in my kingdom, and excellent greatness was added to me" (:36). The tree of Nebuchadnezzar was cut down but the stump was left, with the hope of rising again. The same figure is used in Is. 6:11-13 of how the stump of the cut down tree of Judah could still sprout after the exile: "The holy seed is its stump". Although his could speak of future resurrection at the last day, surely the idea was that the apparently inevitable removal of Nebuchadnezzar, according to Dan. 2:21, could in fact be ameliorated, delayed or even reversed. For even he had freewill, and the prophecy of his destruction didn't have to come true for him. His comment that God "sets up over it the most abased of men" (:17) may mean that he considered that he had been abased and had now been exalted to rule over God's kingdom. We are left wondering what exactly was Nebuchadnezzar's status before God at this time. The unclarity is surely because there were potentials which Nebuchadnezzar could have achieved, but didn't completely.

Dan 4:32 *And you shall be driven from men; and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field; you shall be made to eat grass as oxen-*

All beasts of the field had been given to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:5,6; Dan. 2:37,38), and he as the tree provided food for them. But he is now made as a beast of the field. He is made to feel how his subjects felt. His kingship was thus taken from him. But this is also part of our humanization, our being made 'men' as God intended- being made to feel how we have made others feel. But a lion [as Nebuchadnezzar is presented in Dan. 7:3] eating like an ox is absolutely the language of the Kingdom prophecies in Is. 11:7; 65:25 ["the lion shall eat straw like the ox"]. His conversion was a foretaste of Kingdom living. And we could also consider that there is a hint here that the Kingdom of God in some form could have been re-established at that time. We noted above that this is the significance of the king being left with stump and root, out of which a sprig could shoot forth- the language of Messiah, and also in Is. 11.

The AV translates this as if it was the "men" who would make him eat grass. In this case, we have implied humiliation at the hands of his own courtiers, rather than

simply an illness. This seems confirmed by Dan. 5:20, which speaks of his glory being taken from him.

And seven times shall pass over you; until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will- "Times" in Daniel can mean a year, but in other places, simply a period of time. It could have been seven days, months or some other period. Nebuchadnezzar had been taught that God rules over the kingdoms of men and would in due course subsume them into His Kingdom. He had momentarily accepted that at the end of Dan. 2. But that understanding of the Gospel of the Kingdom was but theoretical and transient. He had to be taught the personal truth of it by humiliation. But that could have been avoidable had he accepted God's word through Daniel in his heart.

Dan 4:33 *The same hour was the thing fulfilled on Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and ate grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of the sky, until his hair was grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws*- This could have been the medical condition known as *insania zoanthropica*, but it seems more likely that it was a uniquely designed punishment with the aim in view of eliciting his repentance. The dew was "from heaven", as if to point out that God was in all this, seeking to bring Nebuchadnezzar unto Himself. Or we could have here a case of lycanthropy, "in which the sufferer retains his consciousness in other respects, but imagines himself to be changed into some animal and acts... in conformity to that persuasion". The description of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation is surely framed in the language of the story of Ahiqar, which was popular at the time. "It is the tale of a wise man of the court who is framed by a treacherous nephew for treason against his king and is forced to hide in a pit. After a period of time, he is needed again by the kingdom and so is sought by the king. Ahiqar recounts that when the king opens the "prison", "I ascended and came and fell before the king; the hair of my head had grown down on my shoulders, and my nails were grown long like an eagle's". The message to the king was that "You're going to become like Ahiqar in the famous story". And so it happened.

The description of Nebuchadnezzar here exactly fits the appearance of Enkidu, in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Enkidu was transformed from a "man of nature" into "a man of culture". Nebuchadnezzar surely knew this story, and the point was made that the true civilized man or "man of culture" is one humbled before the one true God. That is the true and only ultimate culture. Nebuchadnezzar as the apex of "culture" was shown to have been but a "man of nature", a wild cave man.

Dan 4:34 *At the end of the days*- The "seven times". "Times" need not refer to years, it could be literal days or any period.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven- This is the language of prayerful repentance. He lifts his eyes to heaven because he recognizes "the God of heaven" (:37) as opposed to the various idols of Babylon which were located in temples on earth.

And my understanding returned to me- The only true understanding is that we are as beasts and God's Kingdom is over all. It "returned to me" in that he returned to the humility before God which he had momentarily had after the Dan. 2 image vision and after Daniel's explanation of his latest dream 12 months previously. Nebuchadnezzar had earlier recognized that Daniel was the one with "understanding" (Dan. 1:4,17; 2:21; 5:12 s.w.). It's as if he was saying that he had once accepted Daniel's "understanding", which was God's understanding- that he was only the head of gold,

and his kingdom would pass away and ultimately be subsumed within God's Kingdom. And now he again accepted that, his earlier humility and "understanding" of a moment returned to him permanently. "Understanding" or 'knowledge' is the same word used in :32 for how he had to be humbled until he 'knew' that the Most High rules. Now he did 'know' or 'understand' that. But he says this understanding returned to him. Again we see how we may perceive things very clearly at one point, but pride and the passage of life can cloud them to the point that we have to re-learn them. The art of the spiritual life is to live with that knowledge and let the word abide in us. Nebuchadnezzar's 'knowledge' was not only of God's abiding eternity, but also of what it means to be human. For surely his humiliation and rising again is referred to in Dan. 7:4, where he is presented as a lion which "was lifted up from the ground and made to stand upon two feet like a man; and the mind of a man was given to it". He, the proud man, the man who stamped lions on the bricks used to build "this great Babylon", had to become an animal in order to be transformed from an animal into a man as God intended. Being humbled is in fact to become a man, humanity as we are intended to be. He was the lion who became a man. To truly show yourself a man, to be the humanity that God intended, is to be humbled before your God; and not to preen yourself as if you are a lion. Is. 57:15 seems strangely relevant to him: "For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite'". Nebuchadnezzar started as a man, but was made as an animal, so that he might become "a human" again, but man as God intended: "Let his mind be changed from that of a human, and let the mind of an animal be given to him" (:16). But Dan. 7 presents Nebuchadnezzar before his conversion as an animal; a lion with eagles' wings. The 'human mind' he then had was in fact that of an animal. Those wings are plucked and he is given a man's heart- he is transformed from an animal to a man; a true man. The first beast of Dan. 7 was "lifted up from the ground" so it could stand on two feet as a man. No longer a four footed lion.

Nebuchadnezzar in his days of madness would have been similar to a middle aged man in a psychiatric ward, sectioned and identifying as an animal, with wild frightened eyes and a diagnosis well beyond any human cure through therapy or medication. Yet the power of the Holy Spirit is such that in this case, such a person had a spiritual awareness deep within them. And when this was responded to, God did the greatest psychological miracle of the Old Testament. He healed that tormented mind, and made that man the world's most powerful ruler. And despite the man's awful sins and blasphemy, God sanctified and eternally saved him. We have for all time a parade example of how God can psychologically transform a person and save them. Human psychology and psychiatry never totally cured anyone. At best a few symptoms were partially relieved. No psychotropic medication, no course of therapy, can radically transform. Only God's Spirit can. And here we have the parade example.

And I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom from generation to generation- Now finally he accepts the truth of the image vision of Dan. 2:44. If he had accepted it more deeply and from the heart at the time, he wouldn't have needed to be so humiliated in order to learn its truth on a personal level. We too need to convert our Sunday School Christianity, or our previous acceptance of the Gospel of God's Kingdom, into deep personal reality. If we won't do so, still proudly seeking to

build up our own kingdoms, then we too shall be humbled in a desperate Divine attempt to help us accept the truth of His Kingdom so that we might enjoy it eternally.

Dan 4:35 *All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing*- This is not to say that God doesn't value the human person. Nebuchadnezzar had proudly reflected that all the peoples of the "earth" which he knew were under his control. But that, he now realized, was nothing.

And He does according to His will in the army of heaven- The apparently invincible Babylonian army, through which Nebuchadnezzar had attained his empire, were nothing compared to the Angelic army of Yahweh of hosts.

And among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or ask Him, What are You doing?- Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold had been an attempt to stay God's hand, to stop him as the head of gold being deposed and taken over by others. Now he more deeply accepted the truth which he had briefly perceived after Daniel had explained it to him in Dan. 2. The same word for "stay" is used of how the stone "smote" the image and ground all of it to powder, including Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (Dan. 2:34,35).

All Nebuchadnezzar's statements are in fact repeating God's words from already existent Bible texts. Surely more happened here than meets the eye; Daniel maybe spoke to him in far more detail than is recorded. “All the inhabitants of the earth are considered nothing” is Is. 40:17 (“All the nation are like nothing before him; they are regarded as worthless and less than nothing by him”); “according to His will, he does with the host of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth” is Ps. 115:3 (“Our God is in heaven; whatever He pleases, He does” and Ps. 135:6 “Whatever pleases Yahweh He does, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all the depths”); “There is no one who strikes His hand and says to Him, ‘What have you done?’” is Job 9:12 (“Who can say to [God], ‘What are you doing?’” and Job 42:2 “I know that You can do everything; no purpose of Yours can be thwarted”).

Dan 4:36 *At the same time my understanding returned to me*- See on :34.

And the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and brightness returned to me; and my officials and my lords sought to me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent greatness was added to me- His kingdom was returned or restored to him. The message was that he was an example to the Jews. Their kingdom likewise could be restored, in line with the restoration prophecies. But like Nebuchadnezzar, they had to repent and be humbled.

There is no historical evidence that Nebuchadnezzar in his final years became even greater and more glorious than when he proudly strutted the rooftop admiring great Babylon which he had built. Having committed his kingdom and glory to God's Kingdom and glory, it would read rather strangely if in fact he then regained all his secular glory. I suggest that he is now reframing his understanding of glory and majesty. The glory we have, and which he had, was to be with the Lord God, on the side of His Kingdom and prophetic program. The AV offers: "And for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me". The idea would be that instead of secular glory, he had the glory of knowing God in truth. The return of "my understanding", which as noted on :34 referred to his understanding of God's ways, is paralleled with the return of his glory. But his glory was in that he now knew God in the sense of having relationship with him. There is a strong appropriacy of Jer. 9:23,24 to Nebuchadnezzar: "Thus says Yahweh, Don’t let the mighty man glory in his might, don’t let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises

loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says Yahweh". The "excellent greatness" that he felt had been added to him was therefore in reference to God's grace, rather than any reference to secular things. The original seems to mean "the pre-eminent, ultimate" greatness; and he now realized that the ultimate exaltation was to walk humbly with your God and have the hope of the Kingdom.

Dan 4:37 *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; for all His works are truth, and His ways justice; and those who walk in pride He is able to abase*- "Extol" is literally 'to lift up', the same word used of how previously he had lifted himself up rather than God (see on :20). He openly accepts his pride and appropriate abasement. His acceptance of Yahweh as the ultimate King, rather than himself or his previous god Bel, was effectively a resignation of his own kingship and kingdom to Yahweh. He finally learns the truth God tried to teach him through the three friends, when they stated that their God "was able" to deliver. And Nebuchadnezzar at that time, for a moment, recognized that no god was 'able to save' like Israel's God. Now he recognizes that this same God is "able to abase". For Him to be "able to save" He has to be "able to abase" because it is only, as Peter puts it, by being humbled beneath His mighty hand that we can be exalted in due time. Like Nebuchadnezzar, we are taught these things and learn them and accept them for a moment; but often have to be painfully re-taught them so that they become a permanent fixture in our personalities. And thus the word becomes flesh in us, as it was supremely in the Lord.

And so the Nebuchadnezzar who abused God's people [just read Lamentations], desecrated the temple, blasphemously tried to upend the vision of Daniel 2 by making an image of himself all of gold... will, it seems to me, finally be saved. We marvel at God's grace to save literally anyone- if they humble themselves. In contrast, it was pride which led to the Jews and their leadership and kings being condemned as they proudly refused all Jeremiah's multiple entreaties to them. And their abuser Nebuchadnezzar did humble himself and presumably will therefore be saved in the end. He had exalted and abased people at will: "Whom he would he set up, and whom he would he abased" (Dan. 5:19). He "became proud, stubborn, and cruel" (GNB). But he concludes his witness to the world by saying that in fact it is God who 'sets up' those who have been abased. And he is the parade example. He had been taught in Dan. 2 that God sets up, and he himself had exalted the abased Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But until now he never really 'got it'.

DANIEL CHAPTER 5

Dan 5:1 *Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand*- Belshazzar was the effective king of Babylon whilst Nabonidus was in north Africa. Belshazzar means "Bel Protect the King", and he clearly believed that Bel would protect Babylon even with the Medes approaching- and he believed this to the extent of recklessly feasting with the Medes outside the gates. Again, we find the historical accounts in Daniel to be deconstructions of the supposed power of the Babylonian gods, who are revealed as powerless before Yahweh's purpose; just as the dream of Dan. 2 had depicted. The feast was likely an annual religious festival, and Cyrus / Darius planned the attack at precisely that time. Again, we see the victory as being a victory specifically against the guardian gods of

Babylon. The destruction of Babylon whilst feasting was specifically foretold (Is. 21:4,5; Jer. 50:24; 51:39,57).

Quite possibly this feast was to celebrate his coronation. The usage of the temple vessels may even have been an intentional mocking of Jeremiah's prophecy that these would return to Zion after 70 years. He was exalting his gods over Yahweh.

Dan 5:2 *Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels-*

"While he tasted..." is really 'under the power of [the wine]'. It refers to the command given by the king in Dan. 3:10, 29; 4:6; 6:26. The wine is commanding him, rather than he being in command. Yet still he is condemned for the behaviour arising from it, because even drunken behaviour was seen by God in this case as a fair reflection of the true state of his heart.

This was a conscious act of blasphemy. The God of Israel had foretold in Dan. 2 that Babylon would be taken over by another empire; and Jeremiah had made it clear in the previous generation that although Babylon would take Jerusalem, Babylon would also fall to her enemies (Jer. 50:28 etc.). Belshazzar seems to have been aware of this, and with enemy armies outside the gates, he trusts in his god to preserve him and mocks Yahweh. He was turning the table of Yahweh into the table of Bel and the gods supposed to preserve Babylon. In essence we commit the same sin if we turn the Lord's table into our table, in glorification of our own religion and worldview.

Which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, might drink from them- The miserable critics point out that Belshazzar's father was the usurper Nabuna'id [Nabonidus]. But "father" simply means 'ancestor' in practice, and could refer to Nebuchadnezzar as his grandfather (as in Gen. 28:13; 32:9), which he could have been, if Nabuna'id had Belshazzar through one of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters. Indeed this would appear a likely and logical way for Nabuna'id to enforce his claim to the throne and establish his dynasty. That Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar is confirmed by Jer. 17:27: "All the nations shall serve him (Nebuchadnezzar) and his son, and his son's son until the very time of his land come". But father-son relationships were presented at the time in a far less specific sense than the terms are used today.

Drinking from the temple vessels was an act of blasphemy that warranted death, according to the law of his father / ancestor Nebuchadnezzar: "Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins" (Dan. 3:29). His praising "the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone" (Dan. 5:4) clearly alludes to all the metals in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Dan. 2 which were to be destroyed. Babylon fell because of their attitude to the temple: "Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the Lord has raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for His device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of His temple" (Jer. 50:28).

Nebuchadnezzar had desecrated the temple but it seems he was forgiven and humbled himself before Yahweh. Belshazzar didn't continue that spirit but continued to desecrate the temple through his blasphemous use of the temple vessels. And this clearly enough triggered his destruction, and that of Babylon.

Dan 5:3 *Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of God's house which was at Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, drank from them-* "The temple of God's house" means not generally 'the

temple' ["God's house"] but specifically the holy and most holy place. There would not have been many "golden vessels" there; just those used for pouring out the blood on the day of atonement. They would therefore have passed these vessels between them all, as they all drunk from them (:23), rather like a mock communion service. It was very deep blasphemy. It seems that the golden candlestick from the holy place was also present (:5). They were pretending that their table of drunken revelry was the most holy place of the Jerusalem temple.

Dan 5:4 *They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone*- They were imitating the worship of Yahweh (see on :3), and replacing Him with their gods. The golden vessels were now see as part of the paraphernalia of the worship of their golden gods. Gold, silver, brass, iron and a little stone all feature in the vision of Dan. 2. In Dan. 3, Nebuchadnezzar tried to say that the vision was wrong and he as the golden head was going to be the entire image. So here, they were saying that their gods of those same metals were the true gods and that the image was really just a composite of their gods, with the king of Babylon as the eternal head of it.

We note the changed order of the metals in :23: "the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone". Silver is placed before gold because the Babylonian empire has effectively been replaced by the Medes, the silver. These metals are all those of the image in Dan. 2, the implication being that the image was also an idol, and all those metals were to pass away. Although they were acting as if they wouldn't ever pass and those metals were under their control. They failed to learn from Nebuchadnezzar's history of making a golden image of himself to try to deny that those other metals would ever take over from him.

The Nabonidus Chronicle, in its entry for Nabonidus' 17th (and final) year describes the transfer of gods into the city of Babylon in order to by all means protect them from the onslaught of the Medo-Persians. The Chronicle records how afterwards, Cyrus ordered these gods to be returned to their home cities: "From the month of Kislimu to the month of Addaru, the gods of Akkad which Nabonidus had made come down to Babylon... returned to their sacred cities."

Dan 5:5 *In the same hour came forth the fingers of a man's hand, and wrote opposite the lampstand*- This candlestick may have been the one taken from the holy place of the Jerusalem temple; as noted on :3, they were pretending that their table of drunken revelry was the most holy place of the Jerusalem temple.

On the plaster of the wall of the king's palace- Literally, "the chalk"; and this was exactly how the palace walls unearthed in Nineveh appear to have been constructed.

And the king saw the part of the hand that wrote- "The palm". I will suggest on :8 that the hand covered the writing, and only Daniel could as it were make the Angelic hand move to reveal it (:24). This would explain the confusion between the palm and the fingers which wrote.

Dan 5:6 *Then the king's appearance changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; the joints of his thighs were loosened, and his knees struck one against another*- This is the picture of a man facing Divine judgment. We should all be there; the wonder is that for us, as Paul explains in Romans, we are there, but then saved from it by grace through Christ. And it is the picture of the middle eastern world, and indeed the whole planet, on the eve of Divine judgment (Lk. 21:25 "men's hearts failing them for fear...").

We have a powerful word picture of the king. The cameraman of Divine inspiration is zoomed in upon him. His colour changed, his thoughts visibly troubled him; his limbs gave way ['his loins were untied'] and his knees knocked together (Dan. 5:6 RSV). Literally, 'the knots of his loins were loosened / untied'. This is quite typical human reaction to extreme fear, experienced e.g. when men come under fire for the first time. I suggest the loosening of his loins meant that his bowels opened. He was reduced to a pathetic figure, he who had just been drunkenly blaspheming Yahweh's temple vessels. But the very same word for loosening / untying is found a few verses later, where Daniel is presented as the one who can untie knots, although the term is usually translated to the effect "solve problems" (Dan. 5:12,16). The irony is that the king's knots have already been untied... and by Daniel's God. The king calls for Daniel and says to him "I have heard that you can... solve problems (untie / loosen knots)" . Continence of the bowel, bladder and anus is controlled by the sphincter muscle. It is like a knot which closes off our urine and stool. The Greek word 'sphincter' means literally a knot. These things are a clear fulfilment of Is. 45:1 RSV: "Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed". This is incidental confirmation that Cyrus and "Darius" [unknown to secular history] were the same person. The opening of the city gates and the opening of the king of Babylon's bowels stand related. There is then an obvious irony in the way that the king, whose bowels have already been untied by his fear of the Divine word, then asks Daniel to open / untie the knot for him. But it has already happened. As so often, man subconsciously knows the truth of God's word even before it is explained to him. Just as Nebuchadnezzar surely understood the dream of himself as a tree that was to be cut down. The interpretation was obvious to him, surely, even before Daniel stated the obvious to him.

Dan 5:7 *The king cried aloud to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whoever shall read this writing, and show me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom*- It was the job description of the wise men to interpret such things; to offer them huge reward for doing their job indicates not only the king's desperation, but also the tacit recognition that usually they could not really accurately interpret such things. History was of course repeating, for this was the very scene of Dan. 2, when the image vision was interpreted as meaning that Babylon too must pass over to others. Belshazzar should have perceived the similarities, and called for Daniel immediately. Again we note the similarities with Joseph (Gen. 41:42), who would have been a great role model for Daniel. We too will find such role models in the Bible as we face our various life experiences. We note too the similarities with the situation in Dan. 2. Belshazzar demands the writing be both read and interpretted. It's possible that only the king saw what was written ["the king saw the hand that was writing"]; :8 notes that the wise men could neither read nor interpret the writing. Likewise Daniel both recalled and interpreted the vision of Dan. 2, and it seems the same is repeated here. He first read the writing (:25) and then interpreted it (:26). Again, circumstances repeat.

Dan 5:8 *Then came in all the king's wise men; but they could not read the writing, nor reveal to the king the interpretation*- As noted on :7, this is a conscious repetition of the scene in Dan. 2. But Belshazzar failed to respond appropriately. Perhaps they couldn't read the writing because the Angelic hand was covering it, and

only Daniel had the power to remove that hand (:24). They could not read the writing perhaps because they couldn't see it. It was only the king who saw the Angelic hand and what was written. Only Daniel knew and saw the writing. Indeed it could be understood that the king here is seeing a dream, as in Dan. 2; and as with Nebuchadnezzar, his dream is but his own premonitions of his own inevitable fall.

Dan 5:9 *Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his appearance was changed, and his lords were perplexed*- Lk. 21:25 appears to allude here. The king was on the eve of God's judgment, and he knew it. Why be so worried about what could have been shrugged off as an optical illusion? He was after all quite drunk. We see in this matter evidence enough that even the most hardened blasphemers have a conscience, somewhere deep down. This should encourage us to never consider anyone not worth witnessing to. There is a gap in every heart and psyche which only the gospel of God's Kingdom can satisfy. We were wired that way. The description is that of Nebuchadnezzar when he realized that the three Jewish friends were being preserved in the fire by an Angel (Dan. 3:24), and of Nebuchadnezzar when he saw the revelation of his own downfall (Dan. 4:5). The historical incidents in Daniel all share such points of commonality, to demonstrate the same Divine hand in the affairs of men. He works according to a similar imprint and hallmark. And that continues to this day. It is why we can look back upon our lives and see that they make sense. "Appearance" is the same original word translated "brightness"; Nebuchadnezzar's appearance was likewise changed but he repented, and it changed back to how it previously was (Dan. 4:36). But Belshazzar would not repent. He failed to learn from history. The same word is used of the bright appearance of the image in Dan. 2:31, which was to be changed and brought to nothing. Time and again, we see the basic truth of that image revealed in the immediate history of those times.

Dan 5:10 *Now the queen because of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet house: the queen spoke and said, O king, live forever; don't let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your appearance be changed*- This may refer to the king's mother, the queen mother, hence she is mentioned separately to his wives in :2,3. As noted on :2, this would then refer to Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, who would therefore have remembered Daniel's interpretations.

Dan 5:11 *There is a man in your kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him. The king Nebuchadnezzar your father, the king, I say, your father, made him master of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and soothsayers*- The history of Daniel and his interpretations was therefore well known, although Belshazzar had put it out of his mind, even though he knew Daniel and employed him as one of his workers (Dan. 8:1,27 "In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, even to me, I Daniel... I Daniel, fainted, and was sick for some days; then I rose up, and did the king's business"). We too can put inconvenient truth far from our minds instead of recalling it to mind and being humbled by it unto repentance. We note her laboured emphasis of the fact that Nebuchadnezzar was his ancestor, which may have been counted on the basis that she was a daughter or granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar. She was aware of Nebuchadnezzar's repentance and perhaps hoped that Belshazzar would likewise humble himself.

Dan 5:12 *Because an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, the interpreting of dreams, and revealing of strange messages, solving of problems and*

dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation- Daniel was still working for Belshazzar and was therefore known (Dan. 8:1,27). The way he is spoken of as being somewhat distant and unknown therefore suggests he had been ousted from the ranks of the dream interpreters, or had removed himself from them, and was working for the king in a different capacity. We too may need to remove ourselves from situations where we are in a conflict of conscience, even if it means a loss of power and kudos. "Solving of problems" is literally 'untying of knots', see on :6.

Dan 5:13 *Then was Daniel brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, Are you that Daniel, who are of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Judah?*-

Possibly the palm of God's hand was over the inscription until Daniel arrived. And when he arrived the palm was withdrawn. "Brought in before the king" is yet another connection with the Joseph story. Time and again, Daniel was nudged to see the similarities, so that he might act like faithful Joseph.

We must remember that Belshazzar knew Daniel and employed him (Dan. 8:1,27). "Are you that Daniel...?" doesn't have to mean that Belshazzar didn't know or recognize him; it is similar to Saul enquiring who David was after the victory over Goliath (1 Sam. 17:55,56), and David enquiring who Bathsheba was, when she was his next door neighbour and wife of his loyal friend Uriah (2 Sam. 11:3). To enquire who someone was must be read as a Semitic literary device, and not literally. The idea was in all these examples: 'I want you to do something for me and serve me as I ask you'.

Dan 5:14 *I have heard of you, that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you*- The wise men all claimed that they could interpret dreams because they possessed "the spirit of the gods". But their failure meant that they were charlatans, or that in fact the gods of Babylon whom they were so strongly trusting in that evening were not in fact the true God. God so often leads men to situations where they are forced to jettison their myths and favoured beliefs, and accept His truth. But in the final analysis, Belshazzar still would not do this.

Dan 5:15 *Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and tell me its interpretation; but they could not show the interpretation of the thing*- As noted on :14, this was a tacit admission that the gods were not in fact in touch with Belshazzar and his courtiers. But as explained on :1 and :2, they were desperately trusting those gods to deliver them from the armies outside the city walls. God was nudging Belshazzar towards total repentance, but he resisted, although accepting the theoretical truth of Daniel's interpretation.

Dan 5:16 *But I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations, and dissolve problems; now if you can read the writing, and tell me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom*- As noted on :17, that kingdom was about to fall. All such rewards would be only for a few more hours at the most. Perhaps the "third ruler" meant being one of the three rulers of Dan. 2:49, who had once been comprised of Daniel's friends. It's as if the king was promising to return the Jews to the places from

which they had been deposed. But such symbolic repentance was too little and too late now.

Dan 5:17 *Then Daniel answered before the king, Let your gifts be to yourself, and give your rewards to another*- Unlike the queen mother, Daniel noticeably doesn't address the king with the customary "O king, live for ever". He does use this term to Nebuchadnezzar and Darius (Dan. 6:21). But in this case, he knew and believed Belshazzar's day to die had come. He had been so nervous in telling Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of the cut down tree; here he exudes confidence from the vision of God's word, even just a few words, which he saw inscribed on the wall, illuminated for all to see by the candlestick. We too can have every boldness and confidence in knowing the ultimate future of man's glory, according to God's word.

This was said not only because Daniel didn't want to again be in a position where his conscience to God would be hopelessly compromised. He knew from Dan. 2 and from the writing on the wall that the kingdom of Belshazzar was about to fall. To be made third ruler in that kingdom for just a few more moments was not what anyone wanted. Daniel would have been aware of Is. 13:15, which in the context of the fall of Babylon had warned: "he that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword". As it happened, the honours were forced upon Daniel, but God recognized that this was not Daniel's will. We too may find ourselves promoted to situations we would rather not be in, and God understands that. It is for us like Daniel to seek to remove ourselves from those situations as best we can.

Nevertheless I will read the writing to the king, and tell him the interpretation- The difference between reading and interpreting it would suggest that the writing was in an alphabet unknown to the king; perhaps it was in Hebrew. Perhaps the lack of vowel points made it impossible to read and understand; or quite likely the king was illiterate, as most monarchs were in those times.

Dan 5:18 *As for you, O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father the kingdom, and greatness, and glory, and majesty*- To call Yahweh the most high was in direct criticism of the mockery of Yahweh and glorification of the Babylonian gods which had been going on. Daniel could well have been executed for this, but like Joseph and Samuel before him, he spoke forth God's truth as he had done in Dan. 2 and Dan. 4.

We note that Nebuchadnezzar is repeatedly called the father of Belshazzar (:22 especially). This wasn't strictly the case. But I suggested on Dan. 2 that the image prophecy had an initial possible fulfilment in the immediate dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar, ending in Belshazzar. This would explain why Belshazzar is described as the "son" of Nebuchadnezzar when he was a descendant but not his literal son. "Son" can legitimately be used of any descendant. We also note the opinion of several scholars that "Belshazzar" was Nebuchadnezzar's son Evil Merodach.

Dan 5:19 *And because of the greatness that He gave him, all the peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him: whom he would he killed, and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he raised up, and whom he would he put down*- This is all the language of Yahweh Himself. But these possibilities were all given to Nebuchadnezzar by God. He had such power in order to make him later reflect that indeed, such Divine possibilities could only have been given him by God. Our experiences of exaltation are used likewise. We may reflect: 'How could I have

ever... passed that exam, held that job down, done that or this'. The experiences are given so that we may realize that it was all of God, and be humbled; but if we fail to make that realization, then we end up proud and playing God. Nebuchadnezzar had raised up and abused / put down people; he had this same experience, and from his abasing he was lifted up. How we treat others is so often how God treats us. It is therefore imperative to forgive and seek to save others especially those who sin against us. For we too sin against others and against God...

Dan 5:20 *But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened so that he became proud, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him*- The hardening of Pharaoh's heart was from God. Here too, the psychological attitudes of Nebuchadnezzar were confirmed by God. The spirit of God works in this way, confirming our spirit. Which is why our spirit, our mind, our deepest inner heart, is so significant. For God confirms us in it. Pride is a hardening of the spirit or the heart / mind. "They took his glory from him" would confirm what we suggested on Dan. 4:32, that Nebuchadnezzar's own courtiers robbed him of his glory rather than nursing him through a psychological illness.

Dan 5:21 *And he was driven from men, and his heart was made like an animal's, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys; he was fed with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of the sky; until he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and that He sets up over it whomsoever He will*- The humiliation was "until" he recognized the truth of the Dan. 2 image vision. The implication is that he did 'know' or learn this. He was converted, in the end. But the prophecy of Dan. 4 had been that he would be in this humbled situation for a period of "seven times". We noted there that "times" is undefined; it could have referred to seven days, periods of time, weeks or years. In this sense God's time periods are open ended and capable of redefinition. And of course Nebuchadnezzar didn't have to repent; repentance had to be from the heart, of his choice. The "seven times" prophecy regarding Nebuchadnezzar could have been falsified by his refusal to repent, and we will see something similar in later time periods in Daniel regarding Israel's repentance, especially in the prophecy of the sevens in Dan. 9. This is how we can have a sense of excitement with God as we read His words and consider the open ended possibilities which stretch before us.

Dan 5:22 *You, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this*- We are intended to learn from the experiences of others, both contemporary with us and as recorded in the Bible. As noted on Mt. 21:32, the Jews of the Lord's day were held guilty for not repenting when they saw the example of prostitutes and tax collectors repenting. We may not be humbled ourselves as Nebuchadnezzar was, but if we see others humbled, then we are expected to take the lesson and humble ourselves. The experiences of those around us are therefore not random, but brought into our lives by God so that we might learn from them. And we are held responsible for our response to them. This has very far reaching practical consequence, and gives an urgency and significance to social life of an altogether different dimension to what most experience. We note that Daniel scolds the king for his arrogance, and seems fearless in pronouncing his fall and almost laughing off the offer of being 'third ruler' in an empire that was literally about to fall. This contrasts with his nervousness to tell the same kind of message to Nebuchadnezzar. It is the kind of confidence he had as a young man explaining the Daniel 2 image to Nebuchadnezzar. Perhaps this is an

example of the ebb and flow of faith and confidence in every believer. Or it could be that Daniel was so persuaded of the truth of the message that he fearlessly states that truth, knowing the empire was literally about to fall.

Dan 5:23 *But have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which don't see, nor hear, nor know; and the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, you have not glorified*- Realizing the basic truths about our nature, that we are not our own, that our fragile breath is in God's hands, with nothing inherently immortal within us, and that our ways are "His" in that they are known to Him... will lead us to humility and repentance. All true theology must have its issue in practice. "The God, in whose hand your breath (spirit) is" was language which pointed to how the same Angelic hand had written on the wall.

Dan 5:24 *Then was the part of the hand sent from before him, and this writing was inscribed*- I have explained on :5 and :8 that the hand wrote the words and then the palm of that Angelic hand covered the words. Only Daniel had the power to remove that Angelic hand. Note that this was an inscription, hence the earlier mention of the writing being on the plaster; and the idea of an inscription is that it is for public view. It was inscribed on the wall next to the candlestick, so it was as it were illuminated. It's hard to see what other significance there is in the mention of the candlestick. Surely the idea was that the courtiers and all present should have accepted the message and surrendered to the Medes and Persians they knew were besieging them. Just as Zedekiah should have surrendered to the Babylonians besieging him. But they failed to learn the lesson from the circumstances repeating their own history, and likewise pride stopped them from repenting and surrendering. And so their city fell and their king likewise fell.

Dan 5:25 *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN*- This could be rendered: "There is counted a mina, a shekel, and two half minas"; for justification of the translation, see R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* p. 135. "Mene" is the word used for counting or numbering. This has more obvious connection with the interpretation of the words given in :26-28. The mina would then refer to Nebuchadnezzar, the shekel (a 60th part of a mina) to Belshazzar, who was found of little weight or account; and the two half minas would then refer to the Medes and Persians. Indeed the word "upharsin" in Aramaic sounds like "and the Persians". The repetition of the word "mene", "numbered", is another connection with the dream which Joseph interpreted for another king; it was stated twice because the fulfilment was so certain and would begin fulfilment immediately (Gen. 41:32). As noted on :26-28, the original text carries the implication that these things were immediately happening. But Belshazzar only theoretically accepted that, by still trying to promote Daniel within his already ended kingdom.

Some texts read just one "mene", and there is only one "mene" referred to in the interpretation in :26. The words refer to weights- a minah (60 shekels), a tsekel or one shekel, and upharsin, two half shekel pieces, referring initially to the Medes and Persians. This makes a total of 62 shekels- the age of Darius when he took the kingdom (:31).

The explanation of the handwriting on the wall is initially hard for readers to understand, because it is unclear whether the words are being read or interpreted. When we read that "Peres" means that the kingdom is divided and given to the Medes

and Persians, we are surely not to understand that that is what the word "Peres" means as a word. That surely is the interpretation. My suggestion is that the handwriting consisted of the nine letters mn'tqlprs, which can be read as three words of three consonant letters each. Daniel gives three interpretations of each word. Depending which vowels are placed in each word, different words [vocalizations] can be formed with different meanings. And this is the key to how Daniel arrives at the interpretations. He doesn't so much as give an interpretation, as with previous visions; he simply reads the writing. The words formed are themselves the message.

On the simplest level of meaning, the words are simply weights used in a balance or scale. We could vocalize them as in most English versions, 'mina, shekel, half-mina'. But if we vocalize as 'menah, teqal, peras' we have words which speak of God's evaluation: 'he has reckoned, he has weighed, he has assessed'. But if we vocalize as 'menah, tiqqal, paras', we have God's actions of judgment in response to His evaluation: 'he has paid out, you are too light, Persia!'. These three levels of interpretation all allude to scales and weights as a metaphor for God's judgment; to 'pay out' is the language of the balances and transaction. It is a legitimate alternative translation to "it is finished" (AV). This is made explicit in :27: "You are weighed in the balances and found wanting". A weight of 62 was required to equal the weights of a mina [60 shekels], a shekel and two half shekels. And that weight was Darius / Cyrus at 62 years old. "Many Babylonian weight-stones with a value of a mina, a shekel or a half-mina are now housed in archeological museums, some of them inscribed in Aramaic with the very words of our passage: mene, teqel, or peres". The idea of Divine judgment as scales was commonly understood; there are Egyptian paintings of souls being weighed in scales after death, in order to determine where and how they will spend the afterlife. And the prophets speak of the nations being weighed in the balances and not coming to much. Note that God weighs even pagan unbelievers in this detailed way.

It has been demonstrated that the date of the fall of Babylon comes immediately after the annual morning rising of the constellation Libra, which in Akkadian was called zibanitu, 'the scales'. The magicians of Babylon were well versed in the interpretation of the zodiac and stars. But they missed the obvious connection, because they couldn't read the writing on the wall. Yet again they are demonstrated as useless and the whole incident even pokes fun at them. And of course, the point is made that it is not the stars nor Libra that weigh nations, people and kings in the balances- it is the God of Heaven. This is a classic example of deconstruction.

The difficulty of the wise men in reading the text may simply have been that it was written in Hebrew with no breaks between the three words; and they didn't know which vowel points to add between the consonants, in order to vocalize it and read it aloud. Or perhaps only the king saw the hand that wrote; and quite likely he was illiterate.

Dan 5:26 *This is the interpretation of it: MENE; God has numbered your kingdom, and brought it to an end-*

In the interpretation of each of the weights, Daniel makes a word play, based around the similarity [paronomasia] with other words. In this case to the verb *menah*, to count or number. The kingdom was 'paid out', the language of the counting house and scales; NEV "brought it to an end".

As noted on :28, the original suggests that it has now imminently been ended, although Belshazzar's response in elevating Daniel reflects how he only accepted the truth of these words on a theoretical and not a personal level. Numbering is a figure

for the final judgment (Job 31:4), the final taking of account; but the essence of judgment day is right now, before the God who weighs and numbers actions and lives as they happen.

The number of days of the Babylonian kingdom was therefore related to the behaviour of the king. Nebuchadnezzar could have lengthened the days of his "tranquility" by cutting off his sins, or perhaps he could have altogether avoided judgment by doing so. He didn't, and so his kingdom was removed, but was restored because he repented. Likewise, Belshazzar is criticized for not learning this lesson. The numbering of his days had it seems been cut short because of his acts of drunken blasphemy with the vessels of Yahweh's temple.

I suggested on Dan. 2 that the metals that followed Nebuchadnezzar, the head of gold, could refer to the rulers / kings who followed him. The image was him and his dynasty, in the initial possible application. We may have something of that here. Mene, the 60 shekels, would have been Nebuchadnezzar. If indeed the text reads "Mene, mene" then there was a reference also to his immediate successors, Evil-Merodach and Neriglissar. Possibly the extra "mene" was inserted to develop the correspondence with the four kings schema of Dan. 2. Tekel or tsekel, the one shekel, would have been the next ruler Labashi-Marduk; and uparsin, the two halves, would then have referred to the joint rule [co-regency] of Nabonidus and Belshazzar.

Dan 5:27 *TEKEL; you are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting*- "Tekel" is the Hebrew "shekel", a weight. But in the interpretation of each of the weights, Daniel makes a word play, based around the similarity [paronomasia] with other words. In this case to the verb *teqal*, to measure, or, 'to make light', in the sense that a weight on a balance can make the weight on the other side of the balance 'light'. And so he reaches the interpretation that Belshazzar is 'light', he has been weighted and made light and thus "found wanting". We must take away the lesson that we are not to be found 'light' before God; we recall that the Hebrew idea of *kabod,* "glory", means literally 'weight'. We are to abound in the "weightier matters of the law" and not be the light, surface level chaff of this world that shall be blown away at judgment day. As noted on :26 and :28, the original implies that this was the situation at that moment. There was no desperate plea from Belshazzar for mercy, no statement of repentance, but rather he continued with life as it had been by elevating Daniel within his already ended kingdom. And this is a cameo of so much human response before God's word. The final judgment of men is likened to a weighing in the balances (Job 31:4,6), but the essence of judgment is going on right now in this life. "We make the answer now".

Dan 5:28 *PERES; your kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians*-

The interpretation makes use of a double word play, in that 'Peres' sounds like the word for 'Persians' and also the verb *peras*, to divide. Uparsin, meaning 'two', would hint at there being two definitions of 'Peres'; one is that your kingdom has been broken up, and the second meaning was that it had been given to Media and Persia.

The original implies that this is imminently happening. But by elevating Daniel to third ruler in the kingdom, Belshazzar showed that he only theoretically acknowledged this truth, just as some terminally ill people deny the realities right up to the end. And so it is with us all; we have a tendency to think that God's urgent word is not true quite as stated, although on another level we may genuinely accept the truth of it. The division of the kingdom could refer to it being given to both Medes and Persians, but 'division' may more carry the sense of dividing it out, to others, just as

required by the image vision of Dan. 2. We note that division is judgment; so often the enemies of Israel were judged by being divided against themselves. Those who make the Lord's house divided are effectively working out their own judgment / condemnation. The division of the kingdom perhaps also alludes to the divided state of the kingdoms of men presented in the image of Dan. 2.

Dan 5:29 *Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with purple, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom*- This response was surprising in that to give such bad news would typically have warranted immediate execution. Belshazzar humbled himself and tried to return Daniel to the three senior rulers, who had once been comprised of his Jewish friends (Dan. 2:49). But Belshazzar's humility and apparent repentance was too little and too late. To accept the truth of God's word is not of itself enough. The way he proclaimed Daniel to a third ruler in his kingdom was of itself a tacit reflection of his inability to accept that his kingdom had been ended and given to the Medes (:28). The gold chain, purple clothing which was the insignia of the kingdom and proclamation was all so bizarre to Daniel, who knew that at that moment, the kingdom was ended. All our exaltation in this life is similarly inappropriate and meaningless. For the end of all things is at hand, and the judge stands before the door. Or we could have here an example of how like Nebuchadnezzar, a man can accept the truth of God's word for him, but not personalize it. Hence the Angel insisting: "To you it is spoken". And this stands as a global challenge for all time- to personalize God's word, far beyond merely accepting that it is true and Divinely inspired. The chain of gold put on the reluctant Daniel would have encouraged him that he was indeed going through the experience of Joseph, and would personally be saved. See on :13.

Dan 5:30 *In that night Belshazzar the king of the Chaldees was slain*- It is hard to know whether this was by his courtiers, or as a result of the Medes entering Babylon. There may indeed be a gap of some years between the death of Belshazzar and Darius taking the kingdom (:31). Such gaps in history are found at other points in the Biblical narrative. We think of how in 1 Kings 14, Ahijah states to Jeroboam's wife that Abijah would die, Jeroboams dynasty would be overthrown, and Israel's kingdom ended. These things appear to all happen at the same time, when there were significant time periods between them. However, I have noted on :25-28 that the idea is that these things happened immediately, at that moment; and this leads me to support the traditional view that immediately, that night, the Medes took Babylon. This is also the implication of Jeremiah's prophecies, that in the night of her feasting, Babylon would fall. H.P. Mansfield gives relevant support for this: "Xenophon (*Cyrop*. 7:5) is quoted as stating: "But Cyrus, when he heard that there was to be such a feast in Babylon in which all the Babylonians would feast and revel through the whole night, on that night, as soon as it began to grow dark, taking many men, opened the dams into the river (i.e. he opened the dykes which had been made by Semiramis and her successors to confine the waters of the Euphrates to one channel), and allowed them to again flood the country, so that he could enter Babylon beneath its walls in the channel of the river". He quotes the address of Cyrus to his army: "Now let us go up against them. Many of them are asleep; many of them are intoxicated; and all of them are unfit for battle". Herodotus (Book 1:19) states: "it was a day of festivity among them; and whilst the citizens were engaged in dance and merriment, Babylon was for the first time, thus taken". Isaiah predicted that the gates of brass

would no longer provide a defence, and that the "bars of iron would be cut asunder'" (Is. 45:2). Herodotus states that these brazen gates were situated along the banks of the river, but at the time of the attack, some of them had been left open, probably by some within the city who had come to terms with the Persians". But against this we must balance Dan. 6:28: "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian". Another option is that "the vassal king whom Daniel calls Darius the Mede was Gobryas (or Gubaru), who led the army of Cyrus to Babylon".

Dan 5:31 *Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old*- "Darius the Mede" may be another name for Cyrus (so D.J. Wiseman), Cambyses the son of Cyrus (so Boutflower) or Gubaru, whom Cyrus appointed as governor of Babylon immediately the city fell (Whitcomb and several other prominent commentators, although this runs into difficulty at Dan. 9:1). "Darius" may well be a title [meaning 'subduer'] rather than a name. The Medes took Babylon by diverting the flow of the Euphrates and entering the city along the river bed; this is the historical basis for the imagery of the drying up of the Euphrates in the last days, so that Babylon falls(Rev. 16:15,16). The "kings of the east" of the last days therefore correspond to the hordes of various Arabian mercenaries who were used by the Medes as soldiers. We can already see the development of such groups in the Middle East today. See on :25 for the significance of the age 62.

If Darius was indeed Cyrus (see on :30), we recall that Isaiah's prophecies about him set him up as a potential Messiah figure. He could have been an initial fulfilment of the stone of Dan. 2, hitting the image on the feet of the end of Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty. Which [see on Dan. 2] was the initial possible fulfilment of the image. His kingdom could have morphed into a re-establishment of God's Kingdom in Judah. Indeed he urged the exiles to return and do this. But both Cyrus and the Jews failed in this, and so the kaleidoscope turned again, and other possible pictures of fulfilment came into view.

I suggested above that the mention of 62 connects with the number of shekels implied in mene [60 shekels], tsekel [1 shekel] and upharsin, two half shekels [1 shekel]. But the Rabbis calculate that the moment Darius took the kingdom was 62 years after Nebuchadnezzar had taken Jeconiah into captivity: "They were exiled in the days of Jehoiachin in the seventh year counting from the conquest of Jehoiakim, which is eight years after the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. There remained to Nebuchadnezzar’s reign thirty-seven years, for he reigned forty-five years, and twenty-three of Evil-merodach’s and the two years of Belshazzar that passed, totaling sixty-two". If that is legitimate, we marvel again at the hand of God in human history. Who would have known when Darius was born, a helpless baby, that God had this destiny mapped out for him?

DANIEL CHAPTER 6

Dan 6:1 *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, who should be throughout the whole kingdom*- These 120 satraps were symbolized by the 120 lion statues along Babylon's main procession street. The destruction of their representatives by lions is another inversion of Babylonian power and values which is common in Daniel. Herodotus records that "Darius" ['restrainer'] was a title for the king, an appellative like 'Pharaoh', rather than a personal name. This may therefore be a different 'Darius' to that of Dan. 5:31. It could well be that the

Darius of Dan. 6 was in fact Cyrus the Persian (see on :28). This would then fit the historical interpretation of Dan. 7:5, which requires a Mede to be in power before the elevation of Cyrus. The book of Esther records 127 satraps at that time, so 120 at this time sounds right. However, the 120 could have been over the newly conquered province of Babylon.

Dan 6:2 *And over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one; so that these satraps might give account to them, and that the king should have no loss*- We note that Daniel had turned down the offer of becoming third in the kingdom under Darius (Dan. 5:16). But what he rejected he has now been given. The elevation of Daniel would have been because it was known that he had bravely prophesied the victory of the Medes over Babylon. He was well known for this, hence his elevation; but this means that the Babylonians also would have known Daniel's position about them, and he would have been in a similar position to Jeremiah, who likewise was within the besieged city [of Jerusalem in his case] and prophesied the victory of the enemy. These similarities between human lives all serve to give us encouragement and warning, as well as demonstrating that all is indeed under Divine control and we are not at the mercy of random event.

Dan 6:3 *Then Daniel was promoted above the presidents and the satraps, because an excellently wise spirit was in him*- This spirit perceived within him was that of God (Dan. 4:8,9; 5:11,14). His wisdom of spirit is elsewhere associated with his interpretation of Divine dreams; perhaps the promotion was because of this, as it was every other time he was promoted. His interpretations had of course predicted the Medo Persian victory against Babylon, and yet they also demanded their fall. Perhaps it was because of his words against Babylon that he was promoted. But it may equally have been because of his general wisdom and integrity. He was promoted several times, and each time he seems to slip out of the limelight, either by his own will or because he was manipulated out of the position. To be in any position of power within those empires would've involved him in conflicts of conscience to his God. We too at times need to allow ourselves to slip away from the limelight and situation provided by promotion of whatever kind.

And the king thought to set him over the whole kingdom- This could refer to the province of Babylon. But just as Joseph had the promotion to a similar position over all Egypt, perhaps Daniel's integrity and evident connection with Yahweh made the king desire to give him practical responsibility for the entire empire.

Dan 6:4 *Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find occasion against Daniel regarding the things of the kingdom; but they could find no case nor fault, because he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him*- The content of the Gospel is "the things [of] the kingdom" (Acts 1:3; 8:12; 19:8). The kingdoms of the world at Daniel's time are set up as fake kingdoms of God, with their leaders as an imitation Christ, an antiChrist. As ever, jealousy motivated all personal criticism of Daniel. It would have been an unpleasant experience for him, living as a foreigner amongst jealous men seeking his downfall, and all the time not wanting the exalted position anyway.

Dan 6:5 *Then these men said, We shall not find any occasion against Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God*- This has remarkable implications about Daniel's absolute integrity, for which all God's servants should be known in their secular lives. Worship of other gods was allowed in the empire, but religion was seen as a part time affair and your loyalty to your god was not an

exclusive relationship. You could also be loyal to other gods, and for certain periods you could be totally devoted to another god, e.g. if it was the day of worship of the local god, you worshipped that god on that day. And that is the essence of the test of our faith in this multivalent world. Our faith and devotion is exclusively to the one God, and it is not a part time hobby level matter.

Dan 6:6 *Then these presidents and satraps assembled together to the king, and said to him, King Darius, live forever*- All the monarchs had the idea that they were immortal and expected this to be recognized- hence the address "live forever". Nebuchadnezzar had sought to demonstrate this by making the statue of gold completely, when he was but the head of gold according to the image of Dan. 2. We note however that Daniel, despite his sensitive conscience toward his God, still goes along with this form of address (:21), even though he of all people knew from his own prophecies that the kings were far from immortal and would all come to their end.

Dan 6:7 *All the presidents of the kingdom*- This was untrue, because Daniel was one of them. The king ought to have perceived that this was a set up.

The deputies and the satraps, the counsellors and the governors, have consulted together in order to establish a royal statute, and to make an enforced decree, that whoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, except of you, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions- Darius knew full well that Daniel would be praying to his God. For Daniel prayed with his windows open toward Jerusalem in full view of everyone, "as he did previously" (:10). It was therefore known to all that Daniel did this. Darius knew that Daniel had contact with his God and had made prophecies through God's Spirit (see on :3). Darius presumably went along with the suggestion because he was fearful of minorities rebelling against him, and such periodic tests of loyalty were common. This was what Nebuchadnezzar had done with his golden image. But Darius didn't learn the lesson from that.

Dan 6:8 *Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which doesn't alter*- It was only by tradition that it didn't alter. The king was all powerful. The only thing required to change it was his humility, but as we note on :9, his pride was too great. The courtiers seemed to have guessed that when it came to killing Daniel for praying to Yahweh, the king was likely to want to change; and so they remind him that this law cannot be changed. The only reason Darius would have agreed to this was because of the appeal to his pride- that he was divine, and a divine being didn't change his principles.

Dan 6:9 *Therefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree*- As noted on :7, Darius knew full well that Daniel was in the habit of openly praying to his God, and I suggested on :7 that the king surely knew that Daniel was being set up. And yet Darius clearly respected Daniel, which was why he had promoted him, and on account of which he was so distressed when he realized that Daniel had to die. Why then did he sign the decree? A theme of Daniel is the almost unbelievable power of human pride. The king's better judgment was overridden by his pride, and his wish to go along with his flatterers in believing the myth of his times- that he as king was in fact Divine and immortal. This had been the undoing of Belshazzar, and it had almost been the undoing of Nebuchadnezzar. We see therefore the power of human pride and what happens if we succumb to flattery and the human tendency to play God. Our

better judgment and spiritual side is flattened beneath the weight of it. Darius acts in accordance with how the other monarchs in the book of Daniel are presented- they could have repented and were given the chance to, they theoretically accepted the truth of God's prophetic word and personally respected Daniel; but their pride stopped them from accepting the basic truth of the image of Dan. 2, that they too would pass, they were not eternal, were men and not God, and needed to accept the reality of God's Kingdom and resign their own kingdoms.

In the same way as they could have repented, they could also have restored captive Judah to their land, and thus helped re-establish the Kingdom of God in Israel. Cyrus is presented by name in Isaiah as a Messiah-like figure who could have orchestrated this, by destroying Babylon and empowering Jewry to return. If the Darius in this chapter was indeed Cyrus as suggested on :1 and :28, then we see how far he failed to realize what was potentially possible. He gave the decree to allow Judah to return in the first year of his reign (Ezra 1:1); but now he seems to have faltered and become consumed with pride so that he didn't live up to his potential; and Judah likewise failed to grasp the Divinely presented opportunities, with the majority of them preferring to remain in captivity.

Dan 6:10 *When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he still went into his house (now his windows in his room were open toward Jerusalem) and he kneeled on his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did previously-*

The three times of the day connected with when the morning burnt-offering was offered, when the 'evening' burnt offering was offered; and then sunset. This continues the major Biblical theme that prayer is our equivalent to sacrifice. It is a giving to God, of time, of mental focus, of trust.

The statement that his windows were open may not require us to imagine that he opened the windows. They were open windows i.e. without lattice work (cp. "closed windows" with lattice work in Ez. 40:16). It was easy to see into them because there was no window nor anything blocking the view inside. Prayer towards the temple was in time of confession of sin and need for God's forgiveness and salvation, as we see in Jonah: "Then I said, I am cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple". There was no religious or legal obligation for Daniel to pray like this, just as there was no obligation for him to refuse the king's food in Dan. 1. He risked his life for his personal conscience, which was likely a conscience not shared by the rest of his Jewish brethren; even though his prayer to Jerusalem in time of exile was surely begging for their salvation. He had the spirit of the Lord Jesus as He died for Israel, misunderstood and even hated by them. He had no group support psychologically nor spiritually; this issue of prayer was totally personal to him. He was making a point; he could have taken the essence of the Lord's future teaching that in prayer we should close the door of our inner room and pray unseen by others (Mt. 6:6). He could easily have justified private prayer at this time. The strength and depth of his personal conscience at this time was so strong; he must have been so very close to the Father as he knelt in prayer at this time. "As he did previously" points up how important is daily spiritual habit. It was and is worth dying for. He was known for retiring to his upper room three times / day to pray to his God. Everybody knew that was the rhythm of his life, now matter how busy things were in the office... He was surely inspired by David's example, although again we note that example is not Divine law: "Evening and morning and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud; and He

shall hear my voice" (Ps. 55:17). A verse like that can be used to build a personal conscience, but not to argue for a Divine law about praying three times / day.

He prayed toward Jerusalem with reference to how Solomon had said that Israel in their sin and captivity would pray toward the temple (1 Kings 8:33,35,38,44,48). Daniel was deeply aware of the sin of Judah and felt it as being his own sin; his prayer in Dan. 9 is full of such identification with Israel's sins. He felt that duty towards his weak and sinful brethren as stronger than his own fear of a miserable death. He saw this as a Divine command which although not explicitly expressed as a command, is effectively a commandment because it is so strongly implied as necessary for us. This incident is surely the basis of Acts 5:29: "We ought to obey God rather than men". Many Jews surely consoled themselves that prayer is a private matter, and wouldn't have advertised their prayers, certainly not by opening their windows and praying on their knees in full view of religious informers. But Daniel was willing to die for the sake of how important he felt prayer to be. And he challenges us all in this, we who so often are guilty of praying when overtired, or spending ou time on petty things until we have no time left to pray. Our time budget needs to give prayer serious priority, at whatever loss- even of life itself, according to Daniel's example. To pray regularly three times / day, perhaps as David did at dawn, noon and unset (Ps. 55:17 cp. Acts 10:9) required no small discipline. He had a demanding job and life situation, just as David did. His requirement for time to pray regularly was therefore advertised to his contemporaries; it was no secret. This is such a challenge to those in demanding careers; it is no more the done thing to take time out to pray than it was for Daniel, living as he did in an environment where leadership was connected to religion, and he was clearly out of step with the surrounding religious views.

Solomon's prayer, to which Daniel is alluding, required prayer to be made specifically toward the temple in Jerusalem. But that temple lay in ruins. Daniel's prayer toward it therefore reflected his understanding that God's presence doesn't dwell in temples made with hands. "That is true" (literally "the thing is true", as AV) is the very term used of the truth of Daniel's prophetic revelations (Dan. 7:16- remember that the visions of Daniel 7 were given before this time, see Dan. 7:1). If this "Darius" is indeed Cyrus, then we note that in his third year, Daniel received another vision, "and the thing was true" (Dan. 10:1). But Darius would not humble himself before the truths of God and change his perceived truth, just as we and many others struggle to.

Dan 6:11 *Then these men assembled together, and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God*- "Assembled" means more 'to throng'. The petition and supplication (the idea is of "grace") was surely for the revival of Judah's fortunes with the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel, and the fulfilment of the prophecies of the restoration. But Daniel knew that due to Judah's weakness, this would have to be by grace, and thanks to the intercession of a righteous remnant represented by himself. This was for Daniel more important than his personal death. "Before his God" suggests that the presence of God was just as much there in a room in Babylon as it was in Zion.

Dan 6:12 *Then they came near, and spoke before the king concerning the king's decree: Haven't you signed a decree, that every man who shall make petition to any god or man within thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered, That is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which doesn't alter*- Now was the moment when the king could say: 'Yes I did, but I was wrong, I am not going to have Daniel killed. Mock me as you will, assume that I cannot actually be divine because I am now changing my position, but

change it I will'. And he doesn't do that. His pride was too great, although at one and the same time, as the text often implies, he had a level of faith and spirituality. But human pride is so strong.

Dan 6:13 *Then they responded and said to the king, That Daniel, who is of the captives of Judah, doesn't respect you, O king, nor the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day*- "That Daniel" indicates how they despised him. This is the extreme power of human jealousy. "Doesn't respect you" was just what the courtiers had eagerly told Nebuchadnezzar when the three friends refused to bow to his image in Dan. 3. Darius ought to have learnt from Divine history and perceived that he was being set up for a major fall. But he refused to join the dots, just as we do, because his pride made him act illogically in spiritual terms.

They mention that Daniel is a Jew- and refer to him by his Hebrew name and not his Babylonian name. They surely did this because the idea of the decree had been to guard against rebellion and disloyalty from ethnic minorities within Babylon who were seeking to rebel against the king. And Daniel's interpretation of the dreams in Daniel 2 and 4, along with the words of the other Hebrew prophets, clearly showed that the Hope of Israel was the ending of all human empires [including that of Persia] and the establishment of Israel as God's Kingdom upon their ruins. Daniel was already under suspicion; and this act of disloyalty confirmed that.

We note the strong similarities between the friends being "cast" into the fiery furnace, and Daniel being "cast" into the den of lions. In both cases they had disobeyed an edict from the king that demanded false worship. In both cases they are reported to the king by jealous contemporaries and "accused" (Dan. 3:8; 6:25). In both cases, an Angel saves them (Dan. 3:28; 6:23). Those who try to harm them are harmed in that same way [death by lions / fire]. Both kings (Nebuchadnezzar and Darius) rise in alarm (Dan. 3:24; 6:20), approach the place of destruction (Dan. 3:26; 6:21), address the Jews by their names, and then use the same term to describe them: "servants of the Most High God" (Dan. 3:26) and "servant of the living God" (Dan. 6:21). The kings both command the Jews who had survived death to then come out and approach them. We naturally enquire why there are these parallels. It could be that Daniel had somehow saved himself from having to stand up for his faith in the events of Daniel 3, for Daniel's absence from the story is strange. But he was made to fellowship the sufferings of his friends in a remarkable way.

Dan 6:14 *Then the king, when he heard these words, was very displeased, and set his heart on Daniel to save him; and he struggled until the going down of the sun to save him*- AV "displeased with himself". The apparently omnipotent king is again demonstrated to be easily manipulated. He is driven to asking or hoping that Israel's God will save Daniel (:17), seeing his power and his gods cannot. And this is a theme of Daniel; that apparent power is not really power, and all such structures have feet of clay as shown in the image of Dan. 2. He presumably kept quiet and internal how displeased he was. For the courtiers wouldn't have wished to provoke his displeasure. His admiration for Daniel and his struggling to save Daniel were all internal and well hidden. Otherwise we are left with the case of his courtiers forcing him to do what displeased him. And that just wasn't what courtiers did. His struggle within himself [he "set his heart on Daniel to deliver him"] that night was largely with himself, with his own understanding and projection of himself as a god who always made infallible decisions which therefore could never be changed nor somehow have exceptions added to them. He struggled with his own pride, and how he would look to his

courtiers. This struggle or 'labouring' may perhaps have involved consultations with legal experts, but more likely it refers to the internal struggle within him against his own pride. And the fact he didn't command Daniel's release shows that he lost it; his pride was stronger than his humility and displeasure with himself ("sore displeased with himself", AV).

In Ezra 4, Artaxerxes issues a decree to cease the rebuilding of Jerusalem. In Ezra 7 king Artaxerxes issues a decree to begin restoring and building Jerusalem. But the laws of the Medes and Persians were unchangeable (Esther 1:19; Dan. 6:14-16). So we see here how Darius could have changed the fate of Daniel- only his pride stopped him. For to lose face and admit "I was wrong, just too hasty in my words" is so hard for man.

Dan 6:15 *Then these men assembled together to the king, and said to the king, Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians, that no decree nor statute which the king establishes may be changed*- "These men" had the upper hand over the king, but only because they knew that his pride was such that he could not retract the law. The same happened when Herod refused to retract his oath and had John the Baptist murdered. This is the power of human pride; it can bring down the most powerful person.

Dan 6:16 *Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions*- Being cast to the lions and preserved may therefore be used in 2 Tim. 4:17 and 1 Pet. 5:8 in a figurative sense, encouraging us to see ourselves as in Daniel's shoes and likewise preserved.

Now the king spoke and said to Daniel, Your God whom you serve continually, He will deliver you- Service to God is here paralleled with prayer. Those who lament their apparent inability to do much physical service should remember this. Prayer is no less a service to God. I have suggested that Darius did on one level believe, but his pride squashed his spirituality. We see his more spiritual side expressed here, weak though it was; he believed that God would deliver Daniel. We note too that Darius knew full well that Daniel prayed / served his God "continually". His signing of the decree was therefore done in the full knowledge that it would affect Daniel. I don't think he was simply an elderly man who was fooled and manipulated by his courtiers. Rather was he like us, knowing truth on one level, and yet allowing his pride on the other hand to lead him to decisions of a moment which he would later bitterly regret. This seems to me the more likely and imaginable understanding of why he signed the decree. By admitting that Daniel's God could save Daniel whereas the king could not, Darius was tacitly accepting that he was not God, and his acceptance of prayer solely to himself was therefore wrong. But as with Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar initially, his repentance didn't go far enough. His apparently solid faith that God would deliver Daniel contrasts with his query in :20. Again we see repeated a feature of all the monarchs in the book of Daniel- they displayed spirituality, faith and humility for moments, but like us, found it hard to maintain their intensity.

Dan 6:17 *A stone was brought, and laid on the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring, and with the signet ring of his lords; so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel-*

"Sealed" or 'closed' is the word used of God closing or sealing the mouths of the lions (:22). The king's apparent power to seal or close was in fact irrelevant, and totally overridden by what God did. We have here another similarity with Joseph,

who was thrown into a cistern (Gen.37:24), which typically had a stone placed over it (Gen. 29:3; Lam. 3:53).

The situation has evident similarities with the sealing of the Lord's tomb (Mt. 27:66), after Pilate like Darius before him allowed his pride to override his better judgment. It could be that Darius wanted his lords and himself to take total responsibility, and believed that God would deliver Daniel (:16) and their collective power and authority would thereby be declared as null and void. But by doing so we could also understand that even at the very end, he still lacked the required humility to disassociate himself from the execution.

As explained on :10, Daniel had risked his life to pray for Judah and confess their sins because he felt so identified with them. Being placed in a grave to die was a response to that; for he was suffering the punishment upon Judah, who were figuratively "cut off in the dungeon" with a stone barring their escape (Lam. 3:53). In this again we see a pointer forward to the Lord Jesus, whose death and burial was likewise an act of identity with His people.

Dan 6:18 *Then the king went to his palace, and spent the night fasting; no musical instruments were brought before him: and his sleep fled from him*- The Aramaic word for "palace" can also mean 'temple'. We again meet the theme of the Babylonian religious system being trounced and declared powerless. The lack of sleep recalls the parallel situation in Esther 6:1; circumstances repeat in history, because it is the same Divine hand at work. It is our wisdom to perceive this, and to conclude that man is never alone, never in an unprecedented situation. This is the purpose of Biblical history. The king's fasting was presumably in order to beg God to deliver Daniel. If he had humbled himself, then he could simply have released Daniel. We see here how things so often turn out; he had a lower level of spirituality because he wouldn't take the highest level, which was to simply release Daniel as Pilate could have released the Lord. But the point is, he did fast to God, and even through his own weakness, God urged him closer to Himself. We marvel at God's patience and desire to work with all men, even the proud, to bring them to Himself.

The Aramaic for "musical instruments" is obscure and could also mean 'dancing girls' or concubines. His sleep fleeing from him is what happened to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:1). But there is no vision- for Darius knows the essence of the message of the Dan. 2 vision, that Yahweh rules in the kingdoms of men.

The narrative at this point expresses the lack of action by all involved. The king doesn't even sleep, he doesn't even 'do' that; he has no entertainment; the accusers and Daniel do nothing, and the lions do nothing. Daniel is apparently silent throughout until the morning light comes and the ordeal is over. In the midst of all this human inaction, God's silent action is paramount.

Dan 6:19 *Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in urgency to the den of lions*- Again we see the conscience of the king at work. He was not disinterested. See on :18. "In urgency" recalls Nebuchadnezzar responding "in haste" to the suffering of the three friends (Dan. 3:24).

Dan 6:20 *When he came near to the den to Daniel, he cried with a lamentable voice; the king spoke and said to Daniel: Daniel, servant of the living God, is your God, whom you serve continually, able to deliver you from the lions?*- His apparently solid faith that God would deliver Daniel in :16 contrasts with this query. Again we see repeated a feature of all the monarchs in the book of Daniel- they displayed spirituality, faith and humility for moments, but like us, found it hard to maintain their

intensity. "The living God" is a term used to differentiate the one true God from the idols (Acts 14:15; 1 Thess. 1:9). We see here the progress in his thinking. His night of fasting to Daniel's God led him to believe that the one "living God" was Daniel's God and not his idols. We would likely have given up in disgust with Darius, after he sacrificed Daniel's life for the sake of his proud agreement to play God. But God worked with him, and brought about this undoubted spiritual progress in the man.

This is the only time a Gentile calls Yahweh "the living God". We could well read this within the background context of King Nebuchadnezzar turning to Yahweh. We wonder to what extent Darius too became a believer in Yahweh. For "the living God" is a phrase usually used in the context of declaring all other gods as dead and lifeless (Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26; 2 Kings 19:4; Jer. 10:10).

"Whom you serve continually" alludes to Daniel's praying continually, three times / day, and continuing doing so on pain of death. Prayer is service. This is a comfort for all who are incapacitated. They can serve- in prayer. Prayer is a form of serving God.

We note the characterization of the king as emotional. He is "deeply distressed" (:15), unable to sleep, and calls to Daniel with a "lamentable" voice , LXX "with wailing" (:20), and is then "exceedingly glad" at Daniel's deliverance (:23). Daniel is presented as without emotion and just calm and secure in his faith. Such emotion was not seen as appropriate for a king; the gods, whom the kings were supposed to represent, had no emotion. Hence a king's decree was not to be changed because he was eternal and infallible, like the gods. The presentation of the king as emotional points up the irony of the situation.

The "den of lions" was full of wild angry destructive beasts. And "den of lions" may have been just a technical term for the pit, possibly other wild animals were there too. The connection is clear with the visions of wild beasts in the next chapter; and Daniel, representing God's people, lives at peace amongst them and is saved from them. Thus Dan. 6 is the preface to Dan. 7. Lions got into a pit by being lured into it and then trapped; thus lions are hunted by using a pit (Ez. 19:4,8), and dens / pits are used to trap and subdue wild animals (Ps 7:16; 9:16; 35:7,8, 57:7; 2 Sam. 23:20; 1 Chron. 11:22). The lions had been trapped already. They were not free agents. And Daniel moved at peace amongst them, their mouths closed to him by the Angel.

And there is a deconstruction going on here. In the Akkadian poem *Ludlul bel nemeqi*, the hero of the story loses his high status at court because of malicious plotting by other courtiers, is thrown to the lions but Marduk rescues him “from the pit”. The king clearly knew the story, and wonders whether Daniel's God can actually do what Marduk supposedly did in mythology. And He does. This poem was very well known. It has been found on over 50 cuneiform tablets from the time from throughout the region. It was apparently used as a standard text in educating the elite classes. Everyone knew the story. And thereby Marduk was deconstructed. The one true God controlled the wild animals, preserving His people from them, and using them to destroy the enemies of His people when the sun arises and a new day dawns [cp. the Lord's coming]. And that is the simple message of the vision of the next chapter. So many reliefs have been unearthed presenting the kings of the time as glorious hunters of lions, triumphing over them. Especially from the North Palace of Nineveh, depicting king Assurbanipal. But again all this is deconstructed. The king Darius fears the lions and is powerless over them, as are his courtiers. But Daniel and his God have power over lions and triumph over them. The North Palace in Nineveh had reliefs, currently in the British Museum, showing the king playing with lions he had tamed and conquered. They had apparently been drugged. The idea was to show

how the king was supreme over the king of wild beasts. But it was the king Darius who was fearful of the power of the lions, and it was God's man Daniel who walked at ease amongst lions. Lions appear so frequently on the reliefs uncovered from palaces of the time. The lion was a symbol of kingship. But the Most High was in control of the lions, not king Darius. He controlled kingship, as the image of Dan. 2 had made clear. And His man Daniel was effectively the king. The reliefs portray the king as always winning against the lions. Dan. 6 shows the king as it were overpowered, both by his own courtiers and his fear of the lions. And Judah's God alone triumphant through Daniel, the quiet, calm, humble believer in Him. The seals of the kings usually included lion imagery. Again we see the irony. Darius sealed the stone over the den of lions with his lion imagery on the seal. But he was powerless over those lions. Kings are found depicted as shutting the mouths of lions by their great supposed strength, given from their gods. But clearly it was God and not the king who shut the mouths of these lions. Kings kept lions as a symbol of their power. The lions in the pit were the king's lions. But he had no actual power over them; rather did he fear their power. We see yet again that the Daniel story is about a war between the gods- and Yahweh the one true God, the God whom the Babylonians had apparently humiliated by taking His temple vessels into the house of their god. But God wins. That is likewise the simple summary of the book of Revelation.

Dan 6:21 *Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever*- The LXX reflects the ambivalence of the terms used: "O King, I am alive!". But I suggested on :6 that despite his sensitive conscience, knowing that all these kings would be deposed, Daniel went along with this form of address. We too have to make decisions as to whether we shall 'go along' with incorrect ideas and behaviour, or make a point, as Mordecai did by not bowing to Haman. Sometimes Daniel did make a point, e.g. regarding eating meat offered to idols; on this point, which didn't directly concern him personally, he didn't. See on :26. It could also be that Daniel used the term "O king, live forever" but understood it in his own way, namely that he wished that the king would repent and thereby live forever in God's eternal kingdom.

Dan 6:22 *My God has sent His angel, and has shut the lions' mouths*-

Darius had closed the mouth of the pit (:17) but Daniel understands that Yahweh had closed the mouths of the lions. The lions were the king's personal beasts, for kings always had their own lions. True to the theme of Daniel, the king and all his power is under the hand of the one true God. Likewise in Dan. 4:10-12 Nebuchadnezzar is likened to a tree beneath which the wild animals live. But that tree is in fact the symbol of God's Kingdom. The wild animals would take over Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, as we see in Dan. 7. But in reality they were all beneath God and His rulership and dominion. Nebuchadnezzar himself is changed from being the tree to being just another wild animal. The kings of the time are presented on reliefs as hunters and tamers of lions and other wild animals. But clearly it is God who is the lion tamer and not the king, who is pathetically powerless over them. The putting to death of the most ferocious beast by the "Son of man" in Dan. 7:11,12 is what kings were supposed to do- slaying dragons etc. But it is God who does this, ultimately through His Son. And the greatest king is presented as merely a beast to be conquered by God.

Here we have another parallel with the situation in Dan. 3 with Daniel's friends. Their persecutors were likewise slain by the flame intended for them; the king came to their place of intended suffering and spoke; justified and praised them and their God etc. We see this kind of thing in our lives; we pass through situations so similar

to those of our brethren, and our experiences are also intended as a template for our future brethren (2 Cor. 1:4). This is one helpful window onto the meaning of suffering in the lives of believers. The shutting of the mouth of the pit by men is contrasted with the Angel shutting the mouths of the lions. Daniel's faith in this would have been developed by his knowledge of what had happened to the three friends in the furnace. This is how friendship and fellowship in Christ should work in our days- the experiences and deliverances of others become our pattern and inspiration. See on :23. It was Daniel's faith which stopped the mouth of lions (Heb. 11:33); but he says that it was God who shut them. We see here how faith makes us as it were workers together with God; what we believe in, He does, to the point that therefore we, as it were, do it. This is the level of intimacy possible between God and faithful man.

And they have not destroyed me; because before Him innocence was found in me; and also before you, O king, have I done nothing wrong- The original words develop a word play. The lions did not harm Daniel because he had done no harm to the king: "They did not harm me [because] to you I have done no harm". Daniel insists that disobedience to the king was not in fact harming the king; he protests his innocence. The Lord's innocence was likewise the basis of His 'resurrection' (Acts 2:24). Perhaps Daniel inspired Paul, who wrote of how he too was delivered from lions (2 Tim. 4:17) and who likewise claimed to be innocent before God and man (Acts 24:16). Daniel was no mere Sunday School or Synagogue story for him, and neither should it be for us; we are to see ourselves in Daniel and be inspired to act in faith likewise.

One part of our message is of the Kingdom of God; we should be living witnesses to the current rulership of God over our lives, and thereby we testify with credibility and integrity to the future establishment of that Kingdom on earth at the Lord's return. If we are living the eternal life, the Kingdom life, then we are in ourselves advertisements for the good news of the Kingdom. Daniel is an example of this. The Aramaic verb *habal* occurs several times in Daniel, and between them we build up a picture of how Daniel was a living witness to the Kingdom. The word means to hurt / destroy. We find that the Kingdom of Babylon was to be cut down and destroyed; whereas the Kingdom of God was to never be destroyed (Dan. 4:23; 2:44). The mouths of the lions were closed so that they did not "hurt" [s.w. 'destroy'] Daniel (Dan. 6:22); and because of this, Darius praises God, saying that His Kingdom would never be 'destroyed' (Dan. 6:26). Daniel was not destroyed; and thus Darius came to believe that God's Kingdom would not be destroyed. Because Daniel was set up as a living part and foretaste of that Kingdom. To a far greater extent, "the Kingdom of God" is a title given to the Lord Jesus- because He in His mortal life was the essence of that Kingdom, the embodiment of the Kingdom life.

"Done nothing wrong" is literally "done no harm". It is the word used of how the lions did no harm to Daniel (:23). The king's power to "harm" Daniel is again overridden and he is shown to be powerless. Just as the king had closed the den but God closed the mouths of the lions (:17). The apparently unchangeable nature of Medo Persian laws is overridden by God's law and word.

Dan 6:23 *Then was the king exceeding glad, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God*- Again we see a similarity with the deliverance of Daniel's friends from the furnace, upon whom no smell or trace of fire was even found. See on :22.

Dan 6:24 *The king commanded, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions mauled them, and broke all their bones in pieces, before they came to*

the bottom of the den- "Accused" is literally 'slandered'. A sober warning to slanderers. This breaking in pieces connects with the image prophecy, where the little stone crushes to pieces the kingdoms of men. The historical incidents in the book of Daniel were all evidences that the larger Divine program would just as surely come to fulfilment. Such punishment of men with the very experience they intended to inflict upon others is in accordance with God's law (Dt. 19:11-13,19; 24:16), and the whole scene is presented as analogous to the destruction of the rebels in the wilderness (Num. 16:32). Perhaps Darius had been made aware of God's law through the preaching of Daniel; to have agreed to destroy Daniel because of his pride therefore makes his failure all the more serious. And God's continued grace and patience with him all the more wonderful.

The method of destruction here appears to fulfil Nebuchadnezzar's penalty for blasphemy against Yahweh: "[they] shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses [families] laid in ruins" (Dan. 3:29). The king ordered the deaths of all these people immediately, without any due legal process, exercising his right to override the legal process. He likewise could have used his sovereign power to deliver Daniel. The destruction of the families of the guilty was usually only done in cases of insurrection or treason. The king considered that actually these men were plotting his overthrow- whereas they had tried to make Daniel out as guilty of this. Perhaps they wanted Daniel dead in order to advance their own plans for overthrowing the king. This kind of irony is so true to real life- the one who is actually doing good and preventing treason is the one falsely convicted of treason.

Dan 6:25 *Then king Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages, who dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you*- This copied Nebuchadnezzar in making a multi-lingual declaration of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to all peoples. That the king had power to unilaterally do this further indicates that he was not as weak and manipulated as some like to make out. He was proud and powerful, that was the problem. His power to do this suggests further that this "Darius" was not "Darius the Mede" who would not have had such wide authority.

Dan 6:26 *I make a decree, that in all the dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God, and steadfast forever, His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed*- Perhaps the king is alluding to how he was usually addressed "O King, live forever"; and he now recognizes that he is not in fact Divine, and only Daniel's God lives for ever. See on :21. He is accepting the truth of the image of Dan. 2. He was clearly aware of passages like Dan. 2:44, but had previously resisted the implications of the message. Now he accepted it and preached it to all peoples. The similar vision of the four beasts was given before this incident (Dan. 7:1), and the king likely was aware of the same teaching expressed there- that God's Kingdom alone would be eternal, and would triumph over his empire.

And His dominion shall remain to the end- This could simply mean 'eternally'. But perhaps this passage is behind Paul's explanation of how the Lord Jesus delivers the Kingdom to God the Father at "the end" (1 Cor. 15:24-26). This is very much the language of the image vision of Daniel 2, and of the proclamation of Nebucadnezzar in Dan. 4:3,34. Clearly Daniel's earlier history and dream interpretations were known. And these may have led to the accusation of treason against him.

Dan 6:27 *He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, He who has delivered Daniel*- Darius here displays quite some humility; for it was he who had struggled and failed to deliver and rescue Daniel (Dan. 6:14). The emphasis is on how "He", God, delivers and rescues when man cannot. This suggests that Darius realized that Daniel's deliverance was only one of many ongoing

miracles and activities of God in "heaven and in earth" at that time. He recognized the wider hand of God in human affairs. Darius is here using the words of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:3); perhaps he was trying to make a similar repentance, inspired by the example of a previous monarch who had likewise encountered Daniel. The examples of repentance we see and read of in others are intended to inspire us to repentance (see on Mt. 21:31,32).

From the power of the lions- Darius may also have in view how Daniel's enemies were as a den of lions to him, which is how the figure is used in Ez. 22:25.

Dan 6:28 *So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian*- The identity of Darius is problematic; this could be a way of saying "Darius, who was Cyrus the Persian". But Darius is specifically called a Mede, although perhaps this is a way of saying that he now called himself a Persian. Thus we could render with D.J. Wiseman "Darius, even (namely, or i.e.) the reign of Cyrus the Persian". "Such a use of the appositional or explicative Hebrew waw construction has long been recognized in 1 Chron. 5:26 ("So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria even the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria"). We note Dan. 11:1 LXX "The first year of Cyrus". It is a sociological and political miracle that a man could serve under at least four kings, remaining in 'power' even when political power changed from Babylon to Media to Persia: Nebuchadnezzar, [and possibly Evil-merodach], Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. It is a testament to Daniel's integrity and also his lack of strong political allegiance to any of them- for otherwise the successor power would have destroyed him along with the rest of the previous empire.

DANIEL CHAPTER 7

The four metals of the image of Daniel 2, followed as they were by the feet and ten toes part of iron and clay, are matched by the four beasts of Daniel 7, culminating in the beast with ten horns, which is also destroyed by the second coming of Christ. It is emphasized that Nebuchadnezzar 'saw' the image, or literally, he had a vision of it (Dan. 2:26,31,34,41,43,45). The same word is used in Daniel 7 of how now *Daniel* 'saw' or 'had a vision of' the four beasts (Dan. 7:1,2,4,6,7,9,11,13,21). The Daniel 7 vision or 'seeing' was perhaps from God's perspective, Heaven's view of the same realities which Nebuchadnezzar saw from an earthly perspective. There are many verbal similarities, as well as the general outline similarity between the four kingdoms. Thus the intention of the Daniel 2 image was to show how God ‘sets up kings’ who ‘rise up’ (Dan. 2:21,31,39), and the same word is used of how both the lion and the bear are ‘set up’ or ‘raised up’ (Dan. 7:4,5); indeed, all four beasts “are four kings which shall arise out of the earth” (Dan. 7:17). The kingdoms of Daniel 2 reigned over the earth, and that clearly refers to the *eretz* promised to Abraham, Israel, rather than the entire planet. Daniel 7 makes the point that these kings or kingdoms will arise out of that same ‘earth’ which they later dominate. Clearly we are not to look for any identification of the beasts or kings from outside the land promised to Abraham.

The ten horns likewise represent “ten kings” which shall “arise” (Dan. 7:24); and although it is not stated specifically, we are to assume that they arise also out of the same area, the “earth” / land. We should therefore be looking for a group of four kings / kingdoms, out of which arise ten kings / kingdoms; and out of them arises one “little horn” in particular. Revelation’s take on the beasts adds more detail- there are also seven heads, a false prophet acting as publicity agent for the beast, a whore riding

the beast, sitting on seven hills / kings. The four beasts / kings are initially in conflict, striving with each other upon the sea, and arising from that comes the fourth beast entity, the composite beast including elements of all the previous ones. And from that there arises the ten horns and one little horn. We should not, however, think of these situations as having to be chronological developments, i.e. first the four, then the fourth beast, then the ten horns, then the little horn. It may work out like that, but not necessarily. The precise details need not concern us ahead of time; the picture is of a series of leaders and powers involved in the domination of the land promised to Abraham. The fact is, the beasts will all exist together in the last days, just as the metals of the image will. These various entities will "arise" from the land. And this is what we see happening already- in the last few years there has been what is called the Arabic, and particularly Sunni, *sahwa*, 'awakening'. Powers and kings have risen up out of the scrubland and desert of the *eretz*, united in their hatred of Israel, but bitterly divided against each other.

We are for sure in the stage of the winds / *ruach* / Angel controlled nations 'striving' with each other- the *eretz* is full of conflict as never before, not just between Israel and her neighbours, but between those neighbours. There are currently four non-Jewish nations within the *eretz*- Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. But they exist just on paper as lines on the map; there are other significant entities within the area, e.g. Kurdistan, the Islamic State, Gaza, parts of Egypt and Turkey [depending how one defines the northern border of Israel], parts of Saudi Arabia [depending how the eastern border is defined]. In total they make ten kingdoms, but the number ten may not be literal. We would then be awaiting for the "little horn" to arise- a charismatic, antiChrist leader, or perhaps another very small entity. For the horn is called the *little* horn, and yet it is the most powerful in the very last days. However, the Hebrew and Aramaic words translated "little" can mean 'short' in terms of time as well as size. The idea may be that it lasts a very short time indeed, maybe literally days or hours in the very last day, and is the human representative of the beast / horns who personally challenges the Lord Jesus and is destroyed by the brightness of His coming.

The Origins of the Beasts

The empires of Daniel 2 dominate the earth. The Hebrew *eretz* can refer either to the entire planet, or to the land- the land promised to Abraham, the land of Israel, from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt. The dominion of the four beasts is therefore over the same area. Daniel saw the beasts arising out of the great sea. This could be a reference to the laver, which is also called a 'sea' (1 Kings 7:23-26,39). This was a huge circular bowl for washing which was set upon 12 bronze oxen, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. They were arranged in four groups of three, facing north, south, east and west, in imitation of the camp of Israel in the wilderness. The beasts therefore arise out of the territory promised to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rev. 17:15 interprets waters or seas as "peoples". The beasts therefore arise out of the peoples who are to be found in the land of the 12 tribes of Israel. The interpretation is confirmed by the words of the Angel in Dan. 7:17, who says that the four beasts who arise out of the sea are four king[dom]s which "shall arise out of the earth / land".

Another possibility regarding the "great sea" is that it refers to the area of Babylon's dominion. The vision of Daniel 7 clearly parallels that of Daniel 2, which was intended to explain what would happen after the Babylonians. The arena of the "great sea" was to be dominated by other kingdoms apart from Babylon. In confirmation of this, we find the word *rab* ["great"] used about the greatness of Babylon ("great Babylon", Dan. 4:30; Joel 2:2,11). But *rab* is also translated "master"

(Dan. 1:3), "lord", "captain", "chief" (Dan. 2:10,14,48), "master" (Dan. 4:19; 5:11). We could understand the "great sea" as the sea of nations ruled over by the master, the lord of the sea, the king of Babylon- and Daniel is seeing this vision in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon (Dan. 7:1). As in the Daniel 2 vision, Daniel is explaining that the leadership of Babylon will not last, other kingdoms will arise to also dominate the sea of nations which was then under Babylon's sole control. This again pushes us towards understanding the entire vision as specifically concerning the area over which Babylon had dominion, and not the whole planet.

7:21 Let's not get caught up with the idea that Israel shall survive and defeat the invaders in her own strength. The beast must dominate Israel. Jerusalem will be taken. Dan. 7:7,21 speaks of how the beast made war with the saints and prevailed against them- Israel- *until* the Ancient of days came; in Dan. 7:23 he devours the whole land [as a beast] and shall tread it down. The beast of Revelation is so powerful in the earth / land that "the world" wondered at it and at the whore riding it (Rev. 13:3; 17:6,7), feeling unable to make war with it. This of itself requires the demise and degrading of America, Europe and the West generally. Dan. 11:41,45 are likewise clear about the latter day King of the North: "He shall also come into the glorious land… He shall plant the tents of his palace between the sea and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him".

Dan. 7:21,22 speak of how the "saints" will be persecuted by the beast, and then "the saints" will 'possess the Kingdom'. The "saints" are Israel, the same Hebrew word is used in Ex. 19:5 to describe them as a holy or saintly nation, a nation of saints, sanctified ones. If we understand the Kingdom as primarily the land promised to Abraham's seed for them to 'possess', then this makes sense. That land will be dominated and trodden down by the beast, and then the remnant of Abraham's seed will triumphantly possess it eternally; and that mountain, or Kingdom, will then grow to fill the whole planet.

The little horn devours, treads down and breaks in pieces "the earth" (Dan. 7:23); that has little meaning if applied to the whole planet. The context speaks of destruction and persecution of "the saints", God's people in His land. The reference is surely to the specific land of Israel.

Controlling Angels

The four beasts are "diverse from one another" (Dan. 7:3), just as the four metals of the image of Daniel 2 do not naturally bond with each other. The four beasts are controlled by four spirits in Heaven who 'strive' with each other (Dan. 7:2). God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7). Each of those kings or empires had a representative Angel in Heaven. It's not that the Angels themselves strive with each other, they are all obedient to God (see my *The Real Devil* chapter 2 http://www.realdevil.info/2-1.htm) but they play out before the court of Heaven the situation on earth. Later in Daniel we find Angels likewise representative of kings and kingdoms (Dan. 10:13,20). The comfort is that God is aware of all that happens on earth, and in fact He orchestrates it. The situation on earth is therefore not ultimately spinning out of control. My point in this context is that the four beasts strive with each other and do not naturally bond with each other. This is the same situation as we find in the feet and toes made part of iron, part of clay, mixed with each other but not cleaving to each other. Just as the image stands erect in the last days in order for it to be destroyed, so the sequence of beasts which we have in Daniel 7 are not simply a historical outline of a sequence of empires. Each of them exists in some form in the last days, and are united together in their brief domination of the earth / land promised to Abraham. The first three beasts stand 'before' the fourth one, the original meaning

'in the presence of', rather than previously in chronological terms (Dan. 7:7). The fourth beast has its body destroyed, although the other beasts are also present there and have their lives prolonged "for a season" (Dan. 7:11,12). The historical interpretation of the beasts is not irrelevant, however. The final entity dominating Israel will incorporate aspects of all the previous systems which have dominated the land promised to Abraham.

The Fourth Beast

The fourth beast with the ten horns equates with the legs or iron and ten toes of the image of Daniel 2. This entity will be in existence at the time of Christ's return, because it is to be destroyed by His coming. And we have that same picture in Revelation. Historically, the legs of iron represent Rome, but the beast is not a historical entity, it exists in the last days. So although there are parallels and outline similarities between the metals of the image and the beasts, this is not to say that they are all one and the same. The final beast has elements of all the previous beasts, it is a composite entity including all the elements of the previous systems which have dominated the land and people of Israel. Just as the image stands complete in the last days, so the final beast stands complete. The whore sits on many waters, representing various languages and peoples; and yet she sits upon the beast (Rev. 17:1,3,15). The latter day beast is therefore not one nation but an amalgam of peoples.

As the entire image was "terrible" (Dan. 2:31), so the fourth beast system is described with the same word (Dan. 7:7). As the image appeared “excellent” (Dan. 2:31), so the strength of the fourth beast was ‘excellent’ (s.w. Dan. 7:7). Dan. 7:7 emphasizes that this final beast is altogether more aggressive than any previous beast / dominator of the land: "Dreadful, terrible, strong exceedingly... it was different from all the beasts that were before it". The original word translated “dreadful” suggests whoever sees it slinks away in fear- its strength and advantage over others is “exceeding”. This is the same awe we find in Rev. 13, where the world looks on at the beast, marvelling at this entity and feeling that nobody can even begin to make war with him. This speaks of an entity that is more aggressive and fear-inspiring than the aggressive Babylonians, Assyrians or abusive Nazis. It implies too the eclipse of the West as the dominant world power block and power broker. The current IS may develop into an entity which fits this bill- a reign of terror involving cutting off children's heads and parading their actions on videos, live crucifixion of any who don't agree with them, but with a stranglehold advantage over any critics... The same radical difference between this final beast and all previous ones is brought out by the way in which John, after all he had earlier seen, was in shock at the way the beast drunk the blood of the saints, i.e. the people of God, Israel in their land (Rev. 17:6). The whole world likewise is in shock horror at this beast (Rev. 13:3; 17:8). The entity currently known as the IS hasn't yet struck so much fear into everyone, but the time is surely coming. Dan. 12:1 puts it this way: "There shall be a time of trouble such as never was" for God's people, and they will be saved from it by the standing up of Jesus for His people, the resurrection of the dead and the destruction of the "king of the north". The "time of Jacob's trouble" from which he shall be saved (Jer. 30:7) must be understood in the context of how the phrase "time of trouble" is used in the Bible to describe times of Israel's invasion and suffering at the hands of their neighbours (Is. 33:2; Jer. 2:27,28; 8:15; 11:12,14; 14:8,19; Ez. 7:7). "There shall be a time of trouble such as never was" therefore suggests a time of abuse of Israel such as has never been seen. And this includes the Nazi holocaust, the death camps of Europe, the Babylonian and Assyrian atrocities... It's purely wishful thinking to hope that the IDF and Israel's military technology will stave this off. It will not. Jerusalem is to be

taken and the women raped (Zech. 14:2). The beast is to dominate the earth / land of Israel.

The "iron teeth" of the beast (Dan. 7:7) can be connected with the way that "Damascus" tore the Israelites with teeth of iron (Am. 1:3). Damascus is a key player in the future Islamic state which is to be established in the land promised to Abraham. There will be an element of the historical Syrians in the entity which finally dominates Israel. And we can clearly see that in the IS. The same figure of a beast with huge teeth closing in upon Israel is to be found in Joel 1:6, describing the Babylonian and / or Assyrian invasion of the land. Teeth like lions are also mentioned in the picture of men with long hair arising like aggressive locusts out of the earth / land to torture to death those who live there for five months (Rev. 9:4-8). This very much sounds like the long haired jihadist fighters of the IS briefly dominating the land at the end. But they are part of the beast system, which includes this element of teeth because it is a composite figure including all elements of Israel's persecutors.

The beast will "devour" the land (Dan. 7:7), just as the historical Babylon 'devoured' Jerusalem with fire (Jer. 30:16; Lam. 4:11; Ez. 15:5; 19:12; 23:25; Hos. 8:14; Am. 1:4; 2:5) and the Assyrians devoured the land (Jer. 50:17; Hos. 11:6; 13:8; Joel 1:4,19,20; 2:3,5,25). All these verses use the same word translated 'devour' in Dan. 7:7. Clearly enough, the 'devouring' of the fourth beast is a summation of all previous 'devourings' of God's land and people. Even in Old Testament times, this idea of a singular beast embodying all Israel's enemies was not unknown. For Ez. 34:28 looked forward to the day when "Neither shall the beast of the land devour them [any more]". Mal. 3:11 likewise speaks of how "the devourer" will be rebuked by God when finally Israel respond to the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:1). This again suggests that the final devouring of Israel will be whilst the Elijah prophet is making an ongoing appeal for their repentance and acceptance of Jesus. Once they do so, the devourer is rebuked and Jesus returns to His desperately repentant people.

The beast stamps on others (Dan. 7:7); the same word is used for how Egypt did this to God's people and others within the land promised to Abraham (Ez. 32:2). Although Egypt doesn't figure in the sequence of metals in the image of Daniel 2, the beast incorporates aspects of all Israel's previous dominators- and they include Egypt. We can therefore expect the beast entity to include features of Nazi, Catholic and other historical persecutors of God's people, even though those entities weren't part of the Daniel 2 image. This is why the historical interpretations of 666 and the beast which apply them to Nero's Rome and various Catholic persecutions are not *per se* incorrect. They were true for their time. But the final persecuting entity will include them all within what it is and what it does.

The Remnant

It is specifically stated that the beast "stamped the remnant" after it had torn and destroyed the land. This could refer to the remnant or “rest” of the beasts (7:12 s.w.). But it may mean that as a result of all the persecution and destruction of the majority of Jews in the land, the surviving remnant of God’s people is stamped underfoot, or subjected to despite. The very same metaphor is used of how the city of God will be "trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". Those "times" may well refer to the period of 1260 days, three and a half years, spoken of in the prophecies of the tribulation. This trodden down and abused remnant are those who will finally repent and accept Jesus. There are prophecies of how this "remnant" (same word translated "residue" in Dan. 7:7 AV) will finally repent (Is. 10:20-22; 28:5). Is. 11:11,16 speaks of the latter day gathering of this "remnant" from areas throughout the land promised to Abraham- as if there will be a literal taking captive of

the surviving Jews left in the land, scattering them throughout the 'land' promised to Abraham. The chronology fits well- the beast briefly dominates the land, the majority of Jews living there are killed, a remnant remains, who are stamped underfoot whilst Jerusalem likewise is trodden underfoot, and this leads to their repentance and therefore the return of the Lord Jesus to save them from the IS. It's worth noting that the word "remnant" is used repeatedly of the remnant of Judah who were in captivity in Babylon at Daniel's time and the remnant of them who returned to the land. This would've been how his first audience naturally understood the term- referring to Jewish people who had been taken out of their land by their neighbours (Ezra 3:8; 4:3,7,9; 6:16; Neh. 10:28; 11:1,20; Esther 9:16 "the remnant of the Jews that were in the king's provinces").

Then shall come to pass the word of Zech. 12:8: "He that is feeble among them [s.w. Dan. 11:41 about how many in the land of Israel will be overthrown or made feeble] in that day shall be as David". The suggested allusion is to David overcoming the Palestinian Goliath, who all else feared to make war with as he spoke his blasphemy against God and Israel- exactly the language of Rev. 13:4-8.

The Beasts all Exist Together

There is a clear parallel between the four winds which strove with each other upon the sea, and the four beasts who came up out of the sea. The impression is that these beasts all exist at the same time, and their conflict with each other leads to the final appearance of a beast which represents all of them; and this entity dominates the earth / land promised to Abraham, and God's people upon it. The appearance of this entity will therefore be brought about by massive conflict within the land promised to Abraham- and this is what we are seeing before our eyes. The only uniting issue between the powers in that area is a common hatred of Israel and desire to take Jerusalem. This will be the basis of the final beast arising. We can perhaps look to the development of four distinct power groups within the land promised to Abraham, giving rise to ten 'kings' or leaders, the horns of the beast, the ten toes of the image. The period of conflict between those groups could be very brief. We need not, therefore, think that the Lord's coming isn't near because we can't currently identify those four entities or ten leaders. What we are seeing before our eyes is the winds blowing on the sea, striving between the peoples of the land / earth promised to Abraham, leaving millions dead and the entire region in bitter division. And this, according to Daniel 7, will give rise to the emergence of the final entity of abuse, probably an Islamic State, likely on the pattern of the entity now known as the Islamic State.

The beast of Revelation 13 has elements of all the other beasts. And so does the fourth beast of Daniel 7. It had iron teeth and brass nails (Dan. 7:19), alluding to the brass of the third kingdom and the iron of the fourth kingdom. It had "eyes of a man" and a human eye on its horn, (Dan. 7:8,20), just as the first beast, the lion, had a human heart and stood up like a man (Dan. 7:4). The bear, the second beast, had three ribs in its mouth, representing its conquest of three other powers; the fourth beast features a little horn which conquers three other horns (Dan. 7:8). The bear also 'devoured much flesh' (Dan. 7:5); the fourth beast 'devours' the land (Dan. 7:7). The third beast, the leopard, had four heads (Dan. 7:6), rather like the fourth beast also has ten horns; and Revelation 13 explains that these are later located on seven heads. The fourth beast of Daniel 7 is therefore a composite beast; the other beasts merge into an entity which includes all of them, even though they still exist separately- for in the final Divine judgment, the fourth beast entity is destroyed, but the beasts have their dominion taken away although their lives are "prolonged for a season and time" (Dan.

7:12). This may mean that the final entity is destroyed, but the individual components of it continue to exist "for a season and time". The only other reference in Daniel to a period being "prolonged" is when the same word is used in Dan. 4:27 regarding the possibility of the king of the kingdom prolonging his life by repentance; it could be that the delay or prolonging is in order they repent. This may also explain why the first beast, representing Babylon, is pictured as having a man's heart being given to it after its wings [power] are cropped. The historical king of Babylon had a beast's heart (Dan. 4:16), but his understanding [a human heart] returned to him on his repentance (Dan. 4:34). So this feature of the first beast may be a hint at a repentance after the pattern of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 4.

The Revival of all the Beasts

On one hand, the metals of the image in Daniel 2, and the sequence of beasts which parallel them in Daniel 7, speak of a series of kingdoms in history which dominated Israel. And yet on the other hand, they must all exist in the last days, under the headship of a latter day Babylon. I suggest this will be fulfilled by the latter day entity which dominates Israel including elements of all the previous empires which dominated Israel. The other prophecies in Daniel contain more detail about these various empires in their historical fulfilment. Elements of those prophecies will therefore also have some application in a latter day sense; various characteristics of those empires will be seen in the final entity which dominates Israel. It will be not only Assyria *redivivus* but also Persia, Greece and Rome *redivivus*. This kind of thing is seen elsewhere in the Scriptures- for often Israel's enemies are described in terms of their previous oppressors, especially Egypt. Take Is. 52:4: "My people went down into Egypt to live there, and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause". It was the Egyptians who oppressed Israel in Egypt, but they are here called the Assyrian- because at Isaiah's time, the Assyrians were the threat to Judah, but they are cast by Isaiah in terms of the Egyptians of previous centuries.

Daniel 7 depicts the various metals of the image as various beasts. The final beast of the last days incorporates all the elements of the previous beasts. But her head will be Babylon, replete with a latter day Nebuchadnezzar. Note that the first three of the empires of Daniel's image had Babylon as their capital. It is appropriate that the latter day revival of the image and beast has Babylon likewise as its capital. It surely cannot be accidental that in Babylon today, "the ancient temple of Ishtar has been rebricked, replastered and whitewashed… carved into the bricks are reliefs of oxen and a mythical beast called the mushrishu, with the head of a serpent, body of a fish, front legs of a lion, and back legs of an eagle" (*Chattanooga New Free Press*, April 5, 1987). Latter day Babylon chooses to identify itself as an amalgam of beasts!

The various beasts and metals must all be in existence at the time of Christ's return in order for him to destroy them by his coming. The little stone hits the image on its ten toes- corresponding to the ten horns of the fourth beast of Dan.7. The ten horns must in a sense be in existence at the time of Christ's coming. But so also is the fourth beast, corresponding to the legs of iron- because it is at the coming of Christ that "the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (Dan. 7:11). Likewise at this same time, "the rest of the beasts… had their dominion taken away" (Dan. 7:12). The other beasts, corresponding to the earlier metals in the image, are 'alive' at the coming of Christ. Just as the image stands complete, so all the beasts are alive in order to receive judgment. The horns are presented as part of the fourth beast; their destruction is part and parcel of the fourth beast's destruction.

Daniel sees the four beasts (corresponding with the four metals of the image of Daniel 2) all come up *together* after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3),

connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25). The fact they all come up together shows that he was not only seeing a continuous historic vision. The way he sees the beast representing Babylon come up when historical Babylon at the time of the vision had already 'come up' shows it was not a historical description of those powers. The beasts all exist again in the last day, just as all the metals of the image exist together in order to be destroyed together by the Lord's return. Yet the 'traditional' interpretation of the beasts as depicting the various empires which dominated Israel in the past still holds true; the point is, the final beast incorporates elements of all those powers which once dominated Israel. It is in this sense that the whole image of Dan. 2 stands complete in the last days; the latter day Nebuchadnezzar has beneath him all the elements of Israel's previous persecutors.

Dan. 7:19 describes the fourth beast as having the iron and brass metals of the image of Dan. 2 in it. The fourth beast had feet and teeth, we are specifically told. The lion, representing the head of gold, had feet (Dan. 7:4); the bear, representing the breast of silver, had powerful teeth. The fourth beast has "claws of brass", but brass referred to the *third* empire in the sequence of empires in the parallel Daniel 2. The point being, that the fourth beast has elements of the previous beasts in it. And likewise, the final entity which dominates Israel at the time of the Lord's return in glory will have within it elements of all the previous dominators. Thus the fourth beast had all the characteristics of the other beasts. By it being destroyed through its ten horns being smitten by Christ's return, it is as if the image of Dan.2 is standing erect and complete in the last days, being hit on the ten toes (cp. the ten horns of the beast) by Christ's return.

Various Possible Outcomes

The four beasts are described as "diverse" from each other (Dan. 7:3). The Aramaic word translated "diverse" is used 21 times, and every time it distinctly means to be changed from one state to another. It is used about 'altering' a king's word (Ezra 6:11; Dan. 3:28), the face of a man being 'changed' from one appearance to another (Dan. 3:19; 5:6). The idea is not simply that there were four beasts which were different from each other; it's surely axiomatic that four different beasts are going to be different from each other. The beasts of Daniel 7 are clearly related to the metals of the image in Daniel 2; but this is not to say that the same thing is being said simply through different symbolism. That would be relatively pointless. There is an extension of the ideas and a modification of the way in which the final end [the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth] will be achieved. I have suggested in the appendix that Daniel's prophecies were conditional; a sequence of four kings could have arisen after Nebuchadnezzar, culminating in the establishment of the Kingdom on earth. Daniel's long life spanned the 70 years captivity of Judah and the reign of at least four kings; the prophets repeatedly state that the intention of that captivity was that the captives might "know that I am Yahweh"; the experience was to be God's pleading with His people to repent (Ez. 20:36). Daniel wrote his visions for others to read, indeed it is specifically mentioned that he spoke out loud the Daniel 7 vision (Dan. 7:1). The visions were part of that pleading with the captives to accept God's perspective and join in on the side of His Kingdom. But Israel, as a whole, would not. Most of them preferred the soft life in Babylon and did not return at the time of the restoration. They would not "know Yahweh" nor did they repent- instead, as Ezekiel 18 makes clear, they blamed their captivity upon the sins of their fathers being visited upon

them by an unjust God. Because of this lack of response, the possible outworking of the visions changed.

The passing of power from Babylon to the Medes could have continued according to the Daniel 2 vision; four kings could have arisen (note they are called 'kings' and not 'kingdoms' in Dan. 7:17), and the Kingdom of God would have been established at the end of the 70 years captivity. But there were delays because of the Jews' lack of response. Hence Daniel's sorrow and shock throughout the book as he saw the final outworking being delayed. Therefore the fact the beasts are 'changed' or 'altered' is seamlessly in context with this idea of delayed and recalculated outcomes of the prophecies. This would explain why the further visions of the beasts in Daniel 8 suggests that in the time of the third kingdom [the Greeks], a charismatic leader would arise [clearly having Antiochus Epiphanes in view] who would be destroyed by the coming of God's Son and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. But that scenario also didn't work out, and Antiochus Epiphanes became a prototype of the final antichrist, requiring a gap between that part of the prophecy and the last days. Perhaps this is why Daniel's first vision in Daniel 7 is of the first three beasts, and then "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast" (Dan. 7:7)- as if the vision of the first three beasts was separate to that of the fourth beast. Likewise at the end of Daniel 11, the king of the north is clearly Antiochus Epiphanes throughout the chapter; but 11:40- 12:5 clearly envisages him standing up against "Michael" and being destroyed at the time of the resurrection of the dead. This didn't happen, and so there arose a hiatus in fulfillment. This is not to say that God's word is falsified; rather is it proved ultimately true in a way which takes on board human freewill. For otherwise, the very existence of God's prophetic word would be deterministic of human behavior to an extent that human freewill is taken away by the very existence of the Divine word.

It's noteworthy that the vision of Daniel 7 is presented as seven separate visions, each introduced by the rubric "I saw" (7:2,4,6,7,9,11,13). Revelation is an expansion upon Daniel's visions, and there we find seven visions which are in turn subdivided into seven visions and some of those subdivisions even are subdivided into seven visions. Admittedly, these can be defined in various ways, but some of the more obvious ones are: 7 visions:

1) Revelation 4 - 8:1
2) Revelation 8:2 - 11
3) Revelation 12 - 14
4) Revelation 15, 16
5) Revelation 17, 18
6) Revelation 19
7) Revelation 20

The seven visions of conflict explaining the Establishment of God's Kingdom between Rev. 11:15-13:8:

1. The woman with child: the birth of Jesus, 12:1-2
2. The great red dragon: the enemy of Peace, 12:3-6
3. The war in heaven: the Cross, 12:7-12
4. The dragon, the woman, and her children: the struggle of God's people, 12:13-17
5. The seven-headed beast from the sea: the power of Rome, 13:1-4
6. The war against the saints: persecutions, 13:5-10
7. The beast and his mark: corruption of the emperor and the dragon's agents, 13:11-18

Then there are the Seven Visions of Mt. Zion, Rev. 14:1-20; the Seven Bowls of the Wrath of God, Rev. 15:1-16:21;the Seven Visions of the Fall of Babylon, Rev. 17:1-19:10 ; the Seven Visions of Recompense, Rev. 19:11-21:5.
The point is that the outline scenario of Daniel 7 is repeated in more detail in Revelation. But the primary reference remains the same- a prediction of a final time of trouble within the land promised to Abraham, which will come to term in the return of Christ to earth to establish His Kingdom upon the ruins of Israel's enemies.

The Four Beasts and the Cherubim
It's apparent that the four beasts are full of allusion to the cherubim vision seen by Ezekiel- also whilst in captivity in Babylon, just as Daniel was. The cherubim were likewise four separate living creatures [beasts] which somehow were also one. The four beasts of Daniel 7 become comprehended in the fourth beast and in the one composite beast of Revelation 13, which includes all elements of the previous beasts within it. Note that the Hebrew / Aramaic for "beast" means literally a living one- the living creature of the cherubim vision. The cherubim featured the faces of lion, ox, man and eagle (Ez. 1:10), and lion, ox and eagle feature in the descriptions of the four beasts; the 'man' element is found in that the lion has the heart of a man, and the little horn of the fourth beast has the eyes of a man. The first living creature has wings which are lifted up from the earth (Dan. 7:4)- which is precisely the language of the cherubim wings being lifted up from the earth in Ez. 1:19,21; 10:16,19. As the first beast is made to stand on its feet (Dan. 7:4), so the cherubim caused Ezekiel to stand on his feet (Ez. 2:2; 3:24). The second creature had a "side" which was "lifted up" (Dan. 7:5), as the cherubim likewise had 'sides' which were 'lifted up' (Ez. 1:8,20). The third beast had four wings as each of the living creatures / cherubim did (Dan. 7:6; Ez. 1:23). The first and fourth beasts / living creatures have feet (Dan. 7:4,7) as the cherubim do (Ez. 1:7). The description of how these living creatures / beasts will be judged by the Lord Jesus includes language also used in Ezekiel's cherubim visions- One seated upon a throne, wheels of burning fire (Dan. 7:9).

Ezekiel's vision was surely well known to Daniel. The connection is surely that throughout the course of human history, especially the course of Gentile domination of the land of Israel, the glory of God shone through it all, it was all going according to His purpose; and the various beasts were in fact manipulated by the living creatures of the Angel cherubim. Daniel 7 says this in different terms by opening with the statement that the four spirits / Angels of Heaven were responsible for the uprising of the four beasts (Dan. 7:2,3). Events were not just taking their course, with everything spinning out of control; but rather, God through the Angels was powerfully in control. And His glory shone through the apparent cruelty, shame and randomness of the events that appeared to be happening to His land and people.

The great comfort is that these four beasts are reflected in Hos. 13:7,8, where God threatens that *He* will be to Israel like a lion, a leopard, a bear and a wild beast. All these beasts are significant because of what they do to Israel; that is the territory and arena of their domination. But they are all acting as it were on God's behalf, like the four beasts of the cherubim. There is no radical evil, evil out of control in the cosmos, with God's people at risk from being dominated by it. God is completely in control, and even the terrible things done to Israel by the beasts are under His total control. People get hung up on evil- death, cancer, loss of loved ones, the cruelty of man and the complexities of how that affects us. The challenge of faith is to see that all these things "work together for good" for those who love God, and our eternal salvation is the final outcome.

Who is the Beast?

If we are looking for a power or ideology within the land promised to Abraham which focuses upon the destruction of Israel, then we do not have far to look. Islam explicitly encourages Moslems to attack Israel and force Jews to either convert to Israel or be killed: Consider these passages from the Hadith: "You will fight against the Jews and you will kill them until even a stone would say: Come here, Muslim, there is a Jew (hiding himself behind me); kill him" (Book 41.6981). Book 19.4366 likewise: "I will expel the Jews and Christians from Arabia and will not leave any but Muslim". The 'Arabia' here is often interpreted as the Arabian Peninsula, but that was probably not in Mohammed's perceptual geography. By 'Arabia' he meant 'the lands where the Arabs live', and that area includes Israel, inhabited as it is by several million Palestinian Arabs.

The Eclipse of the West

However we interpret the fourth beast and its horns, the point has to be accepted that it is radically different to any entity or empire which has ever dominated the earth / land of Israel before. It was "terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong... it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it" (Dan. 7:7). It is this same beast which led John in Revelation to be staggered and amazed. For such an entity to dominate Israel in the last days, the current geopolitical situation must change. The West will be powerless to stop it. The historical support of Israel by the West, and their continual involvement on the ground in the Middle East to avert catastrophe and protect their interests there... will end. This could be because of their financial collapse, or an oil / energy stranglehold over them, or the uprise of domestic forces allied with Islam which leave them powerless to get involved; or maybe they genuinely turn against Israel.

Or perhaps the beast entity is in possession of military technology, just as Goliath was, which leads to the sense that nobody can make war with this beast: "Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev. 13:4). And if 'all' that is required for peace is to let these guys have their way with Israel... well, that will be a price which will seem cheap compared to the unleashing of nuclear, germ, chemical or some other kind of technology against the West. "Who is like unto the beast?" suggests that it is felt that nobody is comparable with the beast in order to make war with it; there is a superiority of military ability which is perceived which results in recognizing that this entity cannot be challenged. The language is very much of David and Goliath. The current dependency of Israel upon military technology to maintain the upper edge over their enemies must therefore come to an end. All those scenarios are well on the way to development. Nuclear technology is already in the hands of Iran, and can spread easily to irresponsible hands. It would also be typical of Russian foreign policy to spite the West by arming the West's enemies with such technology. Without the West as the power broker in the Middle East, such an entity will surely arise. The release of the restrained horsemen on the banks of the Euphrates may refer to this restraining influence being removed (Rev. 9,16). The growth of the IS shows the potential for it, if nothing else. So the very prediction of such an entity arising in the land promised to Abraham has some radical implications for the West.

Judah’s invasion by the Babylonians is clearly a type of the latter day invasion by the Islamic entity or state. The Biblical record emphasizes Judah’s sense of betrayal, in that her lovers and friends [i.e. other nations] had not come to her aid as they had promised and as she had hoped (Lamentations is full of such language). This has its counterpart today, in that Israel depends upon the West to be the power broker deflecting any major strike against them by the Islamic powers around them. But that

factor will be removed, the promises and undertakings will not come true- because the Biblical picture is of a huge state in power over Israel without opposition.

The Horns on the Beast

The ten horns represent ten kings- the reference may be to individual leaders rather than to nations (Dan. 7:24). They arise out of the head of the beast, maybe implying they share the same overall ideology or thinking. That ideology would be that of hatred of Israel and a common desire to destroy her- which rather suggests Islam. That is the only appropriate ideology within the earth / land promised to Abraham which could be the candidate for the fulfilment of this prophetic requirement.

The overall picture presented by the descriptions of the horns is of conflict with each other, whilst at the same time dominating the earth / land of Israel. The little horn 'subdues' [to abase / humiliate / degrade] three of the horns, and according to Rev. 17:16, the ten horns hate the whore, the individual riding the beast entity, and bitterly destroy and burn her. And the fortunes of the entire entity ebb and flow- one of the wounds has a deadly wound but revives, the beast itself has a deadly wound from a sword but revives (Rev. 13:3,12,14), the beast was, is not and yet is (Rev. 17:8), and we are beginning to see this ebb and flow of the fortunes of the entity developing in the land / earth. This is precisely the picture that has more recently unfolded in the land promised to Abraham- a series of increasingly powerful and aggressive leaders and powers, morphing together *from the perspective of Israel and God's people* into a system of abuse such as has never been seen and never will be. And yet from another viewpoint, they are bitterly divided against themselves.

The tendency is to want to clearly identity each of the ten toes / ten horns of the fourth beasts, the wings of the lion, the three ribs in the mouth of the second beast, the four wings and four heads of the third beast, the three horns who are plucked up by the little horn of the fourth beast, and then in Revelation we have seven heads found on the beast, as well as the ten horns, who in Revelation "hate the whore" and burn her; and the whore who rides the beast sits on seven hills or kings. Each of these attributes [toes, horns, wings, heads] refer to kings / kingdoms. Looking at the scenarios through half closed eyes, as it were, not sweating the details, we have the impression of a latter day entity dominating the earth / land promised to Abraham, which is comprised of a bewildering array of smaller powers and charismatic leaders who are often pitted against each other. This is exactly the position we see developing in that geographical area. We don't need to interpret the fine details ahead of time- that is not how prophecy functions. When it all happens, then it will be clear. What we are seeing is the general picture developing- an array of aggressive powers, some strong and some weak, broadly grouped into four groups, matching the four beasts who will exist in the last days. They are all united around a desire to dominate Israel. It's not hard to imagine how they will destroy each other, which is God's preferred method of judging His people's enemies.

The Little Horn

The changing of times and laws by the antichrist figure of Dan. 7:25 sounds like the radical Islamist desire to impose the Islamic calendar and *sharia* law in the land promised to Abraham, which they see as their caliphate; and for sure, if Israel becomes part of an Islamic state, then the keeping of the Jewish calendar will be outlawed. The implementation of *sharia* law and changing legal structures to reflect it, is a major theme in their program. It's clear that the three and a half year domination of Jerusalem and changing of the Jewish law and calendar had an initial fulfilment in the abuses of Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated the temple. There was a three and a half year period from the edict of Antiochus in June 168 BC to the

rededication of the temple in December 165 BC. The little horn of Daniel 8 comes out of the Greek kingdom, but the horn of Daniel 7 out of the fourth kingdom. I suggest that this is because the prophecy could have been fulfilled totally at the time of Antiochus- Messiah could have come and destroyed him. But the various required preconditions weren't met, and so there was another possibility of it coming true out of the Roman kingdom [another possibility is that the four beasts and metals refer to Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece rather than Babylon-Medo Persia-Greece-Rome]. Revelation uses the same imagery to describe the antiChrist of the last days, who will incorporate some elements of the previous historical fulfillments of the little horn in men like Antiochus Epiphanes.

Dan. 7:1 *In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon*- This was about 10 years before the fall of Babylon. As with all Bible prophecy, there was a short term initial fulfilment which guaranteed that the larger picture would likewise finally come true. We discussed on Dan. 2 how the initial possible fulfilment of the image was in the immediate Babylonian dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar. But Nebuchadnezzar's descendants failed to have his final humility before the things of God's Kingdom, as Dan. 5 makes clear to Belshazzar. And so now the kaleidoscope turns, and the elements align to produce another possible picture- that after Babylon arises another empire. Thus Dan. 7:1 locates the vision at the beginning of the reign of Belshazzar, who is presented in Dan. 5 as the last king of Babylon. Dan. 8 shows how yet another sequence was possible, with the Kingdom of God being established at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Daniel had a dream on his bed: then he wrote the dream and told the conclusion of the matters- The entire vision of the beasts of Daniel 7 is summed up in Dan. 7:1: "the *rosh* of the words" (AV "sum of the matter"). And the *rosh* surely refers to the individual of Ezekiel 38:2 who will lead the latter day armies against Israel. The whole system of beasts is summed up in an individual *rosh* or leader, just as the metals of the image in Daniel 2 are in the form of a man with the face of Nebuchadnezzar. The little horn of Daniel 7 is actually called "the beast": "I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (Dan. 7:11).

Dan 7:2 *Daniel spoke and said, I saw in my dream and, behold, the four winds of Heaven broke forth upon the great sea*- This again is a deconstruction of Babylon's religion; the Enuma Elish describes the god of Babylon, Bel (or Marduk) using four winds to destroy sea monsters and become god of gods. This narrative is subverted so that Yahweh is to be recognized as God of all gods.

Nebuchadnezzar 'saw' the image, or literally, he had a vision of it (Dan. 2:26,31,34,41,43,45). The same word is used in Daniel 7 of how now *Daniel* 'saw' or 'had a vision of' the four beasts (Dan. 7:1,2,4,6,7,9,11,13,21). The Daniel 7 vision or 'seeing' was perhaps from God's perspective, Heaven's view of the same realities which Nebuchadnezzar saw from an earthly perspective. There are many verbal similarities, as well as the general outline similarity between the four kingdoms. Thus the intention of the Daniel 2 image was to show how God 'sets up kings' who 'rise up' (Dan. 2:21,31,39), and the same word is used of how both the lion and the bear are 'set up' or 'raised up' (Dan. 7:4,5); indeed, all four beasts "are four kings which shall arise out of the earth" (Dan. 7:17).

Quite simply, God is behind all these beasts. They are raised up and destroyed by Him. He is in control, no matter how scary they appear. This is why all four of the

beasts are alluded to in Hos. 13:7,8, a passage which alludes to all of them- lion, leopard, bear and general "beast": "I became like a lion to them, like a leopard beside the road I will lurk. I will meet them like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will rip apart their heart's enclosure. And I will devour them there like a lion, as a beast of the field would mangle them".

The situation here clearly alludes to that at creation. Darkness covered the deep, and the wind / Spirit of God swept over the waters- resulting in creation (Gen. 1:2). Daniel at night in the darkness sees the same thing. And out of this work of the wind / Spirit, there arise beasts (Gen. 1:20,21,24,25,28,30; 2:7,19,20) just as there do throughout Daniel 7. Man was given dominion over the things thus created (Gen. 1:26-28), and in Dan. 7 the "son of man" ends up having "dominion" over the beasts that have arisen. The simple takeaway is that God is over the arising of the beasts. Despite the wickedness and freewill decisions of evil men, God is the creator of it all. And all those beasts, kings and empires arose in order to judge Israel for their sins. As the prophets repeatedly teach, this was all of God. Scary and powerful as those entities were, they were created by God, made to arise from the water covered land / earth, just like the natural beasts of the field had arisen. God is repeatedly presented as the creator of "evil" in the context of the judgment of His people (Is. 45:5-7). All this is why I don't vote and take a laid back approach to human politics, as we see God raising and deposing leaders and empires.

Dan 7:3 *Four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another*- This again is a subversion of the entire narrative of Babylon, for the walls of the Ishtar Gate were decorated with identical great beasts, who were said to defend Babylon. They would all come to their end before Israel's God. The nations represented by the beasts come from the *earth*, the *eretz* or land promised to Abraham (:17). The imagery of the sea may therefore simply be because there is a deconstruction going on- as explained on :2, the god of Babylon was supposed to have dominated the monsters of the sea in order to become the supreme god.

Wild beasts were the threatened punishment upon Israel for their sin. So we are to expect the dominion of these beasts to be over the land and people of Israel. And this is what the metals of the image of Dan. 2 speak of likewise- dominion over the earth / land of Israel. Indeed, the ancient world often spoke of the arising of beasts as punishment for breaking a covenant (evidence provided in G.W. Buchanan, *The Book of Daniel* p. 167). And Israel had broken covenant; and these were the judgments to come upon them. The point is, the dominion of these beasts was to be over Israel; that is the focus of the vision, not Europe nor the rest of the planet.

Daniel saw this vision at the very end of the Babylonian empire, in the reign of Belshazzar (:1), whom Dan. 5 presents as the last king of Babylon. But he sees the beasts, including the first beast [which is clearly based upon historical Babylon] arising from the sea. Yet Babylon had already arisen at the time of the vision, and was waning in power. This underlines the fact that the essential fulfilment of this vision is in the last days, for all the beasts exist together then just as all the metals in the image exist, to be broken by the Lord's return. Whatever historical fulfillments there were, the vision speaks of entities arising in the very last days to abuse God's people and be destroyed by the coming of His Son.

The four beasts are "diverse from one another" (Dan. 7:3), just as the four metals of the image of Daniel 2 do not naturally bond with each other. The four beasts are controlled by four spirits in Heaven who 'strive' with each other (Dan. 7:2). God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7). Each of those kings or empires had a

representative Angel in Heaven. It's not that the Angels themselves strive with each other, they are all obedient to God (see my *The Real Devil* chapter 2 http://www.realdevil.info/2-1.htm) but they play out before the court of Heaven the situation on earth. Later in Daniel we find Angels likewise representative of kings and kingdoms (Dan. 10:13,20). The comfort is that God is aware of all that happens on earth, and in fact He orchestrates it. The situation on earth is therefore not ultimately spinning out of control. My point in this context is that the four beasts strive with each other and do not naturally bond with each other. This is the same situation as we find in the feet and toes made part of iron, part of clay, mixed with each other but not cleaving to each other. Just as the image stands erect in the last days in order for it to be destroyed, so the sequence of beasts which we have in Daniel 7 are not simply a historical outline of a sequence of empires. Each of them exists in some form in the last days, and are united together in their brief domination of the earth / land promised to Abraham. The first three beasts stand 'before' the fourth one, the original meaning 'in the presence of', rather than previously in chronological terms (Dan. 7:7). The fourth beast has its body destroyed, although the other beasts are also present there and have their lives prolonged "for a season" (Dan. 7:11,12). The historical interpretation of the beasts is not irrelevant, however. The final entity dominating Israel will incorporate aspects of all the previous systems which have dominated the land promised to Abraham.

Daniel sees the four beasts (having similarities with the four metals of the image of Daniel 2) all come up *together* after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3), connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25).

The four beasts are described as “diverse” from each other (Dan. 7:3). The Aramaic word translated “diverse” is used 21 times, and every time it distinctly means to be changed from one state to another. It is used about ‘altering’ a king’s word (Ezra 6:11; Dan. 3:28), the face of a man being ‘changed’ from one appearance to another (Dan. 3:19; 5:6). The idea is not simply that there were four beasts which were different from each other; it’s surely axiomatic that four different beasts are going to be different from each other. The beasts of Daniel 7 are clearly related to the metals of the image in Daniel 2; but this is not to say that the same thing is being said simply through different symbolism. That would be relatively pointless. There is an extension of the ideas and a modification of the way in which the final end [the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth] will be achieved.

Whilst the beasts of Dan. 7 and the metals of Dan. 2 are related, there are significant differences. There is not a one for one alignment between the two visions; that would be rather pointless. The vision of the metals in Dan. 2 doesn't precisely map out onto the beasts of Dan. 7. In Dan. 2, all four kingdoms are utterly destroyed simultaneously by the stone (Dan. 2:35,45). But in the vision of the four beasts, only the fourth beast is killed; the first three beasts have their empire / dominion taken away but themselves continue to live (Dan. 7:12). Dan. 2 stresses the weak and mixed nature of the final kingdom (Dan. 2:40-43). But Dan. 7 emphasises a progression of kings [horns] within the fourth kingdom and describes one particularly terrifying king. The fourth kingdom is observed by Daniel to be radically different to all the others (Dan. 7:7,8,19-25). The Dan. 2 image has no mention of ten entities or kings at the end, nor of anyone equivalent to the "little horn". If the idea was that these beasts arose one after the other, surely this would have been stated. Without that clarification we are surely left to assume that they arose together at the same time.

Likewise, the sequence of Dan. 8 [Medo-Persia, Greece, Little horn, Kingdom of God] is shorter than that of Dan. 7 [four beasts starting with Babylon, horns, little horn, Kingdom of God]. Which in turn is shorter than the sequence of Dan. 2, which has four empires starting with Babylon and then a weak entity of iron mixed with clay, leading to the Kingdom of God. The focus of Dan. 7 is largely upon the fourth beast and little horn, whereas Dan. 2 doesn't give this emphasis. The two feet are mentioned in Dan. 2 but not ten toes. In the initial possible application to Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty, there was no feature of "ten" at the end of it. Just the co-regency of Nabonidus and Belshazzar, the two feet. But in the later re-interpretation, we are left to deduce that the ten toes could be the ten horns of the fourth beast in Dan. 7. Although the weakness of the feet in Dan. 2 is not a theme found in the parallel in Dan. 7; there was a reinterpretation and extension of the 'ten toes' in Dan. 7.

It could even be argued that although the empires of Dan. 7 do have some similarities with the kings and empires of Dan. 2, the Dan. 7 beasts are totally different entities which shall exist specifically and only in the last days, at the moment when the Lord comes and establishes God's Kingdom. The four beasts apparently arise together, at the same time (Dan. 7:3); the entire vision of Dan. 7 would then be solely about the situation in the very last days before God's Kingdom is established on earth. Whereas the entities in Dan. 2 arise one after the other. And that is the whole purpose of that vision. We learn in Dan. 7:7 that the fourth beast stamps upon "the residue", i.e. the others, the other three beasts, who are therefore existing at the same time as the fourth beast. Those entities do not destroy or succeed one another, like the kingdoms do in Dan 2; but are trampled on by the fourth beast. "The residue", i.e. 'the rest' of the beasts, again feature in :12: "As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time". These statements are stubborn problems for any continuous historical interpretation of the beasts. The fourth beast is presented in Revelation as an entity that specifically arises and exists in the very last days. It is not an entity that historically existed for centuries in some form. This approach certainly solves other stubborn problems which arise if we insist on seeing the entities of Dan. 7 as merely parallel to those in the image of Dan. 2. Dan. 7:17 states clearly that "These great animals, which are four, are four kings, who shall arise out of the land". Clearly this is at some time future to when Daniel had this vision (:1), decades after the vision of Dan. 2. The first beast was yet to arise. But if this is paralleled with the "head of gold" then this becomes problematic. For Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon had already arisen, Nebuchadnezzar was long dead and Babylon was about to fall. So it seems also legitimate to take an entirely latter day view of the beasts, incorporating as they do elements of the previous entities that had dominated Israel seen in Dan. 2. This obviates all the difficulties in trying to force history into compliance with these prophecies, as we see in the vain attempts to find 10 horns on the Roman empire. All this would explain why Daniel was so grieved that he didn't understand the vision of Dan. 7; whereas he had been given the interpretation of that of Dan. 2. He clearly saw the events of Dan. 7 as different to those of Dan. 2, which he apparently did understand. For "understanding" had been given unto him of the Dan. 2 vision. This approach however is just one possible turn of the kaleidoscope; for the relevance to Greece and Antiochus is too exact to deny. But when this didn't lead to the re-establishment of God's Kingdom, thanks to the arrogant, legalistic, unspiritual nationalism of God's people, then the kaleidoscope turned again. And quite possibly this totally latter day interpretation comes into view. These aren't all just possible interpretations; they are possibilities that really could have brought about the establishment of God's

Kingdom. One after another, the human factors failed. Cyrus wasn't the Messiah he could have been, neither was Zerubbabel, neither was Judas Maccabeus. And Israel crucified Jesus their Messiah when He came. But still God's final saving purpose will succeed, even if it takes more time. "For at the time of the end shall be the vision" (Dan. 8:17) would suggest that the things of the little horn etc. have their main fulfilment at the very end, before the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, and not in any other time historically.

I suggest these differences of interpretation reflect the different scenarios that were possible. Just as in our lives, there have been so many possible scenarios. Our failure to take the path we were meant to didn't mean the end of our relationship with God. It meant that one possible set of potential futures didn't happen. Both on the level of individuals and geopolitics, we see God striving by all means to make something work, inexorably leading towards His final plan of salvation in His Kingdom.

There is so much repetition of behaviour and patterns of behaviour and judgment in the book of Daniel. Thus Belshazzar's behaviour in desecrating the things of Yahweh's temple was to be repeated in that of the little horn. That doesn't make the little horn Belshazzar. And so it would be in line with this if the entities of Dan. 7 are not the same as those of Dan. 2, but they followed the patterns seen experienced with those entities.

7:4 *The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings-*

We have noted on Dan. 6 how the king's lions were tamed and under Yahweh's total control, and His man walked fearlessly with them. Now we find that the first of the beasts is a lion. The connection is clear- that somehow God's true people will be ultimately preserved. The bas reliefs show that the kings of Babylon and Assyria claimed to have hunted and killed wild animals before their coronations. In Dan. 7, we see God ultimately overcoming the wild animals and then being enthroned over the world for ever.

The initial reference is to Nebuchadnezzar, who is described as an eagle during his madness (Dan. 4:30). We note the LXX of Dan. 4:30 "My hairs became like an eagle's wings and my nails like a lion". In his humiliation, it's as if his eagle's wings were clipped and he was left just with the claws of an eagle.

Both lion and eagle are symbols of Babylon (Jer. 49:19-22 cp. Lam. 4:19; Hos. 8:1; Hab. 1:8). They are also associated with Islam; Ali, Mohammad's son in law, is called "The lion of God, always victorious". The plucking of the wings could refer to Nebuchadnezzar's loss of power. Jer. 49:19-22 specifically calls Nebuchadnezzar the lion, and his soldiers the eagles. The primary potential fulfilment of the vision was in matching the four metals of Daniel 2, which spoke primarily of four *kings* rather than kingdoms which were to arise. A lion with eagles' wings would have appeared like a sphinx, a monster assumed to be a demonic being. The point is that all that was considered demonic and radically evil was all the same under Divine control and manipulation; there is no radical evil in creation. This is why the New Testament uses the language of demons when describing the Lord's miracles, which clearly showed that whether or not demons actually exist, they are of no power compared to God.

I saw until its wings were plucked- Maybe a reference to the mental illness of Nebuchadnezzar, or the decline of the empire after his death. I have suggested several times on Dan. 2-6 that the various monarchs had the opportunity to repent and restore the Jews, and to resign their own kingdoms under the Kingdom of God they were allowing to be re-established in the form of the kingdom of Judah. But they all failed

in this. The lifting up of the plucked lion would therefore refer to how after Nebuchadnezzar's final repentance, the kingdom could have been lifted up and glorified. Whether or not Nebuchadnezzar maintained his repentance to the end of his days we don't know, but his kingdom and successors didn't. And so their kingdom likewise had to fall.

The plucking of the wings could refer to how Lydia, Media, and Persia cast off Babylonian rule and appointed their own kings. Or maybe to how after Nebuchadnezzar, there was no farther extension of the Babylonian empire under the subsequent, weaker, rulers.

And it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand on two feet as a man; and a man's heart was given to it-

"It was lifted up" just as the bear "was raised up" (:5) and "dominion was given" to the leopard (:6). True to the message of Dan. 2, human power and prowess is all ultimately given by God. Although there is no specific definition of the power lifting up, raising up and giving dominion, it is clearly God. His is the higher hand in human life, over and above human freewill. And this mighty hand is willing to work in our lives through the Spirit, if we are open to it. The first three beasts are all natural animals that have something added to it which doesn't belong by nature. The lion and leopard have wings, the bear was strangely raised up on one side. This simple observation reflects again the higher hand of God in human life, over and above the natural.

LXX "stood on human feet"; the feet were changed from paws to human feet. We should note that Daniel was likewise raised to his feet as a sign that his self abasement had been acceptable with God (Dan. 8:18 "he took hold of me, raised me to my feet"). So it was with Nebuchadnezzar. His repentance and humiliation made him man as God intended. A psychological miracle was performed upon that man. Having the mind of a man is what God seeks from all men, and will finally be achieved in all those who are in His Kingdom: "Let the nations know that they are men" (Ps. 9:21).

Nebuchadnezzar started as a man, but was made as an animal, so that he might become "a human" again, but man as God intended: "Let his mind be changed from that of a human, and let the mind of an animal be given to him" (Dan. 4:16). But Dan. 7 presents Nebuchadnezzar before his conversion as an animal; a lion with eagles' wings. The 'human mind' he then had was in fact that of an animal. Those wings are plucked and he is given a man's heart- he is transformed from an animal to a man; a true man. The first beast of Dan. 7 was "lifted up from the ground" so it could stand on two feet as a man. No longer a four footed lion.

Nebuchadnezzar in his days of madness would have been similar to a middle aged man in a psychiatric ward, sectioned and identifying as an animal, with wild frightened eyes and a diagnosis well beyond any human cure through therapy or medication. Yet the power of the Holy Spirit is such that in this case, such a person had a spiritual awareness deep within them. And when this was responded to, God did the greatest psychological miracle of the Old Testament. He healed that tormented mind, and made that man the world's most powerful ruler. And despite the man's awful sins and blasphemy, God sanctified and eternally saved him. We have for all time a parade example of how God can psychologically transform a person and save them. Human psychology and psychiatry never totally cured anyone. At best a few symptoms were partially relieved. No psychotropic medication, no course of therapy, can radically transform. Only God's Spirit can. And here we have the parade example.

The lifting up from the earth / ground may simply mean that this beast becomes like a man. The first beast, representing Babylon, had "the heart of a man". It was the embodiment of an individual person- Nebuchadnezzar. The latter day Babylon likewise will be centred around a person- the antiChrist figure of the last days, who in turn will profess to be the incarnation or embodiment of the false prophet Mohammed. What happened here is the reverse of what happened to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:16,33). It could be that we have here a potential prophecy, of what could have happened after Nebuchadnezzar's repentance after his years of mental illness, living as a beast. The beasts are represented as having human features because like the metals of the image, the primary possibility of the prophecies was that Nebuchadnezzar would be followed by a series of kings rather than kingdoms, which would climax in the revelation of Messiah and the re-establishment of the Kingdom. That didn't happen, but it was the potential, which Judah's spiritual indolence disallowed.

Nebuchadnezzar in his madness became as a beast- with a body like a beast, hair like an eagle, and nails like those of a beast (Dan. 4:33). This language is all used about the beasts in the later prophetic parts of Daniel's prophecy. They had features of eagles (Dan. 7:4), bodies of beasts (Dan. 7:11), and remarkable nails or claws (Dan. 7:19). Nebuchadnezzar became like such a beast because the latter day beast would be the embodiment of him, just as the image of Daniel 2 had the face of Nebuchadnezzar and was in the form of a man. The beast is epitomized by a man- "the number of the beast...is the number of a man" (Rev. 13:18).

Note that Nebuchadnezzar personally was the head of gold, and so we can understand this first beast as Nebuchadnezzar or at least, Babylon at his specific time. It is Nebuchadnezzar who is described as an eagle (Dt. 28:49-53; Lam. 4:19; Ez. 17:1-5,11-14; Hab. 1:6-8) and lion in his attack upon Judah (Is. 5:25-30; Jer. 4:6,7,13; 25:9,38; 49:19,22; 50:17,44).

Dan 7:5 *Behold, another beast, a second, like a bear; and it was raised up on one side*- "On one side" could refer to how Cyrus arose on the borders of Chaldea, and in this way the bear positioned itself to attack the lion [Babylon]. But probably better is GNB "like a bear standing on its hind legs", making it have an element of Nebuchadnezzar, who likewise we have just read stood on his feet like a man rather than as an animal (:4). The original could mean "half crouching", or standing on its hind legs, ready to pounce in attack. The historical application could be to the Medes arising and then the Persians, hence it appears to have two sides to it.

And three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth: and they said thus to it, Arise, devour much flesh- "Arise" is a command to the beast to stand up as a man, on two feet; to perhaps repent and become fully human as Nebuchadnezzar did (see on :4). Whether it does arise as commanded isn't recorded. Just as we will not read whether the first three beasts are destroyed or not; we are only told that the fourth beast is destroyed, whilst the others have their lives prolonged for an undefined period. As noted on :4, these beasts are all epitomized in a man, the latter day antiChrist figure who is based upon Nebuchadnezzar. The "three ribs", the remnant of other beasts devoured by this beast, encourage it to stand up as a man and devour even more flesh; to do to others, as had been done to them. The three ribs could refer to the conquering of Lydia, Egypt and Babylon by Medo-Persia; or to the three great Assyrian cities of Nineveh, Calah, and Resen which they sacked. But it's hard to understand how their remnants encouraged Medo-Persia to devour others. The relevance to Lydia, Egypt and Babylon was therefore but a primary fulfilment; the vision, like that of Daniel 2, speaks primarily of the last days, in the same way as the entire image of Dan. 2 [the

basis of Dan. 7] stands complete in the last days. Or the three ribs may refer to Nebuchadnezzar, his son and his son' son, the three generations that ruled Babylon according to Jer. 27:7.

Jer. 51:27-29 describes how God stirs up four nations against Babylon. One was Media, the other three were the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. These were all taken over by Media. Jer. 51:11 and Is. 13:17 speak of how God "stirred up" the Medes against Babylon, and Is. 21:2 commands Media to besiege Babylon. This Divine stirring up and command is referred to in this "Arise, Devour much flesh". The beast is in the process of eating- it has ribs in its mouth and is being commanded to eat. This would refer to the Medes about to devour Babylon. For this vision is in the first year of Belshazzar (:1), and he only reigned for three years before being overthrown by Darius the Mede. And yet if we turn the kaleidoscope and see a latter day application, all these beasts are to devour God's people and land. These four beasts are reflected in Hos. 13:7,8, where God threatens that *He* will be to Israel like a lion, a leopard, a bear and a wild beast. Israel's enemies are often likened to such wild animals. All these beasts are significant because of what they do to Israel; that is the territory and arena of their domination in the image of Daniel 2.

We can also translate as it having three ribs between it's teeth. These would connect with the idea of three horn kings who would pass away which we will meet later. The three Medo Persian kings we are told of in the Bible are Cyrus, Ahasuerus and Darius. This has the advantage of an interpretation which requires only a knowledge of Biblical history.

The clear initial reference of the little horn to Antiochus Epiphanes [especially when we connect it with the little horn of Daniel 8] means that one possible sequence was Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece. "The order of Medes and Persians as the second and third kingdoms is supported by the sequence of kings in Daniel 6 and by their pairing in Dan 5:28. Furthermore, in Dan 8:3, the two-horned ram represents the kings of Media and Persia, with the latter appearing afterwards and larger".

Dan 7:6 *After this I saw, and behold, another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it-*

Daniel sees one vision in :1-6 of four beasts arising but only three of which he describes. He then sees another night vision, beginning in :7, of the fourth beast. Why? In Dan. 8 we are presented with a scenario whereby the Kingdom of God could have been established in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, at the end the Greek empire. That possibility didn't happen. And so the kaleidoscope turned and the possibility of a fourth entity became the next potential reality. That is why there are two visions here. In the first, there are four beasts but only three are described, the vision ending with the third beast of Greece. But then in the second vision, from :7 onwards, we have a vision specifically of the fourth beast, its' horns and little horn.

The four wings may refer to the four winds, one for each of the "four corners of the earth" (Ps. 104:3; Zech. 2:6). Cyrus described himself as "'king of the four corners of the earth... Sin, the light of heaven... gave into my hands the four corners of the earth". The four heads would then be the four kings of Persia we are informed of in Dan. 11:2 ["there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth..."]: Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius and Xerxes.

The four heads could suggest a looking to expand in all directions. The historical application would be to the kingdom which succeeded Babylon. But I have explained that just as the image of Dan. 2 stands complete in the last days, so all the beasts likewise exist on the eve of the Lord's return (:12). They can refer to different aspects

of the latter day entity which dominates the land promised to Abraham. The fact Daniel saw them successively arise is on one level just the furniture of the vision, and doesn't have to mean that there will be a chronological sequence of entities in the last days. There will be an element of four wings and heads in this particular manifestation of the latter day beast.

Historically, the leopard could refer to the lightning speed of the Persian troops, if the bear is understood as Media. The four heads / wings would then refer to the first four Persian kings, from Cyrus to Xerxes. Or it could refer to the lightning speed of the Greek ascendancy to power in the region under Alexander the great and his four generals, Ptolemy, Seleucus, Philip, and Antigonus; who may each be represented by the four wings and heads. Unless the generals are represented by the heads, and the wings speak of the four divisions of the Greek empire: Greece, Western Asia, Egypt, and Persia / India. The problem with all these historical interpretations is that they fail to meet the required criteria- that the vision of the beasts, like that of the image in Dan. 2, concern domination of the *eretz* promised to Abraham and not areas far outside of it such as Greece and India. The similarities are at best vague, and the main fulfilment will become clear in the latter domination of the *eretz* by an entity which includes all these previous elements. It should also be remembered that in Rev. 17:13, horns represent kings, and heads represent mountains or kingdoms. Whether the four heads can represent Persian kings or parts of the Greek empire is therefore questionable, especially as the Greek conquests were not established as kingdoms under a king. The decorum of the symbolism requires that the wings and the heads are different in their meaning; four wings would suggest two pairs of wings. It may simply be allusive to the double winged beasts which were the classic symbols of Babylon and Assyria, as if to say that there were elements of their abuse of Israel in this beast.

"Dominion was given unto it" would clearly refer to the lightning speed of Alexander's victories, within a few years conquering from Greece to India, defeating 600,000 Persians with only 30,000 men etc.

Dan 7:7 *After this I saw in the night visions, and, behold, a fourth beast, awesome and powerful, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces*- This is what the little stone of Dan. 2:34,45 does. This entity tries to execute judgment which only God should, and which He will do in the return of His Son to earth. This playing God is a significant factor in the judgment of these latter day entities.

The beast will "devour" the land (Dan. 7:7), just as the historical Babylon 'devoured' Jerusalem with fire (Jer. 30:16; Lam. 4:11; Ez. 15:5; 19:12; 23:25; Hos. 8:14; Am. 1:4; 2:5) and the Assyrians devoured the land (Jer. 50:17; Hos. 11:6; 13:8; Joel 1:4,19,20; 2:3,5,25). All these verses use the same word translated 'devour' in Dan. 7:7. Clearly enough, the 'devouring' of the fourth beast is a summation of all previous 'devourings' of God's land and people. Even in Old Testament times, this idea of a singular beast embodying all Israel's enemies was not unknown. For Ez. 34:28 looked forward to the day when "Neither shall the beast of the land devour them [any more]". Mal. 3:11 likewise speaks of how "the devourer" will be rebuked by God when finally Israel respond to the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:1). This again suggests that the final devouring of Israel will be whilst the Elijah prophet is making an ongoing appeal for their repentance and acceptance of Jesus. Once they do so, the devourer is rebuked and Jesus returns to His desperately repentant people.

The beast stamps on others (Dan. 7:7); the same word is used for how Egypt did this to God's people and others within the land promised to Abraham (Ez. 32:2). Although Egypt doesn't figure in the sequence of metals in the image of Daniel 2, the beast incorporates aspects of all Israel's previous dominators- and they include Egypt. We can therefore expect the beast entity to include features of Nazi, Catholic and other historical persecutors of God's people, even though those entities weren't part of the Daniel 2 image. This is why the historical interpretations of 666 and the beast which apply them to Nero's Rome and various Catholic persecutions are not *per se* incorrect. They were true for their time. But the final persecuting entity will include them all within what it is and what it does.

And stamped the residue with its feet: and it was diverse from all the beasts that preceded it; and it had ten horns- This beast was a composite beast, including the elements of the former beasts. It would have appeared very similar to Marduk, god of Babylon. Just as the image of Daniel 2 stands complete in the last days, headed up by a latter day Nebuchadnezzar, so this final beast is Babylon revived.

The difference between devouring and then stamping the rest with its feet could suggest that this entity was not content merely with conquering, but destroyed [stamped upon] the rest which it could not conquer. This is hard to fit to any particular historical entity, but it complements the general impression we get of the latter day entity conquering the *eretz* of Israel and then causing destruction to the surrounding peoples. Such a scenario can easily be imagined given the current nature of things in the Middle East. The stamped bits of beast, as it were, would then correspond with the brief final part of the Dan. 2 image, a mixture of metal mixed with clay. That is how the Middle East will end up, and the Lord's return will be in judgment upon that final phase of the Dan. 2 image and the mess left by the fourth beast.

The little horn in Dan. 8 is clearly Antiochus Epiphanes in its initial application. This leads us to see the fourth beast as Greece. The ten horns in this case would refer to the ten successors of Alexander on the throne of Antioch: (1) Alexander the Great, 336–323; (2) Alexander Aegus, 323–312; (3) Seleucus I, 312–280; (4) Antiochus I, 280–261; (5) Antiochus II, 261–246; (6) Seleucus II, 246–226; (7) Seleucus III, 226–223; (8) Antiochus III, 223–187; (9) Seleucus IV, 187–175; (10) Antiochus IV Epiphanes, 175–16 ; taken from Hartman and Di Lella, *The Book Of Daniel*, p. 214.

Dan 7:8 *I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one-*

The little horn came up or 'arose' just as all the beasts arose from the sea (:3) as a result of the winds of heaven blowing on the sea. The simple takeaway is that these monstrous entities were all caused to arise by God. This is the great theme of Daniel, that human political power is given and taken away by God. All is under His control; there is no radical evil out there in the world of human geopolitics. This arising / lifting / coming up of the little horn is the antithesis of how God makes the horn of His people and Messiah to arise, e.g. "He has lifted up a horn for His people" (Ps. 148:14); "I will cause a horn to sprout for the house of Israel" (Ez. 29:21); and in Zion "I will cause a horn to sprout for David" (Ps 132:17; also Ps. 89:19-21). The little horn has "fellows" (:20), just as the Lord does (Heb. 1:9; Zech. 3:8). Likewise we wonder as to the meaning of the worst horn being "little". Possibly the connection is with the Lord coming from "little" Bethlehem (Mic. 5:1), and the little one becoming a thousand (Is. 60:22). Whilst the stone of Dan. 2:34 is not specifically called a "little stone" we can infer that we are supposed to see it as a small stone, which turns into a

huge ever growing mountain. Again we are thus led to see this horn as a fake Christ. All the horns represent men, kings, but the little horn has "eyes like the eyes of a man". Why mention this, unless the idea is that he is a fake replica of the "son of man" figure we also meet in this vision.

The little horn has points of connection with Nebuchadnezzar. His eyes are notable, just as Nebuchadnezzar lifted up his eyes to heaven. His mouth likewise spoke great things (:8), mocking the God of Israel in how he spoke to the three friends and to the Jews besieged in Jerusalem. The little horn has an especially arrogant look; the same word is used of the "sight" or look of Nebuchadnezzar in his arrogance, as a tree whose "sight" was visible to all the earth (Dan. 4:19,20). Nebuchadnezzar persecuted the saints [Judah in their land, and also the three friends] and tried to change God's times and laws (:25), as seen in his attempt to build a gold statue that changed God's statue of Dan. 2. We also see this in the fact that God's law required Him to be worshipped exclusively yet Nebuchadnezzar sought to change that. The little horn is therefore cast as a Nebuchadnezzar redivivus. "The same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them" (:21) clearly alludes to what Nebuchadnezzar did to Judah and Jerusalem. This is the sense in which the entire image of Dan. 2 is Nebuchadnezzar, headed up by him as the head of gold, and standing complete in the last days. The language of the little horn in Dan. 8:10 recalls that used of Nebuchadnezzar in Is. 14:13 "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God".

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, this appears to speak of an individual who arises, the antiChrist, who deposes others in order to establish himself as the personal epitome of the fourth beast, which in turn is the composite of all the beasts. It is this individual who faces off against the real Christ at His second coming and is judged by His appearance on earth (:9). The horn / king was "little", and the original may mean one who has been diminished. The one made little arises or 'comes up' to be the greatest, an imitation Christ. It could be that this individual has been humiliated in some previous conflict, but now arises again. This could be associated with the way the beast received a deadly wound but was healed (Rev. 13:3,12).

Before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots: and behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things- The plucking up of three horns (= kings, Dan. 7:24; 8:20; Rev. 17:12) by such a dominant individual is hard to conclusively prove as having been historically fulfilled. It has a latter day application which is yet to become clear. This individual king is as it were the personification of the beast. He arises in the last days and will be alive at the time of the Lord's return. This simply doesn't fit a Pope being given three states in Italy. The horns are kings, not kingdoms. Mountains or kingdoms are heads not horns (Rev. 17:9). The destruction of the little horn simply cannot refer to the supposed "loss of temporal power of the papacy" in 1870. This individual is destroyed by the Lord's return and not some generations previously. And he is destroyed by the Lord's return, not some European individual of bygone centuries. Nor is it reasonable to claim that the uprooting of three horns was done by the Papacy in the destruction of the Heruli, Vandals and Ostrogoths in the sixth century. What great, acute persecution of "the saints" happened after that? In any case, the Ostrogoths and the Vandals were defeated by Belisarius, a general in the army of Justinian, emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire. The Heruli were destroyed by the Lombards in 493 AD. The Lombards were Arians and not Catholic, indeed they were enemies of the papacy.

The little horn of Dan. 8:9 pushes in three directions. Possibly this matches the little horn of Dan. 7:8 uprooting three horns. "A mouth speaking great things" fits

well with Antiochus Epiphanes, who "spoke with great arrogance" (1 Macc. 1:24). The three kings he uprooted would then be King Artaxias of Armenia, Ptolemy VI Philometor and Ptolemy VII Euergetes, all of whom Antiochus defeated one after the other (in 169, 168 and 166, respectively). Or they could refer to the Selucid kings whom Antiochus Epiphanes uprooted: Seleucus IV and his sons Demetrius and Antiochus.

And yet although the little horns do the same things, there are differences between the "little horn" scenarios, comparing Daniel 7 and Daniel 8. In Dan. 7 the little horn arises from the fourth beast and is among the 10 horns which are part of that beast. In Dan. 8, the goat first has one horn, which is then broken and replaced by four horns (Dan. 8:5,7). And the little horn arises from one of them. The four horns are clearly the four kingdoms that arose out of Alexander the Great, whereas the horns in Dan. 7 are clearly individual kings or rulers. Yet again, we have different possible scenarios within God's ultimate unstoppable purpose of establishing His Kingdom on earth.

Dan 7:9 *I saw until thrones were placed, and One who was the ancient of days sat: his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames, and its wheels burning fire-*

"Were placed" is correct. "Set" or "cast down" misses the allusion to how cushions for great men were laid, not "set", but "cast down" for the great man to sit upon.

The language is that of the cherubim vision of Ez. 1. Remember that Ezekiel and Daniel were in Babylon as exiles around the same time. We note the wheels of fire; and the living creatures which are part of the cherubim. Above them there is the equivalent of this "ancient of days" figure: "and on the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man on it above" (Ez. 1:26). The idea may that the beasts of Dan. 7 are in fact to be incorporated into the cherubim vision. The four beasts of Dan. 7 are different to each other and in conflict, but the four beasts of Ezekiel's cherubim are identical and all under God's control. That was God's perspective on the apparently random time and tide of human empires. There is no radical evil, and these entities are in fact all under Divine control and will be moved and controlled to ultimately achieve His glory. But the vision of Ez. 1 was specifically to encourage the exiles in Babylon of their possible future. The cherubim were potentially hovering over them in Babylon and they could have returned to Zion with the cherubim above them, as it were, to judge all their oppressors. They precluded that possible future at the time by their refusal to repent and accept the prophetic message. But ultimately the cherubim vision of the Kingdom of God would come true when the scenario of Dan. 7 was worked out. Daniel perceived the idea of God prolonging and delaying the final restoration, in that in Daniel 9 he begs that God will not in fact delay; for the visions of Dan. 7 and Dan. 8 all spoke of a delay in the restoration compared to his time. He was heard in that an Angel was caused to fly swiftly, implying a speeding up of the Angelic processes; but still the delay remained in place because despite that, Israel refused to adequately repent.

There is an abrupt change from the earthly realities of :8, which are recorded in prose, to this poetic [in Aramaic] description of the Divine throne and judgment. This abrupt change is intentional; to get the point over, that the situation on earth is going to be dramatically, suddenly changed by the Lord's return. The thrones were "placed" or as AV "cast down". The kings and kingdoms of men are to be destroyed by the

Lord's coming, just as the little stone destroys all the metals. The kingdoms of men become those of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 11:15). The ambiguity between 'placing / imposing' and 'throwing down' is because the placing of God's throne is upon the casting down of human thrones. The "thrones" plural may be an intensive plural referring to the one great throne, sat on by "Him" singular (:10). Or the plural may be because it is the thousands of *elohim*, the judged and persecuted people of God, who now as it were sit on the Lord's behalf to judge their persecutors.

Dan 7:10 *A fiery stream came forth from before Him*- The original for "stream" is only elsewhere used about "the river", Euphrates. Now the forces represented by that river are to be judged. But the equivalent Hebrew idea is repeatedly used for how the nations were to flow as a river to Jerusalem (Is. 2:2; 60:5; Jer. 31:12; Mic. 4:1). The harder side of God strangely attracts. As the judgments flow out of Zion, so the peoples flow towards it. When God's judgments are in the earth / land, its inhabitants come to learn righteousness (Is. 26:9).

Thousands of thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him- These are not myriads standing before Him to receive judgment, but the myriads of the seed of Abraham who now as it were sit with Him in judgment upon their persecutors. 'Standing before' is being used as a parallel to 'ministering'.

The judgment was set, and the books were opened- The Lord Jesus returns to earth with the Angels. They play a part in the final judgment. The placing of thrones (:9) and the sitting of the judgment is likely metaphor, part of the idea of the thrones / kingdoms of the world being subsumed beneath God's throne / Kingdom. I discussed on :9 that the "Him" may refer to the Lord Jesus personally, but it could be that the plural "thrones" mean that God's people now sit in judgment upon their persecutors, with their representative Angels now physically with them.

Dan 7:11 *I saw at that time because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke; I saw even until the beast was slain, and its body destroyed, and it was given to be burned with fire*- The destruction of the beast is spoken of immediately after introducing the little horn. That horn or leader is presented as the personification of the beast, the whole evil system of its day and previous generations all represented in one person. Thus the words of the horn call forth the beast's destruction; it will be the ultimate case of being condemned for the sake of words (Mt. 12:37), and the Lord applies that principle as warning to us all. The language suggests that it was the words of the horn which led to the beast's destruction. There will be teaching and claims made by the horn which are the most blasphemous ever; there was something dramatically noteworthy about them.

"The voice" is literally 'the sound', as if the words reached Heaven itself and human words triggered such a huge judgment response. So sensitive is God to our words. The implication of this verse could be that the primary reason for the judgment of the fourth beast was its arrogant and blasphemous words. We see for all time the importance of words and language. By our words men shall be judged and condemned.

There is a repeated theme of pride being the reason for the fall of the kings / empires. The ram "did as he pleased and grew arrogant" (Dan. 8:4), in turn "the goat grew more and more arrogant" (Dan. 8:8). In Dan. 8:25 The little horn "will be proud of himself", "the little horn bragging and boasting" (Dan. 7:11), "it had eyes and a mouth and was boasting proudly" (Dan. 7:20).

It is common for interpreters to see the beasts of Revelation as a continuation of the fourth beast of Daniel. But again there are differences- as the kaleidoscope turns and presents another picture, similar but still different. Thus Daniel's fourth beast is slain and destroyed (Dan. 7:11), whereas the beast of Revelation is slain and revived (Rev. 13:3,12,14). Daniel's beast is slain and given to the fire, whereas that of Revelation is thrown alive into the fire (Rev. 19:20).

Dan 7:12 *As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time*- Just as all the metals of the image exist together when the little stone [Messiah] comes to earth and destroys them, so all the beasts likewise exist together at the time of His coming. The taking away of all human dominion surely speaks of their being subsumed beneath God's eternal kingdom. But their lives bring prolonged for a period, a season [a period until a Jewish feast?] and a time [a year?], may be in order to give them the chance of repentance. The original word for "Prolonged" only occurs elsewhere in Dan. 4:27, where Daniel urges Nebuchadnezzar to repent so that there might be a lengthening or prolonging of his life. This connection should serve to guide us in interpreting this prolongation of their personal lives after their political destruction; it will be in order to help these terrible abusers of God's people to repent. Such is God's earnest desire to bring all men unto repentance, and we should share in that Spirit today. See on :5. God's desire for human repentance is so huge. This means that all our attempts to preach repentance and to personally repent will have His huge blessing and presence.

The "dominion" will be taken away in the sense that these entities have no dominion over God's people. Ez. 34:25 will then come true, when Israel accept the new covenant: "I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause dangerous animals to cease out of the land".

As discussed above, the metals of the image of Dan. 2 do not map well onto the beasts and vision of Dan. 7. The entities of Dan. 2 are all destroyed at the same time. Those of Dan. 7 are not destroyed apart from the fourth beast. Those of Dan. 2 are introduced in succession but exist simultaneously. The fate of the first three beasts isn't clear. Perhaps because of an open ended element to God's purpose with them, in one or more possible iterations of it. Perhaps some element of repentance is factored in; or some weighting is given to the fact they were merely instruments of judgment upon Judah, used in God's hands. But the glorious end is similar- the unhewn rock hits the image and becomes an eternal mountain (Dan. 2), the son of man comes in judgment in the clouds of heaven to avenge His people (Dan. 7).

"A season and a time" could simply mean 'until a specific predetermined point in time' rather than refer to any particular time period. See on :25 for discussion of how these terms don't necessarily mean a year and are open ended. Because that is the nature of prophecy. "The time" of :11 is ultimately the point when the Lord returns and establishes God's Kingdom: "for the time had come, and the holy ones took possession of the kingdom" (Dan. 7:22 NJPS).

Dan 7:13 *I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of the sky One like a son of man, and he came up to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before Him-*

One option for this human like figure is that it refers initially to Michael, the Angel prince who stands for Israel. This is why this figure is interpreted later in the vision as the "saints", Israel, God's people; it is to them that the kingdom / dominion is given, whereas here it is given to the Son of Man. But they are represented in Michael

(Dan. 12:1), and Angels in Daniel are described as being in human form. But as the kaleidoscope of the various possible interpretations turns [fulfilment in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, in AD70 and then in the last days], it becomes clearer that this element of the vision, this "Son of Man", is the Lord Jesus. This "One like a Son of Man" is the equivalent of the little stone of Dan. 2- but I showed there that the stone represents both God's revived people and also the Lord Jesus personally. It's the same with the Son of Man. And that would be why the first beast alludes to Nebuchadnezzar, who was made fully human [a "son of man"] by his repentance and subsequent exaltation.

"The sons of men" is a common term for humanity in general. The son of man is therefore an appropriate title for the essence of humanity, man in his essence. And it speaks ultimately of the Lord Jesus. Those who bring the "son of man" [Jesus] before the "ancient of days" [God] are surely the Angels. They received Him out of the sight of the disciples in Acts 1 and as it were introduced Him to Heaven. This 'coming of the Son of Man' is clearly understood as the second coming (Mt. 24:27,30,37,39 etc.). Just as at His ascension, the Lord was introduced to the Father and in the court of Heaven, given all dominion; so at His second coming He is likewise given from God the moment and authority to now take this dominion unto Himself in actual terms on earth.

Dan 7:14 *There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed-*

Verses 13 and 14 could apply to both the Lord's ascension, and to His return at the last day. I suggest the ambivalence of the interpretation is because the Lord's ascension after His resurrection could indeed have led to His re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth soon afterwards. That didn't happen, as Israel refused to repent and the Gospel wasn't taken to all the world. And so the kaleidoscope turned again, and all this became capable of fulfilment at the Lord's return in the last day. This is why the book of Revelation uses the language and images of Daniel in such a way that it applies them both to the situation in AD70 and to that of the last day. Because the Lord could indeed have re-established the Kingdom in AD70. The little horn, which was clearly Antiochus Epiphanes historically, is thus reapplied by Revelation to some latter day entity who will exist just before the Lord's return.

There was "given him..." compares with how the Kingdom is given to the saints of the Most High (:27). The triumph of the "Son of Man" is shared with His people. This is an Old Testament foretaste of what it means to be "in Christ". "All the peoples, nations, and languages" is the very term used of the subjects of the kingdoms of men within the empires of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius (Dan. 3:4,7,29,33; 5:19; 6:26). The saints of the most high become as the supreme emperor was in the kingdoms of men- they the despised, persecuted Jewish exiles, refugees and asylum seekers. A similar inversion awaits this world. This is the equivalent of the little stone becoming God's eternal Kingdom on earth in Dan. 2:44. The purpose of the Kingdom becoming God's is so that people from all nations, languages etc. should serve Him. It is not merely a taking power for the sake of it. The language here is therefore at the basis of the great commission, to even now make this same appeal to all nations. The Kingdom of God is a case of now but not yet. We proclaim it worldwide right now, in the spirit in which it shall be proclaimed at the Lord's return. Because the Kingdom is to spread world-wide, we should therefore spread the Good News of this coming Kingdom

world-wide. In prospect- and no more than that, let it be noted- the Kingdom has been established in that the Lord Jesus Christ has all power in Heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). This is the language of Dan. 7:14 concerning the future Kingdom. The believer must live the Kingdom life now, as far as possible (Rom. 13:12,13). At the establishment of the Kingdom, we will be spreading the Gospel throughout this planet. In this life too we should live in the spirit of the Kingdom in this regard.

The great commission of Mt. 28 has evident reference to Dan. 7:14, where the Son of Man is given authority and power over all *so that* people of all nations, races and languages should serve Him. We must remind ourselves that out of the 5,000 or so languages in the world, the vast majority have no true Christian representatives; and only about half of them have the Bible in their own language. And as of the year 2001, only 12% of the world have English as a first or second language. We have a long way to go in fulfilling this. Either that, or the scope of God's acceptance of men from all these languages and nations over time and over space today is far wider than we as a community have thought. However, I personally am driven instead to understand that the Truth of Christ must be taken into literally all the world by our community in these last days. Rev. 5:9 presents us with the picture of men and women redeemed from *every* kindred [tribe / clan], tongue [*glossa*- language], people [a group of people not necessarily of the same ethnicity] and nation [*ethnos*- ethnic group, lit. 'those of the same customs']. This means that, e.g., not only redeemed 'Yugoslavs' will stand before the throne in the end; but Macedonians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrans, Bosnians...every ethnic group, with every custom, will have representatives who will have believed the Truth and been saved.

Dan 7:15 *As for me Daniel, my spirit was grieved in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me-*

In Dan. 6, Daniel had been calm and at peace in the den of lions / wild animals. And had been preserved. Now he reacts to he terrifying vision. But his reaction was particularly concerning the fourth beast and little horn; and it is a reaction of grief and concern, I suggest more because of what he sensed they were going to do to God's people. This is the acme of spiritual maturity- to be deeply grieved for God's people. It was this which in essence led the Lord to endure the cross.

Daniel has so far been portrayed as the 'go to' person for dream interpretation (see Dan. 2:25-45; 4:19-27; 5:18-28). Now he has a dream and like the kings before him, was terribly worried about it and desperate for the interpretation. Life goes like this. We are made to realize how others' in our lives felt. We who were able and qualified in one area are made to understand how the unable and unqualified feel in that same area. All part of the education of the Spirit and God's way of teaching us. We tend to feel our experiences are unique but in fact they are in essence within a type of experience shared with others.

Daniel was not merely relaying a Divine message. He was deeply concerned at the content. As the Psalmist was "pricked in my reins", so the grief of Daniel for his people was deeply internal; this was no passing feeling of 'Oh what a pity it is that more won't hear the Truth'. He was grieved in the midst of his body. He had hoped for the restoration of the Kingdom of God in his lifetime; and now he feared that in fact it would be terribly delayed to well beyond his time. And he grieved for that. Even after he was given the interpretation, his spirit remained grieved (:28). So the grief was not because he didn't have the interpretation, but essentially because he figured that Israel's kingdom was not to be restored during his lifetime, and his people must yet suffer the more.

Dan 7:16 *I came near to one of those who stood by*- Presumably an Angel. He was given the vision surrounded by Angels standing by him. In :10 we read of myriads of Angels and their charges 'standing by'; Daniel was as it were transported forward in time to the day of the Lord's coming back to earth.

And asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things- We see here the basic principle, that God's truth is revealed to those who wish to know it. It is not immediately apparent; hence the Lord used parables so that those who wanted a quick obvious message wouldn't find it. But those who asked Him for the interpretation received it. This is why some find the Bible hard to understand- exactly because they do not truly seek to understand it, nor can they humble themselves to recognize that without Divine help, we cannot of itself properly understand the Divine words we read or hear.

Dan 7:17 *These great animals, which are four, are four kings, who shall arise out of the land*- They dominated the land / *eretz* from which they arose. Their provenance was from the *eretz*. They are to be understood as powers which arise from within the territory of the land promised to Abraham, and come to dominate it. This makes many of the continuous historical interpretations of the beasts at best primary fulfillments. The major fulfilment is yet to come, and the situation within the *eretz* now helps us see that this can realistically happen soon. We note the beasts were "four kings" rather than 'kingdoms'. This would look ahead to four such rulers arising in the last days. Perhaps there was a potential fulfilment in three or four kings arising after Nebuchadnezzar, climaxing in the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom; and Daniel lived through the reigns of that many monarchs. But due to lack of repentance, that scenario didn't happen. The final fulfilment is therefore in the last days. Seeing all the beasts exist together at the time of the end (:12), we need not think that there must be a chronological sequence of four leaders who arise. They are aspects of the same entity, viewed from different angles. The fact Daniel has to describe them in chronological order and saw them perhaps one after another doesn't mean that they have a chronological fulfilment. This is the tendency of Greek, linear thinking. But here we are reading Hebrew apocalyptic, which places little stress upon linear chronology.

Dan 7:18 *But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever*- Daniel would have understood these "saints" as God's people, Israel, who would be the ones persecuted in the last days by the beast system (:25). "Come inherit the Kingdom prepared for you" perhaps alludes here. The same term is used of how Darius "took the kingdom" (Dan. 5:31). Maybe even there, "the kingdom" refers to the kingdom of Israel. Because the prophetic theme in Daniel is that the various metals and beasts had dominion over the kingdom of Judah and the land promised to Abraham, and this was to be surrendered to Messiah at His appearing. Eternal possession naturally alludes to the promises to Abraham, that his seed would inherit the *eretz* for ever (Gen. 17:8; 22:17,18). That *eretz* was "the kingdom" they would eternally inherit.

"The saints of the Most High" may refer to the Angels; “the people of the saints of the Most High” (:27) would then refer to the believers, who had had guardian Angels. "The Most High" is actually plural; it could be a plural of majesty, or the most high ones would be the Angel. The term is likewise plural in :22,25,27. It would be Israel's guardian angels in view in Dan. 8:24 where "he shall destroy the mighty ones and the holy people". This is how closely connected the Angels are to their

charges. In the court of heaven, they are as it were destroyed as they act out or reflect there the situation upon earth. Dan. 7:24,25 likewise: "another king shall arise... and he shall wear down the saints of the Most High". But the parallel is clear with :14, where the heavenly "one like a son of man" is given the everlasting kingdom. He is corporately "the saints". This could refer to the Angel Michael whom we read later in Daniel represents God's people (Dan. 12:1). As we will see in Dan. 10, the conflicts and issues on earth are played out before the throne of God by representative Angels. But there is also an obvious application to the believers "in Christ" in the latter day context; and to a similar Messiah like figure in the more immediate context of an application to Antiochus Epiphanes. In that context, the "saints" would have been the faithful Israelites at the time of the Maccabean revolt. But even they were a minority and too focused on immediate nationalism than the things of the Kingdom of God.

Dan 7:19 *Then I desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast, which was so different from all of them, exceedingly terrible, whose teeth were of iron, and its nails of brass; which devoured, broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet*- The brass claws weren't mentioned in the initial description. Iron and brass were metals within the image of Dan. 2. The idea is that this beast is a composite of all the previous beasts, just as the image as a whole is a composite of all the different metals which were within it. "The residue" is literally 'the remnant' and is used of the remnant of Judah who had survived the Babylonian invasion (Ezra 6:16 "the rest of the children of the captivity"; Esther 9:16; Is. 10:20-22; 11:11,16; 28:5). But the more immediate reference in the context is to the "rest" or remnant of the previous beasts (:12 s.w.). The fourth beast tramples those who remain of the other beasts and those who remain of the Jews, and parts of them (the iron and brass) as it were stick to this fourth beast, becoming part of it. This produces the brief element of the image upon which the Lord returns- a weak mixture of clay and iron shards which has been trampled down. For breaking in pieces and trampling would be the only way to actually produce such a situation. We can expect an absolute bloodbath in the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and the scene for that is now set.

Dan 7:20 *And concerning the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, and before whom three fell, even that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spoke great things, whose appearance was more aggressive than its fellows*- This horn can be understood as Antiochus Epiphanes, and also Vespasian in AD70 (see on :24). The prophecies had various primary fulfillments over time, each of which pointed forward to the major fulfilment which is yet to come, where the latter day horn will have all the features of its previous historical incarnations. The great and blasphemous things spoken by this horn would be associated with the changing of Divine times and seasons by the same horn which we read of later.

Dan 7:21 *I saw, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them*- "The saints" can refer to both natural and spiritual Israel; natural Israel will be trampled along with many adherents to the earlier beasts (see on :19). The same word is used of Angels; those who represent God's people in the court of Heaven. The original translated "war" more carries the sense of "battle" than an ongoing war; the reference may be to the "battle" of Armageddon (Zech. 14:3 s.w.). This is the basis of Rev. 11:7; 12:17 and Rev. 13:7, where the beast makes war and prevails against God's people; but by doing so the beast effectively makes war against the Lamb, the returned Lord Jesus (Rev. 17:14; 19:19).

Here and in :22,25 the "saints" are spoken of as being destroyed and hurt by the little horn. In the sense they refer to the Jews, this judgment was because of their sins. But that is not mentioned, although in Dan. 8:12 the little horn judges the Jews "because of transgression". The perspective is very much that of final salvation. The saints or holy ones in :21,22,25 can also be seen as the Angels. Entities on earth can conquer them in the sense that the representative Angels of the saints, be they Israel or Christian believers, play out the scenes on earth before the throne of Heaven.

GNB gives: "While I was looking, that horn made war on God's people and conquered them". Daniel's desire to understand was answered by being shown something new. He saw the little horn conquering God's people. But this presupposes that Daniel saw "God's people" in the vision. For the little horn makes war with them. The only element of the vision which matches "God's people" is the picture in :10 of millions of people awaiting judgment. Those crowds of people are the only element that could match "Gods people" in what Daniel now sees. So they are attacked and conquered whilst awaiting judgment. This means that all God's people are awaiting judgment. We stand before His judgment seat, awaiting the start of the proceedings, and life happens to us as we are waiting. This gives an urgency to our living and thinking. We are awaiting judgment, standing there before the throne. Right now.

Let's not get caught up with the idea that Israel shall survive and defeat the invaders in her own strength. The beast must dominate Israel. Jerusalem will be taken. Dan. 7:7,21 speaks of how the beast made war with the saints and prevailed against them- Israel- *until* the Ancient of days came; in Dan. 7:23 he devours the whole land [as a beast] and shall tread it down. The beast of Revelation is so powerful in the earth / land that "the world" wondered at it and at the whore riding it (Rev. 13:3; 17:6,7), feeling unable to make war with it. This of itself requires the demise and degrading of America, Europe and the West generally. Dan. 11:41,45 are likewise clear about the latter day King of the North: "He shall also come into the glorious land… He shall plant the tents of his palace between the sea and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him".

Dan 7:22 *Until the ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High, and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom*- These are the same "saints" who are prevailed against in :21. I have mentioned at several points in expounding Revelation that it could well be that those of God's people slain during the final tribulation are resurrected separately, and are used to judge their latter day abusers.

Dan 7:23 *Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on the land*- The land in view is that promised to Abraham. This is parallel with the fourth power in the image vision reigning over "all the earth" or land.

Which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and shall devour the whole land, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces- In :19, the fourth beast devours, treads down and breaks in pieces "the remnant", both of Israel and of the earlier beasts, just prior to being destroyed by the Lord's return to earth. All the beasts are therefore in existence together in the last days. Any attempt to find historical fulfillments of these things is therefore doomed, and at best only vague fulfillments can be suggested. Instead of devouring persons, "the remnant", here the fourth beast devours and abuses "the whole land". This is clearly the land promised to Abraham. No very satisfying fulfilment of this can be found in the various historicist interpretations. It is the "land" which is from where the beasts arise, it is that same land where they have dominion

and are devoured by the fourth beast. It is the picture of a total bloodbath in the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham, and the scene is now set for that to happen. It is the sheer scale of the evil, aggression, torture and bloodletting which makes this final beast "different" from all others in history. The same word is used in Daniel for how the face of Nebuchadnezzar was "changed" because of the extreme wrath he felt towards the Jews (Dan. 3:19). Whilst all the beasts 'differed' from each other (:3), there was something radically different in how this beast was different to all of them (:7,19). Any attempt to apply this to historical Rome fails to account for this radical difference required by the text.

Dan 7:24 *As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise: and another shall arise after them; and he shall be different from the former, and he shall put down three kings*- Zech. 1:19-21 specifically uses the language of horns to describe those Gentile entities who had scattered Judah and were to be judged. The behaviour of the horns on the fourth beast must be understood in terms of the persecution of natural Israel, not the Christians down the centuries. Seeing the little horn that arises out of the ten horns is so similar to Antiochus Epiphanes, it would seem one reasonable interpretation to be that they refer to the number of Greek rulers over Palestine. But the events of Antiochus Epiphanes didn't lead to the re-establishment of God's Kingdom, although that was potentially possible. And so the kaleidoscope turned again, and a fulfilment in AD70 became possible. But again, the preconditions required weren't fulfilled- Israel didn't repent. And so there will be the final fulfilment in the last days.

The language used in Dan. 7 about "the little horn" matches that of Dan. 11:36-45 about "the king of the north", who was Vespasian in the AD70 context. The shadowy primary fulfillments help us to imagine the kind of latter day fulfilment which is the primary burden of these prophecies. Vespasian directed war against the Jews and Jerusalem in particular for three and a half years, from the battle of Ptolemais in April AD67 to September AD70 when Jerusalem fell (Josephus, *The Jewish War* 3.29; 6.407; 435). He was made emperor in AD69, a year which saw three emperors in one year: Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. One cannot deny an initial fulfilment here; but Vespasian was in Palestine and Egypt all that time, and it is hard to say that he 'put them down' in the terms required by the language here. So we have to accept that this was but a primary fulfilment, looking ahead to a greater one when antichrist is established in the last days, presiding over the three and a half year tribulation of Israel and the Jews. Kenneth Gentry points out that if Julius Caesar is counted as the first emperor of Rome, then Vespasian would have been the tenth emperor, the tenth horn who was also the little horn (Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (San Francisco: Christian Universities Press, 1997) pp. 154–159). But this horn, different from the others just as the fourth beast differs from the other beasts (:7,19) is something radically different and unprecedented in human history. It points, as noted on :24, to a radically abusive destruction within the *eretz* promised to Abraham; it will truly be the unprecedented time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1). The Nazi holocaust will pale into insignificance before it.

But Dan. 7:23,24 stress how the fourth beast was radically different to the preceding beasts, and the little horn was also radically different to the other horns. The beasts were different from each other (:3), but the fourth beast was different from all the other beasts (:7). The point is surely that although the previous empires were different to each other, they were effectively all in the same category when compared with the fourth beast. Because he was so totally different to them. Three times

(:7,19,23) it is stressed that the fourth beast was different to all the other beasts. We note how just as the fourth beast was diverse from the other beasts, so the little horn is to be diverse from the other horns. We are given the impression of an ever more concentrated form of evil. The Roman empire was not so radically different to the preceding empires. Josephus describes that they did to Jerusalem and the Jews in AD67-70; the Old Testament prophets and Lamentations describe what Babylon did to Jerusalem and the Jews. Whilst it could be argued that what the Romans did was even worse than the Babylonians, it was not of such a totally different order as implied by Daniel's prophecies of the fourth beast. This is what leads us to think that what is in view is a latter day entity of a nature never seen before. We get the impression that this is indeed what Daniel will later call a time of trouble such as never was for God's people. It will be of an altogether more awful nature than anything done to God's people, including by the Nazis, Babylonians and Romans. Lamentations speaks of the horrors performed by the Babylonians in Jerusalem, but this latter day entity will be of a totally different order. Hence Daniel's fixation upon the fourth beast and little horn, and the Angel only really giving an explanation of those two entities. And Daniel becoming pale with fear and physically ill after seeing what the fourth beast would do to the Jews.

The ten horns represent "ten kings" which shall "arise" (Dan. 7:24); and although it is not stated specifically, we are to assume that they arise also out of the same area, the "earth" / land. We should therefore be looking for a group of four kings / kingdoms, out of which arise ten kings / kingdoms; and out of them arises one "little horn" in particular. Revelation's take on the beasts adds more detail- there are also seven heads, a false prophet acting as publicity agent for the beast, a whore riding the beast, sitting on seven hills / kings. The four beasts / kings are initially in conflict, striving with each other upon the sea, and arising from that comes the fourth beast entity, the composite beast including elements of all the previous ones. And from that there arises the ten horns and one little horn. We should not, however, think of these situations as having to be chronological developments, i.e. first the four, then the fourth beast, then the ten horns, then the little horn. It may work out like that, but not necessarily. The precise details need not concern us ahead of time; the picture is of a series of leaders and powers involved in the domination of the land promised to Abraham. The fact is, the beasts will all exist together in the last days, just as the metals of the image will. These various entities will "arise" from the land. And this is what we see happening already- in the last few years there has been what is called the Arabic, and particularly Sunni, *sahwa*, 'awakening'. Powers and kings have risen up out of the scrubland and desert of the *eretz*, united in their hatred of Israel, but bitterly divided against each other.

We are for sure in the stage of the winds / *ruach* / Angel controlled nations 'striving' with each other- the *eretz* is full of conflict as never before, not just between Israel and her neighbours, but between those neighbours. There are currently four non-Jewish nations within the *eretz*- Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. But they exist just on paper as lines on the map; there are other significant entities within the area, e.g. Kurdistan, the Islamic State, Gaza, parts of Egypt and Turkey [depending how one defines the northern border of Israel], parts of Saudi Arabia [depending how the eastern border is defined]. In total they make ten kingdoms, but the number ten may not be literal. We would then be awaiting for the "little horn" to arise- a charismatic, antiChrist leader, or perhaps another very small entity. For the horn is called the *little* horn, and yet it is the most powerful in the very last days. However, the Hebrew and Aramaic words translated "little" can mean 'short' in terms of time as well as size.

The idea may be that it lasts a very short time indeed, maybe literally days or hours in the very last day, and is the human representative of the beast / horns who personally challenges the Lord Jesus and is destroyed by the brightness of His coming.

Dan 7:25 *He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear down the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time-*

These things have a clear potential possible application to Antiochus Epiphanes. There was a three and a half year period of abuse of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, beginning in June 168 BC with the edict of Antiochus (1 Macc., 1:20-53); and ending with the re-dedication of the Temple on the 25th of Chisel [December], 165 BC (1 Macc. 4:52). But a three and a half year period can also be reckoned from the erection of the heathen altar in the court of the Temple, on the 15th of Chisleu 168 BC, to the death of Antiochus about the middle of 164 (as in Dan. 8:14).

We must note that we read of times and not years. The idea of a time being one year and times being two years has become an assumed truth. There are other options. "Times" could as well be translated "seasons". The same word is used in Is. 64:6 for a woman's menstrual "season" or "time", in which case we could even force an interpretation of a "time" as something between 28 and 35 days. Goldingay "posits that the sequence of elements in this expression refers to an unspecified “time that threatens to extend itself longer,” which is “brought to a sudden termination”. This fits admirably with the open, flexible, non-determinate approach to these prophecies which I am suggesting. "The time" is ultimately the point when the Lord returns and establishes God's Kingdom: "for the time had come, and the holy ones took possession of the kingdom" (Dan. 7:22 NJPS).

The little horn thought to change the times. The "times" surely connects with the various "times" or time periods found in Daniel's prophecies. They were flexible- the little horn sought to change them. This surely doesn't mean that the "little horn" knew the time periods of Daniel and consciously tried to change them. It may mean that he acts in such a way that God considers changing the time periods. God alone ultimately can change the time periods: "He changes the times and the seasons" (Dan. 2:21). Surely Acts 1:7 alludes to this: "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father has set within his own authority". The connection with Dan. 2:21 would mean 'set within His own authority to change'. This is why predicting things according to the time periods of Daniel must be overshadowed by an awareness that God changes the times. He can shorten the days for the sake of the elect.

The rabbis translate "Until the time of two times and half a time". There were 480 years from the founding of Israel at Sinai to the building of the temple, followed by 410 years from the building of the temple to its destruction. This makes 890 years, and half of that time is 445 years. Together this makes the figure of 1335 found in Dan. 12:12. Which would then be a cipher for the sanctuary being restored rather than a literally time period of days. We note that 1335 is the numerical value of "And I will hide My face" (Dt. 31:18). The "times" are in God's hands and He changes times and seasons. The length of the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were flexible. Their "tranquility" could have been lengthened and in Belshazzar's case it was shortened. So attempts to work out time periods and fix their calendar end point is in fact not at all the spirit of what we see about God in Daniel.

This little horn tries to do what the previous human kings in Daniel had failed to do- change laws. We have just read of Darius' failure to change his own laws. The changing of times / seasons and law, as well as deposing three kings (:24), is all God's

behaviour (removing kings and setting up kings, Dan. 2:21 and note the possibility of the "end" coming after God deposes three reigns in Dan. 8). This entity therefore acts as does the "man of sin" in 2 Thess. 2, showing himself as God. The fulfilment in Antiochus Epiphanes didn't lead to the Kingdom of God as was potentially possible, but 2 Thess. 2 and Revelation helps us see that the prophecy has been reapplied and reinterpreted to come true in its essence in the last days. The initial reference of this would be to the attempt by Antiochus IV to change the Jewish calendar and feasts in BC167. In contrast, Dan. 2:20,21 says that God alone "changes seasons and times"; He established the heavenly bodies for these times and seasons (Gen. 1:14). Yahweh alone has dominion over time, in all its aspects. It is relative only to Him.

The little horn seeks "to change times and laws"; but we go straight on to read that God's people are given into his power for "a time and times and the dividing of time" (Dan. 7:25 AV). It could therefore be that the time period of time, times and half a time [three and a half years?] is in fact defined and chosen by the little horn, as part of him seeking to establish "times". This could explain why there is some variableness in this period- Daniel 12 mentions 1260,1290 and 1335 days. If Israel repent, or other preconditions are met, then the time of intended abuse is changed. Israel were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:18,21,24,28 etc.). Perhaps those seven times are halved to three and a half times, due to God's desire to shorten the days of this awful tribulation. It may be that the little horn power or ruler decrees a time of abuse for the remaining Jews. Or it may be that the new caliph seeks to change some tenets of Islam, as he already is doing by shifting the focus of Islam from Mecca (which is in Saudi Arabia, who are officially against the Islamic jihadists currently)- to Jerusalem. Or it may be that they seek to change GMT time to Mecca time- something radical Moslems already live by, and seek to spread to the entire planet. Indeed, the biggest clock in the world has been built in Mecca in a bid to enforce Mecca time on all Moslems rather than GMT. The Mecca Clock Tower has been designed in purposeful contrast to Big Ben.

The little horn of Daniel 7 is the beast of Revelation 13:

Daniel 7	Revelation 13
"... a mouth speaking great things" (verse 8) "And he shall speak great words against the most High ..." (verse 25) "I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them" (verse 21)	"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies . . . And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven" (verses 5,6) "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them" (verse 7)

Notice that the little horn of Daniel 7 is actually called "the beast": "I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (Dan. 7:11).

The little horn is also to be connected with the “King of the north” of Daniel 11, which is historically based upon Antiochus and the leaders of the northern part of the Greek empire, from Syria. The fact the Islamic jihadists and their leadership have emerged from Syria is maybe significant in this context:

	Daniel 7	Daniel 8	Daniel 11
1.	The little horn	The little horn	"The king"

2.	At the end of the times of the Gentiles	At the end of the times of the Gentiles	At the end of the times of the Gentiles
3.	Very aggressive	Very aggressive	Very aggressive
4.	"A look more stout than his fellows"	Magnifies himself	Magnifies himself
5.	A mouth speaking great things against the Most High		Speaks marvellous things against the God of gods
6.	Makes war against the saints and prevails	Destroys the holy people	
7.	Destroyed by the Ancient of days	Destroyed by the Prince of princes	

We note further that the little horn of Daniel 8 is connected with the beast of Revelation:

". . . it cast down some ... of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them" (Daniel 8:10)	"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth" (Revelation 12:4)

We also see the similarities between the "little horn" and the "king of the north" (Dan. 7:25 cp. Dan. 11:36).

Dan 7:26 *But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away*- The "they" refers to "the saints", who shall judge the world. The saints refer to natural and spiritual Israel as well as the Angels. 1 Cor. 6:2,3 seems to have this passage in mind: "The saints shall judge the world. And if the world is to be judged by you... You shall judge Angels". This could therefore mean that the "saints", the Christian believers, shall along with Angels judge as Angels. For that is the idea here in Dan. 7, which was clearly in Paul's mind. The 'taking away' of the dominion is the same word as in Dan. 2:21- God "removes kings". The image vision shall come ultimately true at the hands of God's once oppressed people.

His dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end- Just as the fourth beast consumed and destroyed, so it shall be consumed and destroyed. This is a major theme of Revelation- the judgments poured out upon the earth / land of Abraham by the latter day abusers are then given to them. Babylon drinks her own cup.

"To the end" connects with the proclamation of Darius which we have just read in Dan. 6:26: "His dominion shall remain to the end". The connection with Dan. 6:26 suggests this entity will be in existence immediately prior to the establishment of God's eternal Kingdom. At first blush, this is where the application to Antiochus

Epiphanes breaks down. Until we realize that the Kingdom of God could have come at that time, but various preconditions weren't met. And so the kaleidoscope turned again, the same basic elements were rearranged into another possible fulfilment through the Romans and then through the latter day beast.

Dan 7:27 *The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him*- "Under the whole Heaven" now moves the focus further than "the land" which has been in view so far in this chapter. The kingdoms of the entire world shall be given to the saints. "The people of the saints" may suggest that "the saints" are Angels, and their "people" are those amongst natural and spiritual Israel whom they have represented before the court of Heaven. This is the moment when the kingdoms of this world become those of God and His Christ (Rev. 11:15). This is fair evidence that the Kingdom of God shall be established on earth, for it is on planet earth that present human kingdoms and "dominions" [empires] exist.

Dan 7:28 *Here is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my thoughts much troubled me, and my appearance was changed: but I kept the matter in my heart*- I suggested on :15 that Daniel was troubled and upset, to the point of his appearance changing, because he realized that the prophetic program was no longer to restore the Kingdom of God in Judah during his lifetime. "But I kept the matter..." may suggest that like Moses, he considered that possibly God's purpose may yet be changed by fervent prayer and repentance.

Literally, his colours changed. The book opens with Daniel's face colour improving as he stuck to his conscience before God. We get an impression of calm assurance. Now he seems to lose that. Possibly because he (like so many) was too set on the idea of the Kingdom of God and his own prophecies being fulfilled in his lifetime.

DANIEL CHAPTER 8

Dan 8:1 *In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, even to me, I Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first*-

We know from Dan. 5 that Belshazzar is about to be judged and destroyed for blaspheming the temple. But Daniel is now shown that beyond his time would come a "little horn" who would do the same and suffer the same. He is being set up to learn what we all need to, that Divine history repeats according to patterns and we are to learn those patterns.

The vision of Dan. 8 I suggest gives yet another possible outcome or schema leading to the re-establishment of God's Kingdom. The image of Dan. 2 spoke of four kings / empires followed by an unstable mixed period before the "end". Dan. 7 has four beasts, the fourth of which has ten horns and a little horn, who arises from among the ten horns against God and His people for a defined number of days and is destroyed by the "end". Dan. 8 has two beasts, Persia and Greece, led by Alexander the Great. Out of Alexander's four generals or four [not ten] "horns" comes a little horn, clearly Antiochus Epiphanes, who abuses God's people for a defined number of days and is destroyed by the "end". But that "end" didn't happen to Antiochus Epiphanes. These different scenarios do not perfectly map onto each other as is often

suggested. There are similarities; the second beast of Dan. 7 [Persia?] has three ribs in its mouth, and the ram [Persia] of Dan. 8:4 butts in three directions. The "little horns" are described in very similar language and do the same things.

But the differences are significant. The fourth beast of Dan. 7, from which the little horn comes, has no equivalent in Dan. 8. The little horn arises from Greece, the third empire of Dan. 7. The little horn in Dan. 7:25 abuses God's people for "a time, times and a half", 1260 days; the little horn of Dan. 8:14 does so for 2300 evening-mornings. I suggest these are all different potential scenarios. Had the Jews repented at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, had Judas Maccabeus been a true spiritual leader, "the end" could then have come. The little horn of Dan. 8 would have been that of Dan. 7, making the sequence there and in Dan. 2 Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece. Indeed had Cyrus of Persia lived up to his potential as a Messiah figure, and had the Jews returned obediently to the land and rebuilt Zion as commanded, then none of these scenarios need have come true. The failure at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes meant that the kaleidoscope turned again, the fourth beast of Dan. 7 could then have been Rome, the Lord Jesus could have returned in AD70. That didn't happen and so the kaleidoscope turned again, and maybe it will again, until we come to the time when the Lord Jesus returns and establishes His Kingdom. Immediately prior to that, all these prophecies will have their final iteration. All the beasts and metals of the image will exist at the same time; as discussed on :17, the ram, goat and little horn of Dan. 8 will also all exist at the same time. And will all be judged together by His final return. That will be the final picture of the kaleidoscope. The failure of the earlier possibilities only led to something even greater- not merely the re-establishment of God's Kingdom as it was in the time of David, but the establishment of the eternal Kingdom of God on the whole earth under the rulership of the Lord Jesus.

Belshazzar could have repented, but didn't- as made clear in Dan. 5. And so therefore another outworking of prophecy became possible. Belshazzar only reigned three years so this vision was given around the time of the events of Daniel 5, when Belshazzar was slain and "Darius" took the kingdom. This was the first year of Darius, the time of the visions and events of Dan. 9:1 and Dan. 11:1. So the events of Dan. 5,8,9,11 all occurred within the same year. If Darius and Cyrus were separate kings but co-reigned and overlapped with each other, it's also possible that the third year of Cyrus in Dan. 10:1 was in fact this same year- the first year of Darius. Dan. 1:21 could be read as meaning that Daniel died in the first year of Cyrus; but that may mean the third year of his total rule, if he co-reigned with Darius for the first two or three years. In this case then Dan. 5,8,9,10 and 11 were all within the same year or so.

Belshazzar only reigned a few years, so the vision was given about a year before he died and his deposition by Darius the Mede recorded in Dan. 5. Perhaps as with Nebuchadnezzar, this prophecy was as it were a serving of notice upon him, and he had like Nebuchadnezzar one year in which to repent and alter the otherwise prophesied and inevitable chain of events. Belshazzar was aware of what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar and was condemned by Daniel for not having learnt the lesson from it. We too are expected to learn from situations going on in the lives around us or in our families. This is one channel of God's word of communication with us.

"To me, even to me" is a phrase picked up by Peter when he says that the vision of beasts and Gentile inclusion was given even to him (Acts 11:5). He read Daniel as we should- not as mere history alone, but as a living pattern to be followed.

Dan 8:2 *I saw in the vision; now it was so, that when I saw, I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision, and I was by the river Ulai*- This could mean that he was in Susa when he had the vision, although that is unlikely as he worked for Belshazzar of Babylon (:27) and the Persians were his enemies; or that he was transported in the vision to Susa. Daniel was seeing the vision of Medo-Persian power, viewing in vision the citadel or palace, just a year before that power would conquer Babylon. If he relayed the vision to Belshazzar, this was similar to his revelation of a dream of downfall to Nebuchadnezzar a year before *he* fell. So Daniel was having a repeat experience, just as circumstances repeat in our lives. Perhaps he was seeing what Elam, once a province of the Babylonian empire, was to soon turn into- a citadel epitomizing Persian and not Babylonian power.

I have discussed on Ps. 137 how Jews sat by the rivers / canals of Babylon like the Ulai and Chebar, and some like that Psalmist were caught up in bitterness, endlessly playing the tape of their own experiences and the bitter words spoken to them. Failing to accept that Ezekiel by the Chebar and Daniel by the Ulai had seen visions of restoration and victory over their oppressors. Those canals were dug by slave labour, including the Jewish exiles. But at those very places there was given the hope of glory in the midst of their workaday lives and experience.

Dan 8:3 *Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high*- Ulai was a canal joined to the Euphrates, so "the river" can have reference to that. We have the impression of a ram about to no longer be restrained by a river [Euphrates] and surge toward Babylon. This is the picture we have in Rev. 9:14; 16:12. Again, the historical application to Medo-Persia must be seen as only a pointer towards the fulfilment in the last days, when Babylon falls as a result of hordes of Islamists bursting across the Euphrates into the *eretz* promised to Abraham which is the focus of Bible prophecy. The ram was a symbol of Persia, embossed on their medallions and on the crown of their kings.

There is no word for "two" in the original. We wonder if in fact there was potential for this beast entity to have had more horns. It's just that two are mentioned.

But one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last- The power of the Medes was far less than that of the Persians who followed them under Cyrus. All the beasts and horns in Daniel are observed coming or growing up, and then being destroyed. When a power or individual are in the ascendancy, observers tend to think that they are unstoppable and invincible. Daniel's prophecies make the simple point that they too shall fade and fall, unlike the things of God's Kingdom.

The horns are uneven; just as the second beast of Dan. 7:5 was "raised up on one side". The second beast of Dan. 7 rampages in three directions; the beast of Dan. 8 has three ribs in its mouth.

Dan 8:4 *I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward; and no beasts could stand before him, neither was there any who could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and magnified himself*- This is language elsewhere used about Yahweh, who alone does His own will to the ultimate term, and is alone to be magnified, and before whom none can stand nor be delivered from. All the monarchs and empires considered in Daniel are all guilty of playing God, and are punished accordingly. The compass points recall Abraham being bidden look to them all, and being told that all he saw was to be part of the land eternally promised to him, the *eretz*. The ram didn't push East in the vision because the Persians came from the East,

and their conquests Eastwards to India were irrelevant to the prophetic focus upon the *eretz* promised to Abraham. This small detail is strong confirmation of our position that the prophetic dominion of the beasts is over *eretz* Israel and not anywhere beyond that.

The beasts of Dan. 7 are supernatural, having elements of natural animals such as lions. The beasts of Dan. 8 are rams and goats- usually harmless animals, clean animals, at best only using force in defence; but they are presented here as being stirred up to uncharacteristic flights of aggression. We are left to infer God's influence upon them. On :17 I will comment upon the similarities between Ezekiel and Daniel. The people of Judah are likened to rams and goats in Ez. 34:17-19,21,25. And they too become aggressive. Their behaviour is described in the same language as that of the aggressive rams and goats of Dan. 8. They gore (Ez. 34:21 = Dan. 8:4) and trample others (Ez. 34:18 = Dan. 8:7,10). The simple takeaway is that as the people and leaders of Judah had done, so the beasts were doing to them. And Ez. 34:25 actually calls them "bad beasts".

There is a repeated theme of pride being the reason for the fall of the kings / empires. The ram "did as he pleased and grew arrogant" (Dan. 8:4), in turn "the goat grew more and more arrogant" (Dan. 8:8). In Dan. 8:25 The little horn "will be proud of himself", "the little horn bragging and boasting" (Dan. 7:11), "it had eyes and a mouth and was boasting proudly" (Dan. 7:20). Out of all the things they could be condemned for, pride is the number one issue. God is so sensitive to it. See on Dan. 7:11.

Dan 8:5 *As I was considering*- It was Daniel's desire to understand which led to further revelation and understanding. This recalls how those who enquired further about the Lord's parables were given further understanding "in the house".

Behold, a male goat came from the west over the surface of the whole land, and didn't touch the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes- The speed of the goat speaks of the lightning speed of Alexander's conquest. The "notable horn" was Alexander. Alexander's son was named Alexander Aegus, "Son of the Goat". The other horns in the visions can also be seen as individuals; the notable little horn we encounter on the fourth beast is therefore an individual who makes great and amazingly fast conquests, something like that seen by the jihadists taking large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria overnight in 2015. The "male goat" was a symbol for the leadership of the flock.

Dan 8:6 *He came to the ram that had the two horns, which I saw standing before the river, and ran on him in the fury of his power*- Alexander defeated the Persian Darius at the river Granicus in 334 BC, his forces plunging in swimming across the stream, and rushing on the enemy. Hence the appropriacy of seeing the ram before a river. His fury was from his desire to revenge the Persian domination of Greece.

Dan 8:7 *I saw him come close to the ram, and he was moved with anger against him*- Persia had previously cruelly dominated Greece, and this was the anger of bitter revenge by Alexander the Great.

And struck the ram, and broke his two horns; and there was no power in the ram to stand before him; but he cast him down to the ground, and trampled on him; and there was none who could deliver the ram out of his hand- Perhaps a specific reference to the burning and trampling of the Persian city of Persepolis. The trampling and casting down is exactly the language of the later abusers of God's people, the horn

of Dan. 7:8. The clear historical fulfilment in how Alexander of Macedon / Greece treated the Persians is intended to explain how the latter day little horn shall act. Alexander was characterized by small forces winning amazingly quick victories against much larger forces due to their speed and military technology; and we can imagine this being repeated in the latter day little horn. This is already the feature of organized Jihadist groups. The two horns broken refer to the ending of the Medo Persian empire.

There is a repetition of how likewise Medo-Persia had been the same: "neither was there any who could deliver out of his hand" (:4). The point is that what seems invincible is replaced by something else that seems invincible. This is all the ebb and flow of human prowess and dominion, as taught in the vision of Dan. 2. And in this case the point is made that what man does to his fellow man, is in turn done to him. "There was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand" in that the other peoples whom the Persian empire called to its aid couldn't save them from Alexander.

Even before Babylon conquered Judah, Isaiah and Jeremiah had foretold that Babylon would be punished by Persia [Elam, a word similar to "the ram"] for being too cruel to the Jews (Is. 13:3,5,17; 47:6). But Jeremiah stated that Elam / Persia would "be dismayed before their enemies and before them that seek their life" (Jer. 49:37); God would "set His throne in Elam" and "destroy the king and the princes" (Jer. 49:38). This would be because He would "break the bow of Elam" by bringing "the winds from the four quarters of heaven" (Jer. 49:35,36). These four winds surely refer to the four generals of Alexander the Great that helped him to overcome the Medo-Persian empire. But they were raised up by God, by His winds / spirits / Angels which were seen whipping up the sea in Dan. 7 so that the beasts arose from it as a result. All was under God's control. This was just as God had earlier "raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes [to destroy Babylon]: for His device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of his temple" (Jer. 50:28). Likewise Jer. 51:28, "Prepare against her [Babylon] the nations [Media and Persia] with the kings [Darius and Cyrus?] of the Medes". They were 'prepared', far above the time and tide of human history and aspiration there was this higher, controlling hand of God.

Dan 8:8 *The male goat magnified himself exceedingly*- Zech. 9:5,9 foretells Alexander's attack on Gaza and Palestine and paints him as the arrogant antithesis of the humble Messianic King of Israel, who was to ride a donkey rather than Alexander's charger. Alexander is thereby set up as a fake, imitation Christ, an antiChrist.

And when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and in the place of it there came up four notable horns toward the four winds of the sky- The notable horn was an individual, Alexander the Great. The horns elsewhere in these visions likewise refers to individuals, not to any organization like the papacy. The horn was broken in that Alexander had no dynasty. His brother Philip Aridaeus, and his two sons, Alexander Aegus and Hercules, failed to continue it. This refers to the untimely death of Alexander the Great and his kingdom being divided amongst his four generals. "Lysimachus ruled over part of Thrace, Asia Minor, part of Cappadocia, and the countries within the limits of Mount Taurus. Casander possessed Macedonia, Thessaly and part of Greece. Ptolemy obtained Egypt, Cyprus, Cyrene, and ultimately Coele-Syria, Phoenicia and Judea. Seleucus obtained Phoenicia, Syria, Babylonia to the Indus". Daniel 11 focuses upon the two of them, the kings of the north and south, who dominated God's people and land of Israel. Again we see that the focus of the

prophecies are upon them and not upon any other geographical area. But they were directed "toward the four winds of the sky / heaven", as if to say that they were under the domination of heaven, or perhaps opposed against heaven; the "four winds" may refer to the four cherubic Angels, as God makes His Angels spirits or winds (Ps. 104:4). See on :10.

Dan 8:9 *Out of one of them came forth a little horn, which grew exceedingly great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the glorious land-*

All the history of Seleucus ["one of them"] is passed over up to Antiochus Epiphanes, because these visions are about what was done to the land and people of Israel. They are not a general prediction of history in advance.

The push toward the South refers as in :5 to Egypt. Dan. 11:21 ff. provides us with the history and shows that this is clearly Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He attacked Egypt (1 Macc. 1:16-20; 2 Macc. 5:51; Dan. 11:29,30) and then Persia to the east (1 Macc. 6:1-6; 2 Macc. 9:1-28). It's hard to apply this attack of the South and then the East to any 'Roman' or Catholic entity. If this is the same little horn as in Dan. 7, then it surely has to be conceded that there was another primary intended fulfilment of that prophecy in relation to Greece and Antiochus Epiphanes. "Toward the east" references the expedition of Antiochus led an expedition into Elymais (on the East of Babylonia); and again we have this alluded to in Dan. 11:40. We note that like Dan. 8, the visions of Dan. 10 and 11 refer only to Persia and Greece existing before the final establishment of God's Kingdom. This is definitely an alternative to the four kingdom scenario of Dan. 2 and 7- it was another possible future that didn't happen.

The little horn of Dan. 8:9 pushes in three directions. Possibly this matches the little horn of Dan. 7:8 uprooting three horns.

The connection between the Angels and the people of God in their land is shown by how the horn extends horizontally on earth until it comes to the "glorious land"; and then it rises up vertically to the host of Heaven, the stars, and to the commander of the host.

Many historicists like to understand this "little horn" as Rome and the Papacy. But this little horn came out of one of the four generals who succeeded Alexander the Great. The reference seems without doubt to Antiochus. Israel even then was the land of glory- potentially. It was their legalism and apostasy which meant that the Messianic kingdom was not then established, but potentially it could have been. Rather like apostate believers are still given exalted titles in the New Testament because of the potential status they had.

The little horn of Dan. 8:9 is clearly related to the little horn that arises from the fourth empire in Dan. 7. And the little horn of Dan. 8 is clearly Antiochus Epiphanes. But that doesn't at all fit the 'Roman' interpretation of the beast of Dan. 7 from which the little horn arises. I suggested on Dan. 2 that this is an example of how there were possible, potential fulfilments. The little horn of Dan. 8 could have been destroyed by the coming of a Messiah figure. But that didn't happen. And so the kaleidoscope was turned, and the same images [in this case, of a little horn] meshed to produce a different picture. Greek step logic wants to see a simple correspondence between statement and fulfilment over time. But that is to misunderstand or ignore the genre of apocalyptic. This genre takes the images and realigns them, mixing them with others, to produce various possible pictures. A rigid step logic will fall down in making sense

of the two 'little horns', and will fail even worse when it comes to the horns and heads of Revelation.

Dan 8:10 *It grew great, even to the army of Heaven; and some of the army and of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled on them-*

"It grew great" is a key theme here. The word is used several times. The ram "magnified himself", grew great (:4); "The male goat magnified himself exceedingly" (:8); "a little horn, which grew exceedingly great" (:9); "it grew great" (:10); "Yes, it magnified itself / grew great" (:11). Men and empires grow great, but everything in this world is born to roll downhill. These prophecies help us to see all human glory as it is; beauty, wealth, power shall all briefly rise but eternally fall. Expensive homes fall down, beauty fades, well toned muscles flab, career training becomes obsolete... only the things of God's Kingdom are eternal. We note that in each case, the ram, goat and little horn 'grow great' or 'magnify themselves' immediately before their fall. This hubris is one reason for the Lord's judgments at His return- because He so hates pride and His coming will be timed in order to judge pride.

The “host of Yahweh" can refer both to the heavenly army of Angels (Josh. 5:14,15; Ps. 103:21; 148:2) as well as to the peoples or armies on earth which Yahweh calls "My host" (Ex. 7:4), "the hosts of Yahweh” (Ex. 12:41). The situation on earth is reflected in Heaven by the representative Angels playing out the roles before the court of Heaven. This is the Angelic / Spirit mechanism, as it were, through which God sees and knows all things. It heightens our awareness of the importance of our existence and actions on this earth. And may provide a clue to Paul's enigmatic comment "Because of the Angels".

God's Angels and people were as it were trampled under foot just as Alexander had done to the Persians in :7. In Daniel we find the "host" being trodden down, God and His Angels apparently defeated- when the truth was that this is only how it seemed, and Daniel's visions, like that of Ezekiel of the cherubim in this same context, show that in fact God works through this to the final achievement of His intention to save His people and establish His Kingdom. What a wonderful day it will be when these things are turned to sight before men, and what Paul calls "the weakness of God" is shown to be His power. The "weakness" of the Lord on the cross is the parade example of all this: "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men... For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you" (1 Cor. 1:25; 2 Cor. 13:4).

"The army of heaven" could on one level refer to the way Antiochus saw himself as exalted above all gods of all nations. The term is used about them in 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3 "they worshipped all the host of heaven". The books of the Maccabees record him demanding all conquered nations give up their own laws and gods; he frequently desecrated the temples of those he conquered. And as the Maccabees often record, he especially practiced this against Yahweh. The language of the little horn in Dan. 8:10 recalls that used of Nebuchadnezzar in Is. 14:13 "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God". Likewise the little horn "magnified himself even to the Prince of the host" (Dan. 8:11), i.e. even to God Himself, just as in Is. 14:14 Nebuchadnezzar claimed: "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High". Although "the prince of the host" could also refer to the Angel Michael (Dan. 12:1), possibly manifest in the High Priest Onias. See on Dan. 7:8.

"Of the stars" implies "some of the stars". Stars can refer to Angels, but also to military commanders (Num. 24:17) or faithful ones amongst God's people (Dan.

12:3). Again, they had their Angelic representatives in Heaven. The stars who fought from Heaven appear to be Angels fighting for Israel in Jud. 5:20.

But the army and stars are defined in :24 as "the mighty and holy people", the army of Yahweh (Ex. 12:41). Stars are symbols of God's faithful people (Gen. 22:17; 26:4; Ex. 32:13; Dt. 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; Neh. 9:23; 1 Chron. 27:23). And yet the language sounds applicable to Angels. As Dan. 12:1 explains, Israel have an Angel superintending them, and perhaps we are to understand each individual member of God's people as having an Angel representing them. Hence the language here refers to both individual Jews as well as their representative Angels. The stars are specifically a symbol of the faithful Israelites in Dan. 12:3. The language also recalls that of Is. 14:13,14 regarding the desire of Babylon to take the temple mount.

Angels can represent political powers before God; see on :8. This has interesting implications in Dan. 8:8-12: "Four notable ones toward the four winds of Heaven (the number four and "winds" both have Angelic connections). And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which... waxed great, even to the host of Heaven (the Angels controlling the Jewish people); and it cast down some of the host and of the stars (both "host" and "stars" are Angelic words), and stamped upon them; Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host (the "Most High" Angel, the Angel of Jesus, who was the real prince of the Angel hosts), and by him... the place of His sanctuary (i. e. the temple, where the "Most High" Angel dwelt) was cast down. And an host (of Angels controlling the soldiers of Antiochus) was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the Truth to the ground". "The Truth" here does not necessarily refer to a set of doctrines or people holding them which comprises the true Gospel. This can never be thrown down, and in any case "the Truth" in this sense was not thrown down after the sacking of the temple. "The truth" being thrown down may parallel the host and stars being cast to the ground in :10- in which case "the truth" represents the Jews in covenant relationship- or it may hint at the Mosaic Law being "thrown down" by the Angelic destruction of the temple and the Mosaic system. "Thy Law (of Moses) is the Truth" (Ps. 119:142). This all lays the basis for Rev. 12 describing the conflicting groups of Angels in Heaven at the time of the final abolition of the Mosaic system.

Dan 8:11 *Yes, it magnified itself, even to the prince of the army*- "The prince of the host" was initially Onias the high priest of the host, the army, of priests and of Israel. But clearly it also refers to Michael the representative Angel of Israel. In Daniel, nine times "prince" [*shar*] is used of men and nine times of an Angel, reflecting the theme of how men have representative Angels matching them in the court of Heaven. We note that the term *elohim* is used of priests, of Angels and of God Himself. Michael was apparently defeated (see on :10) but arises in eternal victory in Dan. 12.

The Hebrew words for "host / army" [*ts'bah*] and "glorious / pleasant / beautiful" [*ts'bee*] in :9 are very similar. The little horn 'grows exceedingly great' towards the glorious / pleasant land of Israel in :9, and likewise towards the host / army of heaven and the prince of the host in :10,11. The heavenly host are the host of the land of Israel. We note that the "host" is not specifically defined here as the Jews. Because although these things clearly had a primary fulfilment in the abuses of Antiochus against the Jews, they will have a final latter day fulfilment against God's people however they are defined. The prince of the host / army has the burnt offering 'taken away from him', and "the place of his sanctuary was cast down"- all by a mere man. This is the degree to which God's mighty Angel, representing Himself, can have things taken away from Him by man.

Indeed "the prince of the host" could be read as God Himself. "Even unto the prince of the host it magnified itself" speaks of showing greatness against God, just as the king of Babylon did in Is. 14. The word for "place" is used mostly of God's abode, whether on earth (Ex. 15:17, 1 Kings 8:13), or in heaven (Is. 18:4, 1 Kings 8:39,43,49; Ps. 33:14). This is how far God allows human freewill, and how far He is sensitive to human behaviour. Man can, in the short term, take something away from God. The continual burnt offering was to be 'taken away' from "the prince" by the little horn. "Taken away" can mean to steal. From the God who in another sense owns everything. But He has given it to us. "Will a man rob God?", Malachi asks. And Malachi answers this shocking question "Yes". They were robbing God in not paying tithes and giving sacrifices. He is a God near at hand and not afar off, which is why He feels this things so closely and personally. This explains the strange statement in Dan. 12:7 that "the power of the holy people" will, for a time, be smashed or broken. That power is surely God. And in this light we must imagine how Daniel felt when he heard in Dan. 9:26 that the Messiah whom he was looking for as the saving answer was "to be cut off". Jerusalem and the sanctuary were again to be destroyed...

The army is the host of God's people and their representative Angels (see on :10). Their prince is "the prince of princes" (:25), "the God of gods" (Dan. 11:36 cp. Dan. 7:8). So God Himself could be in view. But the prince could equally refer to the high priest. And the language of "prince of princes" is applied to the Lord Jesus in Rev. 1:5. So whilst this prophecy may have application to the rage of Antiochus against Israel's God, it clearly is recorded because all the previous abusers of God's people point forward to the final entity which shall abuse them, which will incorporate features of all Israel's previous abusers. As Antiochus magnified himself against God and the Jerusalem temple, so shall the latter day antiChrist against the real Christ, the prince of princes. The little horn makes himself as if he is "the prince of the host" (Dan. 8:11 Heb.); he sets himself up as an alternative Christ, an antiChrist. God is presented in Daniel as being able to depose kings and change or decree the times and seasons; the decree of Nebuchadnezzar to kill all the Babylonian wise men was "changed" by the revelation of His prophetic word through Daniel. The same words are used for how the little horn will change times and laws [s.w. 'decrees'] (Dan. 7:25). In terms of 2 Thess. 2, he declares himself as God enthroned in the temple of God, after the historical pattern of Antiochus.

And it took away from him the continual burnt offering- This was specifically ordered by Antiochus (1 Macc. 1:20,47,54,59). Such a command was not specifically made by the Romans. The requirements of the text here fit Antiochus very well, but are a very imperfect fit to the events of AD67-70.

There are many connections between the historical chapters of Daniel and the visions. Daniel is noted for serving God "continually" (Dan. 6:11,14,17,21) His morning and evening prayers were surely when the sacrifices would have been offered (1 Chron. 23:30). The Jews recognized the connection between the daily sacrifices and prayer, the prayer times in the temple were at the same time as the daily sacrifices (Acts 3:1). In Dan. 9:21 Daniel prayed "about the time of the evening sacrifice", seeing his prayer as the sacrifice. The connection is presumably to teach that despite the continual burnt offerings being ended, the essential offering to God was of prayer made toward Jerusalem as Daniel had done. There was no actual need for a sanctuary in order to offer to God. For the holy place is your own room and heart. We read here literally of "the continual", "burnt offering" is added by many versions in explanation but the corresponding words aren't in the original.

And the place of his sanctuary was cast down- This speaks of "the prince of the Host" living in the temple, a phrase recalling the Angel captain of the Lord's host in Josh. 5:15. See on Ps. 78:60. The prince of the army was therefore God manifest through the Angel superintending Israel. The casting down of the temple was not specifically done by Antiochus, but his abuse of the sanctuary is thus described because this history points forward to the latter day antiChrist who shall do this.

The LXX of Dan 8:9-11 would imply that only at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the captivity of Judah would be "delivered": "And out of one of them came forth one strong horn, and it grew very great toward the south, and toward the host: and it magnified itself to the host of heaven; and there fell to the earth some of the host of heaven and of the stars, and they trampled on them. And this shall be until the chief captain shall have delivered the captivity". Thus the period of only 70 years in captivity was lengthened; and even then, this is not how things worked out in practice. Likewise the time for the restoration of the temple from the hands of pagan abomination is redefined in Dan. 9:27 LXX as now no longer being in Daniel's time, nor any time close to it, but rather at the time of the Kingdom of God: "On the temple shall be the abomination of desolations; and at the end of time an end shall be put to the desolation".

It is stressed that the sanctuary of God was "cast down" (Dan. 8:11), "trampled under foot" (Dan. 8:13). "destroyed / wasted / spoiled" along with His capital city (Dan. 9:26), "made desolate" (Dan. 9:27). If the city and sanctuary of a god was destroyed in this way, so publically, then that god had lost and had been slain by the god of the army who did this. God as it were emphasizes His own apparent destruction. He recognizes by all this repeated language that indeed, it does look as if "the death of God" has validity, it is how it seems, it is what it looks like. He gets that. The purpose of the prophecies is to show that in fact He exists and is hugely active beyond that. Clearly enough, God doesn't care for His 'image'. He allows people to think as they do about Him, without rushing in to correct impressions. We think of His apparent silence and lack of involvement and engagement at the time of tragedies. It is all a test of our spiritual perception, and we are guided by His word in this. And yet Jeremiah had lamented, using the same word for "cast down", that "He has cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and hasn't remembered His footstool in the day of His anger" (Lam. 2:1). As ever, God was ultimately behind this casting down by the little horn.

The LXX reads very differently: "And this shall be until the chief captain shall have delivered the captivity: and by reason of him the sacrifice was disturbed, and he prospered; and the holy place shall be made desolate". This may be a legitimate reading, in that there was the potential for the Angel Michael, the "chief captain" of Israel (Dan. 12:1), to end the captivity / exile at this time. We note Daniel is next recorded as wondering why the captivity hadn't ended (Dan. 9:3).

Dan 8:12 *The army was given over to it*-

AV "And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice". This hints that it was God who gave the little horn a "host" or "army". Such hints are common in the visions of Daniel. Beasts are raised up, "given" things etc.- by God. But the host "given" was in order to overthrow the "host" or army of God's people and their Angelic representatives: "the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them" (:10). We would see here the way that representative hosts of Angels act out in Heaven the conflicts upon earth, host against host. We see here how all the conflicts ultimately have God in control over them.

However the GNB is likely not far wrong in offering: "People sinned there instead of offering the proper daily sacrifices, and true religion was thrown to the ground". It was abuses in the temple that led the little horn to desecrate it. This would fit the time of Antiochus and the Romans, but makes no sense if applied to the Papacy. The reference may be to how Antiochus installed an armed garrison in the 'city of David' with the object of overawing the worshippers and stopping any Jewish religious rites there (1 Macc. 1:33-38; 8:51; 2:15,31; 4:41).

This could be translated as AV "A host / army was given him". As in :13 and elsewhere, it is emphasized that all power is "given" to these horns and beasts. See on :24. Ultimately they were given power by God. The world is not radically out of control; there is no radical evil in the cosmos. All is finally under God's control, and this Divine giving of power to Israel's was "on account of [their] disobedience".

Along with the continual burnt offering on account of disobedience- Most expositors note the paganism of some of the Jews who returned from Babylon, and quote 1 Macc. 1:11-16: "In those days went there out of Israel wicked men, who persuaded many, saying, Let us go and make a covenant with the pagan that are round about us; for since we departed from them we have had much sorrow... Whereupon they built a place of exercise (a school) at Jerusalem, according to the customs of the pagan; and made themselves uncircumcised, and forsook the holy covenant, and joined themselves to the pagan, and were sold to do mischief". This is true, but specifically the opportunity to offer the daily burnt offering was taken away because of "disobedience". Many of the Jews who returned from Babylon were proud of their obedience; but the prophets repeatedly warned them that their daily burnt offerings were a provocation to God because of their hypocrisy and legalism (Is. 43:23; 66:3; Am. 5:22; Mal. 3:3)

And it cast down the truth to the ground, and it did according to its will and prospered- See on :10. Is. 59:14 had lamented that amongst the restoration community, "truth is fallen in the street". Antiochus merely confirmed in physical terms the blasphemy of the sanctuary which they had committed in spiritual terms. "Truth" may refer to the law of Moses (Ps. 43:3; 119:4). But we can perhaps understand "the truth" in the sense it is used in John's writings and in Dan. 9:13, for a life lived in fellowship with God: "we have not entreated the favour of Yahweh our God, that we should turn from our iniquities, and accept Your truth". The result of the destruction of the sanctuary was that it severely damaged the walk of God's people with Him.

Another possibility, given the various potential fulfilments of the prophecies, is that "the truth" refers to what "the truth" usually refers to in Daniel- the prophecies (Dan. 8:26; 9:13; 10:1,21; 11:2). The visions of Dan. 2 and Dan. 7 had shown a fourth entity arising after Greece, which would be the prelude to the re-establishment of God's Kingdom. But this "truth" was deposed or cast aside ["down" isn't necessarily implied in the original] in that Antiochus Epiphanes would behave in such an awful way, that the re-establishment of the Kingdom was made possible then. Because his sins were so extreme that he filled up the required level of sin, and this could've triggered the final judgment [see on :23].

Dan 8:13 *Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who spoke*- The tribulations which come upon God's people are described as being under the control of a "certain one", "Palmoni", or the 'wonderful numberer' as that can be translated, implying that there is one powerful Angel who co-ordinates the timing of all things, and other Angels ask this Angel for information concerning the

time periods worked out for the saints in their charge, as here in Daniel's case. Job seemed to have sensed very keenly the "appointed time" for his trials to end and for his "change" of nature to occur. We have seen that the phrase "appointed time" is the same word as "host" used regarding the Angels. But like Job, because we can't see the Angel physically it's easy to get bitter about the trials brought upon us by them, as Balaam got bitter with the ass until he physically saw the Angel causing the trial (Num. 22:23). See on Job 14:5; Dan. 12:1.

How long shall be the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, and the abomination that makes desolate, to give both the sanctuary and the army to be trodden under foot?- The desolation caused by transgression (the Jews' transgression, see on :12) is clearly initially that done by Antiochus (Dan. 11:31). He erected a heathen altar erected in place of the altar of burnt-offering in the Temple court. But there is a 1290 day period between the end of the continual burnt offering and the placing of the desolation (Dan. 12:11). But here the period for both is 2300 evening-mornings. The time periods definitey are variable. The 1290 period may possibly have been true in the time of Antiochus, but it was not true in AD67-70; the daily sacrifices were offered then right up to AD70. It could have come true then- the LXX of Dan. 8:13 is quoted by the Lord in Mt. 24:15 about the AD70 situation. So these were but incipient fulfilments- the last days will see the final fulfilment. Dan. 9:26,27 require the city of Jerusalem to be taken, and the abomination of desolation placed there; and this is quoted by the Lord Jesus as requiring fulfilment in the last days just prior to His return (Mt. 24:14,15,29-31). Any previous fulfilments were incipient at best; they did not immediately herald the Lord's visible return as required by the Oliver prophecy. Lk. 21:24 adds: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot".*

Daniel's question "How long...?" was answered. The exiles had lamented that they had no prophet who knew "How long": "There is no longer any prophet, nor is there any among us who knows how long" (Ps. 74:9,10). He was thus assured that he was indeed a prophet. Even though the answer was not to his liking [as he was expecting an immediate re-establishment of the Kingdom of God], and therefore he struggled to understand it. So often our difficulty in understanding the Bible is because we subconsciously don't want to accept the truth that we see there, again, subconsciously.

We enquire who exactly are "the army" or "host". It is used of Angels, but also of the ministers in the sanctuary or priests (Num. 4:23,30,35,39,43; 8:24,25). Again we have the Angels representative of their charges on earth.

Dan 8:14 *He said to me*- Daniel has heard two Angels talking in :13. One has asked the other how long the desolation would continue. But the other Angel now speaks directly to Daniel. The first Angel was Daniel's representative in the court of heaven. Daniel naturally had the question in his mind, as to how long this would continue for. And his Angel asks another Angel that question, and that Angel then answers Daniel directly. Our questions and situations are likewise represented in Heaven. Truly man is not alone. In :13, Daniel has as it were overheard a discussion between two Angels. Daniel has within him the obvious question: "In that case, how long...?". One of the Angels asks that very question, and then the answer is directed to Daniel. We are to understand that our representative Angel carries our questions and

fears before the court of Heaven, and answers are given. Note the parallel between Angels and God's people discussed on :11.

To two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed- The phrase "evening-mornings" refers to the daily sacrifices, which were offered twice daily, morning and evening. 2300 evening-morning sacrifices were therefore 1150 days. The various time periods in Daniel all seem around this number- 1260, 1290, 1335 days, and three and a half times [years?] which is 1260 days. Perhaps the variations are because the final periods are flexible, depending upon how quickly Israel repent in the last days, and how intense are our prayers and longing for "the end". Or it could be that the 2300 is the period from the beginning of the tribulation until the time when the abomination is ended. Perhaps the days of the elect's tribulation are shortened from 2300 to 1260 (Mt. 24:22).

Antiochus is clearly the "little horn" of Daniel 8, but this is the same little horn which arises from the fourth beast in Dan. 7. Consider the similarities: Dan. 7:8= Dan. 8:23; Dan. 7:20 = Dan. 8:9; Dan. 7:21,25 = Dan. 8:10; Dan. 7:25 = Dan. 8:11,25; Dan. 7:25 changing times and seasons = Dan. 8:11,12, and 1 Macc. 1:44-51 records how Antiochus forced the Jews to stop offering the daily sacrifice and Jewish feasts, and desecrated the altar with pigs' blood. The period in which the daily sacrifices were stopped is described as 2300 mornings and evenings (Dan. 8:13,14), that is 1150 days when the twice daily [morning and evening] sacrifices were stopped. According to the dates given in 1 Macc. 1:41-59; 6:1-17, this is the exact period between when Antiochus began forbidding the daily sacrifices in Autumn of BC167 to the day of his death in the spring of BC163. There is no other very compelling fulfilment of the 2300 mornings and evenings.

Dan. 9:27 says that "for half a week he will put a stop to the sacrifice and the meal offering". Dan. 8 gives a period of 2300 evening-mornings, i.e. 1150 days, for the cessation of sacrifices. In Dan. 9:27 the time period is different- three and a half days, possibly meaning three and a half years or 1260 days. So often in Daniel we find the time periods are flexible. Which they are, because there are various possible and potential fulfilments of the prophecies, and the range of them is because God takes into account human freewill. For prophecy doesn't make God deterministic. Possibly these 1260 days are reduced to 1150 because the "days are shortened for the elect's sake". We must also factor in that 1 Maccabees gives a period of exactly 3 years for the desecration of the altar by Antiochus Epiphanes [1080 days if we take a 360 day year, 1095 days if a 365 day year]. This again could be because there was a shortening of the days. Josephus however claims it was exactly three and a half years (*Wars* 1.32). We could simply suppose that the time periods in Dan. 7:25; 8:14; 9:27; 12:7,11,12 all designate a period of roughly three and a half years and refer to the same time. The differences are because "the days" are shortened or lengthened in accordance with human freewill responses. And another simple takeaway is that all the suffering of God's people is only for a period foreknown by God. There comes a time of the end, a time when the days of suffering end.

The phrase 'evening-mornings' naturally recalls the account of creation, "There was evening and there was morning, a [e.g. second] day" (Gen. 1:8). The hint may be that through that long period [humanly speaking] of darkness, blasphemy and destruction, there was arising a new creation. Likewise in Dan. 7 we have the ferocious beasts arising out of the sea, with the winds / Spirit of God hovering over the waters. Those terrifying beasts and their evil work was in fact part of a new creation. The appearance of the "son of man" at the end then connects with the creation of man.

Perhaps the 'evening-morning' idea is used because we have noted the parallel with Daniel's continual evening and morning prayers, paralleled with the sacrifices. The message may be that the end will come if there is continued prayer during the period. And prayer is one of the human freewill responses that shortens or lengthens fulfilment of prophecy. Possibly there is an allusion to how the punishment for Israel's disobedience would be a longing for morning at evening, and a longing for evening at the morning (Dt. 28:66,67).

Dan 8:15 *It happened when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, that I sought to understand it; and behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man-*

This is clearly an Angel. The Angels are called those who stand by in Zech. 3:7.

Daniel sees the vision but doesn't understand it; but he wants to. Previously, it was the kings who had seen visions and wanted to understand, and Daniel had explained to them. Now the roles are reversed. Daniel is being made to feel himself into the place of those kings. Likewise he is described several times as awestruck and visibly sick and distressed because of the visions or their interpretations; just as the kings had been. Here we have a major feature of the Biblical histories, and of our lives as believers: we are made to experience and feel that which other people do. People who are in our lives, as believers or unbelievers. This is such a common theme in the Bible, and in life, that we conclude that this is what God does oftentimes with man, at least with believers. To bring us to greater human understanding, and to place our own apparently unique experiences within the wider context of society and people around us.

"Man" is *geber*, suggesting the name Gabriel (:16). Daniel sought to understand the meaning of a vision; but two verses earlier, an Angel had asked another Angel for understanding of the same vision. Here surely we have the practical meaning, in Angelic terms, of God knowing our prayers and arranging the answers before we even ask them. Perhaps it was Daniel's guardian Angel who asked a more senior Angel for the interpretation of the vision, knowing Daniel was going to be asking for it. Yet it was the second Angel who actually gave the answer to Daniel (Dan. 8:14). Verse 16 describes the one Angel standing at the Ulai river calling out: "Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision". Yet at this time, Daniel himself was in vision at the Ulai river (:2). His guardian Angel was there, right in front of him. And He had foreknown Daniel's feelings and arranged for another Angel to respond to them... and so the second Angel (Gabriel) also comes near where Daniel was standing (:17). His guardian Angel had literally called Gabriel to come over to Daniel... And all this is going on for you and me *hourly* in the court of Heaven! There's another example of this in Dan. 12. There are two Angels with Daniel by the river (:2). One of them asks the other: "How long shall it be to the end...?" (:6; cp. 8:13). Yet this was exactly the spirit of Daniel! And then the other Angel gives *Daniel* the answer. His guardian Angel knew his unexpressed questions and desires, and passed them on to another Angel to answer. See on Zech. 1:12.

If our Angel has not the strength or authority to give us a blessing which He sees we need, He can ask another Angel to bring this about- thus Daniel's guardian Angel had to ask Gabriel to help Daniel understand the vision which He knew Daniel so desperately wanted to have interpreted (Dan. 8:16). It may be that this request by the guardian Angel was not for the best for Daniel, because it seems to have been denied by God- v. 27 says that at the end of the interpretation or "understanding" being given by Gabriel, "I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding" (v. 27

N.I.V.). In that case, it would seem that when Gabriel said "Understand, O son of man" (v. 17), Gabriel Himself either did not appreciate that giving Daniel the understanding would not help him, or He obeyed the request from the guardian Angel unquestioningly. Or alternatively, was Gabriel saying in v. 17 that Daniel was to understand that the vision would not be fully understood till the last days, as in Dan. 12:4? This would mean that it is in the hands of the Angels as to at what time, both individually and as the body of God's people generally, we gain spiritual understanding of certain parts of the word, in the same way as the Angels debated "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do?". This may be very relevant to the various interpretations of Revelation held by God's true people down through the years, each interpretation giving great encouragement to a certain group of saints, despite their details varying considerably. This process would then be seen to be under the direct control of the Angels.

Dan 8:16 *I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision*- Gabriel is El-Gibbor, a title of the Lord Jesus (Is. 9:6). Hebrews 1 labours the point that the Lord was not an Angel. This Angel was not the Lord Jesus, but just as Michael represented Israel (Dan. 12:1), so this Angel was the representative of the Messiah. I have noted on :11 the theme in Daniel of men and entities having Angelic representatives. It is only through reading the Old Testament in the light of the Lord Jesus that we can come to any correct understanding.

Dan 8:17 *So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I was frightened, and fell on my face: but he said to me, Understand, son of man; for the vision concerns the time of the end*- Daniel was face down (:18), the manner of the Jews to bury. He experienced a symbolic death and resurrection, because the vision concerned "the time of the end". Although the vision clearly concerned Antiochus and Alexander, clearly the essential fulfilment was not in them but in the events of the last days. This makes any other primary fulfilments of the prophecy no more than that- primary fulfilment. "The end" is the "end" of the final cleansing of the sanctuary (:14), "the end" of Lk. 21:24; 1 Cor. 15:23, the visible return of the Lord Jesus to earth to destroy the blasphemous edifice and system then enthroned in Jerusalem.

Being addressed as "son of man" would have reminded Daniel of his contemporary prophet [and possibly acquaintance] Ezekiel, who over 90 times was addressed as "son of man". Just as Daniel falls on his face and is restored upright by an Angel (Dan. 8:17,18), so was Ezekiel: "When I saw it, I fell on my face... He said to me, son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you. The spirit entered into me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me" (Ez. 1:28; 2:1,2). These parallels between believers are common in spiritual life, and are often recorded in Biblical history. We are intended to see such connections, and this becomes the basis of being "in fellowship" in practice. No theological creed creates this fellowship; "doctrine divides; experience unites", as Paul Tournier put it long ago.

"For at the time of the end shall be the vision" (Dan. 8:17) would suggest that the things of the little horn etc. have their main fulfilment at the very end, before the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, and not in any other time historically. Indeed we could fairly define "the vision" as the entire vision of the ram and goat (:1). This would then require the ram, goat and little horn to all have a specifically latter day interpretation. The obvious historical references to Persia and Greece were therefore merely the immediate potential fulfilment, which didn't fully come about in

that there was no direct Divine intervention to re-establish God's Kingdom and eternally save His people. Just as all the metals of Dan. 2 and beasts of Dan. 7 exist in the last day, despite their clear historical references.

Dan 8:18 *Now as he was speaking with me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face toward the ground; but he touched me, and set me upright*- See on :17; Dan. 9:21. Clearly enough, as noted on :17, the time of Daniel's resurrection was to be the time of the end, when these things would have their fulfilment. Any historical interpretations of the horn and desolation of the sanctuary are therefore not the essential fulfilments.

Dan 8:19 *He said, See, I will make you know what shall be in the latter time of the indignation; for it concerns the appointed time of the end*- This is as clear a statement as we could wish that the events described in the vision speak of the last days, and the historical fulfilments were only incipient, clear as they were.

Dan 8:20 *The ram which you saw, that had the two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia*- It has just been stressed in :17,19 that the vision is of the time of the end. The obvious historical fulfilments in the kings of Media and Persia were therefore only primary fulfilments. There must be a latter day equivalent, but in the very last days, the times when Daniel would be resurrected (see on :17,18).

Dan 8:21 *The rough male goat is the king of Greece: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king*- Philip was king of Macedon before Alexander; this may be an example of where the prophecy will only have its 'best fit' fulfilment in the last days (:17,19). Or "first" may simply mean 'greatest'. Their great leader, Alexander the great, was “the great horn” on the goat (Dan. 8:21); this was broken, and four kingdoms arose out of that (Dan. 8:22). But out of them arose “a king of fierce countenance” who was to be “broken without hand” (Dan. 8:25). This is the very language of the entire image being broken by the stone cut out without hands, which speaks of the return of Christ to earth (Dan. 2:44). But at first blush, this seems out of chronological sequence- that a fierce king arising out of the breakup of the Greek empire [surely referring to Antiochus in its historical sense of fulfilment] should be broken by the second coming of Christ- many centuries later. But the problem is solved once we understand that the image stands erect and complete in the last days, in the sense that elements of all the previous empires and leaders would be incorporated in the final entity which shall be destroyed “without hand” by the return of the Lord Jesus. Daniel 7 has spoken of the fourth beast having a little horn which is destroyed by the coming of Christ and the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth. But Daniel 8 speaks of the *third* beast, the third kingdom of the image of Daniel 2, as having a “little horn” which is destroyed by the Kingdom of God. The conclusion would seem to be that at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, to whom the little horn of Daniel 8 clearly refers, there could have been the coming of a "Christ" and establishment of the Kingdom. But this didn’t happen, and so Antiochus Epiphanes became a prototype of the latter day little horn, which will emerge from the *fourth* beast; and there is a large gap or delay in fulfilment between his time and that of Christ’s coming.

Dan 8:22 *As for that which was broken, in the place where four stood up, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power*- The four generals who took power after the death of Alexander the Great did not have "his power". But as laboured in :17,19, these historical events were not the ultimate fulfilment; they

point forward to events specifically around the "time of the end", the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, when Daniel shall be resurrected. We can look therefore for the arising of an individual like Alexander, who shall be broken before the Lord's return.

Dan 8:23 *In the latter time of their kingdom*- The idea could be that the historical kingdoms and related events of Greece, Antiochus, Medo-Persia etc. are to have their latter day fulfilment, as stressed in :17,19.

When the wicked have come to the full, a king of fierce appearance and understanding mysteries shall stand up-

"When the wicked have come to the full" could mean "when the transgressors have completed (their guilt)", a similar idea to the iniquity of the Amorites becoming full, i.e. judgment came after a specified period. And why like that? Because that period was their opportunity for repentance. We marvel that a hardened blasphemer like Antiochus could be given a hope of repentance. We think of how God likewise tried to get Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar to repent and gave them a specific time period. It's the same idea of God elsewhere waiting until "the cup of iniquity was full" before judging as in Gen. 15:16: “The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full”. Likewise Mt. 23:32: “fill you up then the measure of your fathers” and 1 Thess. 2:16: “to fill up their sins”. This is the time of Dan. 9:24 "To make an end of sins". But that verse in Dan. 9 is in the midst of a quite different chronology, of the 70 weeks prophecy. Again we have to conclude that there were various chronological schemes that were potentially possible, such is God's sensitivity to human freewill, and His refusal to make His prophecies simply determinate predictions that rob man of his freewill.

The same words for a king of fierce face are found in Dt. 28:49,50, describing the *nation* that will be brought upon a disobedient Israel in judgment: "Yahweh will bring a nation against you from far, from the end of the earth, as the eagle flies; a nation whose language you will not understand; a nation of fierce face". That nation was embodied in this individual king. Just as there is confusion between king and kingdoms in all the visions. Dt. 28:50 can be understood on one hand as Rome, but as discussed on :1, the initial possible iteration of the vision concerned Antiochus Epiphanes. When that didn't work out, the kaleidoscope turned and it became relevant to Rome, and then it turned again, becoming relevant to the latter day antichrist. The whole vision of Dan. 8 is described as "the vision of the evenings and mornings" (:26) and this may also allude to Deuteronomy 28 and the curses for disobedience: : "In the morning you will say 'If only it was evening!' and in the evening you will say 'If only it was morning!' because of the great fear your heart will feel and because of the sight your eyes will see" (Dt. 28:67).

Antiochus Epiphanes is characterized by "understanding mysteries" in Dan. 8:23; he is a fake Daniel, who did understand (Dan. 1:4,17,20; 8:5,15; 9:2; 10:1). Just as he seeks to act as God.

This person arises in the time of the end- and this phrase in Daniel always has some reference to the time of the Lord’s return and Daniel's personal resurrection (:17,19). He is to arise out of the Syrian Kingdom, i.e. part of the divided empire of Alexander the Great. Historically, this must refer to Antiochus who arose in the latter time of the kingdom of the four generals; Rome just doesn't fit here. Some Protestant expositors seem to wish to see the Papacy here, and so have ignored the obvious application to Antiochus and tried to force everything into a Roman context. The individual king of fierce countenance applies so much better to Antiochus than to any

of the Roman generals involved in the events of AD67-70. But whether Antiochus or Rome, the vision specifically refers to the very last days. The time when he will arise will be the time when “iniquity is come to the full”- which fits most comfortably with the very last days. The iniquity is that of :12, the sin of Israel in rejecting Jesus as Messiah. Dan. 8:17, 19 make it clear: “The vision pertains to *the time of the end*... the final period of indignation... the appointed *time of the end*”. This is the time when Israel's wickedness (:12) has come to its full point, when final judgment and deliverance will come. Such a point of the final filling up of Israel's sin is envisaged in Mt. 23:32; 1 Thess. 2:16. "Understanding mysteries" can mean that he would use deceit, as explained on :25. This makes sense when applied to Antiochus: "The king sent his chief collector of tribute, who came unto Jerusalem with a great multitude, and spake peaceable words unto them; but all was deceit: for when they had given him credence, he fell suddenly upon the city, and smote it very sore, and destroyed much people of Israel... Antiochus sent also that detestable ringleader, Apollonius, with an army of two and twenty thousand, commanding him to slay all those that were in their best age, and to sell the women and the younger sort; who, coming to Jerusalem, and pretending peace, did forbear until the holy day of the Sabbath, when, taking the Jews keeping holyday, he commanded his men to arm themselves, and so he slew all them that were gone to the celebrating of the Sabbath" (1 Macc. 1:30; 2 Macc. 5:24). Dan. 11:27 provides the history; he would "obtain the kingdom by smooth sayings". The deceit of Antiochus was seen in how he deceived and destroyed his nephew, Ptolemy Philometor, in order to get power.

The manifestation of a Kingdom in its leader is to be found in the way the antiChrist is called "the king of fierce countenance" in Dan. 8:23. But the entire nation or entity which persecute Israel in the last days is a "nation of fierce countenance" (the same words are used- Dt. 28:50). Their leader is an embodiment of them.

Dan 8:24 *His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall be very destructive, and shall prosper and do his own will-*

"But not by his own power" is yet another reminder that these powerful men and empires had actually no power of themselves, it was all given by God, as in Jn. 19:11; Is. 10:5 etc. We note that the interpretation in :24,25 differs somewhat from the original vision, which spoke of the desecration and destruction of the sanctuary. There is not reference to this in the interpretation. Possibly because the potential for Antiochus Epiphanes to do this wasn't realized. He did desecrate the sanctuary, but he didn't destroy the temple to the extent implied in the vision. The interpretation also makes no reference to the "host" or army given him in the vision. These aspects were unfulfilled in him; but did and will come true in future possible fulfilments of the prophecy.

See on Rev. 21:12. The Lord was intensely intellectually conscious throughout His sufferings. Often it is possible to see in His words allusions to even seven or eight OT passages, all in context, all relevant. Reflect how His response to Pilate “You could have no power against me" (Jn. 19:11) was a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 8, about the persecutors becoming mighty “but not by his own power". The apparent mightiness was due to God giving him the power; that is the point. See on :12. God only gives power to the Gentile persecutors of Israel because of their sins and His desire for their repentance. This is why the repentance of Israel is such an important precondition for the Lord's return, and we ought to be preaching it to them right now.

The reference however may also be to how the beast is given power not of himself but from the entity known as "the dragon" (Rev. 13:2), an earlier entity which has arisen.

And he shall destroy the mighty ones and the holy people- Or, "the people of the holy ones". As noted on :10,11, each of God's people have a representative Angel. What is done to them is effectively done to the Angels who represent them before the court of Heaven. The "holy ones" of :12,13 are clearly Angels. Again we have confirmed that in Daniel we are being invited to see God's host or people on earth as having representative Angels in Heaven. Hence the Lord Jesus will return with His holy ones or Angels with Him, in order to judge His holy ones on earth.

Dan 8:25 *Through his policy*-

"Policy" is the word elsewhere translated "wisdom" and it is used of Daniel himself in Dan. 1:17; 5:11,12,14. Likewise the little horn 'understands riddles', AV "understanding dark sentences" (:23), just as Daniel is described as doing (Dan. 5:12). Daniel repeatedly said that his wisdom was not from him, just as for the little horn "his strength will be mighty, but not with his own strength" (:23). "And so Daniel prospered" (Dan. 6:29) is the word thrice used of the little horn prospering (Dan. 8:12,24,25). The little horn is an anti-Daniel. Not simply evil, but actually a mimic of what is true and Godly; a veritable anti-Christ.

The singular "his" clearly refers to the latter day antiChrist individual in view. It appears somewhat of a twist to make this apply to generations of Roman Catholic leaders, as historicists do. It is the official policy of Islam to use deceit to bring down their enemies and to destroy under the banner of peace. The individual would fit a radical Islamist in the last days.

He shall cause deceit to prosper; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and in their security shall he destroy many-

Again, the initial application was to Antiochus. "In (time of) security he will destroy many" is the language used of him when we read the Biblically provided history of him in Dan. 11:21,24. Again we note that for all the reasons God could judge the little horn, the one given is his pride "in his heart", an internal attitude that God is so sensitive to.

The fierce king "by peace shall destroy many" (AV); perhaps alluded to in the prophecy that the sudden destruction wrought by the Lord's return will be when men are saying "peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3). This certainly sounds like the result of jihadist Islam, the [supposed] religion of peace. The Semitic consonants S-L-M are at the root of the words Islam and also Shalom, Salaam [Hebrew and Arabic for 'peace']. There were no vowels in ancient Hebrew and Arabic. The connection is in that peace ['salaam' in Arabic] is believed to come from 'islam', submission. Muslim apologists frequently justify their religion by claiming that Islam is a religion of peace [even if they believe in murdering anyone who disagrees]. As we survey the atrocities being performed in the name of Islam today in the territory of the land promised to Abraham... we are seeing this being fulfilled. By peace / salaam / Islam, many are being destroyed. What however we are still waiting to see is more focus upon the leader of the jihadists, for these prophecies focus upon 'kings' and 'horns' [kings] more than more abstract 'kingdoms'. This may partly be because God attaches much importance to the responsibilities of leaders, but also because there must arise prominent leaders, especially an antiChrist figure who is the "fierce king" orchestrating this destruction of many by his religion of 'peace'.

The latter day beast of Revelation and his publicity agent likewise do apparent miracles; the little horn of Dan. 8:24 will destroy by miracles (AV “wonderfully”, but

the Hebrew is elsewhere translated as ‘miracles’ or ‘performing miracles’). The Koran claims that God will perform miracles in support of Moslem activity and judgment of unbelievers, especially Israel. The prophet Mohammad is the pattern and “aim” of Islam and their leaders. The miracles attributed to Mohammad in the Hadith are similar to latter day judgments upon Israel. It may be that the Islamists bring these judgments in a manner which appears miraculous:
Multiplying bread and water *Volume 4, Book 56, Numbers 779, 780*
Making animals speak *Volume 3, Book 39, Number 517*
Splitting the moon *Volume 6, Book 60, Number 388*
Making stars appear *Volume 1, Book 8, Number 454*
Making rain *Volume 8, Book 73, Number 115*
Making a dead body arise *Volume 4, Book 56, Number 814*
Ascended into the sky and thence to Heaven

All these things are spoken of as happening in the various seal or trumpet judgments. It may be that the Caliph of the final jihadist Islamic entity does indeed appear to be able to do miracles, and he consciously does these things because he wishes to impersonate Mohammad. Remember article 8 of the Hamas Covenant: "Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model”- also quoted by the jihadists today.

The coming of the "wicked one" is "after the working [Gk. *energeia*] of the Satan". The Satan of the last days is as defined in Revelation 12- the beast of the last days. But God sends "strong delusion that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. 2:9,11). "Strong delusion" again uses the same term, *energeia*. The energy in the whole thing is from God, not some 'satan' in the orthodox sense of radical evil in the cosmos. The satan-beast of the last days is under God's direct Angelic control, as made clear in Revelation. Due to the false miracles, the masses will flock to believe in this individual. We are already seeing something of the sort in the land promised to Abraham, where the Islamic extremism and its caliph is being believed and followed in a way which is strange and unbelievable to the rational observer. God will confirm these people so that they believe this individual and the beast-satan system behind him.

He shall also stand up against the prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand-

"The prince of princes" could initially refer to Michael the chief prince (Dan. 10:13), "the commander of the [Angelic] host of Yahweh" of Josh. 5:14,15. This was in view in earlier potential fulfilments through Antiochus Epiphanes. But in the last days, it applies to the Lord Jesus. "He shall also stand up against the Prince of princes" ultimately refers to God ("the God of gods" Dan. 11:36; "God of gods and Lord of kings", Dan. 2:47). The parallel "little horn" in Dan. 7 exalts himself against "the most high" (Dan. 7:8,11,20,25). In the latter days, this refers to God manifest in the Lord Jesus, the prince of the kings of the earth. But this didn't happen, because the Antiochus application was a potential that didn't happen. Just as in Dan. 11 everything fits so well, until we come to a sudden point when it no longer does. The application failed, but in essence will come true with a latter day Antiochus, another time of peace and safety, and the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus is called "Messiah *the Prince*" in Dan. 9:25 in order to contrast with how the anti-Christ, the fake Christ, is also called "the prince of the host" in Dan. 8:11. "It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host" (ESV). This prince "shall stand up against the Prince of princes", the Lord Jesus (Rev. 1:5; see on :11). There will be a final showdown between these two princes, and their respective followers and Kingdoms. The armies of the earth / land will be gathered together

against those of the Lord Jesus. And the Moslems will eagerly rush into this final conflict, believing that this is "the Day of Discrimination, the day when the two armies met" (Sura 8.41). Being broken without human hand is clearly the language of the Lord's return to destroy the king of the north and the entire image system he personifies (Dan. 2:34; 11:45). This individual therefore exists at the time of the Lord's return and shall be destroyed thereby. It cannot therefore majorly refer to any system or individuals before that time. The historical fulfilment would have been in Antiochus dying not in battle but of a mysterious illness. It is hard to see any possible application to the destruction of any Roman entity associated with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70.

The little stone cut out without human hand in Dan. 2 is the very phrase used of the destruction of Antiochus Epiphanes, who "shall also stand up against the prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand" (Dan. 8:25). Clearly there was a possible potential fulfilment of the Dan. 2 prophecy at his time. But again, it didn't happen and the prophecy was again reapplied and reinterpreted. Antiochus died suddenly of a stroke. But the Kingdom of God didn't come, perhaps because Judas Maccabeus failed to be the potential Messiah figure. And above all, because the Jews were not spiritually ready and wanted their own kingdom rather than God's Kingdom.

Dan 8:26 *The vision of the evenings and mornings which has been told is true: but seal up the vision; for it belongs to many days to come*- Again we see emphasized, as in :17,19, that the obvious historical fulfilment in the likes of Alexander and Antiochus was only the incipient fulfilment; these things belong to the very last days, the time of Daniel's personal resurrection (:17-19). The simple statement that the vision is true is lifted from Dan. 2:45. As noted on :25, the destruction of the image system and the beasts is the same as the destruction of this latter day arrogant individual who will personify them. The vision was to be sealed until the time of the end, which Dan. 12:9 explains as meaning that it would not be understood until the time of the Lord's return; as Rev. 13:10. The unsealing of the scroll in Revelation therefore also majorly refers to the events of the very last days before the Lord's return. Only then, when prophecy is being fulfilled before the eyes of the faithful, will the ultimate interpretation be apparent. All we can do now is muse over the primary fulfilments, and get some broad picture of how things shall unfold at the end. The purpose of prophecy is not to predict the future, but so that the generation that sees the fulfilment will realize that this was all foretold and all is going wonderfully according to plan. And the traumas of the last days will mean that this is vital encouragement.

Daniel's prophecies, specifically those with potential for fulfilment under Antiochus, were "sealed". The implication may be that no matter how men go to and fro to find knowledge, the fulfilment will remain hidden. The text of the prophecies were possibly literally sealed but opened in the time of Antiochus. And they were written in Aramaic so that the Jews of the time clearly understood. But Is. 29 speaks of prophetic words being sealed, impossible of interpretation by learned and unlearned alike, as a result of Israel's sin and refusal to realize their potential. The sealing of the prophetic book there referred to a judgment in consequence of Judah's sins. Daniel's prophecies about the Antiochus period were sealed because they were only to come to fulfilment if the seals were removed by the fulfilment of various preconditions. This didn't happen. And so the concept is repeated in Revelation, where the scroll of the book of life, the ultimate sealed book, is unsealed by the Lamb after the seal events of the very last days.

Dan 8:27 *I Daniel, fainted, and was sick for some days; then I rose up, and did the king's business: and I wondered at the vision-*

Daniel's trauma may be because he had lived through the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, and was expecting restoration. But now he is given a vision of an even worse destruction of the temple and even more abuse of his people. For as yet he has not received the prophecies of Messiah and eternal restoration of Dan. 9 and 11. He had clearly under estimated the sin and impenitence of his people, and was still struggling to accept the conditional and flexible nature of Divine prophecy, as we see also in Dan. 9:1-4. And perhaps all God's children have struggled with these same things, especially those who come to accept they will likely die before their Lord returns; having lived their lives in expectation of His imminent coming. I suggest that it was Daniel's reflection upon these things at this point that led him to make the prayer of confession of sin of Dan. 9.

Why the mention that after seeing these things, Daniel got up and went back to work doing the King's work? The idea is that like us, we understand clearly that kings and empires shall all pass away and we always even know some details about events leading up to that. But for now, we must go on with our workaday lives. Although doing what we do in the knowledge that all this shall pass away and is as light as the chaff that shall be blown away and known no more.

This is the same kind of conclusion to Dan. 7; Daniel feels sick after the interpretation is given, having realized that the fulfilment was not until "many days to come" (:26). As noted on Dan. 7:15, he had the welfare of God's people so deeply in his heart that he felt actually ill because he realized that their restoration was not going to happen as had been potentially possible when Jeremiah first uttered the restoration prophecies and mentioned a 70 year period.

But none understood it- This may mean that he discussed it with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but they too did not totally understand it. This lack of understanding was likely because he knew little about Greece. "But none understood it" suggests Daniel shared it with others, but no one was able to explain it. Thus his experiences again repeat those of the kings for whom he had interpreted dreams. Just as we have experiences which enable us to understand the feelings of others in our lives. Likewise "fainted" means to be exhausted or sleepless, the verb used in Dan 2:1 for how the king's sleep fainted from him. Again by this Daniel was allowed to enter into the experiences of a man who had been in his life many years ago. We may pass through experiences which help us understand how someone felt with whom we intersected decades ago.

Daniel didn't understand the 2300 evening-morning period (Dan. 8:27), and in Dan. 9 he is given understanding (Dan. 9:2,22,23). The answer was in the 70 weeks prophecy. "Understand the vision" (Dan. 9:23) prefaces the 70 weeks prophecy, and the vision in view is that of Dan. 8, repeatedly called "the vision" (Dan. 8:1,2,13,15,17,26). The issues of Dan. 9:24 are exactly those of Dan. 8:12-14: transgression will be finished, everlasting righteousness will be brought, and a holy of holies anointed. But just as the 2300 period differs from the 1260 day period of Dan. 7, so the interpretation in Dan. 9 differs. Because the 70 weeks period is not 2300 evening-mornings. Likewise the 1260,1290 and 1335 day periods of Dan. 12 seem to offer yet another scenario. The language of Dan. 12:10,11 is that of Dan. 11:31-35, initially about the possible fulfilment in Antiochus Epiphanes. Surely we have to conclude that the time periods are flexible and changeable, as God factors in all the possible fulfilments in line with human freewill decisions. This really has to be the

case, for otherwise Divine prophecy would be simply deterministic and rob man of any freewill.

DANIEL CHAPTER 9

Dan 9:1 *In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans*- Daniel would have known Isaiah's prophecies that Cyrus would or could have been the Messiah figure to save Judah. "Darius" was likely his general or another title for Cyrus. The 70 years prophecies of Jeremiah were all about 70 years dominance of Babylon ending with the restoration. Now was the time... but it wasn't happening. The end of the Babylonian domination of Judah spurred Daniel to study and pray for the restoration of the kingdom of God in the form of Judah. He had seen the first part of the image and beast prophecies come true, at least in its historical form. He obviously thought that in some sense, the "end" could come- if there was sufficient repentance. And his prayer of repentance was an attempt to demonstrate that. He didn't merely resign himself to there having to be a further sequence of kings and kingdoms dominating the land before the end came. He was open to the idea of God's flexibility and ability to change a predicted set of events, in line with human repentance and spirituality. Or perhaps he understood the image as standing complete under the headship of Babylon, and now being ready for destruction by the little stone, seeing that the Babylonian headship had now been removed.

Dan 9:2 *In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by the books*- Not by vision and direct revelation, but by his own studies. Hence his deep disappointment when he received the visions of Dan. 7 and 8 about how the end was not going to be after the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecy, but there had been delays incorporated into the Divine program because of Judah's sin and refusal to fully repent. The record of this prayer is in the past tense (:4). It could be that after realizing at the end of Dan. 8 that things were not going to work out as had been potentially possible, Daniel recalls this previous prayer of his, and recognizes that it has not been answered as he had wished; it would be answered, but not within the time frame he had expected. And so was fulfilled Ez. 14:14, which had stated that even Daniel could not avert the calamity to befall Judah.

It could be argued that in fact Daniel misunderstood. He was calculating 70 years from the first deportations from Judah, which he had been part of. But a fair case can be made that those 70 years should have been calculated from the destruction of the temple. Yet still God responds to Daniel's prayer and misunderstanding, doesn't point out where he had miscalculated, and instead responds by refocusing Daniel upon the final ultimate fulfilment of the restoration after the 70 weeks leading to Messiah's Kingdom.

The number of the years about which the word of Yahweh had come to Jeremiah the prophet for the accomplishing of the desolations of Jerusalem, even seventy years- God has intentions that He has placed in history. But this doesn't mean that man is predetermined beyond his freewill. Always there is a flexible element in prophecies, to allow for the human response element. No new vision appears after Dan. 8- what we have in Dan. 9-12 is explanation and further development of that vision. The explanations are in Dan. 8:17,19-26; 9:24-27 and Dan. 11:2-12:3. Clearly the kaleidoscope was turning and the elements being rearranged to give different

scenarios as the primary possibilities were precluded by various human failures to meet the preconditions. Daniel understood that after 70 years Jerusalem must be restored; but he earnestly prayed for their forgiveness *so that* this would happen (Dan. 9:2 cp. 19). Perhaps he opened his window and prayed towards Jerusalem exactly because he wanted to fulfil 2 Chron. 6:37,38: "If they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn, and pray unto thee… toward their land… and toward the city which thou hast chosen". He knew that repentance was a precondition for the promised restoration to occur.

In the context of the returning exiles, Daniel was aware that the 70 years of desolation had to be fulfilled, and yet he asks God not to defer the promised restoration (Dan. 9:2 cp. 19), as if he understood that the predicted revival of Israel could still be delayed by God on account of their unpreparedness, even though it was prophesied. Daniel understood from Jeremiah's prophecies that Jerusalem's fortunes would be revived after the 70 year period was ended. Yet he goes on to ask God to *immediately* forgive His people, as if Daniel even dared hope that the period might be shortened. Daniel lived into the reign of Cyrus (Dan. 6:28), and so he would have witnessed "the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25; Ezra 1:1). But it seems to me that whilst the prophecy of the 70 years came true in one sense, the Jews didn't respond as they should, and so the time of Zion's true freedom in the Messianic Kingdom was delayed. Daniel had been petitioning the Father to not delay beyond the 70 year period in doing this. But in another sense, the prophecy was re-interpreted; Daniel was now told that there was to be a "seventy weeks of years" (Dan. 9:24 RSV) period involved in order to gain ultimate forgiveness for Israel as Daniel had just been praying for. The 70 years had become "seventy weeks of years". The command to rebuild Jerusalem was given in the first year of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1); but Daniel must have watched in vain for any sign that Zion's glad morning had really come. And so it is recorded that in the third year of Cyrus Daniel was given a vision that confirmed to him that "the thing was true, but the time appointed was long [Heb. 'extended'; the word is also translated "greater", "more"]: and he understood the thing" (Dan. 10:1). What was "the thing" that was true, which Daniel sought to understand? Surely it was the vision of the 70 years that he had sought to "understand" in Dan. 9:2. The Hebrew "dabar", translated "thing", is usually translated "word". He was comforted that the word of prophecy would come true; it was "noted in the scripture of truth" (Dan. 10:21). It was just that it had been extended in its fulfilment; "for yet the vision is for many days" (Dan. 10:14). And this was how he came to "understand the thing / word". The essential and ultimate fulfilment of the 70 years prophecy would only be after a long time, involving 70 "weeks of years". Thus Daniel came to "understand" the vision (Dan. 10:1); hence he was so shocked, depressed and disappointed that the fulfilment would not be in his days. But he is set up as a representative of those of us in the very last days who shall likewise "understand" (s.w. Dan. 12:10) the very same prophecies which Daniel studied. Daniel is described as both understanding, and also not understanding (Dan. 10:1; 12:8). Surely the idea is that he understood the principle of deferment and the outline meaning of the prophecy; but he didn't understand the details. And so perhaps it is with us who will, or do, likewise "understand" as Daniel did.

The prophecy of 70 years exile in Babylon is specifically stated as having been fulfilled in the first year of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:20-22, "till seventy years were completed... in the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled"). But it is also said to have been fulfilled in the second year of Darius: "O Yahweh of Armies, how long will You not have mercy on

Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You have had indignation these seventy years?" (Zech. 1:12; the rest of Zech. 1 shows that God has indeed had mercy on Jerusalem). Daniel 9 could be reinterpreting the 70 years as 70 'sevens'; or, adding another 70 'sevens' to the 70 years. Clearly fulfilment of time periods can be delayed or made open to various starting and ending points. Such is the open ended nature of such prophecies. Another possibility is that the taking of Babylon by "Darius" [unknown in secular history] was effectively by Cyrus. Daniel would have known Isaiah's prophecies, that had in advance named Cyrus as the Messiah. But that hadn't quite happened as envisaged in Isaiah- hence Daniel's concern.

The end of the exile and the restoration was the time when the prophecies of Jeremiah about 70 years would be fulfilled. It should be noted that Jer. 25:11 specifically states that the 70 years would be the length of the Babylonian kingdom: "And those nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years". Jer. 29:10 is explicit: "When Babylon's seventy years are over". I suggested on Dan. 2 that the initial possible fulfilment of the image prophecy was in the Babylonian kingdom from Nebuchadnezzar onwards until its fall. The beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign is often dated to 605 BC; and so the defeat of Babylon in BC 538 roughly 70 years later would mean that Darius was Cyrus [or his army general], and this was when the Jews were intended to return. But Cyrus failed to be the intended Messiah figure and the Jews generally preferred the soft life in Babylon rather than the restoration of Zion. And so there had to be the prophecy of Daniel 9 to provide another path forward.

I suggest that having read of the 70 year period in Jer. 29:10, Daniel went on to Jer. 29:12-14, which predicate the prophecy coming true upon Israel's prayer- and therefore he prays the prayer we have here: "When you call to Me and come and pray to Me, I will give heed to you. You will search for Me and find Me, if only you seek me wholeheartedly. I will be at hand for you – declares the Lord – and I will restore your fortunes. And I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places to which I have banished you – declares the Lord – and I will bring you back to the place from which I have exiled you". The time period was conditional upon Israel's prayer- just as prayer plays a huge part in the realisation of the final time periods. Daniel understood it was conditional and therefore he prays. Daniel is in fact praying hoping against hope; for he surely was aware of the words of his contemporary prophet Ezekiel, who had stated that even if Noah, Job and Daniel were to intercede for the remnant, they could save none but themselves (Ez. 14:12-20). But like Moses, he prays for what he has been told was impossible; or we think of Jeremiah, praying when God had told him not to pray any more for Judah. The problem was that one man's prayer could not be counted for all Israel. But Daniel gallantly tries- and fails. The Lord Jesus set His face to Jerusalem as Daniel set his face to Jerusalem to pray. And He succeeded where Daniel as a good but imperfect man had to fail. However his prayer did elicit Angelic response (:21-23)- the essence of the prayer would be even more gloriously answered, but not immediately, as Daniel clearly hoped. We see the same with the Lord's request not to actually have to die on the cross and to be saved from that death. In one sense the 70 years prophecies were fulfilled (2 Chron. 36:21) but in another they weren't. But even the response to the prayer, in the 70 weeks prophecy, was open to adjustment. Even the word for "weeks" is literally 'sevens' and could apply to seven periods of things other than days. For it is hard to find a clear historical interpretation of the 7 - 62 - 1 week program outlined. Finding credible starting points is very difficult. Any interposition of a 'gap' within the 70 weeks [e.g. placing the final half week in the last days] surely is at variance with the whole idea of a 70 week period. The 'anointed one' initially could have been Cyrus (Is. 45:1),

Zerubbabel or Joshua the High Priest. They all failed in their potentials. Cyrus was the best initial fulfilment option, appearing 49 years [7 'weeks'] after the destruction of the temple. But he failed in his potential, being distracted by worldly power and paying too much attention to the pressure from his princes and his son Cambyses. The rest of the 70 weeks prophecy goes awry after that point; just as Antiochus Epiphanes fulfilled so much about the little horn and "king of the north" in Dan. 7,8,11, but failed to fulfil to the end. Various other preconditions, especially the spiritual state of God's people, were not met. And so the kaleidoscope turns again, and we have these things deferred until the last days. This is the genre of apocalyptic. All attempts to view these scriptures as simple linear predictions of events will fail. With the possible exception of the Lord's Olivet Prophecy, which is about events solely in the very last few days before His coming, Bible prophecy in the apocalyptic genre is not intended to have a single simple linear, chronological fulfilment. We naturally enquire why we have so much detail about scenarios that didn't come true; the same question as to why we have all the detail of Ez. 40-48 about the commands relating to a temple the exiles should have built but didn't. It is to bring us to the spirit of David in Ps. 139, marvelling at how much knowledge God has. Not only of our thoughts and actions before we do them, but of all our multiple potentials that didn't come true. And those of His collective people. The result of the 70 weeks was "to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness" (:24). This ultimately was not in practice achieved by the 70 weeks prophecy; it finally comes true through the work of the Lord Jesus coming to its full term at His return.

Another possibility is that there is an intentional ambiguity in how Jer. 25:11,12 speaks of "seventy years". The Hebrew word for "Seventy" is composed of consonants which with different vowel points could read "weeks". After 'weeks of years', the restoration would come. The difference is between *shav'uim* [weeks] or *shiv'im* [seventy]. And Daniel is being told that Israel's impenitence and the failure of the Messiah figures meant that God was now reading this as weeks of years, not 'seventy years'.

We note that Daniel was reading and responding to God's word through Jeremiah. In response, he has a word from God (Dan. 9:25). This is a more dramatic instance of what happens in the life of every believer. Our hearing of God's word leads to His word in response to us, in that His word is a living word.

Jeremiah's prophecies against Babylon were sent to Babylon when Zedekiah visited Babylon in the fourth year of his reign (Jer. 51:59-61). Quite possibly it was from this that Daniel became aware of Jeremiah's prophecies.

Dan 9:3 *I set my face to the Lord God*- Daniel prayed with his windows open toward Jerusalem. Yet he was praying to God, not Jerusalem as a city or the temple as a material place. The physical praying toward Jerusalem was merely to focus him upon the essence, that God was still somehow present in ruined, Divinely judged Jerusalem. If however the idea is that he prayed heavenwards, this could be read as him recognizing that as Ezekiel had described, the glory of the Divine presence had indeed now left Jerusalem.

To seek by prayer and petitions, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes- He recognized that Bible prophecy isn't just automatically fulfilled. He realized that the idea of revival after 70 years required prayer and deep repentance. Or maybe that 70 year period had already expired, and so Daniel begs for the restoration to happen. We see here the openness of God, which is a function of His extreme sensitivity to human prayer and repentance. This is why the 70 year period was understood by Daniel to be flexible, and why there are various time periods in Daniel which apparently reflect the

varying possibilities in fulfilment. This is why we can never construct an exact chronology of latter day events in advance. So much is open.

"Petitions", Heb. *hanan*, is a form of the common word for 'grace'. He was looking for grace, realizing, as he clearly states, that Israel have sinned, broken the covenant and didn't deserve anything from God.

Dan 9:4 *I prayed to Yahweh my God, and made confession, and said, Oh Lord-*

The Hebrew for "prayed" is strictly 'to make intercession'. Daniel wasn't simply asking for something. He saw himself as interceding for Israel, based on his own rightness with God, and begging God to show grace to His impenitent people who had broken His covenant. He failed and His prayer as it stood went unanswered, in the short term. But the answer was the revelation of the Messiah, who would successfully mediate and make an end of all sin.

John Collins has observed that the prayer "flows smoothly, full of traditional phrases and free of Aramaisms" (*Daniel* p. 347). This is what we would expect when a native Hebrew speaker prays in Hebrew to his God; we can have every confidence that we are reading the actual words prayed by a man many centuries ago. The Hebrew translated "confession" is the common word used for praise or worship. To confess sin in such true penitence is the ultimate worship; we too easily associate worship with musical performance, but this is not the idea in Hebrew thought. God may be worshipped upon or using musical instruments, but the essence of worship is within the heart.

The great and dreadful God- The phrase is used to distinguish God from the gods of the nations (Dt. 7:21; 10:17; 1 Chron. 16:25; Ps. 96:4; there are many allusions to Deuteronomy in this prayer). Daniel realized that idolatry was the essence of Israel's sin. That there is only one God has such huge implications in human life. This title of God is also used by Nehemiah (Neh. 1:5; 4:14; 9:32). Nehemiah was also influenced in his prayer of penitence by Daniel's prayer. We too should reflect Biblical influence in our words and reasoning; in this sense the Bible becomes a living word, a word for our lives.

Who keeps covenant and loving kindness with those who love Him and keep His commandments- Daniel accepts that covenant relationship requires obedience, and yet he is going to confess that Israel have been disobedient; and he has faith that despite their continued disobedience, his singular repentance and prayer might be accepted by God, so that the covenant blessings might be restored to Israel. This speaks to the issue of whether God's grace is conditional or not. As Daniel states, the grace of "loving kindness" of the new covenant is conditional upon obedience; and yet that grace is such by its nature that we can hope to receive this grace despite personal disobedience, through the mediation of another (the Lord Jesus, in our case). If Daniel had not understood that, he would not have prayed this prayer as he did.

It has been well argued that the prayers of Dan. 9 and Neh. 9 alludes heavily to Zechariah and Haggai's calls for repentance in order that the Kingdom be reestablished. "In both we see the key role of the prophets in warning the earlier generation (Zech. 1:4, 5, 6; 7:7, 12; cf. Neh. 9:26, 30; Ezra 9:10–11; Dan. 9:6, 10) and the use of the construction of ביד to speak of the agency of these prophets (Zech. 7:12; cf. Neh. 9:30; Ezra 9:11; Dan 9:10). In both we see the function of the law as the standard rejected by the earlier generation (Zech. 7:12; cf. Neh. 9:16,29,34; Ezra 9:10, 14; Neh. 1:7; Dan. 9:5, 10,11) and the near identity of the words of the prophets and the law (Zech. 7:12; 1:6a; cf. Neh. 9:29,34; Dan. 9:10,11). In both the earlier generation is identified as אבות (Zech. 1:2, 4, 5, 6; 8:14; cf. Neh. 9:2,9,34,36; Ezra 9:7;

Neh. 1:6; Dan. 9:16; Ps. 106:6,7) and the sin of that generation is linked with the present generation (Zech. 1:6b, 8:14; cf. Neh. 9:32–37; Ezra 9:6–7; Neh. 1:6–7; Dan. 9; Ps. 106:6). Finally, in both there is an admission of the justice of God (Zech. 1:6b; cf. Neh. 9:33; Ezra 9:15; Dan. 9:6,14)".

Dan 9:5 *We have sinned and have dealt perversely, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even turning aside from Your precepts and from Your ordinances*- The prayers of Ezra 9 and Neh. 9 are similar to this prayer, with the faithful individual taking upon himself the guilt of the nation. Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel were likely inspired and encouraged by the examples of each other in doing so. It is the very opposite of the guilt by association mentality which is so strongly within human nature, and which has been wrongly glorified in so many religious communities. These men eagerly accepted the guilt by association, because they so loved God's people and were themselves part of that people. The Lord Jesus on the cross exemplified this attitude. As stated in :4, covenant relationship and the related blessings were conditional upon obedience; Israel had been disobedient, and were impenitent on an individual level. And yet as noted on :4, that grace is such by its nature that we can hope to receive this grace despite personal disobedience, through the mediation of another (the Lord Jesus, in our case). If Daniel had not understood that, he would not have prayed this prayer as he did.

"Done wickedly" translates the word usually understood as 'condemned', and the word for "ordinances" [literally 'verdicts'] continues the legal language. Israel had sinned and been condemned. And yet Daniel even at this stage pleads for their restoration and salvation. Paul develops this in Romans; we are condemned sinners, the verdict has been given; and yet even in our dire situation we can still be not only forgiven but counted righteous, thanks to the new covenant in Christ. The essence of the new covenant was what was promised to Abraham, so it was in operation at Daniel's time.

The triple mention of "sin... iniquity... and wickedness" is answered in :24. These were to be dealt with [and in a more permanent and more glorious way] by the work and cutting off of Messiah. The very thought of which initially would have struck desperation and bitter disappointment into Daniel's heart. Likewise :16,18 and :20 speak of the city, temple and people. Dan. 9:24 says these will suffer- but be restored by the 'cut off' Messiah. For us too, the very things that strike deep into our hearts with desperation, illness, death itself etc., are in the end all part of a far more glorious and eternal salvation than any immediate answer to our prayers could ever achieve.

Dan 9:6 *Neither have we listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land*- The prophetic ministry is not described in such detail in the historical accounts. This verse implies that they spoke not simply occasionally to kings and leaders, but to absolutely everyone in Israelite society. Daniel was himself a prophet and yet he identifies himself here with the disobedient people, whom "we" had not listened to. This deep self-identity with sinners when not having sinned personally in that way is the essence of the work of the Lord Jesus and of all those in Him.

Dan 9:7 *Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as at this day*- As explained on :5, Israel had sinned and were in shame. Confession of sin involves an acceptance that Yahweh is righteous, and we are not. We see the same in David's confessions of sin after the Bathsheba incident. One title of the Lord Jesus is "the

Lord our righteousness"; our confessed sin is a declaration that the Lord is righteous, and through imputed righteousness, all those in the Lord Jesus are therefore and thereby declared as righteous. If righteousness "belongs to You", then we are to identify with that righteousness rather than our own sinfulness. On a psychological level, the essence of repentance and indeed Christianity is a question of identity; despite our past and ongoing sinfulness, with whom and with what do we essentially self-identify? With our sin, or His righteousness?

To the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, who are near and who are far off, through all the countries where You have driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against You- Daniel and Judah were in captivity, but the ten tribe kingdom of Israel had been scattered by the Assyrians much earlier. But Daniel's vision was that repentance by himself and the remnant of Judah could lead to a total restoration of all Israel, in line with the prophecies of the restoration.

Dan 9:8 *Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You*- This repeated emphasis upon "shame of face" (:7) or 'blushing' reflects how deeply Daniel felt the presence of God. In that presence, he as it were blushed with shame. This is how close we can realize God's presence. In :6, Daniel has spoken of the shame of the same categories, the kings, princes, fathers and common people. Daniel was a prince (Dan. 1:9), but here he identifies himself with the common people. He speaks of "us", and then the kings, princes and fathers. He is a powerful example of identifying with people in order to try to save them, just as God did in His very human Son. And our outreach to the world is likewise at its best when we identify with our target audience. He had learnt all this from Jeremiah, whose prophecies he was now considering: "righteousness belongs unto You, but unto *us* [Jeremiah included] confusion of faces" (Jer. 7:19).

Dan 9:9 *To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness; for we have rebelled against Him*- The term "mercies and forgiveness" is only used twice, and each time about how the punished exiles could receive mercy and forgiveness if they repented (1 Kings 8:50; Is. 55:7). But they had not repented, yet Daniel seeks to as it were do this for them. "Rebelled" is the word and idea used of how Israel rebelled against God in the desert and therefore didn't return to the promised land (Num. 14:9), and the word is repeatedly used about those who apparently rebelled in not wanting to inherit the land intended for them (Josh. 22:16,18,19,29). The same had happened with the exiles; they had rebelled, and most of them preferred to remain in Babylon rather than enter the promised land (Neh. 9:26; Ez. 2:3; 20:38). Daniel is aware of the situation, and yet has the spiritual vision to believe that in the spirit of Moses influencing God to all the same save Israel, so he could perhaps alter the nation's condemnation and bring about the immediate restoration of the Kingdom in his lifetime. God didn't agree to this, giving the 70 weeks prophecy as His response; after all, most of Judah had remained in Babylon and didn't want the good news of the restored Kingdom. The essence of Daniel's request would come true, but not the timing. It seems he was too strongly influenced by his personal desire not to die and to see the restored Messianic Kingdom in his own lifetime.

Dan 9:10 *Neither have we obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets*- We note that the words of the prophets were still counted as God's "law" (:11); this means that the "law" could be

ammended, added to, and also subtracted from. Many of the laws were only really applicable to Israel in the wilderness; and this affects the issue of the Sabbath. The laws were not eternal but flexible, even in Old Testament times; and this paves the way for understanding the abrogation of those laws by the Lord's death.

Another take is that the "laws" in view were those given by the prophets, not those mediated to Israel by the priests as the law of Moses was. Possibly what is in view are the laws for the restoration given in Ez. 40-48 and the offer of a new covenant by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. All this had been unresponded to by God's people. God had offered to write His laws in the hearts of the exiles. And they had refused to be open to that.

Daniel's confession in :10-12 is full of allusion to Deuteronomy. He is admitting that Israel broke the old covenant and are receiving the results of doing so. Yet he still asks for forgiveness and restored relationship with God. This is his way of asking that the promised new covenant be put into operation by God. This request was answered in the 70 weeks prophecy, which speaks of Messiah being cut off and the ultimate ending of sin and its consequences. It was just that the timing was not going to be immediate, as Daniel hoped. But the essence of his prayer was to be gloriously answered, on a scale far beyond what he could have then imagined.

Dan 9:11 *Yes, all Israel have transgressed Your law*- Again Daniel focuses upon the ten tribes as well as Judah, "all Israel", because his vision was for the fulfilment of the prophecies of Israel's total restoration from wherever they had been scattered.

Turning aside, that they should not obey Your voice- The "turning aside" was in order that they should not obey; the idea is that they turned their ears away so that they didn't hear what they had to obey. I suggest that the psychological basis for all apparently intellectual failure to understand God's voice is because we subconsciously fear that if we understand rightly, we shall have to obey. See on :18.

Therefore the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses the servant of God has been poured out on us; for we have sinned against Him- The Mosaic curse for disobedience to the oath was punishment "seven times". Daniel seems to have thought that the sacking of the temple and Babylonian exile was that "seven times" punishment. The prophecy of the 70 weeks seems to be saying that the time of punishment was not yet over, not least because Israel had not repented, and most of the Jews preferred to remain in Babylon rather than participate in the restoration.

Dan 9:12 *He has confirmed His words which He spoke against us, and against our judges who judged us, by bringing on us a great evil*- The term "great evil" is exactly that used about the "great evil" of Judah's sins (Ezra 9:13; Neh. 13:27; Jer. 44:7). The sin was in effect its own punishment; the "great evil" of their sin was matched with the "great evil" of the Babylonian invasion and exile (Jer. 16:10; 32:42).

For under the whole Heaven such has not been done as has been done to Jerusalem- Daniel would have been unable to legitimately say this if he referred to the whole planet; for all he knew, similar desolations had been wrought in other places and times. "The whole Heaven" in view was as it were the sky over the land promised to Abraham, the earth-heaven system in Daniel refers specifically to that area, as I have explained on Dan. 2 and Dan. 7.

Dan 9:13 *As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil has come on us: yet have we not entreated the favour of Yahweh our God, that we should turn from our iniquities, and accept Your truth*- Daniel doesn't say 'We have not prayed for forgiveness', rather

does he say 'We have not prayed that we might be turned away from our sins'. The promised blessing of the Spirit, that which was promised to Abraham, was not simply forgiveness but a being turned away from our sins, the same phrase is used in Acts 3:26. Daniel realized likewise that the gift of a holy spirit can be received from God; He can give us a new worldview, a new pair of eyes, a psychological acceptance of Divine truth. Daniel recognizes that sin is addictive, and we need to pray for direct Divine action upon the human heart so that we might turn away from sin and accept His Truth. Although Judah had not turned away from their sins, Daniel uses the same word to ask God to turn away His judgment of Zion (:16). He clearly had the spiritual vision to believe in the power of God's grace to accept the mediation of just one person, on behalf of those who are impenitent. We think of how the Lord accepted the faith of the friends on behalf of their friend (Mk. 2:5). "The truth" which they should accept would be the great truth that they had sinned, and that God through His grace could save them out of that sin to restoration through the Spirit. "Mercy and truth" is a common phrase for the promises to Abraham, and according to Acts 3:26 the turning away from sins is part of this covenant promise. The greatest, final truth is that we hopeless sinners have been forgiven by grace. And will surely be saved.

"Accept your truth" can be rendered as RV "have discernment in Thy truth". Meaning to acquire insight into God's revealed will, and to think and act in accordance with it. This is the meaning of "understand" in Dan. 9:25; 11:33,35; 12:3,10. Daniel repeatedly does not understand these later visions of God's word. He feels this is because of how closely identified he is with Israel in their sinfulness and judgment for it.

Dan 9:14 *Therefore has Yahweh watched over the evil, and brought it on us-*

The idea of God 'watching' to fulfil His word in Dan. 9:14 is also taken from Jeremiah, who begins his prophecy speaking of the almond tree, the tree of watching over or hastening (Jer. 1:11,12). The idea was that God watches for the moment to make His word come true, whether for good or evil. This of itself shows us the nature of Bible prophecy. The prophetic words are not determinate, meaning that certain things will happen regardless of human freewill. God has stated His intentions, and is waiting for the right time to fulfil it. Hence Daniel alludes to this idea, because He wants God to in one sense hasten His plan to re-establish His Kingdom, and wants Him there and then to seize the opportunity to fulfil it. In other words, God watches eagerly for human behaviour and required preconditions which enable Him to judge or save. Thus He waits until a certain amount of iniquity has built up before judging sinners; and waits in Daniel's case [or, as Daniel then understood it] for a certain amount of prayer and penitence before fulfilling His word of final salvation.

The implication could be that the evil is pronounced, but there is a period of time after that during which repentance is possible. This was clearly seen in the lives of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. But because Judah refused to repentant, God watched over the evil and brought it upon them. The idea may be that the Angels who are the eyes of Yahweh watched upon it, i.e. they brought it about.

For Yahweh our God is righteous in all His works which He does, and we have not obeyed His voice- Again we see that repentance involves the declaration of God as right and ourselves as wrong (Ps. 51:4 etc. "Against You, and You only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Your sight; that You may be proved right when You speak, and justified when You judge").

Dan 9:15 *Now, Lord our God, You who brought Your people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and has gotten Yourself renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly*- Daniel wished God to bring Judah back from Babylon to the land just as He had brought Israel out of Egypt to the same land. But the reality was that most of Jewry remained in Babylon and didn't want to restore the kingdom themselves.

Dan 9:16 *Lord, according to all Your righteousness, please let Your anger and Your wrath be turned away*- The spirit of this prayer is that God has rightly decreed judgment upon Israel, but the course of that projected history can be changed or ammended in outworking by prayer and repentance. This is similar to what Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar experienced, both being given the chance to repent in order to avoid stated judgments. The openness of God is seen clearer in Daniel than anywhere else. Daniel prayed at this point because Jer. 29:10-14 had predicted that after the 70 years, Judah would pray to God and the kingdom be restored; and Daniel saw himself as representative of Judah, reasoning that the prayer of just one man could be counted as that of the nation. Although in this case God didn't accept that, the principle was valid and is exemplified in the work and mediation of the Lord Jesus for us: "For thus says Yahweh, After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you and perform My word of grace towards you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says Yahweh, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future. You shall call on Me, and you shall go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You shall seek Me and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says Yahweh, and I will turn again your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places where I have driven you, says Yahweh; and I will bring you again to the place from where I caused you to be carried away captive".

From Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all who are around us- The same word for "reproach" is repeatedly used in Nehemiah of the "reproach" of Judah even after the exiles returned. The end of Judah's "reproach" was associated with the projected restoration from Babylon and reestablishment of God's Kingdom in the form of Judah under a Messianic ruler (Is. 54:4; Ez. 36:15,30 cp. Joel 2:19). But while God's word was a "reproach" to Judah, so their reproach would continue (Jer. 6:10 s.w.). Judah's reproach was to be "eternal" (Jer. 23:40), but Daniel believed that the restoration prophecies about the removal of reproach would reverse this. So to pray for the "reproach" to end was tantamount to asking for the prophecies of the restoration to come true. Daniel certainly had spiritual ambition and vision in praying for this, when the spiritual preconditions in Judah were simply not there. He had learnt from the example of Moses and his own life, that God is prepared to bless a spiritually weak majority for the sake of a righteous minority and their intercession. And this is the essence of what was achieved in the Lord Jesus, as Rom. 1-8 makes clear.

The "great mountain" of God's Kingdom fills the whole earth, but the mountain initially begins at one point on the planet. Elsewhere in Daniel, the mountain is defined superficially as Jerusalem: "Your city Jerusalem, even Your holy mountain". The toes are therefore specifically dominating Jerusalem at the initial point of impact of the stone upon the land. And this is what we would expect from an Islamist confederacy dominating the land of Israel- Jerusalem is the key issue for them. And we know from Zechariah that "the city shall be taken".

Dan 9:17 *Now therefore, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant, and to his petitions*- Daniel had the vision to believe that "just" for the sake of his singular intercession, this restoration of God's Kingdom in Judah could occur. He clearly understood 'the power of one', as Peter Stringer put it to me some years ago. This is the spirit of Christ in Daniel; for our redemption as condemned sinners is on account solely of His work for us, the just for the unjust.

And cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake- The 70 weeks prophecy, given in response to this prayer, speaks of the placing of an abomination which desolates, using the same word as used here for "desolate". The answer was that indeed the desolation would finally be removed, but not when Daniel hoped, i.e. immediately, in his lifetime. The word is repeatedly used in the curses of Lev. 26:22,31,32,34. Lev. 26:35,43 mention that the desolation of the land would be to cover all the Sabbaths and jubilees that had not been kept. The prophecy of seventy sevens of continued desolation until the final cleansing could refer to 70 weeks or Sabbaths or jubilee years. The shining of God's face upon Zion is the language of Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration; Daniel was praying that the Messianic, restored kingdom would then be reestablished on account of his prayer.

Dan 9:18 *My God, turn Your ear, and hear*- As noted on :11, Israel had turned away their ears from God's word lest they understood it and had to obey it. Daniel recognizes this, but had such an insight into the depth of God's grace and His willingness to accept the intercession of just one man, that he asks God all the same to turn *His* ear to Judah's desolation.

Open Your eyes, and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name: for we do not present our petitions before You for our righteousness, but for Your great mercies' sake- Daniel has admitted that Judah have turned their ear away from God (:11) and were impenitent. But he doesn't therefore assume that God will not respond to them. He realizes that grace means that God can cover even that, for the sake of the intercession of the faithful. And so he appeals to God's great grace, admitting that Judah had absolutely no righteousness of their own, and that despite their sins, Zion was still called by God's Name, claimed as His own because He had an eternal purpose with it. This is the great significance of being baptized into that Name and thereby also becoming those claimed as God's very own, whom He will continue to work with according to His purpose even if we turn away from Him.

Daniel speaks of presenting the prayers of others, as if he were a priest. When he was from the royal family, and therefore from Judah. Likewise the whole work of intercession with God for Israel's sins was what the High Priest did on the Day of Atonement. He was forced by circumstance and lack of a visible high priest to do this, just as many who feel unqualified are forced by circumstance to pastor their families or other flocks of God's people.

Dan 9:19 *Lord, hear; Lord, forgive; Lord, listen and do; don't defer, for Your own sake, my God, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name*- As noted on :18, this appeal was for God to hear a people who didn't hear Him (see on :11), to forgive those who were impenitent, to listen to those who didn't listen to God. It was an appeal to His absolute grace and willingness to accept intercession. And that grace was 'God's own sake', it is at the very heart of God and is the quintessence of all He is and stands for. "Don't defer" reflects Daniel's understanding that the purpose of God can be delayed or deferred; the 70 years prophecy of Jeremiah appeared to him to be being delayed in fulfilment, and the answer he receives in the 70 weeks prophecy is

effectively a deferment. Is. 46:13 could mean that at the final restoration, Zion's redemption will no longer be delayed (s.w.); and Rev. 10:6 is clear that in the last days, there will be "delay no longer". We may appeal against it, as Daniel does here, knowing that God is open to dialogue. But He also knows best and operates His delays and hastenings with a justice and grace beyond our comprehension.

The climax of the prayer is in this verse, which has seven Hebrew words in it. And the climax of those words is "Do not defer". This is what Daniel was leading up to. Daniel perceived the idea of God prolonging and delaying the final restoration, in that in Daniel 9 he begs that God will not in fact delay; for the visions of Dan. 7 and Dan. 8 all spoke of a delay in the restoration compared to his time. He was heard in that an Angel was caused to fly swiftly (:21), implying a speeding up of the Angelic processes; but still the delay remained in place because despite that, Israel refused to adequately repent. One could argue that the prayer wasn't answered- in fact there was a further delay, and the request for the current "delay" to be ended wasn't answered at all. Yet it was certainly 'heard'; and an Angel was caused to fly swiftly in response. But as with the Lord's unanswered prayer for deliverance from actual death on the cross, the answer in the end was the more glorious. The answer that Messiah would come but be killed and that Jerusalem would yet again be trashed... would have struck at the core heart of Daniel, dashing all his short term hopes. But that was to be the world's redemption. And it is the same with our apparently unanswered prayers...

Dan 9:20 *While I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel*- Daniel was aware that he too was a sinner, although the record presents him as almost spotless. Or it could be that he felt so identified with the sin of Israel that he felt personal guilt because of it. This helps us understand how the absolutely perfect Lord Jesus could be made a sin offering for us, could be identified with sinners to such an extreme extent that He died the death of a criminal on a Roman cross. I will note on Dan. 10:17 that Daniel had yet to be even deeper convicted of his own sins and also those of Judah.

And presenting my supplication before Yahweh my God for the holy mountain of my God- Note the personal pronouns. As I have repeatedly noted, he believed in 'the power of one', that 'just' one righteous man interceding for a sinful nation could cause their restoration and salvation. This is immense encouragement to us in our intercession for others who currently are far from God; see on Mk. 2:5.

The language of prayer and supplication is what Daniel did in Dan. 6, when the king's men "found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God" (Dan. 6:11). His regular habit of prayer continued, resulting in the deeper insight he now experienced in it.

Dan 9:21 *Yes, while I was speaking in prayer*- We are to imagine Daniel praying out loud.

The man Gabriel- Gabriel was an Angel, but was clearly portrayed as a man and perceived in that way by Daniel. Angels represent men and nations in Daniel, and are strongly identified with those they represent; so it is appropriate to call this Angel a "man".

Whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning- Gabriel had first appeared in Dan. 8:16; but the vision of Dan. 8 was given before the events of Dan. 9 (Dan. 8:1 cp. Dan. 9:1). So the idea is 'the vision I had seen earlier'. But "beginning" means just that. Perhaps the idea is that the vision of Dan. 8 was the beginning of the motivation Daniel received to pray that events might work out differently, and God's purpose be

hastened. Gabriel came to explain the vision of Dan. 8 [no other vision had occurred between then and Dan. 9]. Daniel's desire to understand the 2300 period was answered now- with a different time period. The kaleidoscope of fulfilment had turned again.

Being caused to fly swiftly- See on :19. God's purpose and response was indeed hastened; although the chronological hastening of events was not granted to Daniel, he was assured that God was not therefore indifferent, and had immediately responded. The implication is that Gabriel had been sent forth from Heaven to earth by God to explain the vision to Daniel. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10. An alternative reading is that Gabriel was caused to "fly with weariness" (Dan. 9:21 AVmg.); this would then be an example of the Bible's 'language of limitation' which may refer to the Angels rather than God personally. The Angel flying swiftly should be compared with the passages which talk about running swiftly in order to understand and obey God's word (Hab. 2:2; Amos 8:11,12; Ps. 147:15; Dan. 12:4; 2 Thess. 3:1). Dan. 8:18 also describes how the Angel gave Daniel spiritual revelation.

Touched me about the time of the evening offering- The daily offerings were presumably not made in captivity, but Daniel's heart was very much in the land of promise and in the hope of the restoration of Israel's kingdom. He therefore calculated time according to the time of the offerings. Daniel understood his prayers as an offering to God (as in Ps. 141:2), and Gabriel therefore responded appropriately, answering prayer at the time of the evening sacrifice. In Dan. 8:18, the touch of Gabriel, literally 'laying the hand upon', is a sign of Daniel's acceptance. And so we learn that even if our prayers aren't answered as we wish, this is not to say that we are not acceptable with God. Gabriel seems to have been at pains to help Daniel understand this.

We note Daniel prayed at the time of the evening offering, as if his morning and evening prayers were the equivalent of the daily burnt offerings. See on Dan. 8:11. David in the Psalms often talks of praying in the morning, probably because he saw prayer as his morning sacrifice. Indeed it seems that the time was told by reference to the morning and evening sacrifices (1 Kings 18:29,36; 2 Kings 3:20). Regularity in prayer is critically important. Our natures are so weak that we need this kind of discipline.

Dan 9:22 *He instructed me, and talked with me, and said, Daniel, I am now come forth to give you wisdom and understanding*- This is prophetic of the faithful community in the very last days. The Lord says that when the abomination of desolation appears, then His people should flee Jerusalem; and "let him that reads, understand" (Mt. 24:15-17). Whatever application this had to the events of the three and a half years tribulation of AD67-70 was at best a sketchy and incomplete fulfilment. The tell tale phrase is "let him that reads, understand". This is inviting us to be like Daniel in Dan. 9:22-25, who also wanted to understand the meaning of the "abomination" prophecy. But he was told that the meaning of that vision about the abomination that desolates would only be revealed in the very last days, i.e. at the time of its fulfilment (Dan. 8:17,26; 12:9). The implication of all this is that there will be believing Jews living in the Jerusalem area at the time of the setting up of the abomination; and they will have special understanding of this prophecy which will lead them to flee. The importance of this for our present study is that this indicates that there will be believers in Israel just before the Lord returns. They will have

“understanding” and will be motivated by this to respond. “*Let him*… understand” is paralleled with “*let him* that is on the housetop [flee immediately]… *let him* that is in the field not return”. Understanding leads to action- both then and now.

Dan 9:23 *At the beginning of your petitions the commandment went forth, and I have come to tell you; for you are greatly beloved: therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision*- Daniel's prayer, at least as it is recorded here, doesn't ask for understanding. Instead it is a request for God to act immediately, to not defer the fulfilment of Jeremiah's '70 years until the restoration, if you pray' prophecy. But God sees through to the essence of our prayers, just as the Lord saw that the essence of the tears and intercessions of Martha and Mary was effectively asking 'Raise Lazarus right now'. And so the essence of Daniel's heart was that he wanted to understand, and this therefore was the answer given. As explained on Rom. 8:26, we know not what to pray for as we ought, but the hidden spirit of our deepest heart is read and understood as our request. We also note in this context that as soon as Daniel prayed, the essence of his heart was read and Gabriel dispatched immediately; he was heard immediately. See on Dan. 10:12.

Daniel didn't understand the 2300 evening-morning period (Dan. 8:27), and in Dan. 9 he is given understanding (Dan. 9:2,22,23). The answer was in the 70 weeks prophecy. "Understand the vision" (Dan. 9:23) prefaces the 70 weeks prophecy, and the vision in view is that of Dan. 8, repeatedly called "the vision" (Dan. 8:1,2,13,15,17,26). The issues of Dan. 9:24 are exactly those of Dan. 8:12-14: transgression will be finished, everlasting righteousness will be brought, and a holy of holies anointed. But just as the 2300 period differs from the 1260 day period of Dan. 7, so the interpretation in Dan. 9 differs. Because the 70 weeks period is not 2300 evening-mornings. Likewise the 1260,1290 and 1335 day periods of Dan. 12 seem to offer yet another scenario. The language of Dan. 12:10,11 is that of Dan. 11:31-35, initially about the possible fulfilment in Antiochus Epiphanes. Surely we have to conclude that the time periods are flexible and changeable, as God factors in all the possible fulfilments in line with human freewill decisions. This really has to be the case, for otherwise Divine prophecy would be simply deterministic and rob man of any freewill.

Dan 9:24 *Seventy weeks are decreed on your people and on your holy city, to finish disobedience, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy*- The end point of the 70 weeks was to be the time when they would no longer be punished for their sins and would be reconciled to God. All prophecy would then be sealed or finished. Any other end point apart from the Lord's second coming is therefore not going to fit the requirements perfectly. We will discuss various intriguing possibilities, but these were all potential fulfilments which didn't work out. The rabbis teach that "The number of seven weeks is four hundred and ninety years. The Babylonian exile was seventy [years] and the Second Temple stood four hundred and twenty" (Rashi). In this case the coming of Messiah would have been at the destruction of the temple in AD70, and that is exactly when the Lord could have come- but didn't. A prophecy of 70 weeks means 70 weeks or sevens- any interpretation that supposes a gap within the weeks is problematic. Because it takes away the obvious meaning of a time period. If I promise to come to your home after exactly seven weeks, my promise is falsified if I come to you exactly ten weeks later- explaining that in fact I had come after seven weeks, it's just that I inserted a gap of three weeks into my calculation of what "seven weeks" means. I would therefore suggest that the seventy sevens had various potential fulfiments that

didn't come about, and may [at least in essence] have a final fulfilment at some later point in the actual "last days".

This prophecy is God's response to Daniel's request that Israel's sin would be overlooked and forgiven, so that they could be restored and judgment would end. Despite the fact they were largely impenitent. Daniel was totally identified with Israel in their sinfulness, and hoped that he could be accepted as their representative, so that his devotion to God and bearing of Israel's sin would be accepted by God. The answer was in the prophecy of the anointed one, the Christ, doing this job and playing this role- through His death. So Daniel's perception was correct and the essence of his prayer was heard- in the work and death of the Lord Jesus.

The chapter begins with Daniel praying for Jeremiah's prophecy of the 70 years desolation of Judah to be brought to an end. But Daniel and those who lived after him in the Maccabean period would have struggled to understand how this prophecy had been fulfilled, with Jerusalem still not liberated. I suggest that the 70 weeks prophecy is a reinterpretation of the 70 years prophecy of Jeremiah. The preconditions for the restoration were not met. Most of Judah preferred the soft life in Babylon, and as the restoration prophets make clear, the few who did return failed to fulfil the prophecies of restoration. They did not build nor operate the temple according to the requirements of Ez. 40-48, and so that prophecy was revealed as conditional, and was perhaps reapplied in a purely spiritual sense, or delayed in fulfilment. And the prophecy of 70 years desolation is now extended and tweaked by this prophecy of 70 sevens. But the simple takeaway point was and is that the period of Gentile domination of God's people is limited, an end will come, however delayed. The day for a year interpretation doesn't have to be pushed; the "sevens" could refer to "seven weeks of years". The idea of seven weeks of years, i.e. 49 years, must make every Jewish mind think of the year of Jubilee. 70 x 49 = 3430 years; but the problem is fixing when the first Jubilee was kept after Israel entered the land of Canaan under Joshua. And then there is the problem of the significance of the 7, 62 and final 1 week, which on this basis do not yield any particularly significant chronological points. It is significant that one of the few indirect references to the year of Jubilee in Scripture is in the time of Hezekiah, where it would appear that the great invasion of the land by the Assyrians was in a Jubilee year (Is. 37:30 and context). That invasion and its dramatic destruction by God's direct intervention would therefore typify the events at the end of the final half week, 3.5 year period of suffering.

The language of the ending of sin and bringing in eternal righteousness naturally has some application to the Lord's finished work upon the cross. The whole prophecy was in prospect fulfilled then, but only in the 'now but not yet' sense that we encounter continually throughout the Bible. God for the sake of that prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross [“Father forgive them”] forgave us all our sins then (Eph. 4:32), the whole concept of sin was ended in prospect (Dan. 9:24), one final sacrifice was offered for sins (Heb. 10:12). The result of this is that we should repent, search ourselves and confess as many of our sins as possible, knowing they have been conquered. And we too should forgive each other in the same manner as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32), not waiting for repentance, but learning the spirit of the Lord Jesus and the attitude of our Father.

"I have finished the work which You gave me to do", ultimately finished when Christ cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:4; 19:30), alludes to several Old Testament passages. Daniel 9:24 had prophesied that Messiah's sacrifice would "finish transgression... make an end of sins... make reconciliation for iniquity...bring in everlasting righteousness... and to anoint the Most Holy", as if a new sanctuary were

being inaugurated. In prospect, the whole concept of sin was destroyed at the point of Christ's death, the devil (sin) was destroyed, the opportunity for us to have the everlasting righteousness of Christ imputed to us was opened up. "It is finished" may well have been uttered with an appreciation of this passage (for surely Dan. 9 was in the mind of our dying Lord). In this case, Christ died with the final triumphant thought that our sinfulness had now been overcome. Surely this should inspire us to a fuller and more confident, joyful faith in this.

But when we come to try to fit this in to the chronology of the 70 weeks prophecy, it is clear that the 70 weeks do not end on the cross. There are no significant events in the week and half week before this, nor 62 weeks before that last week. We must look to the last days for a complete, best fit fulfilment.

"To make an end of sins" is the same idea [in different words] to what we have in Dan. 8:23, when Antiochus or the little horn arises when "the wicked [or, wickedness] have come to the full", or "when the transgressors have completed (their guilt)", a similar idea to the iniquity of the Amorites becoming full, i.e. judgment came after a specified period. And why like that? Because that period was their opportunity for repentance. We marvel that a hardened blasphemer like Antiochus could be given a hope of repentance. We think of how God likewise tried to get Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar to repent and gave them a specific time period. It's the same idea of God elsewhere waiting until "the cup of iniquity was full" before judging as in Gen. 15:16: “The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full”. Likewise Mt. 23:32: “fill you up then the measure of your fathers” and 1 Thess. 2:16: “to fill up their sins”. This is the time of Dan. 9:24 "To make an end of sins". But that verse in Dan. 9 is in the midst of a quite different chronology, of the 70 weeks prophecy. Again we have to conclude that there were various chronological schemes that were potentially possible, such is God's sensitivity to human freewill, and His refusal to make His prophecies simply determinate predictions that rob man of his freewill.

Bringing in everlasting righteousness was the message of the new covenant offered to the exiles. There would be a future king named Yahweh Our Righteousness (Jer. 23:5,6; 33:15,16). This is the same as the anointed one, the Christ, the Lord Jesus. No such king-Messiah appeared before Him; but this was the potential in Cyrus and perhaps others. This provision of righteousness was the answer to the prayer in :16: "according to all Your righteousness, please let Your anger and Your wrath be turned away from Your city Jerusalem". The answer to that was in the provision of "The Lord our righteousness", the Lord Jesus. Every aspect and request of Daniel's prayer was answered not as he hoped for [immediate restoration of the Kingdom and forgiveness of Israel by God, yet again]- but in a far more glorious way. In the work of the Lord Jesus, a permanent end being made to sin, and the Kingdom of God being re-established eternally and far more wonderfully than Daniel had in mind. And so it is for so many of our apparently unanswered prayers.

The conditional, potential nature of the 70 weeks prophecy is perhaps hinted at by the use of the word "decreed". The Hebrew word is unusual in that it occurs only here, and is hard to define. It is unclear whether this period was set in stone or not. The period had been cut out [one possible meaning of the Hebrew word], but that doesn't mean it had to be fulfilled literally.

The Lord seems to have had His mind on the idea of seventy sevens when He taught that this is how much forgiveness we must give people. Babylon was given 70 years until judgment; Israel were given 70 sevens, unlimited patience and forgiveness. That was His take on the prophecy.

Dan 9:25 *Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem*- The commandment that went forth could refer to the commandment issued in response to Daniel's prayer (:23 "At the beginning of your petitions the commandment went forth, and I have come to tell you"). The anointed one / Messiah was to come seven sevens from this point. In seven literal weeks, or seven 'sevens', be they days or something else, with a day possibly standing for a year- Messiah was to come. No significant point can be found historically, whatever starting point we choose- but perhaps Cyrus [or some other figure] was potentially enabled to do something then. Which he didn't.

Or this commandment to restore Jerusalem could refer to that of Jeremiah, who in 605 / 604 BC predicted restoration after 70 years. But the natural objection is that a command to restore could hardly be given before Jerusalem had been destroyed. So the reference could be to the word for restoration given right at this time by Gabriel in :23. Or perhaps the decree of Cyrus is in view (539 BC), or that of Artaxerxes (458 BC) or that given to Nehemiah (445 BC). But again, as noted on :24, no starting point yields significant events after 7, 62 and 69.5 weeks. And one has to imagine an inserted hiatus even if we wish to apply the last 3.5 years to the last days. And this does violence to the whole idea of a 70 week period. A case can be made that perhaps the decree to restore Jerusalem refers to that of Artaxerxes I in Ezra 7:24. If we date that decree as being given in 457 BC, then 69 weeks / 483 days / years takes us to the beginning of the Lord's ministry in AD 27.

To the Anointed One, the prince- The "people of the prince" in :26 would destroy the sanctuary, and in :27 "he shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease". One clear possible initial fulfilment would have been in Antiochus Epiphanes. There would have been an exact match with the account of Josephus that “the daily offerings which they [the Jews] offered to God according to the law, he forbade them from offering". And yet still this didn't bring about "the end". And so there were other alternatives, such as the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 with "the prince" being the Lord Jesus at the head of the Roman armies. This would fit better than Antiochus, who defiled but didn't destroy the temple. There were various possible fulfilments for the anointed one, and somehow the prophecy would have worked out for each of them. It could have been Zerubbabel (Ezra 5:2; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 4:6-10) or Joshua the High Priest (Zech. 6:11,12). According to Is. 45:1, this prince potentially could have been Cyrus. But it could have many other referents (Joshua, Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah or Sheshbazzar), or to the Angelic prince Michael who stood for Israel (Dan. 10:21). I suggest below that it could refer to the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross. But the chronological problems stubbornly remain. Just as Jeremiah's 70 years prophecy was recalculated and reapplied into this 70 weeks prophecy, so this 70 weeks prophecy itself has to be recalculated, and shall come true in perfection in the last days, perhaps during a literal 70 week or 70 'sevens' period within the final 3.5 year tribulation.

Shall be seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks: it shall be built again, with street and moat, even in troubled times- The Lord Jesus is called "Messiah *the Prince*" in Dan. 9:25 in order to contrast with how the anti-Christ, the fake Christ, is also called "the prince of the host" in Dan. 8:11. "It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host" (ESV). This prince "shall stand up against the Prince of princes", the Lord Jesus (Dan. 8:25). There will be a final showdown between these two princes, and their respective followers and Kingdoms. The rebuilding of the temple coincides with the appearance of the "Anointed One". And he is "cut off" then (:26). This just doesn't fit

with an application to the Lord Jesus in the first century, although on :26 I give a possible attempt to make it fit. But the coincidence with the rebuilding of the temple is definitely problematic. So I feel confirmed in repeating that just as the 70 years prophecy was conditional and was reinterpreted and reapplied in the 70 weeks prophecy, so that too didn't work out as potentially possible because of Judah's impenitence. It will in essence come true in the last days, perhaps in a literal period of 70 weeks during the three and a half year tribulation.

"Seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks" is a poor attempt to reflect the Hebrew. There is a distinct break after the "seven weeks"; so we could translate "seven weeks, and [then after that] sixty-two weeks". It has been observed: "the 'athnach, the strongest disjunctive Masoretic accent mark between verse dividers, separates the "seven weeks" from the "sixty-two weeks," rather than joining them into a corporate entity equaling "sixty-nine"". It is hard to find specific points of fulfilment after the seven weeks. Likewise there was no time historically when Jerusalem was rebuilt with streets or squares- spaces for forum, market and justice court; as well as 'moats', referring to a defence system of canals like Babylon had. This is a stubborn problem for those who wish to argue that this part of the 70 weeks prophecy has already been fulfilled. It was surely a conditional prophecy, and it too has had to be reinterpreted, reapplied and recalculated.

Dan 9:26 *After the sixty-two weeks the Anointed One shall be cut off-*

The Hebrew of :26 and :27 is very difficult and ambiguous in places. Thus *nagid* [ruler, prince] is used rather than *melek*, the standard word for king. I suggest this was purposeful. Just as I noted above that the words of the "seventy years" prophecy of Jer, 25:11,12 were ambiguous as to whether "seventy years" were meant, or an undefined period of "weeks of years". All this is because God's plan was open-ended and conditional, and has [and had] various possible fulfilments and iterations.

I discussed on Dan. 8:11 how shocking this would have been to Daniel. It fits into a major theme that God is apparently defeated, the apparent salvation in Messiah was going to be "cut off". But still God would win in the end.

The reference could be to the killing of the High Priest Onias III in 171 BC as recorded in 2 Macc. 4:23-28 (also mentioned in Dan. 11:22). This would have been 62 weeks / 434 years after the prophecy of Jeremiah about the 70 years in BC 605. That would require the initial seven week / 49 year period to run concurrently with the 62 week period. But the temptation is to apply it to the murder of the Lord Jesus, the Christ / anointed one. The prophecy clearly had multiple possible applications, but none of them seem to fit exactly. This is not due to some prophetic miscalculation; just as the 70 year period to restoration didn't happen because of Judah's lack of repentance, and had to be recalculated and reapplied, so the reapplication was likewise a potential that Judah's lack of repentance precluded from happening. As noted on Hos. 5:15, God's intention was that His people would "acknowledge their offence" in captivity, seek Him- and then be restored.

And shall have nothing: and the people of the prince who shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and its end shall be with a flood, and even to the end shall be war; desolations are determined-

"And shall have nothing" is AV "but not for himself". If the AV is correct, and the Lord Jesus is this anointed one, then this surely implies He benefitted nothing from His own sacrifice as He was without sin. But "and shall have nothing" recalls how He died forsaken and betrayed by His friends, His clothing divided amongst His

killers, buried in the tomb of a non-family member who took pity on His having nothing, apparently forsaken by God, a man who in His life had nowhere to lay His head and was popular with low lifes, and became "the song of the drunkards". This kind of Messiah who 'had nothing' in His death was not exactly the kind of heroic Saviour that Israel wanted.

It is stressed that the sanctuary of God was "cast down" (Dan. 8:11), "trampled under foot" (Dan. 8:13). "destroyed / wasted / spoiled" along with His capital city (Dan. 9:26), "made desolate" (Dan. 9:27). If the city and sanctuary of a god was destroyed in this way, so publically, then that god had lost and had been slain by the god of the army who did this. God as it were emphasizes His own apparent destruction. He recognizes by all this repeated language that indeed, it does look as if "the death of God" has validity, it is how it seems, it is what it looks like. He gets that. The purpose of the prophecies is to show that in fact He exists and is hugely active beyond that. Clearly enough, God doesn't care for His 'image'. He allows people to think as they do about Him, without rushing in to correct impressions. We think of His apparent silence and lack of involvement and engagement at the time of tragedies. It is all a test of our spiritual perception, and we are guided by His word in this.

This appears to have similarities with the desolations of Antiochus IV; the "people / troops of the prince" would then be the Seleucid soldiers who settled in Jerusalem (Dan 11:31; 1 Macc. 1:29-40). But Antiochus didn't destroy the sanctuary; he desolated Jerusalem and defiled the temple (1 Macc. 1:46; 2 Macc. 6:2) but didn't destroy it quite to the extent required by the language here. There are of course similarities with the Roman destruction in AD70, but this Roman approach fails to make any sense in :27. And both references to Antiochus and the Romans run into difficulties in fitting in to the required chronology of the 7, 62 and final one week. The prince to come points to a specific individual, whose people or troops destroy the city and temple. He is an anti-Christ, an imitation of the One who is the true Prince of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:4,5).

However, a case can be made that the anointed one is the Lord Jesus, the Christ [Messiah, anointed one]. But again, the chronology is problematic, unless the periods are given big gaps between them, especially between the 62 weeks and the last half week. Such gaps seem to do violence to the whole concept of 70 weeks. But some may still find the idea attractive.

In reply to Daniel's prayer, God promises that:

- In the short term, there will be a decree made to enable the rebuilding of Jerusalem;
- A time for the ending of Israel's iniquity does lie ahead; their cleansing will be through the coming of their Messiah;
- To enable this, a new kind of covenant would be established with them;
- The means to forgiveness would involve a doing away of animal sacrifices and a destruction of the temple, with abominable idols standing there making it " desolate" .
- Eventually this desolation would be done away with.

Thus Daniel's prayer for the forgiveness of Israel and his enquiry about the fortunes of the temple is given a complex answer; very soon a command would go forth to rebuild the temple, but the full judgment for Israel's iniquity still had to come. This would be through the death of their Messiah, great desolation of the temple and other times of trouble. However, ultimately the death and work of their Messiah would enable the eventual cleansing of Israel from their iniquities in a permanent fashion, so that never again would God's House lie desolate. After 69 weeks from the

decree to rebuild the temple Messiah was to be "cut off". This ought to silence once and for all the constant Jewish objection to a suffering Messiah; he was to be "cut off". The decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem was given in BC457. Commentators have frequently multiplied 69 by 7 to give a period of 483 day/years that were to elapse before Messiah's death. However, Jewish time is often reckoned in Lunar cycles rather than Solar, as Europeans are accustomed to. On the basis of Lunar time, 69 weeks of years comes out at 486.5 Lunar years. Allowing for a BC/AD calendar inaccuracy of 4 years, this brings us to AD33.5 for the time of Messiah being cut off; which is exactly when Jesus was crucified, 33.5 years after his birth.

The 69 weeks being split into 7 weeks and 62 weeks is understandable once it is appreciated that most Bible prophecy has some immediate reference to the period around which it was given. 7 weeks of years would come to around 50 years. According to the records of the rebuilding of Jerusalem in Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai it would appear that the bulk of the work was done in the 50 years after the issuing of the decree for rebuilding. This mini time period would doubtless have been of great encouragement to the Jews of the time as they laboured in the rebuilding work amidst so much opposition.

The description of the sacrifices ceasing and the temple being desecrated by an "abomination" can comfortably apply to the final destruction of the temple in AD70. Application to the time of the Maccabees is difficult because despite the disruption of the temple services, the sacrifices did not "cease" permanently. The Hebrew word for "cease" is also translated in the Old Testament as "to cause to fail", "suffer to be lacking", "put down", "to rid", "to take away", showing that the sacrifices in the second temple were to be ended permanently. The placing of abominations in the temple sounds like the Roman desecration of it with the idols of their legions after its final capture in AD70. Jesus also interpreted this part of Dan. 9 with reference to the events of AD70 (Mt. 24:15).

The abomination that caused desolation in AD70 can also be referred to the abomination of Israel's sins, which finally resulted in the desolation of both the land and the temple. Dan. 8:11-13 (R.V.) has many connections with this prophecy of Dan. 9: "The daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down... an host was given against the daily sacrifice by reason of (Israel's) transgression... the transgression of ('making') desolation". Israel's sins reached the maximum degree to which God was willing to let them accumulate without intervening in judgment. If the Jewish crucifixion of Jesus a few years earlier was indeed their rejection of God's Messiah, then this is understandable. Deuteronomy chapters 28-31 consistently link the ideas of desolation and Israel's disobedience. Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, 4.6.6-8) records how the Jewish Zealots made the temple a garrison in AD70 and thoroughly desecrated it by their actions even before the Romans took it.

If the middle of the 70th week was the destruction of the temple in AD70, then it follows that from BC457 to AD70 is 69.5 "weeks". Therefore, if AD70 was the middle of the 70th week, it follows that there was a gap in the fulfilment of the prophecy. Thus it should not appear unreasonable to say that the first 69 weeks had a chronological fulfilment from BC457 to AD33, and that the first half of the 70th week ended in AD70. Now it is of the utmost significance that the Jewish wars which culminated in the sacking of Jerusalem in AD70 began 3.5 years previously in AD66/67. Thus the first half of the 70th week of the judgments upon Jerusalem started at this time. We must ever remember that the 70 weeks prophecy was

concerning the judgments upon Jerusalem and how God was going to deal with their sins, which formed the burden of Daniel's initial prayer.

This gap in the 70 weeks between AD33.5 and AD66.5 must be significant. It could imply that something happened in AD33.5 which gave Israel the opportunity to repent, and that during that time the judgments to come upon them were suspended, although being resumed in AD66.5-70, presumably due to Israel's failure to do anything in the former period to avert those judgments? The Christian reasoning surely sounds uncannily true, that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah who was crucified in AD33.5, and that due to Israel's failure to repent as they should have done the judgments continued. It is noteworthy that the judgments on Jerusalem in the first half of the 70th week were to be by Messiah's armies (Dan.9:26). Having been given control of all things on earth (Mt. 28:18) after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus was able to send the Roman armies, effectively His armies, against Jerusalem in judgment. Indeed, He foretold the future destruction of Jerusalem by God's armies (Mt. 22:1-7); which became His when God gave Him all power after His resurrection.

The final half (i.e. 3.5 day/years) of the 70th week is difficult by anyone's standards. Masada, the last outpost of Jewish resistance to the Roman re-invasion, fell in AD73.5, which could suggest that the final part of this week and indeed the whole prophecy, finished then. But we wonder why that point should be the end of Judah and Jerusalem's sufferings and the introduction of eternal righteousness. It was surely not that significant. This would mean that by AD73 "reconciliation for iniquity... everlasting righteousness" as promised in Dan. 9:24 would have been brought in. But surely that was achieved 40 years before, on the cross. The idea of Jesus as the perfect sacrifice which permanently overcame sin, thus doing away with the need for animal sacrifices, seems to fit what happened on the cross, not in AD73. The (new) covenant of Messiah was "confirmed" (the Hebrew implies violently, with strength) during the 70th week (Dan. 9:27), and therefore the Old Covenant of the law (Dt. 4:13) was finally done away then; yet surely this was achieved on the cross (Col. 2:14-17). The "vision and prophecy" being "sealed" (Dan. 9:24) at this stage may hint that it was by AD70 or just after that the Holy Spirit gift of prophecy was taken away, and inspired writing ceased. There is ample internal evidence that the whole New Testament canon was written before AD70. But again, this doesn't seem a totally comfortable, best-fit interpretation.

However, it is also possible to argue that the second half of the 70th week refers to a time yet future. The new covenant of Messiah must be powerfully confirmed to Israel, and finally an end of all Israel's punishment for sin must be made, with the result that an end (i.e. a permanent end) must be made to the powers that desolate Jerusalem (:24,27). Such an end clearly did not come in AD73, and the final deliverance of Israel from God's judgment and desolators of the temple mount must be yet future. Other scriptures suggest that there will be a final 3.5 year downtreading of Jerusalem during which time Messiah's covenant will be confirmed mightily to Israel, and at the end of which time there will be a final end to Israel's sufferings and the destruction of their desolator. There are other references to a 3.5 year period of trouble for God's people in Daniel: "A time (a year), times (two years) and an half", i.e. 3.5 years (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev.1 2:14). The New Testament speaks of a similar period: 1,260 days -also 3.5 years (Rev. 12:6; 11:3); 42 months (3.5 years) (Rev. 11:2; 13:5). It seems fair to assume that they are all speaking of an identical or associated period of time. We have stressed that during the 70th week, the covenant of Messiah will be powerfully confirmed. Therefore we should see this happening during this final 3.5 years; and Mal. 3:1 describes the coming of the future Elijah prophet as "The

messenger of the covenant", i.e. he will preach Messiah's covenant to Israel. It is thrilling to find that Jesus and James mention that Elijah's first ministry lasted 3.5 years (Lk. 4:25; James 5:17); it would be so fitting in the light of this for Elijah's second ministry to last the same period of time. Given the present world situation, this 3.5 year downtreading of Israel by those who would take every delight in desecrating Jerusalem and the temple area with their anti-Jewish abominations could begin any moment now.

This interpretation is not without problems. But we can note that the cutting off of Messiah and the temple's destruction do not have to be simultaneous, although they both occurred at some stage after the end of the 62 weeks; Messiah's death resulted in the abolition of the temple, seeing that on account of his death the Old Covenant had been done away.

Josephus describes how the Jews at the time of Jesus were looking for Messiah to come at that time due to their study of Dan. 9 and other such prophecies: "That which chiefly excited them (the Jews) to war was an ambiguous prophecy, that at that time, someone within their country should arise that should obtain the empire of the whole world. This they had received, that it was spoken by one of their nation". This is confirmed by the New Testament recording that "all men were musing in their hearts" about Messiah at this time. Dan. 9 could indicate that Messiah was to have two comings: firstly as a prince, and then returning as a King who has received his Kingdom. This is how the Lord Jesus saw himself in the parable of the nobleman (Lk. 19:12). The time period of 69 weeks from the command to rebuild the city ended in both "Messiah the Prince" (Dan. 9:25) and also in him being "cut off" (Dan. 9:26), i.e. killed. Thus it would appear that it was at His death that Messiah became "the prince", the definite article suggesting that this was the specific Messiah and the greatest ever prince. This is all fulfilled by Jesus Christ's triumphant death/sacrifice being rewarded by His being exalted to God's right hand in Heaven, and being made a "Prince and a Saviour" by Him (Acts 5:31), so that due to His death and subsequent glorification in resurrection he became "the prince of (i.e. over) the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5). Messiah's making of "the sacrifice and oblation to cease" was at the end of His 3.5 year ministry. The exposition offered above applies this to His death bringing about the destruction of the temple in AD70.

Dan 9:27 *He shall make a firm covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease-*

Literally, "for half a week he will put a stop to the sacrifice and the meal offering". Dan. 8 gives a period of 2300 evening-mornings, i.e. 1150 days, for the cessation of sacrifices. In Dan. 9:27 the time period is different- three and a half days, possibly meaning three and a half years or 1260 days. So often in Daniel we find the time periods are flexible. Which they are, because there are various possible and potential fulfilments of the prophecies, and the range of them is because God takes into account human freewill. For prophecy doesn't make God deterministic. Possibly these 1260 days are reduced to 1150 because the "days are shortened for the elect's sake". We must also factor in that 1 Maccabees gives a period of exactly 3 years for the desecration of the altar by Antiochus Epiphanes [1080 days if we take a 360 day year, 1095 days if a 365 day year]. This again could be because there was a shortening of the days. Josephus however claims it was exactly three and a half years (*Wars* 1.32).

The application to the Lord Jesus in the first century runs into problems here. It is hard to make the 69 weeks end at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. The covenant He made was eternal and not just for a week. And if the midst of the week when

sacrifices were ended by Him refers to the cross, then it is out of decorum with the idea of 70 weeks that there should be a 2000 year delay until the fulfilment of the second half of the week. The historical fulfilment could have been in the "covenant" reported in 1 Macc. 1:11 between the Jewish hellenizers and Antiochus, which led to the sacrifices being stopped for three and a half years. This certainly fits the 1260 day [three and a half year] period mentioned in Daniel. There was no such covenant made after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. So

And on the wing of abominations shall come desolation- This "abomination that makes desolate" is applied by the Lord Jesus to the events of the very last days; it is this desolation which shall be removed by His literal return to Zion. The phrase is used in Dan. 8:13; 11:31 and 12:11 [see notes there]. In each case, it has discernible fulfilments at the time of Antiochus, when the temple was rededicated to Zeus and pigs sacrificed upon it, and the Romans who placed idolatrous symbols in it; but the context always required that it have a latter day fulfilment, and the earlier fulfilments are never without problems when compared to the text. It's the same here in Dan. 9:27. The outline fulfilments in Antiochus and the Romans don't fit perfectly with the prophetic language, nor do they fit the specific required chronology of the various weeks and days. Any references to the abominations placed in the temple by Antiochus and the Romans in AD70 are at best incipient fulfilments. A Messiah figure could have come then and restored Judah's kingdom, but the final, perfect-fit fulfilment shall be at the Lord's return.

Even to the full end, and the wrath that is determined shall be poured out on the one who makes desolate- This "full end" and total destruction of the desolator never came true of the Romans, and it is the language of the last days. Any applications to Antiochus and Rome are therefore at best incipient fulfilments. The chronology of the 7,62 and 1 weeks didn't work out; but it shall do so, in the last days. This final period of 70 weeks [and they may be literal weeks or some other form of "sevens"] will culminate in "the full end" and the full establishment of God's Kingdom. That was what Daniel longed to see happening and it forms the context of the 70 weeks prophecy. It could have come true at the time of Antiochus and the Romans, but Judah's lack of repentance precluded it. And so it shall come true in the last days.

Daniel 9 speaks of a coming “prince”, an emir or caliph, in Arabic terms, who will lead Israel’s enemies in desecrating the temple area and capturing Jerusalem. This figure had incipient fulfilments in Antiochus Epiphanes and the AD70 Roman desecration of the temple mount. The final conflict with a true Messiah figure and the establishment of God’s Kingdom could have come at these points, but it was delayed, so that these became but shadows of the final fulfilment in the last days.

It is however significant that the Roman desecration of the temple is used by the Lord Jesus in the Olivet prophecy as a prototype of that which shall be done in the last days. The Roman empire began as the republic of the city of Rome; but there were simply not enough literal ‘Romans’ to dominate the large area of the Roman empire. The majority of Roman soldiers were not Romans, but mercenaries or nationals of other areas apart from Rome. What’s interesting is that the legions which destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in AD70 were largely comprised of Arabs, Syrians and other neighbouring nations who bitterly hated the Jews.

Tacitus explains: “Titus Caesar… found in Judaea three legions, the 5th, the 10th, and the 15th… To these he added the 12th from Syria, and some men belonging to the 18th and 3rd, whom he had withdrawn from Alexandria. This force was accompanied… by *a strong contingent of Arabs*, who hated the Jews with the usual hatred of neighbours…” (Tacitus, *The History*, New Ed edition Book 5.1. Editor:

Moses Hadas, Translators: Alfred Church, William Brodribb (New York: Modern Library, 2003)). This Arab / Syrian destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, albeit under the control of a larger 'beast' entity, is a detailed prototype of that which is yet to come. Josephus confirms the record of Tacitus by saying that the Roman troops were gathered in Syria, i.e. the army was gathered together from Syrian recruits: "So Vespasian sent his son Titus [who], came by land into Syria, where he gathered together the Roman forces, with a considerable number of auxiliaries from the kings in that neighborhood" (Flavius Josephus, *The Complete Works of Josephus*, *The Wars of the Jews* or *The History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, Book III, Chapter 1, Paragraph 3)". Josephus also mentions that at least 6000 Arabs were sent by just one Arab king: "Malchus also, the king of Arabia, sent a thousand horsemen, besides five thousand footmen, the greatest part of which were archers; so that the whole army, including the auxiliaries sent by the kings, as well horsemen and footmen, when all were united together, amounted to sixty thousand" (Flavius Josephus, *The Complete Works of Josephus*, *The Wars of the Jews* or *The History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, Book III, Chapter 4, Paragraph 20)".

This picture of a Syrian / Arab desecration of Jerusalem in AD70 is supported by other discoveries and reports. "Legions based in Cappadocia, Syria, and Egypt were made up of recruits from Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt", Nigel Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria* (University of Michigan Press, 2000) p.15. Josephus claims that in the siege of Jerusalem, "the whole army, including the auxiliaries sent by the kings, as well horsemen and footmen, when all were united together, amounted to sixty thousand" (Flavius Josephus, *The Complete Works of Josephus*, *The Wars of the Jews* or *The History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, Book III, Chapter 4, Paragraph 20). A legion contained around 5,000 soldiers and he says there were four full legions and two partial legions involved in the attack- around 25,000 legionaries. This means that the remaining 35,000 were auxiliaries, relatively local men. Josephus confirms this when by noting that the auxiliaries were "sent by the kings" from "the neighbourhood" of Syria, Asia Minor and Arabia. Pollard gives more reason to think of there being many Syrians involved: "Other evidence that Syrian legions of the Flavian period were characteristically 'Syrian' in some way comes from Tacitus' reference to Legion 3 Gallica saluting the rising sun 'according to the custom of Syria' [*ita in Syria mos est*]… in A.D. 69" (*op cit* p. 116). Josephus is quite explicit about this: "The greatest part of the Roman garrison was raised out of Syria; and being thus related to the Syrian part, they were ready to assist it" (*The Wars of The Jews*, *History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, by Flavius Josephus. Trans. William Whiston, Book II: Chapter, Para. 7).

What we do know from Daniel 11:31 is that the "vile person" is also called "the king of the north", and this is a common title for the ruler of Assyria- present day Iran / Iraq / Kurdistan / Syria. And we've shown above that Old Testament passages about the ruler of Assyria are the basis for other 'antichrist' prophecies of the New Testament. The phrase "vile person" is interesting in itself. If the first usage of a word in Scripture is significant, then Gen. 25:34 is indeed helpful here- because it is used of Esau, father of many of the Arab tribes. And it recurs in describing Edom in Obadiah 2, Goliath the Philistine / Palestinian (1 Sam. 17:42), "Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arabian" (Neh. 2:19), and Haman the persecutor of the Jews (Esther 3:6). All these men were Arab prototypes of the "vile person", the ruler of Assyria, who is to again persecute God's people. Note that "the man of sin" of 2 Thess. 2:8 alludes to "the wicked one" of Is. 11:4 LXX, who is, again, "the Assyrian"! So it would appear very likely that the antichrist figure comes from 'Assyria'. And what's going on in

Iraq and the territory of 'Assyria' right now is gripping the whole world's attention. Note how the Assyrian is described in Is. 30:31-33 as being thrown into a lake of fire- just as the future beast will be (Rev. 19:20).

A Jewish-Moslem Antichrist Covenant?

The "prince that shall come", who finally stands in opposition to "Messiah the Prince", will "confirm the covenant with many for one week", during which he places the abomination of desolation (Dan. 9:27). The same language is used here as about the "little horn" of Daniel 7 and 8. This individual is characterized in Dan. 8:24,25 as being politically crafty: "He shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practice, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand". Note that *amad* translated "stand up against" is a word also found in Arabic, and is one of the names of the prophet Mohammad (Sura 61:6). The latter day caliph or "prince of the [Moslem] faithful" will (like all good Moslems) be the emulation of Mohammad. I have explained in commenting on Revelation chapters 6 and 7 that radical Islam has a special theological interest in forcing Jewish people to convert to Islam. And they will feel justified in brutally punishing those who resist- all as predicted in those chapters of Revelation. The idea of Antichrist making a covenant with the Jews is in fact required by the Koran in Sura 3.64: "Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah". It would seem that a covenant is made whereby the Jews accept Islam in return for mercy; but then this covenant is broken and the Jews are butchered. Such agreements featured in Israel's Old Testament history. Sura 4.154,155 and commentary upon it justifies the fiercest punishment of the Jews by Moslems because "We took from them a firm covenant. But because of their breaking of their covenant…". We can imagine how things will develop: The downtrodden people of Israel will enter a covenant with the radical Muslims or jihadist Islamic Beast / State, then they will be accused of breaking it, and this will justify the Moslems in embarking upon a policy of totally destroying them, believing they are being obedient to the Koran by doing so. Sura 5.14,15 likewise: "And because of their [O children of Israel] breaking their covenant, we have cursed them and made hard their hearts. They change words from their context [in distorting the Torah to contradict the Koran] and forget a part of that whereof they were admonished… Therefore we have stirred up enmity and hatred among them till the Day of Resurrection". This "enmity and hatred" is the kind of hatred against God's people in the land that is described in the prophecies of the latter day beast, venting "the old hatred" (Ez. 25:15) against Israel.

The Koran frequently complains that Israel broke their covenant with God and were punished, and the commentaries on the Koran passages about this urge that Muslims should in God's Name punish Jews for doing the same: Sura 7.12 "We found no [loyalty to any] covenant in most of them. Nay, most of them we found wrong-doers". Sura 7.134-136 is relevant: "And when the terror fell on them they cried: O Moses! Pray for us unto thy Lord, because He hath a covenant with thee. If thou removest the terror from us we verily will trust thee and will let the Children of Israel go with thee. But when we did remove from them the terror for a term which they must reach, behold! they broke their covenant. Therefore we took retribution from them; therefore we drowned them in the sea: because they denied our revelations and were heedless of them". Jihadists believe that they must punish Israel, and then make a covenant with them in order for the punishment and terror to be lifted; but Israel will

break that covenant and therefore be totally destroyed. This is precisely the picture we get from Daniel 9, speaking of how the Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel after abusing them first, and then attempt to totally destroy them for breaking that covenant. Sura 33.7,8 and commentaries thereon almost revel in the pain to be exacted upon Israel for breaking the covenant: "We took from them [O children of Israel] a solemn covenant; that He may ask the loyal of their loyalty. And He hath prepared a painful doom for the unfaithful".

DANIEL CHAPTER 10

Dan 10:1 *In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia something was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar-*

"Something" is Heb. *dabar*, the standard word translated "word". "Revealed" is literally 'made naked', the covering or clothing was taken off it. The vision he will not have, which continues into Dan. 12, presents a somewhat different outworking of events to that revealed in Dan. 2 and Dan. 7. The 'word' of another possible scenario was already set up and spoken by God, but it had not been revealed or denuded because a chance had to be given for the earlier potential scenarios to work out.

Belshazzar only reigned three years so the vision of Dan. 8 given in his "third year" was given around the time of the events of Daniel 5, when Belshazzar was slain and "Darius" took the kingdom. This was the first year of Darius, the time of the visions and events of Dan. 9:1 and Dan. 11:1. So the events of Dan. 5,8,9,11 all occurred within the same year. If Darius and Cyrus were separate kings but co-reigned and overlapped with each other, it's also possible that the third year of Cyrus in Dan. 10:1 was in fact this same year- the first year of Darius. Dan. 1:21 could be read as meaning that Daniel died in the first year of Cyrus; but that may mean the third year of his total rule, if he co-reigned with Darius for the first two or three years. In this case then Dan. 5,8,9,10 and 11 were all within the same year or so.

According to Ezra 3:12, some old men returned to Judah when the possibility was created in the first year of Cyrus. Why not Daniel? Admittedly he was very old at this time. Is this one of the few indications of spiritual weakness in Daniel? Note his confession of personal sin in Dan. 9:20. Others would be in Dan. 3, where the obvious question is ‘Where was Daniel’? Another would be the consideration from Dan. 10:4 cp. Ex. 12:18 that he didn't keep Passover (see on :4). The third year of Cyrus meant 72 years after the captivity. Daniel therefore was wondering why there had been no successful restoration according to Jeremiah's 70 years-to-restoration prophecy- he'd been over 70 years in Babylon. He may also have been distressed that the majority of Jews in Babylon had chosen not to return to Judah; and he would’ve heard that those who had returned had faced huge opposition, indeed the rebuilding of the temple was halted until the second year of Darius (Ezra 4:24). Jewish tradition has it that Daniel did return, finally. He would however have been very elderly, at least in his 90s. And we note that the names of Daniel's friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah occur in the list of names of those exiles who returned.

The LXX says the first year of Cyrus, and that a "decree" was issued to Daniel. This would agree with Dan. 1:21 saying that Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus. It's as if in one strand of the Divine working, the decree of Cyrus fulfilled Bible prophecy. But Daniel asks why it hadn't been fulfilled, and is shown in Dan. 10-12 that in fact there will be a great delay in fulfilment. Because clearly Judah were not obedient to the terms of the new covenant which Jeremiah and Ezekiel had proposed. The return from captivity was only to be when Judah returned to God. And they

didn't. So it seems Dan. 10-12 is God telling Daniel privately that in fact the apparent restoration wasn't the real thing. It could've been, but God foresaw Judah wouldn't do their part. Daniel surely sensed that. And so he is shown that the plan of restoring the Kingdom would happen, but with a deferred and re-worked fulfilment.

And it was true, even a great warfare: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision- The "great warfare" is that between the kings of north and south described in chapter 11, which forms part of this vision Daniel now receives. Or we can read as AV "But the time appointed was long", alluding to Daniel's deep disappointment that prophetic timetables were not going to lead to the restoration of the Kingdom during his lifetime. This is a recurrent theme in Daniel.

The long warfare is that which is said to have been ended when the exiles returned (Is. 40:2). But most didn't return, and Cyrus wasn't the Messiah he could have been. So the warfare was as it were extended. Time and again we find God being flexible in response to human freewill. For His prophecies are not determinate of human action to the extent that man is robbed of his freewill. And yet the word was and is true although the warfare was long or prolonged: "the word (is) true, and a great warfare".

Another option is to translate “but it was a great struggle to understand the word”. It was hard for Daniel as it is for so many today to accept the Lord may not return in their lifetimes, despite all their lives having eagerly struggled to match Bible prophecy to geopolitcs.

Dan 10:2 *In those days I Daniel was mourning three whole weeks*- Daniel's mourning may have been for the fact Israel's sin was precluding the immediate reestablishment of God's Kingdom. Or we can take the "mourning" as also meaning that he was praying for the restoration to happen, seeing it was already the third year of Cyrus and he had not turned out to be the Messiah which Isaiah had prophesied he would be, nor had the restoration gone according to the prophetic possibility. In Dan. 9:23, Daniel had experienced praying and then being told that the moment he started to pray, the answer had been given. And now he has another example of it. His fasting we can assume was associated with prayer; three weeks of prayer makes 21 days, and in :12 Daniel is told by the Angel that "from the first day...your words were heard, and I am come for thy words". So because of his prayer ("words"- perhaps put like that to emphasize the power of the 'mere' words uttered in prayer), an Angel was sent from God to give him the understanding he had asked for. His very first prayer for this was answered- but the actual answer came three weeks later. The reason for this was that the Angel had been withstood by the prince of Persia for 21 days (:13). Three weeks is 21 days. So Daniel's first prayer was answered, but it took the Angel three weeks to work out the answer in practice; but during this time Daniel kept on praying, although at the time it must have seemed to him that no answer was forthcoming. So let us be prepared to persevere in prayer, as those saints in Rev. 8 did and were rewarded by the incense finally being offered by the Angel to the Lord Jesus Christ, and thence to God. It may just be possible that there is a mighty Angel of answered prayer (Gabriel?), in the same way as there is a 'wonderful numberer' co-coordinating the timing of God's purpose, and an Angel specifically representing Jesus and Israel (do these four make up the four forms of Angel manifestation in the cherubim and four living creatures?). This Angel would co-ordinate the presentation and answering of prayers. The Angel then describes how he confirmed and strengthened Darius (Dan. 11:1) to the same end to enable the prayer to be answered- as if when our Angel sees someone set in a course of action which will lead to the answer of our prayer, they are confirmed and strengthened in it. The wonder of all this

needs some reflection. Our words, the thoughts within human brain cells, call forth the Angels from the court of Heaven. “When we cried unto the Lord, he heard our voice, and sent an angel [from the myriads standing on the right and left hands of His throne] and brought us forth out of Egypt” (Num. 20:16). Yet the voice that Angel responded to was the voice not so much of specific prayers but of the situation of the people. And the same is with us... See on Zech. 3:1; Zech. 6:8; Hag. 1:2.

Dan 10:3 *I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine into my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, until three whole weeks were fulfilled*- This was not only fasting, but an expression of genuine sadness over the Passover period (see on :4). His sadness was clearly that the prophetic program was going to be seriously delayed beyond the 70 years-to-restoration prophecy of Jeremiah, and this was because of the weakness of Judah. Daniel had prayed in Dan. 9 for the restoration to happen anyway, but had been answered by the 70 weeks prophecy. And he would have been so sad that the opportunity to return to the land given in the first year of Cyrus had been responded to by so few Jews; and at the time of the third year of Cyrus (:1) the rebuilding of the temple had been delayed.

Perhaps he had in view the anointing before the Messianic feast of Is. 61:3. Daniel's fasting may mean that he didn't keep Passover (:4, he had been fasting from the 3rd to the 24th of the first month). Both the Passover (on the 14th day) and feast of Unleavened Bread(15th–21st; Ex. 12:1-20) fell within the period of Daniel’s fast. We have here an example of where principles are often in conflict in our lives, and this is intentionally so. The law of Moses contained many such conflicts- disobedience to one law in order to be obedient to another. This is structured into our lives by God so that our obedience is consciously thought out.

Daniel apparently was used to eating meat and drinking wine. We recall how he initially refused to eat the meat and wine that came from the king. Seeing he still lived in the court, we wonder whether his meat and wine still came from the king. Possibly his conscience changed over time. And yet he remained a man much beloved by God.

Dan 10:4 *In the twenty fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river which is Hiddekel*- This means that for 21 days before this, he had been fasting, throughout the Passover period. So Daniel didn’t keep Passover- he kept the eating of unleavened bread but if he didn’t eat any meat, he didn’t eat the Passover lamb. Was his faith in God’s deliverance of His people fading? Or was he spiritually so on another plane that it was OK for him not to keep the Passover, even though the person who didn’t keep it was to be cut off from amongst God’s people? See on :1.

Dan 10:5 *I lifted up my eyes, and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, whose thighs were adorned with pure gold of Uphaz*-

A man clothed with linen represents both a priest and an Angel (Mk. 16:5; Rev. 15:6). Ezekiel the priest and prophet saw himself thus represented (Ez. 9:2,3,11) yet he also saw the man dressed in linen representing an Angel who was involved with the awesome cherubim system (Ez. 10:2,6,7). He had a guardian, representative Angel that was part of the glorious cherubim. Possibly likewise the Angel of Dan. 10:5 represented Daniel.

The "man clothed in linen" of Dan. 10:5 reappears in Dan. 12:6,7 who is over the waters of the river. This was an Angel in Dan. 8:16, "between the banks of the Ulai [river]". Linen was worn by the priests especially the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:4). We note that the term "prince", used in Daniel of Angels, is used of the High Priest in Ezra 8:24 and of a priest in 1 Chron. 24:5. These Angels of

Daniel were ministering in the heavenly sanctuary. Michael "stands" for God's people (Dan. 12:1) as the High Priest stood for them on the Day of Atonement; to stand before God is to intercede (Dt. 10:8; Jud. 20:28). The Angel does indeed represent the Lord Jesus and Michael perhaps played His role in the court of Heaven before He came into existence and ascended to His Heavenly role and intercession. The idea is that Michael in previous possible iterations of the prophecy, and the Lord Jesus in the last day fulfilment of it, intercedes for Israel before God in the very last days, leading to their salvation.

The very same Hebrew phrase "lifted up the eyes and saw" is found twice in the record of Abraham lifting up his eyes and seeing the place of sacrifice of his son, and also seeing the ram caught in the thicket there (Gen. 22:4,13). This sets us up to expect that Daniel likewise will see something prefiguring the Lord Jesus. The very same three Hebrew words are used in Isaiah's prophecies of how men would lift up their eyes and see the restoration of Zion (Is. 49:18 "lift up your eyes and behold... the Lord shall restore again Zion"; 52:8; 60:4). This was what Daniel had lived his life expecting to see, but instead he sees something more wonderful- a vision of the future Lord Jesus. This was exactly what happened to him in Dan. 9; he had been expecting the fulfilment of the restoration prophecies in his lifetime, but instead is given an extended vision of the death of the future Messiah and the resultant eternal life of God's Kingdom. Something far more wonderful than he had envisaged.

See on Rev. 1:13; this appears to be a vision of an Angel representing the Lord Jesus in glory. The white linen represented righteousness (Rev. 19:8), and yet the visions of Zechariah present the leaders of Israel as clothed in "filthy garments". This therefore was the Messianic Saviour who was perfect. It connects with the prophecy of Is. 11:5 about the Messiah who would restore Judah: "Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins". The gold therefore represents His faith and truth (1 Pet. 1:7). This awesome vision of an Angel representing the then-future Lord Jesus was to encourage Daniel that although his life was ending not as he wished, and things hadn't worked out as he had hoped, yet God's purpose remained sure, and there would be a wonderful Messianic redeemer figure who would save him and all God's people from their hopeless lethargy and sin, and bring about the restoration promised, which in their own strength Israel could not bring about.

Dan 10:6 *His body also was like the beryl*- This stone in the breastplate represented Dan, meaning 'judgment' (Ex. 28:17-21 cp. Num. 2:25). But Dan is absent from the list of the tribes in Rev. 7:5-8. Perhaps the idea is that this is the future Lord Jesus in judgment; and yet also identifying with Dan, the condemned excluded from the Kingdom. We could maybe conclude that this spoke of the Lord Jesus carrying our condemnation in His own body.

And his face as the appearance of lightning- This was the feature of the Angel cherubim who are presented as present at Judah's exile and being the source of their potential restoration (Ez. 1:13). But the vision is ultimately of the Lord Jesus. The final restorer and Saviour of Israel is Him and not Angel cherubim, and so we note the connection with the vision of the glorified Lord Jesus with a face like the sun, the beams of which could be compared to lightning (Rev. 1:16).

And his eyes as flaming torches- The Angels are as it were God's eyes, and they are associated with the potential work of restoring Judah through the activity of the cherubim (Ez. 10:12; Zech. 4:10). But this is a vision of the future Lord Jesus, who was to take over the work of Angels and personally enable the ultimate restoration of God's people. It is He who has eyes as a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14). Hebrews 1 labours

the point that the Lord is not and was never an Angel. Here an Angel is used to represent Him to Daniel, in His then future glory.

And his arms and his feet like burnished brass- The idea of a man who had passed through a furnace [the idea of "burnished"] would have reminded Daniel of the experience of his three faithful friends. This Messianic Saviour was truly human, and representative of all the faithful. Again, this is the language of the cherubim (Ez. 1:7) who were associated with Judah's exile and restoration. But their role and ministry for God's people was to be replaced by the Lord Jesus who likewise is presented as having such feet and arms (Rev. 1:15).

And his voice like the voice of a multitude- This likewise is the language of the cherubim associated with the exile and restoration (Ez. 1:24), but this is also the voice of the Lord Jesus in Rev. 1:15. He has taken over their work, and the potential restoration of Judah to their land by the cherubic Angels has now become reworked as the narrative of the Lord Jesus ultimately restoring and eternally saving all God's true people from bondage to sin.

This individual is the embodiment of the cherubim which Ezekiel had recently seen active for the exiles. Both visions were received by a river of Babylon; and there are so many connections: "His body" = Ez. 1:11,23; "the beryl" or LXX "the chrysolith" was a flashing stone = Ez. 1:16; 10:9; "as the appearance of lightning... as torches of fire" = Ez. 1:13 (R.V. mg.) "'In the midst of the living creatures was an appearance like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches... and out of the fire went forth lightning". "Like the gleaming of burnished brass" = Ez. 1:7 where the feet of the cherubim "sparkled like the gleaming of burnished brass". "Gleaming" is literally 'as an eye' and connects with Ez. 1:4,16,22,27; 10:9. "Like the voice of a multitude" = Ez. 1:24 (R.V.). The vision of Ezekiel was contemporary with Daniel; he was being encouraged that despite the long delay, God was hugely active, the cherubim were still there endlessly churning away towards the final glory of God. Ezekiel's prophecy opens with the cherubim visible by the rivers of Babylon, having left Jerusalem; but the cherubim of glory are seen returning to the rebuilt temple in Ez. 43. In the first year of Cyrus, the decree had been given for the Jews to return and rebuild the temple. But now in his third year (:1), the cherubim of glory had not returned. They were still in exile as it were. The message was clear- the few Jews who had returned had not obeyed the commands of Ezekiel to rebuild the temple as commanded in Ez. 40-48, and therefore the cherubim of glory had not returned. Nor would they. Instead, the final visions of Daniel give a far more glorious resolution- although it would be at a point far in the future. Michael would stand up for God's people, there would be the resurrection of the dead and eternal life for God's true people. A scenario far more glorious than the glory returning to a rebuilt temple in this life.

The figure ultimately looks ahead to the Lord Jesus who likewise was the bodily image of the Father's glory (Col. 2:9). Hence the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14 has many similarities.

Dan 10:7 *I Daniel alone saw the vision; for the men who were with me didn't see the vision; but a great trembling fell on them, and they fled to hide themselves*- There are evident similarities with Saul's encounter with the glorified Jesus in a vision (Acts 9:7; 22:11). We are to understand this vision as being of an Angel who was not Jesus, but represented Him in His then future glory. The Lord Jesus, the future Messiah, was the answer to all Daniel's concerns about the when, where and how of the restoration of the Kingdom. Their trembling and fleeing into hiding is Biblically associated with

the reaction of those who feel unworthy and who are condemned. Daniel's faith in God's saving grace was apparently stronger than theirs at this time.

Dan 10:8 *So I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me; for my moisture was turned in me into corruption*- Daniel was to undergo a figurative death and resurrection. Perhaps this is why he had to be "left alone", to experience the totally personal issues and feelings of death and resurrection. Daniel was disappointed that the Messiah and His Kingdom wouldn't come in his lifetime. So he is given this experience of death and glorious resurrection to encourage him that truly, the best is ahead. At the resurrection, all human strength and glory will be as nothing. No beauty, wealth or human success will have any significance. The Hebrew behind "moisture" is that of dignity of face. Majesty, glory, is the idea of the word (s.w. Ps. 8:1; 45:3; Jer. 22:18; Hos. 14:6; Hab. 3:3). But thereby we will come to identity with the Lord Jesus. For when we read that therefore all that glory ["moisture" "was turned in me into corruption" it means he was disfigured; and the same word is used of how the Lord's face on the cross was "marred" (Is. 52:14). The repeated statement that Daniel was left alone may seem to state the obvious. But this too is an aspect of how we shall be at the resurrection and judgment. All social connections, church, family and friends will not figure at all. We will meet the Lord as we are. And it is for us to develop that personal relationship with Him now. Seeing that's the intention, it's no surprise that human relationships and social connections often go wrong in the lives of those the Lord has chosen as His very own. Being "left alone" with God is a repeated feature in the life of God's children. We think of how Jacob was "left alone" with the Angel (Gen. 32:24), as was Benjamin when his brothers all went to Egypt (Gen. 42:38), the suffering servant (Is. 49:21), Martha left alone in the kitchen (Lk. 10:40), the woman caught in adultery left alone with the Lord (Jn. 8:9), the Lord Himself left alone apart from having the Father (Jn. 8:29), Elijah feeling "left alone" in apostate Israel (Rom. 11:3), Paul left alone at Athens (1 Thess. 3:1). Daniel later tells the Angel how he feels (:16). Likewise every tongue shall confess how we are nothing. But we must get there in this life.

And I retained no strength- As in Dan. 11:6. Often in Daniel we read of "power" coming from God and being given to and taken from men. Daniel learnt in his own personal experience what this felt like, to enable him to better understand the prophecies he was giving. His mortality and weakness, and ours, is the whole world's mortality and weakness. The Hebrew word for "power" is that used in Dan. 1:4- Daniel had ability [power] to stand before the earthly King; now he is unable to stand and has no power, before the Heavenly King. All his human strength was being shown to be nothing. Not by [human] power but by God's Spirit would the restoration be achieved (Zech. 4:6).

Dan 10:9 *Yet heard I the voice of his words; and at the time I heard the voice of his words, I had fallen into a deep sleep on my face, with my face toward the ground*- This alludes to how in Persian courts, the accused lay prostrate with their face to the ground until the verdict was given; they were raised up if they were innocent. Daniel 10:9-11 describes in parabolic form the judgement, with Daniel representing the saints, rising from the grave (as he rose from "deep sleep" on the ground) in great fear and sense of unworthiness, but being comforted by the Angel with news of how pleasing we have been to them ("O Daniel, a man greatly beloved"). This indicates that the Angels will have a large part to play in the judgement; the Lord Jesus returns

from Heaven with the Angels with Him, and they are sent forth to gather the responsible to judgment.

Dan 10:10 *Behold, a hand touched me, which set me on my knees and on the palms of my hands*- Heb. "set me tottering upon my knees". Presumably this was a repeat of how Gabriel had twice touched him in reassurance before (Dan. 8:18; 9:21). Daniel's great fear and weakness was because the whole vision was a foretaste of the final judgment, when he was to be resurrected and stand before the saviour Messiah of Israel- and be accepted. This was the final answer to all his concerns, and the disappointment of a life that had not turned out as he had expected by witnessing the restoration of the Kingdom as prophesied.

Dan 10:11 *He said to me, Daniel, you man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright; for I am now sent to you. When he had spoken this word to me, I stood trembling*-

"Greatly beloved" is literally "greatly desired". God has and will have a desire to the work of His hands, as Job finally figured. He desires us, although the extent of that will only be fully felt by us at that wonderful moment. He now is likewise to be the desire of our soul.

Daniel's figurative resurrection was appropriate, because he was so heartbroken that his life was not going to conclude as he had expected, in seeing the restoration of God's Kingdom in Judah. But he is comforted through the vision of the Lord Jesus in His future glory that there would be the sure hope of personal resurrection. Gabriel says that "I am *now* sent", after the three weeks delay from the first prayer of Daniel being answered. Gabriel came so that Daniel might "understand", but from the end of Dan. 12 it's clear that Daniel didn't understand all the details. But there is no need to understand all the prophetic details to "understand" the essential picture- that God's Kingdom purpose shall come finally true through the Lord Jesus. Or maybe Daniel's final lack of apparent 'understanding' was because he didn't want to finally accept that, and still hankered for Kingdom now.

Dan 10:12 *Then he said to me, Don't be afraid, Daniel*- Whenever Angels appear to God's people, they urge them not to fear. Angels will be sent to gather us to judgment, and meeting them will be the first we know that "He's back!". And surely we can expect the same words in that great day.

For from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard- Daniel's prayer for Israel's restoration was above all a desire to "understand"; but his prayer was surely for the forgiveness and immediate restoration of Israel, as he had prayed in Dan. 9. But God sees to the core. In essence, Daniel was struggling to understand, and God saw this and read this as his prayer. As explained on Rom. 8:26, we know not what to pray for as we ought, but the hidden spirit of our deepest heart is read and understood as our request. See on Dan. 9:23.

And I have come for your words' sake- Another proof that prayer is immediately heard, though the answer may be long delayed. And is often more glorious than what we had first intended or envisaged. This is the extreme sensitivity of God Almighty to the words of prayer, the words meant in our hearts. Human words call forth an Angel to be sent from Heaven all the way to a man on earth, struggling for three weeks to human obstacles to the fulfilment of the wish. We see the same thing in Revelation, where human prayer and actions on this earth call forth Angels to leave Heaven and do mighty things on earth- all for our sakes. We could have no greater

encouragement towards seriousness and intensity in prayer. One word of prayer can result in Angels being sent all that ‘distance’ from Heaven to earth to assist us, as in Num. 20:16 “when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt”.

Dan 10:13 *But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but, behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me: and I remained there with the kings of Persia-*

The "prince of Persia" was both the human prince of Persia and his representative Angel in the court of Heaven. The idea of representative Angels is found in Is. 24:21: "On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth". Just as Michael is the Angel who represents Israel in Dan. 12:1. The idea of peoples having a guardian or representative angel is also found in Dt. 32:8 LXX. "He fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God". "The chief princes" may refer to a group of senior Angels, perhaps those referenced in Rev. 8:2 ("the seven angels which stand before God").

The prince of Persia is surely Cyrus. He resisted the role set up for him in Is. 45:1 and this was one reason why the potential prophetic program was delayed and rescheduled. We note the language of Isaiah is not saying that Cyrus without doubt would restore Jerusalem. He was bidden do this work: "Who bids Cyrus be wise, and he shall perform all my will" (Is. 44:28 LXX). Cyrus was "stirred to action" by God (Is. 45:13 GNB); but being Divinely stirred to action and actually acting are two different things. He was chosen and appointed to restore the Kingdom (Is. 45:1,4). But men can be chosen and appointed to do things which they fail to do. Israel were chosen and appointed to so much which they failed to achieve. The Cyrus passage in Is. 45 goes on to pronounce woe upon the man who strives with his maker and who is as clay unresponsive to the Divine potter. Cyrus is in view immediately before and after that passage, so it seems to speak of him. And in Dan. 10 we see how the Angels were struggling with him as the Divine Potter struggled with the piece of clay that was Cyrus. It is hard to understand Is. 45:11 unless it refers to Cyrus: "The LORD, the holy God of Israel, the one who shapes the future, says: "You have no right to question me about my children or to tell me what I ought to do!"" (GNB). And especially, the prediction of Cyrus' conversion was a potential that went unfulfilled: "I will give you treasures from dark, secret places; then you will know that I am the LORD and that the God of Israel has called you by name" (Is. 45:3 GNB).

In the record, Cyrus seems willing to restore Israel- but he resisted three weeks. At this time (10:1) the project of the restoration had been temporarily halted, and it took the Angel three weeks to overcome this. Things aren't what they seem- people may appear to act or believe one way, when they've greatly resisted it. This means that Cyrus didn’t simply wake up one morning and decree that the rebuilding could continue; he resisted it, and the Angel had an ongoing battle with him over it. Those who appear ‘on our side’ in life may have actually battled against Angels *not* to be like that to us. In Dan. 10:20 Angel fought with him; and he remained fighting with the rulers of Persia, and strengthening Darius the Mede in Dan. 11:1- and I there suggest this figure may refer to Cyrus. The "prince" refers to the human prince of Persia, but then the Angel Michael is called "one of the chief princes". Intentionally, the term "prince" is used for both Angels and those whom they represent on earth, in this case, the princes of men. I suggest that the "princes" in apparent conflict are Angels within the court of Heaven; there, each Angel represents a person or entity upon earth. All the Angels are righteous, but they act out the roles of the various

situations on earth, and God gives His judgment upon them. Dt. 32:8 LXX suggests each nation has a representative Angel.

The difficulty with this approach is that it was in the first year of Cyrus that he restored the Jews; we are now in his third year (:1). Perhaps the reference is to the events of Ezra 4, where the Samaritan opposition was given credence at the Persian court. Or possibly the reference is to Cambyses, who was a prince of Persia in the third year of Cyrus, and who apparently was very anti-Jewish. Cambyses was the son and crown prince of Cyrus. Unlike Cyrus, Herodotus details how he was against the toleration of any other gods or religions within his empire. Possibly "the prince of Persia" refers to Cambyses, and "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" to Cyrus. Perhaps other princes were against the policy of Cyrus regarding the Jews- hence Gabriel remained [working] with "the princes of Persia". Yet Michael was "one of the chief princes" (:13). Those "princes of Persia" (:13) had their Angelic representatives in Heaven. We learn from Ezra 4:4,5 that some counselors from among the local inhabitants had been hired by the Persian government to stop the rebuilding of the temple. That shows that not all the Persian government were behind the idea of Judah's restoration. And Cyrus himself suspended the temple reconstruction project.

Jacob wrestled with an Angel and God almost allowed the Angel to be defeated at one point. Here we note that the prince of Persia "withstood". God of course could have forced him to do His will. But God respects human freewill more than that. He does not force, treating men as mere puppets, but operates at length in such a way whereby His will is done whilst respecting human freewill and self-determination. The original for "withstood" is literally 'to stand before / in front of'- the same two Hebrew words here translated "withstood" recur in Dan. 10:16, where Daniel 'stood before' the Angel. As Daniel stood before the Angel, so the Prince of Persia had also stood before the Angel. It could be understood that Daniel likewise withstood the Angel [see on 10:1 about Daniel's possible weakness]. But more likely are we to perceive that the Angel had both Daniel and the Prince of Persia standing before Him- and had had this situation for the past three weeks in which Daniel had been in prayer. Our prayers are therefore a coming before God in a judgment scenario; we stand before Him, as our adversaries do; and He will hear us.

Michael came to "help" Gabriel- a common word in the restoration prophecies, promising God's "help" for Judah's restoration (Is. 41:10,13,14; Is. 44:2; Is. 49:8). Those promises of "help" were fulfilled in the Angels being sent to help. Michael being "one of the chief" implies a hierarchy amongst Angels; hence Jude 9 speaks of "Michael the Archangel".

Gabriel "remained" with the princes of Persia, implying the physical presence of the Angels is significant. They can as it were only be in one place at a time. We are invited to see them as leaving the court of Heaven in response to our prayers and needs (as in 1 Kings 22:19-22), and moving around the earth to operationalize God's answers to our prayers- as in Dan. 10:20; 9:21,22; Gen. 18:10. Or we can read the text as meaning that when Michael came to help the other Angel overcome the prince of Persia, that Angel "was not needed there with the kings of Persia" (Dan. 10:13 RVmg.). It seems that once the job was done, the Angel wasn't physically required there any more. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10.

Dan 10:14 *Now I have come to make you understand what shall happen to your people in the latter days; for the vision is yet for many days*- This understanding is through the "writing of truth" (:21) which refers to the revelations of Dan. 11. As noted throughout that chapter, the various conflicts between the kings of north and south over the promised land have undeniable connections with historical realities, but they are never a perfect fit to them. They therefore refer to a situation yet to come in the last days; and here we are told that in so many words.

Dan 10:15 *And when he had spoken to me according to these words, I set my face toward the ground, and was mute*- The fact that the [fulfilment of] the vision was "yet for many days" (:14) was obviously distressing for Daniel. He had several times already been told that he was not to live to see the full restoration of the Kingdom, but no matter how many times we are told things in God's word, even by direct Angelic revelation in his case, we still struggle to accept them on a personal level. Our preconceptions of how things must work out in our own lives are very strong, and to resign them, or allow them to be re-interpreted by God, is so difficult. I will suggest on :16 that Daniel's muteness and staring at the ground is in shame, having been convicted of his sin. Despite being commanded not to fear (Dan 10:12), and being given every encouragement by the Angel, Daniel still fears. To the point he was dumb with fear. "Was mute" is LXX "was pricked in my heart", in which case we may have a description of how the fact the fulfilment was not to be "for many days" was like a stab in the heart for Daniel, who had lived a long life expecting the Kingdom to come in his lifetime. Or it may be a hint that he in this foretaste of resurrection, he was struck immediately by his own unworthiness. Yet will be reassured that he is indeed greatly beloved. We can just imagine that being our experience at the resurrection. In the LXX of :16 he describes this as "at the sight of thee my bowels were turned within me".

Dan 10:16 *Then behold, one in the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spoke and said to him who stood before me-*

The intimate connection between men and Angels is perhaps revealed by the way the Angels who appear in Daniel are never described by the usual Hebrew term for 'Angel', *malakh*. Instead the Angels are given human-like descriptions" “like the appearance of a man” “one in human ['Adam'] form” and “the man Gabriel" (Dan. 8:15; 10:16; 9:21). It has been suggested that "Gabriel’s name is likely a play on the Hebrew word *gabor* for both “strength” and “man” as seen in the attribution in Daniel 8:15, “an apparition of a man (*gaver*)”. The association between the Angel and his charge, Daniel, is shown by the Angel calling Daniel a "man [greatly beloved]"; when the Angel himself, it is stressed, appeared as a "man".

The one "like the son of man" is the Lord Jesus in Dan. 7:13 and Rev. 1:13, a vision very similar to the vision of the heavenly being Daniel has just seen. The one who stood before Daniel was presumably the same one who touched his lips. The awesome being Daniel has just seen was a vision of an Angel, perhaps Gabriel, manifesting the yet unborn Lord Jesus in His future glory, such as will be displayed at His return to resurrect Daniel and restore Israel's Kingdom. There is a similarity with how out of the same cherubic vision which condemned Isaiah, there came a being who touched Isaiah's lips and cleansed him from his sin (Is. 6:5-7). This would mean that Daniel's muteness and staring at the ground in :15 was in shame for his sins; he as representative of Israel, as well as a personal sinner, perhaps feeling guilt that he had so insisted upon seeing the restoration in his own lifetime, felt convicted of sin by the

vision of the Christ in glory. And yet it was that same saviour Christ who also cleanses him from his sin.

My lord, by reason of the vision my sorrows are turned on me, and I retain no strength- "Sorrows" is an idea Biblically associated with sin. The vision convicted him of his sinfulness, as any human being would feel in the presence of the Lord Jesus- although of course the Lord didn't then exist, and was represented in His future glory by an Angel. "Turned on me" is the same word as in :8; Daniel's human strength was now felt by him to be nothing, he was totally convicted of his sin.

But "sorrows" is also the word for birth pangs (s.w. Is. 13:8; 1 Sam. 4:19). Daniel felt as prostrate and helpless as a woman in the pains of labour.

Dan 10:17 *For how can my Lord's servant talk with my lord? For as for me, immediately there remained no strength in me, neither was there breath left in me-*

The lack of breath or chronic difficulty in breathing connects with the idea of being like a woman in labour (see on :16). He was almost suffocated with sorrow.

This sense of inability to talk with "my Lord" [perhaps said in the same way as David in spirit called Jesus "Lord", Mt. 22:43] reflects a sense of moral unworthiness. He feels not only convicted totally as a sinner, but also dead, as if he has no breath. Daniel has previously identified himself with Israel's sins and also confessed his own sins in Dan. 9:20. But now before the presence, as it were, of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah he had so hoped to see in his own lifetime, he is the more deeply convicted of his sin. It is one thing to intellectually admit that we are sinners; but there are levels to that conviction, and Daniel now reaches a very high level of contrition. And yet from the very vision which convicted him, he is given cleansing and every assurance of salvation. It is the same experience we may pass through, perhaps when remembering the Lord Jesus as appointed at His memorial table.

Dan 10:18 *Then there touched me again one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me*- This could be another Angel, or perhaps the same "son of man" of :16, representing the Lord Jesus, but described as a different personage here because He assumed a different form. The Lord Jesus likewise used physical touch to assure sinners throughout His ministry; although I again emphasize that the Lord had no personal pre-existence, and we are reading here of an Angel representing the then future Lord Jesus in the glory He shall have at His return in judgment. Hebrews 1 explains in detail that the Lord was not an Angel, but in vision He could be represented by Angels.

Dan 10:19 *He said, Greatly beloved man, don't be afraid: peace be to you, be strong, yes, be strong-*

The only other time an Angel uses these words, "Don't be afraid, peace to you" is when the Angel tells the fearful, sin-convicted Gideon "Don't be afraid, peace to you, you will not die" (Jud. 6:23). Daniel is the most righteous man presented in the Bible, apart from the Lord Jesus. But even he, at his figurative resurrection, feared condemnation. It is the same phrase used by Joseph in assuring his guilty brothers of his grace and acceptance of them. I have explained on :15-18 that Daniel was deeply convicted of his sinfulness by this encounter with the Angelic representative of Messiah in glory. Hence he is again assured, and told not to be afraid- of condemnation for his sins. The "peace" wished to him is surely peace with God. And he is encouraged as we are to accept the strengthening of the Spirit.

When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, Let my lord speak; for you have strengthened me- Daniel accepts God's grace in Messiah, and believing that he is indeed forgiven and cleansed, he agrees to listen and have dialogue with "my Lord", the Angelic representative of the then future Lord Jesus.

Dan 10:20 *Then he said, Do you know why I have come to you? Now I will return to fight with the prince of Persia. When I go forth, behold, the prince of Greece shall come-*

The implication here, as in :13,14, is that the Angel is hectically busy in the fight with the prince of Persia. He uses this busyness to excuse his delayed appearance to Daniel, and says that once he has finished explaining to Daniel, he must be off again to fight with the prince of Persia and also prepare to also fight with the prince of Greece [who would appear about 200 years later]. The impression is given of frenetic activity by the Angels, even working on issues which will only appear on earth after 200 years, in this case. The prince of Persia needed constant attention so that God's saving purpose would not be obstructed. We have but a peek into what was going on behind the scenes of mundane life on earth. It is the same impression Ezekiel was given in the vision of the highly active cherubim, with wheels within wheels buzzing with activity. Whilst on earth, it appeared nothing much was happening to progress God's Kingdom purpose. By faith we are to perceive the same intense activity.

The Greeks were required to take over from the Persians according to Daniel's visions of Dan. 2,7 and 8. But they were still some way off in time [200 years]; but the Angel Gabriel was showing Daniel that he was already at work, even with Persia at its zenith under Cyrus, to bring about God's longer term purpose. Gabriel explained to Daniel that he had to battle with both the rulers of Persia *and Greece* in order to bring about the fulfilment of Daniel's prayer for the final restoration to happen. By appreciating the local politics which the Angel brought about between Persia and Greece, we can better understand why Gabriel had to manipulate *Greece* in order for the *Persians* to allow the Jews to return, and even to encourage them to do so: "From the point of view of the Persian king a strong pro-Persian Judea was a major threat to the Greek coastal lifeline, and as long as the Greeks dominated the coast and Egypt he supported a strong Judean province headed by a Judean-Persian official and peopled by a pro-Persian population, most of whose families were hostages in Babylon and Persia"- Othniel Margalith.

The references to the Angel princes of Greece, Persia and Israel in Dan. 10:20,21 could suggest that each nation or people has an Angel representative in Heaven. Indeed Dt. 32:8 appears to say so: "[God] laid down the boundaries of every people according to the number of the sons of God", i.e. the Angels. It could even be possible that the strange reference in Eph. 6:12 to wicked spiritual beings in the Heavens refers to the Angelic representatives of the evil nations and powers here on earth. Those righteous Angels represent those powers in the court of Heaven- without themselves personally being the least bit wicked or sinful.

Dan 10:21 *But I will tell you that which is inscribed in the writing of truth*- What is noted "in the writing of truth" is the detailed predictions in chapter 11. Other such predictions in Daniel, and generally in the prophets, are presented in terms of visions which must be interpreted. But here we have a direct statement of future history without symbols and visions. This has fazed many interpreters, as they encounter what appears to be a recounting of history told in the future tense. But the key is to

appreciate that this is simply a revelation to men of what is noted in God's book of time. The events are stated as they shall be, without symbols and visions.

It may be that the Bible or the "whole counsel of God" existed in written form in Heaven before it was revealed to men. The fact that there is a literal book of life with writing in it indicates that the Angels do use their capacity to read; and will we too in some form in the Kingdom? But the writing in view is likely the details of the great wars of Daniel 11. This passage would seem to necessitate some written record in Heaven capable of interpretation by the Angels, the meaning of which was being given to Daniel. Gabriel goes on to say "now will I shew you the truth" (Dan. 11:2). So the Angels hear God's word in Heaven, and sometimes inspire men to write some of these words down. Likewise in Rev. 1:1 we learn that the Revelation came from Jesus originally (and from God before that), but was sent to us and signified by the Angel. Does it follow that the Angel was responsible for working out the symbology, the signifying (putting into sign language) of the book, under the infallible guidance of God and Jesus? If so, we can better understand how the Angels eagerly watch over our attempts to understand the word, and are in a position, as Gabriel with Daniel, to step in and assist us in our understanding of it- not least through the trials of life which they bring opening our eyes to it (cp. Job 36:15). However, we know that not all the Angels have this ability, but rather earnestly look into the things contained in the word; or alternatively, they are used by God to work out the symbology which they themselves do not fully understand.

And there is none who holds with me against these, but Michael your prince- "Holds with me" is the same word used for 'strengthen' in this chapter. The word ‘strengthened’ occurs several times in Dan. 10. An Angel ‘strengthens’ Daniel, and then comments that “Michael your prince”, another Angel, had also helped him- he had “strengthened himself with me” (Dan. 10:21 RVmg.). But then the Angel comments that “As for me…I stood up to confirm and strengthen him”, i.e. Michael (Dan. 11:1 RV). The Angel who strengthened Daniel was helped by another Angel, Michael, strengthening him; and then that Angel strengthened Michael. This is possibly a window into the nature of our existence and relationship with each other in the future age! The great Angel Michael is described as "your (Daniel's) prince"- i.e. his personal guardian Angel (Dan. 10:21)?

"Hold" translates the common Hebrew word for 'strengthen'. Possibly the idea is that the Angel had no help in the work of strengthening apart from Michael. He will go on to use the word several times of 'strengthening' men to arise and play their roles, just as the previous visions showed God making nations and kings arise and fall. So often it will be used in the next vision: Dan. 11:1,5,6,7,21,32. The Angel is explaining to Daniel how busy he is in this work of strengthening men; it is beyond his sole personal ability, but he only has Michael to help him. It is however the same word just used of the Angel strengthening Daniel (Dan. 10:18,19,21). The guardian Angel of Daniel who was involved in strengthening Daniel had the same power so strengthen not just him but kings and nations.

We should note that these mighty Angels were fighting "against" the princes of Persia and Greece. But Cyrus prince of Persia is presented as being strangely supportive of the Jews returning from exile and rebuilding the temple. The apparent mystery as to why he made that decree is answered: it was the result of a huge amount of Angelic work over a long time. We may pray for something and have an answer, but that answer took a huge amount of Angelic work to achieve. In this case, it seems Cyrus was not cooperative. The language of Angels fighting *against* him could imply

that he was actually against the Jews in some ways and wanted to do them evil, or at least, not to allow their return. And it took Angelic effort to overcome him. The language of Angelic effort and struggle is reflective of how God will never force man against his will but will work so hard to get the balance right between encouragement on one hand, and the railroading of predestiny on the other.

DANIEL CHAPTER 11

Dan. 11:1 *As for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him*- "Darius" may refer to a general of Cyrus. The "him" being strengthened could refer to Darius, or it could be that Gabriel stood to confirm and strengthen Michael, Israel's representative Angel. This strengthening and confirming is typical of how God works with man. Man may be confirmed in a path but this doesn't mean he will achieve God's intended path for him. The same word is repeatedly used of God's strengthening of Cyrus (Is. 41:9,13; 42:6; 45:1), confirming our suggestion that Darius is effectively Cyrus. The same word for "confirm" is now going to be repeatedly used of how the various kings became strong. But that strength was because of the Angel strengthening or confirming them and not solely of their freewill (Dan. 11:5,6,7,21,32). This is the potential strengthening of the Spirit available to us too. LXX "The first year of Cyrus".

See on Dan. 10:13. This is the Angel of Dan. 10 speaking. "Darius the Mede" took the Kingdom from the Babylonians in fulfilment of the prophecies of Dan. 2 and Dan. 7, that Babylonian was to be succeeded in dominating the earth / land promised to Abraham. The Angel 'stood' to do this, and the desire of Darius was confirmed by the Angel who strengthened him to achieve this. And the Spirit works in our lives in the same way, to confirm and strengthening us in our desires to do God's will. Multiple times David uses the same word in describing God as his 'strength' or 'strengthener'. The word occurs several times in this chapter (Dan. 11:7,10,19,31,38,39); clearly the idea is that the apparent strength of human leaders, armies and kingdoms is from God, as His hand moves in human history. There is a strong possibility that this "Darius the Mede" was in fact the Cyrus who made the decree for the Jews to return; there is no such figure as "Darius the Mede" in history, nor is there anyone between Belshazzar and Cyrus. In this case the reference here would be to the Angelic confirmation and strengthening of Cyrus to make the decree, after the three weeks struggle with him discussed on Dan. 10:12, and also overcoming the opposition from the rest of the Persian rulership, called "the princes of Persia" in Dan. 10. "Confirm" is the Hebrew word used of Angelic strengthening of Lot to leave Sodom (Gen. 19:16), and of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21). But such strengthening has to be accepted, and therefore those involved with the restoration are asked to "let your hands be strengthened" (Zech. 8:9,13 s.w.), Zerubbabel and Joshua were to "be strong" (s.w. Hag. 2:4), and Daniel himself was an example of accepting this Angelic strengthening (s.w. Dan. 10:18,19).

Dan. 11:2 *Now will I show you the truth*-

It seems that the vision of Dan. 11:2-12,3 is the third explanation or development of the vision of Dan. 8:3-14. No new vision appears after Dan. 8- what we have in Dan. 9-12 is explanation and further development of that vision. The explanations are in Dan. 8:17,19-26; 9:24-27 and Dan. 11:2-12:3. Clearly the kaleidoscope was

turning and the elements being rearranged to give different scenarios as the primary possibilities were precluded by various human failures to meet the preconditions.

As noted on Dan. 10:21, the Angel is allowing Daniel to hear what is written in God's planned history. The material is presented as historical statements of fact, and is not shrouded in vision, apocalyptic and imagery as is found in the other prophecies. This is an unusual genre within the Biblical record. The higher critics cannot accept that God can predict history in advance and so they claim that such a detailed outline of the history of the kings of north and south simply could not have been written in advance. To disbelieve God's word is a basic human tendency, the record of Adam and Eve's sin opens the Bible by making this point. The higher critical approach has merely made this lack of faith intellectually respectable. But as often, the critics have failed to do their homework. As I will demonstrate throughout the commentary on Dan. 11, the fit between the history and the prophetic word is not that good. There are indeed outline similarities and points at which the correspondence, or fit, is indeed very tight. But not consistently, especially in the way everything fits Antiochus Epiphanes until :40 but not afterwards. I explain this by stating that Daniel 11 just like Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 describes a situation specifically existing in the last days, which will be the perfect fit. There were hazy hints of continuous historical fulfilments, but they were but incipient, primary fulfilments. This situation is also due to the way that much Biblical prophecy is conditional; as explained on Dan. 2, there were potential fulfilments, scenarios which could have come true, and led to the appearance of a Messiah figure and the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom as God's Kingdom on earth. But Israel's lack of repentance precluded them. And so we are left with an apparently messy scene in the aftermath- bits of prophecy which had partial fulfilments, at times very clear, at times not at all clear. But God's word shall ultimately come true in the situation of the last days.

The best fit is to the events of the Seleucids and Ptolemies. And yet Daniel 11 has a strangely strong relevance to events later, in the Roman period. Again we conclude that the prophecy had another potential fulfilment at that time, which would have climaxed in the return of the Lord Jesus in AD70: ""Octavius, one of the Second Triumvirate, went to war with Marc Antony (also one of the three) and Cleopatra. Reading Octavius as the willful king, Marc Antony as the king of the North (in the region of Syria), and Cleopatra as the King of the South (in Egypt), we see that most of the reading of Daniel 11 comes forth straightforward. Octavius, also Caesar Augustus (the first ruler of the Roman Empire), regarded no other gods, but on legions of their army, they honored "forces", signs of the Zodiac. He attacked the fortress a Phillip with many legions of Roman soldiers and conquered it, and actually displaced whole towns to honor his retiring soldiers after the war. vv. 40-43 depict the Battle of Actium in 2 September 31 BC, between Marc Antony and Cleopatra, both in scope and in composition of military forces. The battle was comprised much at sea, and the large infantries were not engaged. He also left out Edom, Moab, and Ammon, as in v. 41. And, after conquering Cleopatra in Egypt, he then took hold of the wealth of Egypt. The last two verses, then, while not directly seeming applicable to Octavius, could then look forward again, to the same throne, but a different individual king reigning on it. If the above holds true, then the introduction of Daniel 12 falls in the beginning of the Roman Empire, and the time of great trouble prophesied in Daniel 12:1, with Michael the great Prince, would most likely be looking towards the First Century (i.e., the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD)".

This prophecy has many hints that it will all come true in the last days, "at the end of years" (:6). We can therefore expect intrigue and strife between two entities

who both seek to dominate the *eretz* promised to Abraham, the latter day kings of north and south. The reference could be to Shia and Sunni Islamic extremists, the two groups of Israel's latter day abusers represented by the two feet / legs of the image of Dan. 2. All Bible prophecy has its final fulfilment in the last days. The image of Dan. 2 stands complete; the final abuser of God's land and people will include elements of all the previous entities who have done this, headed up by a Nebuchadnezzar type 'head' or individual, the antiChrist. The events of Daniel 11 are an expansion upon those of Daniel 8, where we learn of how the Persians were replaced by the Greeks. The "king of the north" is presented in terms of the little horn that Dan. 8 shows arising out of the Greek empire. This in turn is the same little horn of Dan. 7 which arose out of the situation at the end of the fourth empire- which could have been Greece, with the previous empires those of Babylon, Media and Persia. But the historical fulfilments we can discern in Dan. 11 are only partial; the situation could have resulted in a charismatic king of the north appearing, and being crushed by the appearance of a Messiah. But that didn't happen; but the detailed historical fulfilment of the predictions in Dan. 11 came true up until that point. The detail of the predictions and the exactness of their fulfilment serves as a guarantee that the final fulfilment shall also come. All these historical aspects of the various recorded dominations of the land shall be repeated in essence in the last days; there will again be kings of north and south who at times unite to dominate the *eretz*, at times fight each other, with the king of the north coming out as dominant and then an individual figure arises who seeks to dominate the land; and he is brought to his end by the return of the Lord Jesus and the full re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom as that of God.

Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia- Cambyses, Smerdis and Darius I. Or Cambyses (BC 529–522), Gaumata (Pseudo-Smerdis) BC 522 (for 7 months), and Darius Hystaspis (BC 522–485).

And the fourth- Xerxes. The fourth who is the third could also be a way of saying that the third king would be the most significant and final king.

Shall be far richer than they all: and when he has grown strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece- Xerxes is the Ahaseureus of Esther, proud of his riches (Esther 1:4,6,7). Xerxes raised an army of 5 million men to invade Greece. But the original could also mean that he would stir up all the realm of Greece.

I suggested on Dan. 2 that Daniel's prophecies had potential fulfilments which never came about; there is also a discernible although inconsistent and vague fulfilment of some elements of the visions throughout history; and the main fulfilment is in the last days, when the image stands complete, all the beasts of Dan. 7 are incorporated into the final beast which is to be destroyed, and likewise Daniel 11 may come true in a way we cannot yet imagine, in our last days. The initial possibility of the image prophecy was that there would arise a sequence of kings immediately after Nebuchadnezzar, which would climax in the appearance of Messiah and the re-establishment of God's Kingdom. And here again we have a sequence of four kings arising after Babylon.

GNB "At the height of his power and wealth he will challenge the kingdom of Greece". This continues the theme we will often note in Dan. 11, that kings and nations are struck down at the height of their power, because that is the height of their pride. The same term is repeated in :4: "At the height of his power his empire will break up".

Dan 11:3 *A mighty king shall stand up, who shall rule with great power-*

The word for stand or stood up is so often used in Dan. 11 (:2,3,4,6,7,8,11,14,15,16,17,18,20,21,25,31) just as it is of the ram in Dan. 8:3,4,6,7 and just as Daniel himself was stood up by the Angel. Nations and kings rise and fall under God's Angelic direction. Just as their strengthening is from Him, as discussed on :1.

This king is Alexander the Great of Greece (:4). The focus shifts from Persia in :2 to Greece here in :3, against whom the Persians came with a huge army but were unable to dominate. "Great power" is better "great dominion", in reference to how Alexander ruled the largest ever known empire on earth until that time.

And do according to his will- The language of Dan 8:4 about the ram. Yet the language is allusive to how Yahweh rules with the greatest dominion and does according to *His* will (Dan. 4:35). The various kings and kingdoms of men are all portrayed as playing God, as being fake Messiah figures, and will all have their summation in the final antiChrist figure of the last days.

Dan 11:4 *When he has arisen-*

Throughout Daniel 11 we see continued a theme of the earlier visions: Kings and peoples suddenly fall when at the height of their power (Dan. 11:4 "When he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken", 6,12 "The multitude shall be lifted up, and his heart shall be exalted; and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail", 14 "the children of the violent among your people shall lift themselves up... but they shall fall, 17 "He shall set his face to come with the strength of his whole kingdom... but shall not stand", 19 "he shall turn his face to the islands, and shall take many... but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found"). This surely is because pride triggers the coming of God's judgment; He is so sensitive to pride, and so loves humility. The language of :4 is that of Dan. 8:8 concerning Alexander: "when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven". See on :24.

As soon as Alexander had arisen to power, he suddenly died. We can look to the arising of a latter day individual or entity which appears to dominate the *eretz* promised to Abraham, but this will fall and be divided, resulting in two power blocs struggling for dominance of the *eretz*.

His kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of the sky, but not to his posterity- We note that division of a kingdom is Divine judgment. The same word is used for the division between Israel and Judah. The restoration would mean that God's people would not be "divided" into two kingdoms any more (Ez. 37:22). Divisive behaviour is therefore self judgment. There was an attempt to keep the Kingdom intact under the rulership of Alexander's half brother and then in the name of his son who was born after his death, but these attempts failed. The four winds are the four generals of Alexander, the four heads of the leopard (Dan. 7:6) and the four horns of the goat in Dan. 8:8,22.

Nor according to his power with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others besides these- The kingdom was divided between Alexander's four generals. But the focus of Bible prophecy is upon the powers which dominate the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and so only two of them are now spoken of; the king of the north, the Syrian [Seleucid] kingdom, and that of the south, referring to the Egyptian [Ptolemaic] kingdom, the division taken by Alexander's general Ptolemy Soter. The simple takeaway is that God's focus is so intensely and exclusively upon His people.

Dan 11:5 *The king of the south shall be strong*- Ptolemy Soter defeated the other generals and established a strong kingdom dominating the land of Israel. His 'strength' again is in relation to dominance of the land of Israel, which is the earth / land which the powers of the image in Daniel 2 reigned over.

And also one of his princes; and he shall be strong above him, and have dominion; his dominion shall be a great dominion- The reference is to Seleucus Nicator. He was driven out of the northern kingdom and took refuge with Ptolemy, but then returned and became the king of the North, ruling the Seleucid section of the Greek empire.

Dan 11:6 *At the end of years*- This could simply mean 'in the future' or 'after a period of years', but that is surely axiomatic. The marriage between the leadership of the two groups happened 35 years after the death of Seleucus. This is one of the many reasons to think that the ultimate fulfilment of these prophecies will be "at the end of years", in the last days, before the Lord's return. See on :2.

They shall join themselves together- There were attempts at unity between the kings of north and south, the two parts of the Greek empire which sought to dominate Israel. Likewise the two groups of Israel's enemies may unite together in the last days in their common hatred of Israel, but as explained throughout this chapter, they will not remain together and will bitterly fight each other. This is the iron and clay of the feet of the image not mixing together. The joining in view here is the marriage of the grandson of Seleucus, the first leader of the northern Greek empire ["Syria"], and the daughter of Ptolemy, the leader of the southern Greek empire in Egypt.

And the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement: but she shall not retain the strength of her arm; neither shall he stand, nor his arm; but she shall be given up, and those who brought her, and he who became the father of her, and he who strengthened her in those times- The marriage between the leading families of the kings of north and south came to an end when the wife poisoned her husband. "His arm" can also be rendered "his seed"; the idea of a joint offspring uniting the two groups came to nothing. But the language here is detailed, and will have its fuller fulfilment in events of the last days which are yet to unfold. "Those who brought her" would refer to the Egyptian courtiers who came with the wife, who were also murdered. "He who became the father of her" is AVmg. "whom she brought forth"; the offspring of the marriage was also killed.

The "king of the North" throughout Daniel 11 refers to the King of Syria- so the latter day King of the North who attacks Israel and is destroyed at Christ's return, as detailed at the end of Daniel 11 and the start of Daniel 12, must refer to an individual based upon a King of Syria. Such an individual could easily be the leader of a jihadist entity like ISIS, who took power in Syria.

There are multiple connections between the "King of the North" and the little horn of Dan. 8: 8:11,12,25 = Dan. 11:22,36; 12:1; 8:12 = 11:31; 8:24 = 11:36; 12:6; 8:12,24 = 11:16,17,24,28,30,36,29; 8:12,24,25 "succeeds" = 11:36; 8:19 = 11:30,36; 8:17,19 = 11:27,35,40.

Dan 11:7 *But out of a shoot from her roots shall one stand up in his place, who shall come to the army, and shall enter into the fortress of the king of the north, and shall deal against them, and shall prevail*- In revenge for the murders, the southern kingdom [Egypt] invaded and devastated the Syrian kingdom of the north. The idea of another standing in his place is found also in :20,21 and continues the theme of Dan.

2- the apparently powerful and eternal kings and entities of this world shall all rise and fall under God's hand.

Dan 11:8 *Also their gods, with their molten images, and with their attractive vessels of silver and of gold, shall he carry captive into Egypt; and he shall refrain some years from the king of the north*- Or, "And he shall continue more years than the king of the north". The king of the south at this point was Ptolemy Euergetes, who lived and reigned longer than the king of the north, Seleucus Callinicus. The latter day application of this may be in that the king of the south is to be extremist Islamic, who wishes to destroy all images and perceived idols.

Dan 11:9 *He shall come into the realm of the king of the south, but he shall return into his own land*- If we read as AV "So the king of the south shall come into his kingdom, and shall return into his own land", this would then appear to be a summary of the events of :8. But why the repetition? The alternative reading would refer to an unsuccessful attack on Egypt by the king of the north about 240 BC. However, :29 states there have been three attacks on Egypt by the king of the north, and so here in :9 we read at least of an attack only upon "the realm" of the southern kingdom, i.e. Palestine.

Dan 11:10 *His sons shall war, and shall assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall come on, and overflow, and pass through; and they shall return and war, even to his fortress*- The focus of Bible prophecy is upon the land of Israel. The various conflicts between the kings of north and south, the Syrian and Egyptian wings of the Greek empire, are recorded only insofar as they affected Israel. This confirms my view that the "earth" ruled over by the metals of Dan. 2 and beasts of Dan. 7 is the land promised to Abraham. The two sons of the king of the north, Antiochus, attacked Palestine in order to retake it from the king of the south, Egypt. He passed through Palestine up to the border of Egypt but with Winter approaching (BC218), he 'returned' to his fortress in Ptolemais and then in the spring of BC217 returned towards Egypt. The king of the south [Egypt] counterattacked and drove him back to the Ptolemais fortress.

The language of overflowing and passing through is also used of the Assyrian invasion of Judah (Is. 8:8) and of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 47:2); and here and in Dan. 11:40 it is used of how the king of the north shall overflow and pass through Israel "at the time of the end". So we are encouraged to see this as also having a latter day application; there will be waves of invasions of the land. It is only radical Islam which has such an interest in dominating Israel and Jerusalem.

"Stirred up" twice here and in :25 begs the question "By whom?". Again we have hints at God's hand, meddling with the psychology of men and yet without interfering with their freewill. His hand can meddle (how the word is usually translated) in the hearts of men today, through His Spirit. Likewise "overflowing" is a word repeatedly used (:10,22,26,40). This too begs the question, "Who is driving this storm surge of water?". It is the wind of God's Spirit, driving men even more headlong in the path they have themselves chosen.

Dan 11:11 *The king of the south shall be moved with anger, and shall come forth and fight with him, even with the king of the north; and he shall set forth a great multitude, and the multitude shall be given into his hand*- This refers to the great

battle fought at Raphia, near Gaza, which was won by Ptolemy Philopator, the king of the south. "Moved with choler" (AV) again implies being stirred up by some unseen influence. Again the question is begged, as to what this is. Clearly it is God doing this by working on the hearts of men. It is the same word in Dan. 8:7 about Greece being "moved" to attack the ram of Medo Persia, and is elsewhere translated "provoked". "Given into his hand" likewise suggests some higher force giving victory.

Dan 11:12 *The multitude shall be lifted up, and his heart shall be exalted; and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail*- The great victory at Raphia wasn't followed up on. Ptolemy wished to enter the inner sanctuary of the temple, but was refused by the priests. He therefore threatened the whole nation of the Jews with destruction, and murdered thousands of them. In Alexandria, 40,000-60,000 Jews were slain. Again we note that the prophecy focuses upon history as it affects God's people and land. And again we note that pride leads to destruction: "He will be proud of his victory and of the many soldiers he has killed, but he will not continue to be victorious" (GNB). God looks carefully at the heart of unbelieving Gentiles; how much more upon ours.

Dan 11:13 *The king of the north shall return, and shall set forth a multitude greater than the former; and he shall come on at the end of the times, even of years, with a great army and with much substance*- Antiochus III invaded Palestine again in 201 BC. Again we note that the prophecy focuses entirely upon the relationships between the kings of the north and south insofar as it affects God's land and people. "At the end of times" again suggests that whatever historical application this clearly had, it points ahead to the major fulfilment in the last days. If the idea was simply 'after a period of time', then this would have been expressed differently. The idea of 'after a period of time' would refer to the 16 year gap between the battle at Raphia (see on :11) and this second campaign against the king of the south.

GNB "When the proper time comes, he will return with a large, well-equipped army". Daniel often speaks of "time" and "times"; and they are always under God's control. Here we have another hallmark of the Divine inserted. All these kings and powers had their Divine time to do this or that, despite exercising their freewill. They come to "the end of years" for them (:6,13), as the king of the north finally comes to his "end" in :45 (See on :24 "he shall devise his devices against the strongholds, but only for a time", 27 "they shall speak lies at one table: but it shall not prosper; for yet the end shall be at the time appointed", 33 "they shall fall by the sword and by flame, by captivity and by spoil, for [many] days", 35 Some of those who are wise shall stumble, to refine them, and to purify, and to make them white, until the time of the end; because it is yet for the time appointed", 36 "he shall prosper until the indignation be accomplished", 40 "At the time of the end shall the king of the south contend with him").

Dan 11:14 *In those times there shall many stand up against the king of the south: also the children of the violent among your people shall lift themselves up to establish the vision; but they shall fall*- From this verse onwards, commentators are divided between those who see the prophecy continuing to describe the conflicts between the northern and southern parts of the Greek empire; and those who see the focus now upon the Roman empire, which according to some interpretations of Daniel 2, was the next power to take over dominating the land promised to Abraham. Both lines of interpretation have some undeniably valid connections between the prophetic words

and history. But unlike the preceding verses, the match is not so precise as from :4-13. I suggest again that it is the conditional nature of Bible prophecy which explains this. A path of events could have been followed but it was not, because Israel did not fully repent; and so God tried again, and again. Therefore these same prophetic words have some limited application to both the Greek kingdoms and the Roman empire. I suggest this is understandable if we accept that the main fulfilment of the entire chapter is in the future; the latter day entity which dominates the land and people of Israel will have elements of both Greek and Roman empires, just as the image stands complete in the last days, and the last terrible beast of Dan. 7 and Revelation is a composite of all the previous beasts.

The flow of thought seems to continue naturally from :13, which speaks about the king of the north invading Palestine; and now he directly attacks the king of the south, who at the time was the infant king Ptolemy Epiphanes. Antiochus was not the only one to rise against this infant king of the south; Agathocles, his prime minister, and other groups within Egypt joined in; and Antiochus was supported by Philip of Macedon.

"The children of the violent among your people" are interpretted as the Romans by John Thomas and those who follow the AV "Also the robbers of thy people shall exalt themselves to establish the vision". But "they shall fall" seems out of sequence; the Romans didn't fall for a long time afterwards. And the original does demand that these violent ones or robbers are "among your people". The reference seems more naturally to Jews among Daniel's people who sided with Antiochus as he attacked Jerusalem. "Your people" is the phrase elsewhere used in Daniel about Daniel and his people the Jews. This surely means that the words of Dan. 11 were given to Daniel as prophecy, and are not some later description of elapsed history presented as prophecy and added by another hand (as some claim). "Establish" is the same word translated "stand up" earlier in the verse. These Jewish traitors "stood up" with the Syrian invaders because they justified their actions by saying that they were making this vision of Daniel 11 'stand up' or be established. They justified joining in the destruction of Jerusalem by saying that it had been prophesied in this vision. GNB "they will rebel because of a vision they have seen, but they will be defeated". Possibly a false vision from a false prophet is referenced. You can't force Bible prophecy into fulfilment. The required preconditions were Israel's repentance and the appearance of a Godly Messiah, to re-establish God's Kingdom on His principles, rather than a desire for political, nationalistic independence.

"Stand up" is better 'be stood up'. This repeats the great theme of Daniel, that the Divine hand raises or sets up, and takes down. The same word will be used twice in :15 translated "withstand" (AV). The power to withstand or stand up is therefore given or taken- clearly, by God.

Dan 11:15 *So the king of the north shall come, and cast up a mound, and take a well-fortified city: and the forces of the south shall not stand, neither his chosen people, neither shall there be any strength to stand*- This can apply to both the siege of the Romans in AD70 [although there would be a large gap in the prophecy in this case, and the Romans didn't take Palestine after a conquest of Egypt, nor did they as the king of the north give any daughter in marriage to the king of the South as required by :17] or to Antiochus. The Antiochus interpretation fits better with the forces of the south not standing, and the ones chosen by Ptolemy of Egypt failing to resist Antiochus. As noted on :14, these same prophetic words have some limited application to both the Greek kingdoms and the Roman empire. I suggest this is

understandable if we accept that the main fulfilment of the entire chapter is in the future; the latter day entity which dominates the land and people of Israel will have elements of both Greek and Roman empires, just as the image stands complete in the last days, and the last terrible beast of Dan. 7 and Revelation is a composite of all the previous beasts. However, "the king of the north" in the context refers not to Rome but to the northern part of the Greek empire, Syria, governed by the Seleucids. The king of the south, Egypt, true to Biblical precedent, failed to help the Jews against the king of the north, just as Egypt had not saved them from the Babylonians and Assyrians. The lack of strength to stand may refer to a severe famine which led to the garrisons of the king of the South surrendering; this was why the army led by Scopus who took refuge in the walled city of Sidon had to surrender to the king of the north, Antiochus.

Dan 11:16 *But he who comes against him shall do according to his own will, and none shall stand before him; and he shall stand in the glorious land, and in his hand shall be destruction*- This refers to the actions of Antiochus and the Syrians in Palestine at this time, and the inability of Ptolemy and Scopus, the leaders of the "king of the south", to resist. The language is similar to that about God in Dan. 4:35. This is a major theme of Daniel- that the apparently invincible armies of men are brought to nothing before God. Those who appear so invincible are merely playing God and will be judged by He who is ultimately invincible, and whose will triumphs over human will. And that is the simple takeaway lesson for us to this day. In Daniel's time, Palestine was largely in ruins. But he is reminded that it is still "the glorious land" from God's perspective, and was invited to see it that way with the eye of faith.

"He will do as he wills... none able to stand before him" recalls the description of the ram at the peak of its power in Dan. 8:4, after which he fell. It's the same here. Having arisen to this point, he would soon stumble and fall (:19). This is a common theme in Daniel- that all rise and fall, and they fall at the point of their greatest pride.

The Hebrew translated "destruction" is the word usually translated 'ended', 'finished' or 'accomplished'. It is the word used in :36 of the judgment being "accomplished" or ended; and twice in Dan. 12:7 of the 'finishing' of the destruction of God's land and people. So we could better translate with LXX "he shall stand in the land of beauty, and it shall be consumed [ended] by his hand". The obvious observation is that the destruction of the holy land was not at this point 'ended'. Hence the difficulty of the translators. But once we grasp the idea of conditional fulfilment of prophecy, all becomes clear. The land could at that point have been destroyed 'to the end'. Just as the abomination that makes desolate was set up in :31, well before the time for this to be done in Dan. 9:27; 12:11; Mt. 24:15. This was a possible point of 'ending' that didn't come.

Dan 11:17 *He shall set his face to come with the strength of his whole kingdom*- Antiochus determined to focus all his resources on the destruction of Egypt, the king of the south.

And he shall bring terms of an agreement and perform them- Antiochus was unable to do as he planned, due to the growing threat of Rome. So instead he tried to make treaties with Ptolemy, the king of the south.

He shall give him the daughter of women, to corrupt her; but she shall not stand, neither be for him- Ptolemy married Cleopatra, the daughter of Antiochus. The intention was that Cleopatra would be her father's secret agent in Egypt. But

Antiochus didn't succeed in corrupting her; she came to support her husband rather than her father. Note that Cleopatra Syra is not the Cleopatra VII the mistress of the Roman Caesars. Cleopatra I Syra (died 176 B.C.) was the daughter of the Seleucid king Antiochus III the Great (lived 242-187 B.C.) a king of the north, who gave her in marriage to Ptolemy V of Egypt, the then king of the south.

Dan 11:18 *After this shall he turn his face to the islands, and shall take many*- After Rome defeated Philip of Macedon, Antiochus capitalized on this by grabbing many of the Greek islands.

But a commander shall cause the reproach offered by him to cease; yes, moreover, he shall cause his insolence to return upon him- The Romans demanded that Antiochus relinquish all the islands and territory of Philip of Macedon which he had seized. He refused, and reproached the Romans, but the Romans defeated Antiochus at Magnesia. GNB stresses how yet again, pride was the root of his downfall and not anything else: "a foreign leader will defeat him and put an end to his arrogance; indeed he will turn the arrogance of Syria's king back on him". If pride is the reason for failure, we can only conclude that this was because of the intervention of the God who is so sensitive to pride- even in the hearts of those who are not His people. How much more sensitive is He to pride in those who are His people.

Dan 11:19 *Then he shall turn his face toward the fortresses of his own land; but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found*- After the defeat at Magnesia, the Romans demanded a tribute of 15,000 talents. Antiochus tried to raise this by breaking into temple citadels ["fortresses"] of various gods. Whilst plundering the temple of Jupiter Belus in Elymais, Antiochus was killed.

The language of turning face, returning to the homeland and falling is exactly that of another "king of the north" from Assyria: "he returned [s.w. "turn" in Dan. 11:19] with shame of face to his own land. When he had come into the house of his god, those who came forth from his own bowels killed him there with the sword" (2 Chron. 32:21). The idea is surely that the same Divine hand was at work with the king of Assyria as with this king of the north. Just as God makes empires and kings rise and fall.

"And shall not be found" connects with the fate of all the kingdoms of men at the end of Dan. 2- they will be as chaff that will be blown away never to be found again. But the essence of that future judgment is manifest now in how God judges. We are to have the wisdom to perceive that; the principles of final judgment are manifest in God's judgments in the world in our lives now. See on :22.

Dan 11:20 *Then shall stand up in his place one who shall cause a tax collector to pass through the kingdom to maintain its glory*- As noted on :19, the Romans had laid a huge tribute upon Antiochus and the northern Seleucid kingdom. His successor, Seleucus Philopator, tried to raise the tax / tribute by plundering temples, including that in Jerusalem. The tax was particularly levied upon Judah, "the kingdom" and land which is the focus of the prophecies.

But within a few days- He reigned only 11 years; although "a few days" implies somewhat less than that. This is an example of where the "fit" between prophecy and history is good in places but not in others. This is because the fulfilments were either potentials which began to 'work out' and then didn't; or only primary fulfilments. Only the latter day fulfilment will be the perfect fit.

He shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle- Seleucus Philopator was poisoned by his trusted minister Heliodorus.

Dan 11:21 *In his place shall arise a contemptible person, to whom they had not given the honour of the kingdom*- The reference appears to be to Heliodorus who poisoned Seleucus Philopator. But he was unpopular and "not given the honour".

But he shall come in time of security, and shall obtain the kingdom by flatteries- This appears to refer to how Antiochus IV Epiphanes returned from imprisonment in Rome, came to Athens and flattered the Athenians to support him rather than Heliodorus. Whilst Antiochus IV Epiphanes fits the following verses quite well, his taking of power doesn't nicely fit here. It was not a "time of security", and he actually amassed a large army against Heliodorus although he didn't use it.

Dan 11:22 *The overwhelming forces shall be overwhelmed from before him, and shall be broken; even the prince of the covenant*- The idea may be that Antiochus took control of Syria and overcame some "prince" who opposed him, possibly Onias III, according to 2 Macc. 4. Or it could be that another invasion of Egypt is described, although this is hard to find historically at this time; and we ask why "the prince of the covenant" should be mentioned in this connection. Here as mentioned earlier, there seems a gap between the prophetic words and the possible historical fulfilment. The main fulfilment is yet future. "Shall be broken" recalls how the iron legs of Dan. 2 and the fourth beast of Dan. 7 are to "break" others, and yet then be broken by the Lord's return. This king of the north again acts as a fake Messiah, an antiChrist. "The prince of the covenant" refers most comfortably to the Lord Jesus; "even" is elsewhere translated "in like manner as". Perhaps we are to understand that his 'breaking' is just as the little stone, Messiah, the prince of the covenant, will in turn break him. He is thereby presented as an imitation Christ, who shall be destroyed by the real Christ, in the latter day manifestation of these things. As discussed on :19, we have here an example of how God's final judgment of Dan. 2 is also seen in essence in how He judges now. The connection with the breaking and sweeping away of the chaff of Dan. 2 is strengthened by the GNB: "swept away".

Another view is that "the prince of the covenant" refers to Antiochus removing Onias as high priest in Jerusalem in favour of his own supporters. But this bit of political intrigue against a priest who was himself a political animal hardly seems to fit the language of *the* prince of *the* covenant being "broken". And why call the priest a "prince" if Messiah is not in view? All the other suggestions seem out of step with historical reality- e.g. the idea that it refers to "Ptolemy Philometor, the son of Cleopatra, Antiochus' sister, who was joined in covenant with him". How were such people "broken", we ask. And :23 speaks of Ptolemy Philometor as now making a league with Antiochus, so he was hardly "broken" by him in the preceding verse.

Dan 11:23 *After the treaty made with him he shall work deceitfully; for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people*- This seems to speak of the treaty between Antiochus as king of the north and Ptolemy Philometor as king of the south, who was then but a child and was deceived. Under the guise of assisting Ptolemy Philometor to rule over all Egypt, Antiochus came with a small army and grabbed much of Egypt. We can likewise imagine the latter day king of the north arising from a position of weakness; rather than being the leader of an already large people such as Russia.

Dan 11:24 *Without warning he shall come into the richest parts of the province-* "Without warning" can be translated "in the midst of peace" which is exactly the language of Dan. 8:25 about Antiochus as the little horn: "in the midst of peace he shall destroy many". But the prophecy of Dan. 11 about him is of grater detail and likewise is intended to end with the destruction of Antiochus by the Lord's coming- and that didn't happen. It was a potential that didn't come about and was delayed and reinterpreted until the last days. Antiochus used the guile explained in :23 to take the best parts of Egypt, around Memphis and Alexandria, for himself. But why describe Egypt as a "province"? Again we do not see a perfect fit of the history to the prophetic language; that shall only come in the latter day fulfilment, when there are two power blocs dominating the land and people of Israel with various intrigues between them.

And he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them prey and spoil and substance- This was the first time that the king of the north had so totally taken over Egypt, the king of the south. The historical fulfilment is recorded in 1 Macc. 1:17-20, "And the kingdom was established before Antiochus, and he had a mind to reign over the land of Egypt, that he might reign over two kingdoms. And he entered into Egypt with a great multitude, with chariots and elephants and horsemen, and a great number of ships: and he made war against Ptolomee, king of Egypt, but Ptolomee was afraid at his presence, and fled, and many were wounded unto death. And he took the strong cities of the land of Egypt: and he took the spoils of the land of Egypt". But again the fulfilment is not exact, because there is no record of Antiochus scattering the Egyptians. Perhaps in the last days the two warring factions in the Middle East will end up with the king of the north briefly dominating the king of the south. Who those latter day players are, isn't clear. There could be a clear divide amongst Israel's enemies, like the two legs of the image; perhaps along the lines of the Sunni-Shia divide. Or perhaps the king of the north will be the latter day Assyrian, and the king of the south corresponds to Western forces in the Middle East.

Moreover, he shall devise his devices against the strongholds, but only for a time- Egypt had a series of fortresses for defence, which Antiochus overcame. Egypt was a protectorate of the rising Roman empire, and they demanded Antiochus retreated from Egypt. We wonder whether "a time" is to be understood in the context of Dan. 7:25, "a time, times and a half". In this case, we have evidence that the meaning of "a time" is flexible. GNB "but his time will soon run out". As discussed on :13, the continual reference to "time" and "times" in Daniel all implies that the desperate freewill efforts of men are all in fact within the frames of Divinely arranged "times".

Dan 11:25 *He shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army; and the king of the south shall war in battle with an exceeding great and mighty army; but he shall not stand-*

Again we can read this as 'he shall be stirred up'; hence LXX "his strength and his heart shall be stirred up against the king of the south". This implies an unseen hand stirring up the heart of men- and this is clearly God's activity, directly upon the human heart.

This mighty army of Antiochus is described in 1 Macc. 1 as quoted on :24. Ptolemy likewise raised a mighty army to drive Antiochus out of Egypt. But again the chronology seems slightly "out"; this great invasion ought to have been described before the events of :24 it was to apply totally to Antiochus. The difficulties in correspondence are again a reminder that Antiochus was only a primary fulfilment of

the greater which was to come. According to :29, there were three invasions of the king of the south by the king of the north, and this was the first and greatest of them.

For they shall devise devices against him- Ptolemy Philometor [the king of the south] was weak and betrayed by his own nobles and their intrigues.

Dan 11:26 *Yes, they who eat of his dainties shall destroy him, and his army shall overflow; and many shall fall down slain*- 1 Macc. 1:18 describes how "Many fell wounded to death". His army was "swept away" (NIV, RSV). Ptolemy Philometor was betrayed by those who ate "at his table" (LXX). To eat together was a sign of mutual trust and fellowship, and our breaking of bread at the table of the Lord Jesus speaks of His acceptance of us. All we have to do is to accept it; and we should therefore never deny another presence at His table.

Dan 11:27 *As for both these kings, their hearts shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table: but it shall not prosper; for yet the end shall be at the time appointed*- This again is a hint that the entire situation here is intended for ultimate fulfilment in the last day and not in a continuous historical sense, although there clearly are elements of primary fulfilment in history. All the power and device of human politics and military might will not prosper, because it is God's intention that things shall come to "the end" at the "time appointed" by Him. And this is a wider comfort in human life and experience. Antiochus sat at Ptolemy's table, pretending to be just merely supporting him, when he was lying to him. And yet again, the historical fit isn't exact, because this deceit was really before the massive invasion of :25. The fulfilment is vague and inexact- because it was but a primary fulfilment, and we look to the last days for the exact fit. "The time appointed" might initially have had possible fulfilment at the end of the 62 weeks of Dan. 9:25. GNB "They will not get what they want, because the time for it has not yet come". See on :13,24,33 for how "the time" in Daniel is always a Divinely appointed time. There is the sense in the original that the end has been delayed by an appointed time. Only the Russian Synodal translation seems to get this right: "потому что конец еще отложен до времени", 'because the end is still postponed for a time'. This is exactly what we learn by comparing the various time periods of Daniel; they reflect continual postponements and extensions and reframing of the periods.

A theme developed in Daniel is that there is no essential difference between the various kings and empires. Because human nature is the same in men and empires great or small. Both “the king of the north” and “the king of the south” act according to their own will (11:3,16,36); they attack each other whenever they can; they use their daughters for the sake of their own political advantages (11:6,17); and finally they lie to each other at the same table (11:27).

Dan 11:28 *Then shall he return into his land with great riches; and his heart shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall do his pleasure, and return to his own land*- Antiochus took the riches of Egypt and returned northward. He heard that Jerusalem was in festivity because of a false report about his death, and so he decided to stop there on the march homewards and punish them. His heart was not simply against the Jews but against their holy covenant. In the latter day scenario, it is "the holy [Abrahamic] covenant" which is the root source of bitterness between Islam and Judaism, and between Israel and her neighbours. Antiochus sought to replace Jewish culture with Greek [Hellenic] culture, introducing Greek games on the temple mount, such as naked wrestling and discus throwing. He killed 40,000 Jews there at this time

according to Josephus, and desecrated the temple. There will be something similar done by the latter day king of the north.

Given all the emphasis upon the hand of God influencing human hearts, we should consider here that it would be quite legitimate to translate "His heart shall be *turned* [by God] against the holy covenant". The same words are found in :25, where the king's heart was turned or stirred up against the king of the South.

Dan 11:29 *At the time appointed he shall return, and come into the south; but it shall not be in the latter time as it was in the former*- The evil planned against Judea and Jerusalem was "at the time appointed"; those who thought they were indulging their own plans were in fact under Divine control. This is the consistent comfort of the prophecies. Antiochus made a second attack upon the king of the south, but not as successful as that of :26-28; and his third attack upon Egypt in :42,43 was likewise not so successful as the first one.

Dan 11:30 *For ships of Kittim shall come against him*- A reference to Roman forces and envoys arriving in Egypt, which they saw as their protectorate, forcing Antiochus to back off and return homeward.

Therefore he shall be afraid and shall withdraw, and have indignation against the holy covenant, and shall do his pleasure: he shall even return- On his return northward, as happened in :28, he attacked Jerusalem. He sacked the city and again, his anger was against the covenant; he again sought to impose Greek culture upon the Jews. Maccabees records that he forced the Jews "that they should follow the law of the nations of the earth, and should forbid holocausts and sacrifices, and atonements to be made in the temple of God. And should prohibit the sabbath and festival days to be celebrated. And he commanded the holy places to be profaned, and the holy people of Israel. And he commanded altars to be built, and temples, and idols, and swine's flesh to be immolated, and unclean beasts. And that they should leave their children uncircumcised, and let their souls be defiled with all uncleannesses, and abominations, to the end that they should forget the law, and should change all the justifications of God. And that whosoever would not do according to the word of king Antiochus should be put to death". Such spiritual and psychological domination of the Jews is to be expected from the latter day king of the north, and radical Islam seems a very likely way of fulfilling this.

And pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant- The idea could simply be that the punishments inflicted by Antiochus were judgments upon the many in Judah who had forsaken the covenant. But the original can as well be translated "and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant" (AV). This would then refer to how Antiochus used the apostate high priest Menelaus to develop a group of Jewish apostates who supported the imposition of Greek [Hellenic] culture upon Judaism. The Biblical background of the term "those who forsake the covenant" is that because of this, the temple would be destroyed and Israel judged by their neighbours (Dt. 29:25; 31:16; 1 Kings 19:10; Jer. 22:9). We are therefore set up to expect what we read in :31, that the temple and people of Judah were to be judged.

Dan 11:31 *Forces from him shall appear, and they shall profane the sanctuary, even the fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering, and they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate*- This is the language of Dan. 9:27 about what the Romans did in AD70, and it is understood by the Lord to refer to both the Roman actions in AD70 and more fully, the situation immediately before His return (see on

Mt. 24:15). But that is not to preclude a reference to the blasphemies of Antiochus, who dedicated the Jerusalem temple to Zeus and placed a statue of Zeus on the altar (2 Macc. 6:2). Lk. 21:20 alludes to the same idea but connects this with Dan. 9:27, seeing the desolator as the Roman armies of AD70 and the armies of the latter day invader. However, the "he" here can have application to John of Gischala, the Jewish zealot leader, who was actually the one who made the sacrifices to cease, and with whom Josephus records he pleaded to re-instate them. Josephus saw John as the fulfilment of this prophecy. And yet in the context it clearly also refers to what was done by Antiochus (1 Macc 1:45, 54, 59; 4:52–53). And so we again see that the prophecies have various historical fulfilments, all of them not a perfect fit with the actual prophetic words; but they will have their full and seamless, perfect fit fulfilment at the time of the Lord's return. Just as the metals of the image and the various beasts had their historical fulfilments but will all exist at the Lord's return, when the image of Dan. 2 stands complete. The final abuse of God's land and people will contain all the elements of the previous abusers; in this case, by the likes of Antiochus and John of Gischala.

The abomination that makes desolate can be understood as that which desecrates the temple, as in Dan. 8:12,13, "the transgression of desolation"; and also as 'the abomination of the desolater', which is how Antiochus Epiphanes is described in 1 Macc. 1:29,37-49. The abomination in view was in each historical context some material shrine or altar built on the temple mount, once fortified by the Jews ["the fortress"], with the agreement of apostate Jews. 1 Macc. 1:54 describes what happened at the hands of Antiochus: "Now in the fifteenth day of the month Casleu in the 145th year, they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar and builded idol altars throughout the cities of Judah on every side". The temple was dedicated to Jupiter Olympius, and a smaller altar built upon the original altar for sacrifices to this god, with an image of the idol upon it; "abomination" in the Old Testament means an idol. The Roman 'desolation' of the temple was in similar terms, and so we can look to something similar happening in the latter day fulfilment. This abomination is to be set up in the last days by the latter day invader, and then destroyed by the Lord's return, and 2 Thess. 2 is likewise clear about this; so I cannot see the Mosque of Omar currently on the temple mount as anything more than at best a primary fulfilment of it, along with the erection of a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus on the temple site in AD 132.

The fact is that the abomination that makes desolate is understood as specifically appearing in the last days, before Messiah comes to save His people (Mt. 24:15). But that didn't happen in the times of Antiochus. What he did to the temple could have been 'the end'. But it wasn't. The term is clearly to be linked with the desolation prophesied as being accomplished by the little horn of Dan. 7 and Dan. 8. And that was to be ended by the Lord's coming. But He didn't come then. And so the whole scenario has some apparent reference to what happened in AD70. And again, the Lord didn't come. Clearly there were a series of potential fulfilments, but each time they didn't fully happen. The kaleidoscope turned again. But finally a glorious picture will be presented and fulfilled by the Lord's return to the earth to eternally establish His Kingdom.

Dan 11:32 *Such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he pervert by flatteries*- Antiochus got the apostate Jews on his side. Alcimus and other apostate high priests were used by Antiochus to enforce the Greek culture over the Hebrew. There is a

strong theme in all the fulfilments, that apostate Jews enabled the desolation of the temple. And we are to expect this in the greater, final fulfilment of the last days.

But the people who know their God shall be strong, and do exploits- There was a reaction against this enforced Hellenization. There arose the *hasidim,* called "the Assidseans" in the Book of Maccabees, headed by Mattathias and his sons. Their "exploits" against the Hellenists are recorded in the books of the Maccabees, particularly those by Judas Maccabaeus. Those who "know their God" are those who are faithful to the covenant; the whole purpose of the Abrahamic covenant was and is to know God personally, in the sense of having a personal relationship with Him.

Dan 11:33 *Those who are wise among the people shall instruct many; yet they shall fall by the sword and by flame, by captivity and by spoil, many days*-

The connection with Dan. 12:3 is clear: "Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the expanse; and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever". That speaks in its context of the last day, of resurrection and judgment at the Lord's coming. The conclusion surely is that that day could have come at this time. Just as the abuses of Antiochus, the little horn, could have led to the Lord's coming in the visions of both Dan. 7 and Dan. 8. But it didn't. Various preconditions weren't fulfilled, and so the kaleidoscope turned again and other possible fulfilments arose. We note another connection between the historical parts of Daniel and the visions- in this case, to the way the three friends were preserved from the sword and flame. But these "wise" amongst God's people would not be spared. Sometimes God visibly comes through for His people and other times He doesn't- in the short term.

"The wise" are a group whose prototype was in the wise Daniel and his three friends, who were the minority of Jews who weren't corrupted by the pressures of the Gentile world. Even though the other 'wise' amongst the Jews were corrupted. These wise who instruct many are those of Dan. 12:3 [see notes there], who shall shine eternally. They become representative of all the faithful. We note that Daniel and his friends are presented as having instructed the Gentile kings with Divine wisdom. They are purified, refined and made white (:35) just as were the Jewish friends in the fiery furnace. It is this group of "wise" in the last days who will understand the prophetic word, just as Daniel and his friends did: "those who are wise shall understand" (Dan. 12:10).

The revolt against the Hellenization of Antiochus and the apostate Jews was intellectual as well as in terms of military rebellion and massacres of garrisons etc. This revival of attention to the Mosaic law by the *hasidim* (see on :32) spawned the movements such as the Pharisees which were so opposed to the Lord Jesus when He came. This group are alluded to in Dan. 12:3 as being sure of resurrection and eternal blessing because of their teaching of righteousness. But again, there is an imperfect fit here; because the *hasidim* were often teaching more nationalism than true spirituality, and their understanding of the covenant was Biblically weak. Much of what they said and believed was hardly Biblical spirituality. The falling or stumbling alludes to the judgments upon Israel for forsaking the covenant (Dt. 32:35; Lev. 26:37); perhaps the implication is that they too were not faithful to the covenant. We could conclude that even those who misunderstand are blessed despite their doctrinal weaknesses. But the latter day application is a far tighter fit; that there will be those who teach about Jesus as Messiah within the persecuted Israel of the last days under [Islamic?] domination, who will be eternally blessed. Several passages in Revelation can be seen as referring to them; these are the pastors who will be given to repentant Israel of Jer. 3:15.

"Many days" implies a specific time. "Many" isn't in the original. See on :13 for how "the days" or "time" in Daniel is always a Divinely appointed time.

Dan 11:34 *Now when they shall fall, they shall be helped with a little help*- The Maccabees won amazing victories, but as noted on :33, they were generally far from Biblical spirituality. This was reflected in God giving them a "little help". They of course claimed, as did subsequent Judaism, that their amazing victories against "the king of the north" were due to God being with them. But the record here distinctly downplays that. And there is the statement here that the "little help" would be received at the time of their "fall". Again, the victories of the Maccabees doesn't exactly fit with the Biblical prediction, and we are to look to a latter day fulfilment for the perfect fit.

But many shall join themselves to them with flattery- "Join" may suggest marriage (AV "cleave"). Some joined the revolutionaries, even intermarrying with them, as agents of the Hellenists, the king of the north. Infiltration of the Jewish ranks was seen in the time of Antiochus and also the AD70 scenario, and we can expect it to feature in the final, last days fulfilment.

Dan 11:35 *Some of those who are wise shall stumble, to refine them, and to purify, and to make them white, until the time of the end; because it is yet for the time appointed*- 'Stumbling' [Heb. to totter / waver] is mostly used in a negative sense, of spiritually stumbling. The gods of the kings of Syria were the "ruin", s.w. stumbling, of Judah (2 Chron. 28:23); "you have fallen / stumbled by your iniquity" (Hos. 14:1). But the righteous falls seven times and seven times rises up again (Prov. 24:17, the same word is used); and that stumbling is part of the refining and purifying of the saints. Sin is never wasted, but always used by God towards His glory. This implies that some of "the wise" at this point would endure to "the time of the end", which is the time of Daniel's resurrection and "the end" of the time periods. But they didn't- that potential scenario didn't come about. The situations at the time of Antiochus and AD70 could have led to the ultimate "time of the end". But that potential wasn't realized; Israel did not repent, and instead focused upon nationalism and the hope of a political Kingdom of God. And therefore and thereby these words of Daniel 11 concern the situation in the ultimate "time of the end", the same "end" foreseen in Dan. 9. The LXX gives: "And some of those of understanding shall consider to purify themselves both to be chosen and to be purified to the time of the end, for the season is for hours". It could be that for the sake of the faithful minority, those who were "wise", the time of the end was but hours away; but that "end" still didn't come. The potential was not reached fully. The 'stumbling' of "those who are wise" could refer to their 'falling' by the sword as in :33,34. But the Hebrew for "stumble" is very often used about spiritual stumbling (Is. 8:15; 28:13; 59:10,14; Jer. 6:21; 18:15; Mal. 2:8 etc.). The idea seems to be that some of the wise spiritually stumbled. The Hebrew, followed by AVmg., suggests that it is the fall of some of the wise, either physically or spiritually, which will be the refining and purifying of the truly faithful. And yet even their experience of stumbling, physically and / or spiritually, was part of the Divine effort to purge them so that they might be acceptable at the time of the end, the day of final judgment. The latter day application is imaginable; some of the wise fall in the persecutions of :33,34, some spiritually stumble, but those who are purified by these experiences are those of Dan. 12:3 who shall be resurrected to especial glory. But the text clearly requires that this group who are purged by the sufferings of some of the wise, or even their stumbling in faith, will endure until the time of the end; the

time when "Michael" stands up for God's people and the dead are resurrected (Dan. 12:1-3). Clearly the language demands a latter day application for its main fulfilment. Any attempt to apply this language to the time of Antiochus or AD70 is weak and patchy, and at best but an incipient fulfilment of the final, greater one. This focus upon the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days is found at several points in the visions of Revelation, not least those of the 144,000. The ultimate 'making white' is through accepting the cleansing of the Lord's blood (Rev. 7:9).

See on :13 for how "the time" in Daniel is always a Divinely appointed time. GNB "This will continue until the end comes, the time that God has set".

Dan 11:36 *The king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods-*

The king doing according to his will recalls how other kings did the same; Dan. 11:3 uses the term of Alexander the Great; Dan. 11:16 of Antiochus III). The phrase is also used of the ram [Medo-Persia] in Dan. 8:4,20. These visions are portraying a battle between human will, and that of God. Naturally God wins. And that same battle is played out within every human heart.

"Speak marvellous things against God" is the language of Dan. 7:21, where the little horn [identified in Dan. 8 as Antiochus Epiphanes] "shall speak words against the Most High". John Thomas and others see this "king" as the Romans. But Roman power did not extend until the indignation is accomplished, i.e. the last day, and surely "the king of fierce countenance" here and in Dan. 8:23 better fits Antiochus. But even that is not a perfect fit. As noted on :35; this looks forward to the latter day antichrist, a charismatic "king of the north". The blasphemy of Antiochus is well recorded. His coins bore his image with the inscription "Antiochus: God manifest". He claimed he could touch the stars (2 Macc. 9:8-10) and could like Yahweh weigh the mountains in his scales. Parts of the prophecies seem to 'best fit' Antiochus, others, the Roman-Jewish war of AD67-70. This is intentional. But all these shady and incomplete historical fulfilments prepare the way for the major one, in the last days. They also reflect the conditional nature of the prophecy; the program could have all come true in the time of Antiochus, but it didn't; and likewise in AD70 with the Romans. The factor which precluded it each time was the lack of repentance and true spirituality amongst the Jews.

And he shall prosper until the indignation be accomplished; for that which is decreed shall be done- GNB "until the time when God punishes him. God will do exactly what he has planned". See on :13 for the major theme of how all this apparent exercise of human freewill is still within the frames of God's appointed times. "The indignation" is another connection with the little horn of Dan. 8:19, who is Antiochus: "at the latter end of the indignation". "That which is decreed / determined" uses the word twice used in Dan. 9:26,27 about that which is "determined" being done at "the end". The very last day is in view here. Antiochus didn't bring about that final "end". The end could've come then. I suggest it didn't because various preconditions weren't met. No Messiah figure arose as intended, Cyrus failed in this; Israel didn't want to return from Persia nor did they rebuild the temple as commanded in Ez. 40-48. And so the kaleidoscope turned, and the various elements will form the final picture of the actual last days. But the book is sealed, we will not understand that picture until it happens at "the end". The same "end" when Daniel is resurrected and stands in his inheritance.

The individual spoken of here, the king of the north, was to "prosper" until the last day. Although the time of the accomplishment of wrath could refer specifically to God's judgments upon Jerusalem, as in Dan. 9. But when that finishes, and the times of Gentile domination of her are accomplished, then the Messiah shall come and Israel's Kingdom be re-established. So again we see that the ultimate fulfilment of these words is in the last days. The LXX renders: "And shall prosper until the wrath be accomplished; for on him there is an end". The idea of *"an* end" could be another hint that these prophecies had various provisional, conditional fulfilments in history, various "ends" were potentially possible, but they did not come about. Yet ultimately, the final "end" shall come at the Lord's coming. Thus it could be argued that :36-40 is a summary of the situation which is brought about by the events of :41-45. This approach fits the AD70 situation fairly well, but not perfectly because the main fulfilment of all this chapter is in the last days.

The allusion here in :36 is back to Dan. 9:26,27, leading us to see these words as having an initial fulfilment in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. And yet as I have so often reasoned, all these historical events were not the main fulfilment of these words; they were but precursors of the main fulfilment which is yet to come. But this same language of the self exalted king is used of Alexander (:3), Antiochus (:16), Medo-Persia (Dan. 8:4,20) and the little horn (Dan. 8:12,24). The latter day abuser of God's people will include elements of all the previous ones, which explains the similarities. It could be that :36-39 is a description of how the situation in :40 arises, when the kings of north and south both unite against a third party who is within Jerusalem. So "the king" here would refer to someone in Jerusalem; I suggest in the AD70 context this was John of Gischala, the zealot king / leader. :36-39 would then be describing him.

The exaltation of John above every god was through his blasphemy, as Josephus comments about him: "John, when the plunder from the people failed him, had recourse to sacrilege, melting down many of the temple-offerings and many of the vessels required for public worship, bowls and salvers and tables; nor did he abstain from the vessels for pure wine sent by Augustus and his consort. For the Roman sovereigns ever honoured and added embellishment to the temple, whereas this Jew now pulled down even the donations of foreigners, remarking to his companions that they should not scruple to employ divine things on the Divinity's behalf, and that those who fought for the temple should be supported by it. He accordingly drew every drop of the sacred wine and of the oil, which the priests kept for pouring upon the burnt-offerings and which stood in the inner temple, and distributed these to his horde, who without horror anointed themselves and drank therefrom. Nor can I here refrain from uttering what my emotion bids me say. I believe that, had the Romans delayed to punish these reprobates, either the earth would have opened and swallowed up the city, or it would have been swept away by a flood, or have tasted anew the thunderbolts of the land of Sodom".

Dan. 11:36,37 are clearly given a latter day application by Paul's allusion to them as descriptive of the latter day antichrist figure who will be enthroned and destroyed by the Lord's second coming (2 Thess. 2:3-8). And yet Paul writes as if that person or entity was alive in his time; "the mystery of lawlessness" was already at work, he wrote; although the man of lawlessness was alive but restrained at the time of writing. But again, that was only a primary fulfilment; the main and essential fulfilment is in an individual or entity at the time of the Lord's return.

The references to Rome are however significant. Dan. 11 began with the Persians taking over from Babylon, then talks about the Greek domination of the land, and now

we have Rome, then the breakup of Rome, and finally the coming of Messiah to destroy them and establish God's Kingdom. This is exactly the sequence of rulership we have in the visions of Dan. 2 and Dan. 7. And yet the entire image, all the beasts, and the scenario of Dan. 11, all exist together in the very last days when the Lord returns. The value of appreciating any historical fulfilments are only in that they provide assistance to us in imagining how the final scenario will work out.

Dan 11:37 *Neither shall he regard the gods of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall magnify himself above all*- In the AD70 context, Josephus says of John of Gischala: "But now John, aspiring to despotic power, began to disdain the position of mere equality in honours with his peers, and, gradually gathering round him a group of the more depraved, broke away from the coalition. Invariably disregarding the decisions of the rest, and issuing imperious orders of his own, he was evidently laying claim to absolute sovereignty. Some yielded to him through fear, others from devotion (for he was an expert in gaining supporters by fraud and rhetoric); a large number thought that it would conduce to their own safety that the blame for their daring crimes should henceforth rest upon one individual rather than upon many; while his energy both of body and mind procured him not a few retainers. On the other hand, he was abandoned by a large section of antagonists, partly influenced by envy—they scorned subjection to a former equal—but mainly deterred by dread of monarchial rule; for they could not expect easily to depose him when once in power, and thought that they would have an excuse for themselves if they opposed him at the outset. Anyhow, each man preferred war, whatever sufferings it might entail, to voluntary servitude and being killed off like slaves".

His attitude to women and lack of desire for them is again explained by Josephus: "John's lack of an appropriate desire for women can be seen in his abandonment of the women and children in the middle of his flight from Titus to Jerusalem (*The Jewish War* 4.103–11), and also in his allowing his Galilean contingent in Jerusalem to rape women for sport, to indulge in effeminate practices, and to imitate the passions of women (4.558–63)".

Rejecting the god of his fathers fits Antiochus, who rejected the gods of Syria. And yet his establishment of idols in the temple hardly sounds as if Antiochus didn't regard any god. Not regarding the desire of women is hard to pin on any of the candidates; Antiochus apparently destroyed the idols which were beloved by women, but we must look to the latter day fulfilment for the perfect fit. It may imply the king of the north is homosexual.

The dominant individual presented here doesn't fit perfectly with John, nor with Antiochus, let alone with Constantine [as John Thomas suggests]. Clearly there is to be an individual who must appear in the last days; the focus is very much upon the individual rather than the 'kingdom' represented. I suggested on Dan. 2 that the metals of the image primarily spoke of a sequence of kings, rather than kingdoms. And this will come to its final term in this super-king figure. The LXX offers: "Because that in everything he shall be exalted". This is a personality cult such as never seen in human history. The refusal to regard any god / idol may refer to some radical form of Islam which smashes everything they perceive as idolatry.

Dan 11:38 *But instead he shall honour the god of fortresses*- Trusting in his own fortifications as if they were God, rather than in the true God (cp. Hab. 1:11). Or the idea may be that the God of the fortress is the fortress of :31, the sanctuary of Zion.

He honours Israel's God as well as a god whom his fathers didn't know. This would fit John of Gischala; it also helps us understand the renegade nature of the final antichrist, who Paul says shall sit in the temple of God as "the son of perdition", a phrase used about Judas, one of the twelve. He will be a partial believer, perhaps a renegade Jew. It would also fit how Antiochus likewise glorified his military technology.

But the LXX "And to his place he shall move" reflects the difficulty of the Hebrew here. The future antiChrist will "move" to Jerusalem and enthrone himself there, in a way which none of the previous fulfilments have done. The Peshitta offers: "The mighty god he shall honour in his possession, and a god whom his fathers have not known shall he honour". How can this latter day individual honour "the mighty god" and yet also honour a god whom his fathers have not honoured? The cry of radical Islam is *Allah Akhbar*, Allah above all; and this insistence upon the supremacy of Allah is taken to an extent unknown to previous more moderate Muslims. The idea that Allah is above all leads to the total destruction of anyone and anything outside their group and religion.

"Fortresses" could be an intensive plural referring to the God of the one great fortress, Zion. This is its reference in :31, the fortress of the temple sanctuary (Ez. 24:25). And Zion is often described like this by contemporary writers. Perhaps the latter day antiChrist will claim to worship the God of Zion. But as suggested on :40, actually they come against this one true God in the final fury which leads to their destruction.

And a god whom his fathers didn't know shall he honour with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things- The language of serving a god whom his fathers didn't is that of an apostate Israel serving new gods which their fathers didn't know. The suggestion in the latter day context could be that this antiChrist figure is a renegade Jew. The AD70 application would be to John of Gischala, the self proclaimed king of Jerusalem who provoked the Roman onslaught. He used the precious things of the temple in order to worship "the god of fortresses", the god of trusting in human military power. But as always, the historical interpretation is incomplete and therefore to the skeptic would appear forced, and that is fair enough as observation; because the full and seamless fulfilment is yet to come, in the last days.

Dan 11:39 *He shall deal with the strongest fortresses by the help of a foreign god: whoever acknowledges him he will increase with glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for a price*- This can be seen as partially true for Antiochus as well as the AD70 situation. Antiochus well rewarded the Jews in Jerusalem who accepted him as king. His division of the land for a price would refer to his annulling of the law of Jubilee, and selling the land at cheap prices to the Jews who supported him, or giving it to his mercenaries in lieu of wages. The strong fortresses would then refer to the towns he built throughout Palestine, inhabited by Syrian mercenaries, who pushed their foreign gods as part of the process of Hellenization. But again, this seems an imperfect fit; we look to the last days for the fulfilment in detail. The purpose of prophecy is not to predict the future in advance, but so that when things happen, then we perceive the fulfilment of prophecy. The primary fulfilments (in this case, in Antiochus and the AD70 situation) serve to direct us towards some imagination of how the final fulfilment may materialize.

Another translation is "And he [the king] will take action against the strongest fortress with a foreign god; whoever will acknowledge him [the foreign god] will increase honor, and he [the foreign god] will cause them to rule over the many, and he

[the foreign god] will apportion land for a price". Whatever historical fulfilment is suggested is at best sketchy and apparently forced. This is simply because this passage along with the entire prophecy will have its fulfilment in the last days. The purpose of prophecy is not to predict the future, but in order that when events happen, those who know the prophecies will immediately see their obvious fulfilment. And this passage is a classic example of that. "The strongest fortress" would refer to the fortress of :31, the fortress of the temple sanctuary (Ez. 24:25). In the first century fulfilment, Josephus records that John and the Zealots "converted the temple of God into their fortress [note that word] and refuge from any outbreak of popular violence, and made the Holy Place the headquarters of their tyranny" (*Jewish War* 4.151; also 4.172, 208–16). Tacitus likewise describes the temple area as a fortress, "built like a citadel", "the mountain-citadel" (*Hist.* 2.4; 5.12). John fought against the other zealot factions within Jerusalem, and apportioned land within Jerusalem to his followers (*The Jewish War* 4.135–50, 326–33, 389–97, 558–73).

Perhaps the idea is that the latter day capture of the temple mount will be ascribed to their false god, and then the land of Israel will be divided up, just as envisaged in the last days in Joel 3:2. This conquest of the great fortress, Zion and the temple area (:31), would connect with how 2 Thess. 2 portrays the latter day antichrist as sitting in the temple of God- and then being suddenly destroyed by the brightness of the Lord's coming.

The period of history between Dan. 11:39 and :40 is not described because it is irrelevant to the Jews in Israel, just as there is a gap in fulfilment between the iron legs and the feet in the historical outworking of the image in Daniel 2.

Another take is that the predictions of the lead up to Antiochus Epiphanes up until Dan. 11:40 all came precisely true. So precisely that the critics claim this must have been written after the event. Yet the record says that these things were given to Daniel by the Angel. And they are in the future tense. The predicted death of Antiochus and the resurrection and judgment of the dead are all part of the same prophecy in Dan. 11:40-12:3. But the fulfilment suddenly breaks off. There was no resurrection nor final vindication of God's people at that point. Just as Antiochus Epiphanes is the obvious 'best fit' for the little horn of Dan. 7 and 8. The next step was the conflict with Messiah and the re-establishment of God's Kingdom. That didn't happen. Because various preconditions weren't met. And so the kaleidoscope turned again, and other possible fulfilments came into view. The path of history predicted in Dan. 11 so far is similar to what we have in Dan. 2 and Dan. 7. The path of human history was and is to lead up to the final conflict which will lead to the Lord's coming.

Dan 11:40 *At the time of the end shall the king of the south contend with him; and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen*- GNB when his "final hour has almost come". See on :13 for how everything is in the end according to God's times, even if those time periods are expanded or conflated and Daniel could not understand them. The time of the end" is another connection with the prophecies about Antiochus in Dan. 8:19: "at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end". Likewise Dan. 8:25 "and he shall be broken—but by no human hand" is Dan. 11:45 "Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him". The vision of Dan. 8 concerns 'the time of the end' and the goat represents Greece (Dan. 8:17,21). Clearly Antiochus Epiphanes was the primary potential fulfilment of the "king of the north" who would've been

destroyed at the re-establishment of God's Kingdom. Possibly "the time of the end" refers to the "time, times and a half" of Dan. 7:25. It makes no sense to suddenly demand that the "King of the north" from :40 onwards refers to a totally different entity to "the king of the north" in the rest of Dan. 11. It is simply that the prophecy from :40 onwards could have come true in Antiochus Epiphanes, but it didn't. Because these prophecies are conditional. "Contend" is to push / gore as an animal does; the very word used of the ram in Dan. 8:4. Again we see how all these kings and empires act similarly; and meet their end. All human behaviour is so similar in essence; individuality is a myth, given we all share the same nature. It is only the things of God's Spirit which are radically 'new' for the human experience.

I have suggested that Daniel's prophecies have an element of conditionality to them. There were various potential paths of historical fulfilment which Israel's lack of repentance precluded. And yet the prophecies will all come wonderfully true in the events of the last days. Hence it has been commented: "Whereas the events leading up to the sacking of the Temple in 167 and the immediate aftermath are remarkably accurate (chapter 11:21–29), the predicted war between the Syrians and the Egyptians (11:40–43) never took place, and the prophecy that Antiochus would die in Palestine (11:44–45) was inaccurate (he died in Persia)". Even if we read this as meaning that the king of the south pushes at the king of the north, there is little historical evidence that Egypt pushed at the king of the north after the third invasion of Egypt by Antiochus which is apparently in view. The correspondence with the historical situation breaks down- because it will be finally fulfilled in the last days.

"The time of the end" naturally suggests the time of the Lord's return. But "the end" in Daniel's context would be an allusion to Dan. 9:26, the end of the 70 weeks prophecy: "[Jerusalem's] end will come with a flood, and until the end will be war". That prophecy could have been fulfilled in the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom as God's Kingdom in AD70, but they did not repent, and so the Lord's 'coming' then was in judgment and not salvation. The 'overflowing' spoken of in Dan. 9:26 is repeated here, where the king of the north is likened to an overflowing river, after the pattern of the earlier Assyrian invasion of Judah. A primary fulfilment would have been in the invasion of Vespasian and Titus against John of Gischala, the self proclaimed "king" in Jerusalem. The king of the south in the AD70 context would have been Tiberius Julius Alexander who was the prefect of Egypt and second in command to Titus, and the king of the north would have been Vespasian, who had just defeated Syria and replaced "the king of the north" in its Greek manifestation. He attacked Jerusalem as commander of the Syrian Legion [X Fretensis]. But this interpretation runs into various problems; it doesn't fit all the details. This is because it was but a primary fulfilment, looking forward to the main fulfilment at the Lord's return.

The "him" in view may be a third party, against whom both kings of north and south unite to attack. It could be the Lord Jesus, then enthroned in Jerusalem and attacked by His enemies (as outlined in Psalm 2 and Ez. 38). Historically, it could have referred to John of Gischala who commanded the zealots within Jerusalem in AD70.

But if the "him" is the king of the south, then the Antiochus fulfilment would be in that it is claimed that he attacked Egypt, the king of the south; this would be the third and final attack upon Egypt mentioned in :29. The events of :40-45 have some relevance to both Antiochus the Great and to Antiochus Epiphanes. All these various but not incomplete historical fulfilments were because in each one, there was the potential for the end to come. But it didn't, and God sought other opportunities to

bring about "the end"; and that end shall finally come in the last day. But the historical evidence for this third attack upon Egypt by Antiochus is lacking; and the "many ships" would have been largely unfulfilled. Again we are to understand that this is but a primary fulfilment, and the main fulfilment is yet to come.

The "him" in terms of grammar and context most comfortably refers to "the God of the great fortress / citadel" of :38. The two power blocs in the land of the last days, the kings of north and south, would then each come against this God. Thus would be fulfilled the scenario of Psalm 2 and 2 Thess. 2- the united fury of the various neighbouring enemies of Israel and the Lord Jesus being thrown against Him. The king of the north 'pushes' against Him, the idea being of a beast in wild fury goring someone. This again fits in with the evidence elsewhere provided that the king of the north, the antichrist, is the epitome of the final beast.

And with many ships- In the AD70 context, this would refer to the fleet used by Vespasian to ship his soldiers into Judea (Tacitus records this in his *Histories* 2.4). Any attempt to conquer Palestine and Jerusalem would likely involve shipping in soldiers to the coast, and we shall see this again in the latter day invasion. There were also naval battles on the sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea in AD67/68.

According to some, Antiochus also came with many ships in his campaign against Egypt, so it is claimed. But the problem is that many claims of historical fulfilment are influenced by Jewish sources such as Josephus who wanted to see the fulfilment of this prophecy in Antiochus. And once one commentator picks up on that, the others tend to follow suite, until the claim becomes perceived as hard historical fact. Antiochus was bankrupt, stealing from pagan temples in order to pay his troops; he wouldn't have had the resources to obtain "many ships" at this point.

And he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass through- This appears to be a summary of what we will read in :41-45, which lists "the countries" taken. The LXX gives "the land" for "the countries", perhaps reading the Hebrew as an intensive plural, "the [singular, most significant] country". The overflowing and passing through of the land would then be in the spirit of the Assyrian invasion being described by Isaiah in the same terms. The overflowing flood of Dan. 9:26,27 is likewise against Jerusalem rather than the surrounding lands. Against this is the statement in :41 that he shall enter "the glorious land", but see commentary upon that.

Both the prototype in Hezekiah's time and the descriptions in Dan. 11:40 and Ez. 38 require there to be a personal leader of the northern invasion. Rabshakeh and latter day Sennacherib equate with Daniel's "King (not 'power') of the north", and Ezekiel 38's specific reference to a *rosh* [mighty one, chief prince] and use of the personal pronoun "thee": "Turn thee back... thy jaws... thine army... be thou prepared... thy company" etc. All this emphasis needs some explanation. If the prototype of latter day Sennacherib / Rabshakeh is to be closely followed, this individual need not be a nation, but a young, headstrong, powerful army commander that mirrors Rabshakeh. To make the clues more exciting, remember that Rabshakeh was probably an apostate Jew (note his references to the covenant name, and evident knowledge of conditions inside Jerusalem). "The man of sin" that is to sit in the temple of God in the last days would seem to have reference back to the "abomination that maketh desolate" and to the planting of the king of the North's tabernacles "between the seas in the glorious holy mountain"- i.e. in the temple area of Jerusalem (Dan. 11:45). This "man of sin" points to an individual.

Daniel 11 speaks of an invasion of Israel by “the king of the north” which results in a time of trouble for Israel such as never was, and the standing up of ‘Michael’ and the resurrection of the dead. The period of history between Dan. 11:39 and :40 is not

described because it is irrelevant to the Jews in Israel, just as there is a gap in fulfilment between the iron legs and the feet in the historical outworking of the image in Daniel 2. The section speaking of the last days begins by saying that the king of the north hears “tidings” (Dan. 11:44). The same word is used of Assyria at the time of her invasion of Israel and siege of Jerusalem: "I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land" (2 Kings 19:7). Thus at the very time of Assyria's destruction by God, her previous allies turned against her, exemplifying how Arab in-fighting will be one of the means which God will use to finally destroy them (Zech. 14:13, etc.). "A blast" (Heb. 'ruach', a spirit/angel?) being sent upon Sennacherib is the same term used about Pharaoh's destruction (Ex. 15:8) and that of Babylon (Jer. 51:1), both of which are typical of the final Islamic defeat. Babylon also hears 'rumours' at the time of her destruction (Jer. 51:46). It is to these 'rumours' of wars within the land / earth promised to Abraham which Christ may allude in Mt. 24:6, speaking of "rumours of wars" in the very last days. The smaller nations associated with Babylon/Assyria also hear "tidings" (same word translated "rumour") in Jer. 49:23, showing that they meet the same judgment as 'Assyria' to some extent.

Close analysis of Dan. 11:40-44 reveals that it is couched in terms of the Ez. 38 invasion, which is based upon that of Assyria. However, it is also full of direct allusions to the Assyrian invasion:

"The king of the north" (Dan. 11:40) - Assyria (cp. Zeph.2:13).

"Shall come against him like a whirlwind" (Dan. 11:40), as God will against the invaders in response to this (Zech. 9:14; Is. 28:2). God comes up "like a storm... a cloud to cover the land" in a similar way (Ez. 38:9). A whirlwind attacks from all sides. The combined typology of the previous invasions has shown them coming from all points of the compass. The final combined 'Assyrian' invasion will also have this feature, as it did in Hezekiah's time.

"With chariots, and with horsemen" (Dan. 11:40), for which the Assyrians were famous, and Gog likewise (Ez. 38:4).

"He shall enter into the countries" (Dan. 11:40) as Assyria did *en route* to Israel; "and shall overflow and pass over" (Dan. 11:40), as Assyria under Sennacherib (Is. 8:8; 43:2) and Babylon (Jer. 47:2) are said to have done. The Hebrew root for "overflow" means "to cleanse", occurring in Ez. 16:19 concerning God 'thoroughly washing away' Israel's sins in the last days, as a result of their final tribulations. Thus the 'Assyrian' 'overflowing' of the land in the last days will result in Israel's spiritual cleansing. "The consumption decreed (the final invasion) shall overflow in righteousness" (Is. 10:22). "He shall enter also into the land of delight" (Dan 11:41 A.V. mg.). At the time of Sennacherib's destruction, God termed the land 'delight' (Is. 62:4).

This could indicate that this invasion comes after the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom. The ambiguity is because of the 'variable' timing of Christ's return, seeing this is related to Israel's spiritual reformation - at least it appears this is how God wishes us to see it.

"Many countries shall be overthrown" (Dan. 11:41). 2 Kings 18:34 lists these countries in the Sennacherib context. This confirms that there will be conflict throughout the land / earth immediately prior to the final 'Assyrian' attack on Israel. We are seeing this before our eyes.

"But these shall escape out of his *hand*, even Edom, and Moab, and the chief ('*rosh*') of the children of Ammon (Dan. 11:41). These areas were not meddled with by Sennacherib. There is a triple emphasis on how the other nations fell into his "hand"

in 2 Kings 18:33-35.
"He shall stretch forth *his hand* also upon the countries" continues this "hand" connection, "and the land of Egypt shall not escape" (Dan. 11:42). There is a possible allusion here to Moses stretching out his hand upon Egypt (Ex. 9:15), which would show that the latter-day "king of the North" will claim that he has received Divine guidance to judge Israel. Assyria's invasion of Egypt was associated with that of Israel, further demonstrating that the invasion of Dan. 11:40-43 is alluding to Sennacherib's battle plan.
"He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver" (Dan. 11:43). We are seeing the IS fulfil this by taking over oil wealth as well as billions of dollars of gold reserves.
"The Libyans and the Ethiopians shall be at his steps" (Dan. 11:43) may appear to contradict Ethiopia suddenly becoming opposed to Assyria during the final attack on Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:9). This can be reconciled by realizing that Dan. 11 speaks of two phases in this final invasion. Ethiopia is with Assyria during the blitzkrieg towards and through Israel, but is not necessarily with her in the final 'going forth with great fury' against Jerusalem (Dan. 11:44).
There were these same two phases in the Assyrian prototype - the "great fury" of the king of the north is modelled upon Sennacherib's rage of 2 Kings 19:27,28. The fact that Ethiopia is described as being with Gog in the Ezek. 38 invasion may be an indication that this prophecy is not concerning the final push on Jerusalem, but rather the Assyrian/Arab pillaging of the land for "a spoil and a prey... cattle and goods" (Ez. 38:12) after the pattern of the neighbouring peoples raiding the land in the Judges period. Ethiopia being mentioned in tandem with Libya in both Ez. 38:5 and Dan. 11:43 could suggest that the North African Arabs break ranks with those of 'Assyria' during the attack on Jerusalem, as evidently occurred in Hezekiah's time (2 Kings 19:9).
"He shall plant the tabernacles of his palace... in the glorious holy mountain" of Zion (Dan. 11:45) is the language of Is. 14:13,14 concerning both Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar desiring to take Jerusalem. Thus Dan. 11:45 is saying that the latter-day Assyria/Babylon will do this, seeing that Jerusalem will be taken by their final invasion (Zech. 14:2). Dan. 12:1 says that it is at this time of the latter-day Assyrian/ "king of the north" being in Jerusalem, that Israel will suffer "a time of trouble such as never was", out of which the righteous remnant will be delivered ("every one that shall be found written in the book") by God's intervention, which will be associated with the resurrection (Dan. 12:2).

Dan 11:41 *He shall also come into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom, and Moab, and the chief leader of the children of Ammon*- This could also be translated "and myriads shall stumble", referring to the spiritual stumbling of God's people at the time of the invasion of Judea. And if we stick with "many countries", the reference is to territories around Israel, showing yet again that the focus of Daniel is upon the land and people of Israel and not Europe or the entire planet. In the AD70 fulfilment, the reference would be to the Nabataean kingdom being taken over by Vespasian and Titus as they marched towards Jerusalem. But the Nabateans collaborated with the Romans, providing soldiers to join the Roman advance on Jerusalem, and so they were not "overthrown"; the area was not annexed into the Roman empire until AD106. But which countries did the Romans "overthrow" on their march towards Jerusalem? Again we have the sense that the fulfilment was hardly a perfect fit; the

ultimate, seamless, unquestionable fulfilment will be in the last days. In the Antiochus fulfilment, it is notable that "Moab, Ammon, and Mount Seir" were his allies. And yet the language of escaping from him is another reason to see this fulfilment as an imperfect fit, and looking ahead to the major latter day fulfilment.

I suggested on :40 that the invasion of Israel and Jerusalem specifically has already begun. "The glorious land", the land of glory, is clearly Israel. And "many countries" could be an intensive plural for *the* country, the land of Israel, forming a parallel with "the glorious land"; see on :40. Perhaps this is repeated in order to emphasize the point; but Israel will then be the land of glory because the Lord Jesus is already enthroned in Zion. This would be the scenario of Psalm 2, 2 Thess. 2 and Ez. 38, all of which picture the surrounding nations furiously attacking the Lord Jesus and His people within Jerusalem, and being destroyed; the invasion described in those passages is therefore unsuccessful.

Dan 11:42 *He shall stretch out his hand also on the countries*- As suggested on :40 and :41, "the countries" may be an intensive plural for *the* singular country, Israel. It is the Hebrew word *eretz.* The same Hebrew for "stretch out his hand" is used of how Haman sought to 'stretch out his hand' upon the Jews (Esther 8:7).

And the land of Egypt shall not escape- The idea of the original may not be that Egypt too shall be conquered, but rather than Egypt shall not be a place of escape / deliverance; which would continue a long Biblical theme, of Israel vainly looking to Egypt for help. The LXX says that Egypt shall not be a saviour. This makes more sense; for the idea is of an invasion coming from the north, aiming at Jerusalem, taking all territories on its southward journey until it comes to Jerusalem. Egypt is south of Jerusalem. And as a result of the Jewish war, the Egyptian Jewish community in Alexandria was massacred in AD66.

Dan 11:43 *But he shall have power over the treasures of gold and of silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall be at his steps*- The AD70 fulfilment was in Vespasian going to Egypt from Palestine in order to take control of grain supplies for the Roman empire. He only left Alexandria in Summer of AD70 after being declared emperor (Josephus, *The Jewish War* 4.658; 7.21–22; Tacitus *Hist.* 4.81). Libya and Ethiopia were very supportive of Vespasian being declared emperor.

The Antiochus fulfilment could fit reasonably well at this point; he got support from the Libyans and Ethiopians and sought out the treasures of Egypt for himself. But this was in an earlier invasion of Egypt, not in the final invasion suggested here. So again, the fit may be good in some ways, but is imperfect. I suggested on :40 that both kings of north and south attack Jerusalem and the God of Zion; it could be that the king of the north has dominance over the resources of the latter day "king of the south" and uses their resources in this final onslaught against Jerusalem.

We note the king of the north is destroyed immediately after dramatic success. This is quite a theme in Daniel; we think of the success of the little horn [also = Antiochus Epiphanes] just prior to his destruction. And it is a theme with other kings (Is. 10; 14; 47:1-5; Ez. 27;28). The simple takeaway is that God so hates pride and it is extreme pride that motivates and triggers Him to judge.

Dan 11:44 *But news out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him; and he shall go forth with great fury to destroy and to devote many to destruction*-

The attack on the latter day King of the North will be from the north and from the east. Cyrus was prophesied as Judah's Messiah, and is the only person described as

coming both from the north and from the east: "I have raised up one from the north, and he has come; from the rising of the sun [the east], one who calls on My name; and he shall come on rulers as on mortar, and as the potter treads clay" (Is. 41:25)- language full of allusion to the destruction of the image in Dan. 2. Elsewhere Cyrus is described as "a ravenous bird from the east", the one "raised up from the east" (Is. 41:2; 46:11). He failed to be the Messiah intended; it is true that Cyrus came from Persia in the east via the north (Opis and Sippar) to conquer Babylon, as recorded in "The Babylonian chronicle". But this was just an incipient fulfilment. He didn't come in this way to save Jerusalem. And so perhaps the hint we are supposed to pick up is that now the true Messiah is going to appear and do what Cyrus could have done- but far more gloriously and eternally. Human failure led ultimately to a far more glorious solution in the Lord Jesus, as we saw in the answer to Daniel's concerns in Dan. 9. This approach obviates all struggles to try to interpret these words with reference to Antiochus or later to the Romans.

As explained on :43, Vespasian left the campaign against the Jews in the hands of Titus, and went to Alexandria in Egypt, where he was declared emperor. Exactly North East of Alexandria was Jerusalem.

In the Antiochus fulfilment, he also turned northwards and entered Palestine as a result of bad news received; he met his end by doing so, at the hand of the Romans. Tacitus [*Histories* 5.8] attributes his change of plans to being "hindered by [news of] a Parthian war" and also of a revolt in Armenia; again, news from the North East. 1 Macc. 1:24-28 and Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.5.3 claim that Antiochus was so angry at being thwarted by the Romans in Egypt that he attacked the Jews with all his might as a kind of anger transference. The "tidings" from the North East could simply have been the news of the restoration to some extent of Jewish rule in Jerusalem.

The religious dimension of the latter day invasion is found here, albeit masked by translation, and without any clear precedent in the primary fulfilments. The King of the North will invade *eretz* Israel "to destroy and utterly to make away many" (AV). The Hebrew word *charam* translated 'to utterly make away' specifically means to consecrate, NEV "to devote", to make something over to another, specifically their god or religion. And this is the stated motive of the jihadist groups- to sanctify Israel as a spoil of war to Allah and the Prophet. This is the predicted call found in Joel 2, to sanctify war against Israel- the very language of jihad, holy war. We could speculate that the "tidings" the latter day king of the north hears are the news that the Lord Jesus has returned and established Himself King in Zion, and this provokes his final furious attack. The news of Jewish restoration may have been the tidings from the north east which Antiochus heard and which provoked him to attack them.

Dan 11:45 *He shall plant the tents of his palace between the sea and the glorious holy mountain-*

Or, "seas", referring to the Dead Sea and Mediterranean. The AD70 interpretation would apply this to Vespasian [in Alexandria, Egypt] ordering Titus [the commander on the ground] to establish two encampments on Mount Scopus and the Mount of Olives. The AV "tabernacle" is more or less correct, so we see here a hint at a religious dimension to this invasion, which is only going to be fully fulfilled in the latter day invasion. This invasion unlike those mentioned earlier in this chapter is not apparently successful; the tabernacle is not planted on mount Zion, but between there and the "sea". This would then equate with the unsuccessful attack against the enthroned Jesus in Zion of Ps. 2, 2 Thess. 2 and Ez. 38. There is no very clear

historical fulfilment of this by Antiochus nor Titus, for neither made a tabernacle or encampment between Mount Zion and the Mediterranean. These events are specifically for the last days.

"The glorious holy mountain" could refer to Ezekiel's prophecies of the glory returning to Mount Zion and the rebuilt temple. This was precluded from happening in its primary potential by Judah refusing to rebuild the temple as commanded. And Ezekiel and Daniel both saw the glory of God still hovering above the rivers of Babylon- and not back in Jerusalem. Perhaps the idea is that at the point of this final fulfilment, the glory will have returned to Zion in that the Lord Jesus will have returned and is enthroned there. "The tents of his palace" suggests he will declare himself as king there; near the mountain where Yahweh is now enthroned in the form of the Lord Jesus. The scenario of Ps. 2.

Yet he shall come to his end- The destruction of the latter day invader at the mount of God is a strong theme in prophecy. It is found in Ps. 2,46,48,76. But it didn't come true for Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus died in Persia not in Palestine. But this was the potential envisaged for his end. His end is surely "the end" spoken of so much in Daniel (Dan. 8:17,19 "at the time appointed the end shall be"; 9:26 "unto the end of the war desolations are determined"; 11:27,35,40 "the time of the end"). It is at this "end" that the sealed books are opened and Daniel's prophecies will be understood (Dan. 12:4,9); and "the end" is the time of Daniel's resurrection and rewarded (Dan. 12:13). Any attempt to understand is going to be fruitless; only at that "end" will these prophecies become clear and obvious as daylight in their fulfilment. The implication is that as soon as "the end" of the king of the North comes, there will be the "end" resulting in Daniel's resurrection at the Lord's return.

The end of Antiochus doesn't really fit here. And the AD70 invader did not come to an end after an unsuccessful attack upon Jerusalem. Clearly the fulfilment is yet future. "Holy mountain" is the language of Dan. 9:16,20 about Jerusalem. I suggested on :40 that the "time of the end" is "the end" of Jerusalem as spoken of in the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9; and the same "end" of the invader is in view here. But here the first century, Roman fulfilment ceases to be impressive. The Romans won, not lost. And Dan. 12 goes on to explain that this "end" is at the hand of Messiah's appearance and the resurrection of the dead. Clearly enough, all the primary fulfilments of this chapter which are discernible all come unstuck; because they are no more than shadowy fulfilments, pointing forward to the ultimate fulfilment which is in the last days before the Lord returns. However, it's possible to translate the original here as meaning that it is the "glorious holy mountain" which comes to his end, rather than the king of the north. "The end" refers to the end of the Jerusalem temple in Dan. 9:26; and "the end of these wonders" likewise does in Dan. 12:6,7. This ambiguity in translation is purposeful; because indeed there is a primary fulfilment in the Roman desolation of Jerusalem in AD70, but the main fulfilment is in the destruction of the latter day "king of the north" at the last day. "The end" of Dan. 12:6,7 is in the three and a half year desolation of the temple by the Gentiles, which is repeatedly applied to the very last days in Revelation and the Olivet prophecy. "The end" of the king of the north is "the time of the end" (:40); as Dan. 12 will go on to explain, the "end" of Israel's tribulations at the hand of this "king of the north" will be in Messiah's coming, the resurrection of the dead and the establishment of Israel's Kingdom as God's Kingdom on earth. This never fully happened; the series of invasions of the land by the kings of the north and south are yet to happen, and will be ended by the Lord's return to earth.

And none shall help him- The Romans mocked the Jews for trusting in allies who never came to help them: "Did you rely on... the fidelity of allies? Pray, what nation beyond the limits of our empire would prefer Jews to Romans?" (Josephus, *The Jewish War* 6.330). This assumes the "him" is the king in Jerusalem. But the more natural interpretation is that the king of the north is destroyed without helpers as a result of attempting to attack the God of Zion, the fortress (see on :40). And that has no clear historical fulfilment; it is for the last days.

The Hebrew for "help" here is a common word mostly used of God's help. The king of the north meets his end perhaps desperately wanting God's help but not finding it. That is the essence of the pictures of condemnation, crying out "Lord, Lord open to us", not turning away from God but in fact turning to Him. But all too late. This creates the imperative for us to seek Him now rather than then.

DANIEL CHAPTER 12

Dan. 12:1 *At that time*- The "time of the end" of Dan. 11:40. The chapter break is unfortunate. This verse is interpreted by the Lord as referring to both AD70 and the last days (Mk. 13:19; Mt. 24:21; Lk. 21:23). I have outlined on Dan. 11 the initial fulfillment in the Roman invasion of Judea in AD67-70, but it was not a perfect fit with the prophetic text. This is simply because it was but a primary fulfillment, and the latter day fulfillment will be the perfect fit, although at our standpoint in history we cannot exactly discern how it shall all work out.

Shall Michael stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people-

The "man clothed in linen" of Dan. 10:5 reappears in Dan. 12:6,7 who is over the waters of the river. This was an Angel in Dan. 8:16, "between the banks of the Ulai [river]". Linen was worn by the priests especially the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:4). We note that the term "prince", used in Daniel of Angels, is used of the High Priest in Ezra 8:24 and of a priest in 1 Chron. 24:5. These Angels of Daniel were ministering in the heavenly sanctuary. Michael "stands" for God's people (Dan. 12:1) as the High Priest stood for them on the Day of Atonement; to stand before God is to intercede (Dt. 10:8; Jud. 20:28). The Angel does indeed represent the Lord Jesus and Michael perhaps played His role in the court of Heaven before He came into existence and ascended to His Heavenly role and intercession. The idea is that Michael in previous possible iterations of the prophecy, and the Lord Jesus in the last day fulfilment of it, intercede for Israel before God in the very last days, leading to their salvation.

There are many allusions to Dan. 11 and 12 in the Olivet prophecy. One is the command to pray earnestly, so that we may "escape all these things that shall come to pass" (Lk. 21:36). This is the word the LXX uses here for Michael's intercession ['standing up'] so that God's people may be delivered [escape]. Their / our prayers match the mediation of Michael, who surely refers to the Lord Jesus in the final iteration of "Michael".

'Michael' elsewhere in Daniel refers to an Angel, the Angel especially responsible for Israel, and therefore one of the most powerful Angels- "Michael one of the chief princes" (Dan. 8:13), "the great prince" (Dan. 12:1). The LXX renders Dan. 12:1 as "the great Angel" (AV "great prince"). The closeness of association between the Angel Michael and His people Israel is shown by the fact that when He 'stands up' in

the last days many of the people of Israel ("Your- Daniel's- people") also 'stand up' in resurrection (Dan. 12:1-3).

The standing up of Michael in heaven also reflects the standing up of a new king and kingdom on earth. I explained on Dan. 11 that there is there an account of the succession of empires and kings also found in Dan. 2 and Dan. 7, from the Persians through the Greeks and Romans to the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth at Messiah's coming. This could therefore have potentially happened in AD70; but it didn't. Israel didn't repent. And so there is a gap in fulfillment until the last days, when the image shall stand complete, all the beasts of Dan. 7 reappear in the final terrible beast, to be destroyed by the Lord's coming.

Amos 7 speaks of God through His Angels 'standing up' for Israel as the result of the prayer of Amos and a faithful remnant. Amos sees visions of the impending judgments on Israel. After each he prays "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech Thee: who shall stand for Jacob? ('If you, his Angel-God, don't?') For he is small". The answer comes: "The Lord repented for this. It shall not be, saith the Lord". He repented for the sake of one intense prayer! Notice too Amos asking "Who shall stand for Jacob?". Michael the Angel stands for Israel in the court of Heaven, and thus it appears Amos is pointing out that if Israel is condemned and punished they will have no Angel with them- and so the Angel changes His mind.

"The *children* of your people" may be a reference to how Daniel had hoped that the young people of his generation would return to the land and re-establish God's Kingdom. That would happen- but not when Daniel was expecting it.

And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time- This unprecedented "time of trouble" is the basis for Mt. 24:21: "great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be". "Such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" quotes the language of the plagues that fell upon Egypt (Ex. 9:18,24; 10:6,14; 11:6; cp. Josh. 10:14); Israel are to be treated as Egypt so that a minority might leave Egypt and be saved. "A nation" refers specifically to Israel; there is to be a time of trouble for them far worse than anything they experienced to date, including the 6 million murdered in the holocaust. This requires the total collapse of modern day Israel, and the fall of Jerusalem as required by Zech. 14.

Here the fulfillment in the events of AD70 comes to an end; the time of Jacob's trouble which Jer. 30:7-11 spoke of, and which is here alluded to, would bring about the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, the re-establishment of Israel's kingdom, the mountain being established in Jerusalem and spreading throughout the earth. And this didn't happen. Any attempt to apply this to the events of the day of Pentecost is misplaced, because that was 37 years before AD70, and the Roman empire was not then destroyed by the little stone. Mk. 13 speaks of how "in those days" those in Judaea should flee to the mountains; "for *in those days* shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation... neither shall be (referring to Dan. 12:1 concerning our last days)... except that the Lord had shortened *those days*... *in those days*, after that tribulation... *then* shall they see the son of man coming" . Surely "in those days" shouts for a continuous application to the same "days"- the days of the second coming. At best, "those days" can have a primary reference to the events of AD70, but the *main* fulfillment of the whole prophecy must be in the last days. This point seems impossible to answer by those who disallow any reference to the second coming.

And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book- The Lord seems to allude to this in saying that "the chosen" shall

escape the traumas of the destruction of the temple (Mt. 24:22; Mk. 13:20). This only had a primary fulfillment in AD70; the deliverance is to eternal life through the resurrection of the dead (:2), which refers without doubt to the last days. The references to "your people" reflect Daniel's deep and abiding concern for his people, even though they had generally turned away from God in Babylon, and only he and his friends had resisted eating meat offered to idols in their youth, only his friends had refused to bow down to the image, and he alone had insisted on still praying to Jerusalem under threat of death. He still felt identification with God's people, even in their weakness.

In the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book" , i.e. who are acceptable believers (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry.

Dan 12:2 *Many of those*- The Hebrew generally means simply 'a large number'. Many relative to the wonder of salvation, as many as the stars; but perhaps still numerically small seeing that so few find the way to the Kingdom. "Are there few that be saved?" was a question met by the Lord- and His answer was to refocus the questioner upon entering themselves by the narrow gate through which few shall pass.

Daniel's immediate hope and expectation had been that the Jewish exiles would return to a re-established Kingdom of God. For that was the climax of Jeremiah's "70 years" prophecies. He is now being shown that this wasn't to happen- but there would be a far more glorious answer. All the faithful would be resurrected and glorified. The great enemy is thus revealed as being death itself, rather than Antiochus, the little horn or any other abuser of God's people. This "many" may refer to the "many" Jews of Dan. 11:33,34 who had turned away from Divine wisdom under persecution. The "many" who run to and fro in :4 may also refer to this group. Literally, "many from those". This is not teaching a universal resurrection. And the "many" may be relative to the wonder of resurrection and salvation, rather than implying a large percentage of dead persons shall awake. It could be that the "many" are a subset of "those who sleep", i.e. those who have hope of resurrection. This could imply that this is a particular group who are resurrected, perhaps of those who are slain in the final traumas upon Jerusalem. The primary fulfillment may have been in the resurrection of some in Jerusalem in Mt. 27:52,53.

Who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt-

The language is that of Is. 26:19: “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead”. There is no mention of judgment; the New Testament teaches a judgment [and technically, therefore, a mortal resurrection] and immortality being granted at the judgment seat. We have to put the scriptures together to get the picture. In one sense, as Paul explains, judgment has been dealt with for the believer. But it will still happen, for our education. The Old Testament concept of eternal life began with the promise to reverse the curse in Eden, went on through the promise to Abraham of eternal inheritance of the land, the promise that David would see and experience his great descendant reigning eternally, and is frequently mentioned elsewhere (Ps. 21:3; 28:9; 37:18, 27,28; 41:12; Prov. 10:25,30). Adam was cursed with returning to dust and was then exiled from Eden lest he eat the tree of life and live for ever (Gen. 3:19). This is being alluded to here. Daniel had lived in hope of a mortal return from exile in Persia. But he is being shown that there is a glorious silver lining to that desire not being granted- he will return from man's exile from the

tree of life, and be allowed to have everlasting life. Likewise, "shame" is a feature of the curse and exile from Eden. The implication in Dan. 12:2 is that no longer will "shame" be the experience of the redeemed, although it will be so for the rejected. Is. 25:8, quoted in 1 Cor. 15:54 about the final resurrection, likewise carries the idea of shame being removed by resurrection to eternal life: "He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach / shame [GNB "disgrace", s.w. "shame" 2 Sam. 13:13, "shame of nakedness" Is. 47:3] of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken".

The reference is to the curse upon Adam, that having been formed of "the dust of the earth" he was to return to it (Gen. 2:7; 3:19). The curse shall be overcome; those who have suffered for their sins, which is Israel in this context, shall still be saved ultimately. And this again is huge comfort to ourselves. It is not the personally righteous alone who shall be saved, but those who suffered for their sins and yet believed. But some of them shall receive eternal "contempt"; not all Israel shall be saved. But all who are responsible to judgment will be resurrected; and the final reward shall be given then, at the Lord's coming, and not at the point of death nor in this life. The word for "contempt" is only elsewhere used in Is. 66:24, of how the bodies of those within Israel who refused to accept the restoration of the Kingdom would be eternally despised by those who are saved: “Then they (the Israelites) will go out and look at the corpses of the people who have rebelled against Me. For their worm will not die and their fire will not be extinguished; and they will be an abhorrence to all mankind”. The 'eternal' nature of it doesn't imply their conscious existence. It is 'eternal' by its nature in that they have missed out on eternity, their decisions in this life had eternal moment and consequence. And perhaps we who by grace shall live eternally will eternally despise or somehow remember those who in this life refused it. Just as we despise the name 'Judas Iscariot' when we think of it. For to hate sin in all its forms is a really part of loving righteousness; we see this hatred of sin in David's Psalms and also very clearly in Paul's expression of it in Rom. 7:15-25. On the other hand, there are many Bible verses which speak of how the wicked shall be "forgotten" and the memory of them perish, or more precisely, their 'name' shall eternally perish (Ps. 9:5,6; 109:13; 112:6). Perhaps the resolution is that they have no 'name' to be remembered, nothing good to be preserved nor remembered about them; and therefore for eternity we shall despise them. In contrast, the righteous will receive an “everlasting name which will not be eliminated” (Is. 56:5).

The "contempt" is therefore eternal, whereas the "shame" is that of Rev. 16 when the rejected walk naked and their shame is exposed. The punishment of "shame" for the rejected, in the period between their condemnation and their dying the second death, is a major Bible theme. Prov. 6:33; 11:2: "his shame / disgrace will not be wiped away”; “Do not let me be put to shame O LORD, for I call on you let the wicked be put to shame; let them go dumbfounded to Sheol” (Ps. 31:17). “I am against you, says the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt” (Nah. 3:5,6). "...will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten” (Jer. 20:11). And so many others. It will be so awful that men will seek death and not find it, and how long someone lives or exists in that awful situation will be the measure of the degree of their punishment. Or we could argue that concepts of honour and shame were more pronounced in the ancient world than they are today. The condemned will have no burial, and this was the ultimate shame in the ancient world: "If a man has a hundred children and lives many years but if he... has no burial, I say that a stillborn

child is better off than he" (Ecc. 6:3; also Ps. 79:2 and think of the death of Jezebel). We note the huge efforts made to properly bury the dead (Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David's concern for Saul's body, the Mosaic command that the bodies of criminals should not be left permanently exposed etc.). It could be that whatever is the maximum painful psychological experience for a condemned person, that is what they will receive.

I have elsewhere speculated that the new covenant offered in Jeremiah, Hosea and Ezekiel appears to offer the total resurrection of the historical Israel who went into exile. Dan. 12:2 may appear to contradict this, by speaking of how although "your [Daniel's] people" would be delivered (Dan. 12:1), there would be a resurrection where some receive eternal life and others "shame and everlasting contempt". But those terms "shame" and "contempt" are often used of the Gentile nations around Israel and Judah; possibly those resurrected to shame are the Gentile abusers of God's people during their exile. It was those nations who had shamed and despised [s.w. "contempt"] Israel and Judah in exile (this is stated very often, s.w. Neh. 1:3; 2:17; 4:4; 5:9; Ps. 44:13; 79:4; Is. 4:1; 25:8; Jer. 24:9; 29:18; 44:12; 51:51; Lam. 5:1; Ez. 5:14; 16:57; 21:28; 22:4; 36:15; Dan. 9:16; "reproach" is s.w. "shame"). Those who had shamed and reproached God's people would be the ones who experience shame and reproach at the day of judgment at the resurrection. Thus Ps. 79:12 "Render unto our neighbours sevenfold their reproach wherewith they have reproached". This will come true at their judgment at the resurrection. Thus Egypt will finally have "shame and reproach" (Is. 30:5) as will Edom (Jer. 49:13), the very words here used of the shame and reproach given to those rejected after resurrection to judgment.

Dan 12:3 *Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the expanse; and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever-*

"Those that are wise" is literally 'they that make wise'; those of Dan 12:10; 11:33,35. And we could render "they that make the many righteous", the same phrase as in Is. 53:11: "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant make the many righteous". That is what the Lord did in His death on the cross; and we are to not only accept the work of the cross for ourselves, but to do the work of the cross for others. To be Him in this world. As He bore our burden there, so we are to bear the burden for others.

The mention of the "wise" shining for ever in Dan. 12:3 forms an inclusio with the opening of the book of Daniel. Daniel is presented as the truly wise man because he has God's wisdom in contrast to the wise men of Babylon, who are shown to be fools. Daniel is thus presented as typical of the entire class of those who will be saved. He is our pattern. His wisdom was not in all the human wisdom which he was taught and even excelled at, according to Dan. 1. It was in using *God's* wisdom to turn many to righteousness. See on Dan. 11:33.

Dan. 12:3,10 draw a parallel between those having wisdom and those who turn many to righteousness. The RVmg. translates "those that be wise" as "the teachers", reflecting the play within the Hebrew sense of 'wisdom'- to have wisdom is axiomatically to teach it. To possess God's Truth therefore means that we will teach it to others. One primary application would have been to the *maskilim* who were murdered by Antiochus IV (see Dan. 11:33–35). But again, these were but a primary fulfilment of the wonderful prophecy. They "instruct many" (Dan. 11:33), here they turn them to righteousness. Dan. 11:33 uses the word used in Is. 52:13 of how the servant of Yahweh, the Lord Jesus, instructs or turns to righteousness through His

sacrificial work: "My servant shall deal wisely... so shall he sprinkle many nations... that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand [from Him]". And we are to share that with others. Despite the fact that this group of "the wise" will "stumble", as is stated three times in Dan. 11:33-35: "the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble... When they stumble, they shall receive a little help... some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end". Their witness is in fact exactly because their own stumbling refined them. These ideas are repeated about "the wise" in Dan. 12:10: "Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined". This group of "the wise" who would "understand" are specifically alluded to in Rev. 13:18; 17:9 where we find the latter day group of believers who likewise will be they who "understand" the prophecies.

"Shine" translates a Hebrew word elsewhere translated to the effect of 'teach'. Their wisdom was in turning others to righteousness; and they shall continue eternally doing the essence of what they did in this life, which was to shone as the stars for the sake of others. God's people have been described as "stars" in Dan. 8:10 (s.w.). They were stars, and shall eternally be. This simply means that we should focus upon our spiritual ministry to others in this life; because it's what we shall be eternally doing. The making of others righteous or cleansed connects with another passage in Dan. 8, this time with Dan. 8:14, which speaks of the sanctuary [God's people?] being cleansed or [s.w.] 'made righteous'. It seems that we have here a specific reference to those who preach to and teach Israel within the land / *eretz* of the last days, risking the wrath of the beast to do so. They shall be specifically rewarded. But the essence is true for us all; we shall eternally continue our service and ministry which we each developed in this life. This group of people are defined in Dan. 12:10 as “the wise” amongst latter day Israel who are purified and refined in the latter day time of Jacob’s trouble such as never was for Israel. The very same phrase occurs in Dan. 11:35, where we read that some of these wise and understanding ones will perish during “the time of the end... the time appointed” (RV)- of the three and a half year tribulation? One wonders if the Lord had these “wise” in mind in His parable of the “wise virgins” of the latter days. This would all suggest that some amongst Israel will repent and zealously preach in the last day tribulation, even if it costs them their lives. And Rev. 11 seems to be saying something similar.

Thus in the practice of preaching today, we are working out who and how we shall eternally be. The very concept of preaching is therefore partly designed by God for our benefit, to develop us into the persons we shall eternally be, by His grace. When we read that God will 'require the blood' of those to whom we fail to preach His word (Ez. 3:18), we may here have another reference to a 'going through' of our deeds at the day of judgment. There, perhaps, we will have to give an account, an explanation, of why our neighbours and workfellows lie eternally dead- because we were too shy, too weakly convinced of the eternal realities we knew, to tell them. For the Hebrew word translated "require" implies some kind of inquisition / explanation. Here we see the vital importance of witness.

Is. 53:14 prophesied that through the cross, the Lord Jesus would "justify the many". Yet this phrase is picked up in Dan. 12:3 and applied to those who preach the Gospel- and thereby become "*those* who justify the many". The implication is plain enough. Through preaching, we live out the Lord's death for others in practice, we

placard Him crucified before the world's eyes. We are not simply "Him" to them; we are Him crucified to them. The honour of this is surpassing.

Those who have lived in Christ will then shine as the brightness of the firmament. But the description of the Lord's face shining as the sun draws on this; as if to say that our shining in the future Kingdom will be because we were and are in Him. We will shine forth then (Mt. 13:43), as the Sun of righteousness Himself. The allusion is to the promise that Abraham's seed shall be as the stars (Gen. 15:5). It is through the resurrection at the last day that the covenant will be finally fulfilled. We are to shine now as a candle, and we will shine forth for ever. Like stars, who have no glory of their own but only reflect that of the sun, the Lord Jesus.

All the prophecies could have had a more immediate fulfilment, but the possibility was messed up by Israel's impenitence. Is. 40:5 had called out to a Zion about to be restored that "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed". In other words, the temple ought to have been a re-establishment of Solomon's, with God's attendant acceptance of it also. However, this didn't happen. Ezekiel saw a vision of the glory of Yahweh filling the temple (Ez. 43:5), as if to show that this, in line with Haggai's words, was what *could* have happened at the restoration. However, it's fulfilment must now await the future. Daniel's prophecy that there would be a time of trouble for Israel, followed by a resurrection and judgment, may have had a potential fulfilment in Haman's persecution. The LXX of Esther 5 includes her prayer, in which she says that Haman was seeking to hinder the work of the temple. This would explain why initially the Samaritans persuaded the Persians to make the work cease, but then (humanly inexplicably) another edict is given for it to resume. The people were delivered (Dan. 12:1), as they were by Michael the Angel manipulating Esther. But the resurrection, judgment and Kingdom didn't follow, because Israel weren't ready for it. Then those who turned many to righteousness- i.e. the priesthood, in the primary context- would be rewarded (Dan. 12:3). But Malachi and Haggai repeatedly criticized the priesthood at the time of the restoration for being selfish and not teaching Israel (Mal. 2:7). Daniel and Jeremiah were heartbroken that there had to be such a delay to the full fulfilment of the Messianic restoration of the Kingdom.

We have seen that Daniel's prophecies often parallel the Angels with God's people on earth, whom they represent in the court of Heaven. It is no surprise that the visions conclude with the individual believers shining like the stars, a symbol of both Angels (Jud. 5:20; Job 38:7) and believers, as discussed on Dan. 8:10. There will be some equivalence between us and the Angels [as in Lk. 20:35,36], although Heb. 1 is clear that our role and status will be higher than Angels. The "stars" who were cast down by the little horn and stamped upon (Dan. 8:10) shall now be resurrected and shine for ever. The "wise" who now shine for ever had once fallen: "Those who are wise among the people shall instruct many; yet they shall fall by the sword and by flame, by captivity and by spoil, many days" (Dan. 11:33). This was a far more glorious scenario than Daniel's desire that God's stars not be cast down nor trampled, and that Judah be restored from exile to a restored temple, which according to Ez. 40-48 would be inhabited by mortals- we read of sweat, of divorce and death amongst the priests there.

Dan. 12:4 *But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of its fulfilment*- Beginning at the end of the vision of Dan. 8, Daniel had prayed to understand, indeed he had a desperate desire for understanding. And again he is being told that this will not be granted- only those who live at the end of "the days" will understand. Is. 29:11,12 clearly uses the same image of a sealed prophecy to mean that the prophecy isn't currently understandable. And that is the case with Daniel's

prophecies: "All vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is educated, saying, Read this, please; and he says, I can't, for it is sealed: and the book is delivered to one who is not educated, saying, Read this, please; and he says, I can't read". Daniel was told to seal the book (Dan. 12:4), but it was already sealed by God (Dan. 8:26; 12:9). I take this to mean that he is asked to accept that the book is sealed to him, he will not understand it. Instead, Dan. 9:24 speaks of the work of Messiah as sealing the book. His work would be to "bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy". The wonderful reality of what the Lord Jesus achieved for us should be our focus; it has sealed the book. But the glorious silver lining for Daniel was that because of this he will be resurrected, to witness and participate in the ultimate return from exile, that from Eden and everlasting life. So many amateur Bible students have likewise ended their days without seeing in their lifetimes what they hoped for, and therefore without correct understanding of Bible prophecy. We are to learn from Daniel, and accept that the seals will be removed in the very last days- and then the interpretation will be clear as daylight. Our focus instead must be upon our final resurrection to eternal life, which is far more wonderful than any 'cracking' of Daniel's prophecies in terms of mapping them onto current geopolitics. The Bible is not a riddle to be solved; rather does it present the simple reality of our eternal salvation, and bids us trust in it as gloriously true for ourselves.

The meaning of the final prophecy of Daniel would only be clear at the time of its fulfilment; and this is the case with all prophecy. It would've been hard for Daniel to accept, who obviously wanted to understand his own prophecies immediately. But the imagery of shutting and sealing could suggest that an interpretation of it was possible in Daniel's lifetime, but that was now precluded, and the interpretation and outworking was now hidden until the time of the end. This would confirm what we noted on Dan. 2- that the restoration of Israel's Kingdom as God's Kingdom on earth could have come during Daniel's lifetime, but it was precluded by Israel's lack of repentance. And so the prophecies would come true, but at a longer term moment. This is a classic example of 1 Pet. 1:12 "Unto whom it was revealed (in response to their enquiries) that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister". And yet the Lord's death opened the book, broke the seals. But the end didn't come then, the book *to us* remained sealed, because the intended, possible fulfilment in AD70 didn't come about- again, because Israel didn't fully repent.

A sealed book or scroll is one that cannot be opened or read (Is. 29:11). The opening of the seals in Revelation surely alludes here; they will be opened in the very last days, rather than over a long period of continuous history. The seals of Revelation bring forth events on earth; here, the seals represent the limitations upon understanding Daniel's visions. The idea surely is that when the visions start to be fulfilled, then the faithful of the last days will perceive this and understand the prophecies which previously were unclear. We should therefore not put too much energy into trying to apply them to current world events; their fulfilment in the land promised to Abraham in the last days will be clear to all.

The repentance of Israel will be associated with an opening of their eyes to God's word. "The Lord hath poured out upon (Israel) the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes (quoted in Rom. 11:8 concerning Israel's blindness to Christ)... the vision of all (God's word) is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed... (but) in that day (of the Kingdom) shall the deaf hear the words of the book" (Is. 29:10,11,17,18). This will be when the book is *un*sealed at "The time of the end". It

will be in our last days that Israel's blindness starts to be cured, thanks to a Word-based revival, led by the Elijah ministry.

Malachi's prophecy of the faithful remnant earnestly speaking to each other about the word in preparation for the Lord's coming can be equally applicable to spiritual Israel. The flagship verse concerning the opening of our eyes to latter day prophecy must be Dan. 12:4,10: "Shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge (of Daniel's prophecies) shall be increased... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand". This is all in the context of the Angel rejecting Daniel's plea for insight into his own prophecies. All he was told was that they would be fulfilled in the far distant future, but he was comforted with the thought that the faithful at that time would understand. Thus Dan. 12:4 LXX reads: "Seal the book until the time of its accomplishment"- *then* it will be unsealed and the meaning become apparent to our generation. "None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" suggests that this true understanding of God's word motivates the faithful remnant in holding on to a righteous lifestyle in the morally chaotic latter day world. Those who are "wicked" will not understand, indicating that understanding God's word correctly is in some sense a moral issue and is related to our spirituality. Those who do God's will therefore understand His doctrine (Jn. 7:17). Time and again Israel are condemned because their lack of *understanding* of the prophecies led them into sinful behaviour (Dt. 32:29; Ps. 94:8; Is. 44:18).

Many shall run back and forth, and knowledge shall be increased- This speaks of a time in the very last days when "many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge shall be increased [the context is of Daniel wanting to understand about the second coming of Jesus]... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand". This increase of knowledge of the Gospel is to be spread world-wide by many running to and fro in the last days. The great commission will be fulfilled then as never before.

The vision was to be made plain, so that a herald may run with it (Dan. 12:2,3 Heb.). The latter day preaching of the Gospel world-wide will be motivated by this true and thrilling understanding of latter day prophecy. We will see our place in God's larger plan, and respond to it. Many will run to and fro to increase knowledge, i.e. to increase knowledge amongst others- for running to and fro will not increase knowledge amongst the runners (Dan. 12:4). Yet according to 2 Thess. 2, there will be a massive apostasy from the Truth in the very last days, whilst antiChrist is enthroned. Could this not be because so many of the true Christian community have been expecting that antiChrist will *not* reign like this, that Israel will never possibly be overrun, and that they have had to own up to having been looking the wrong way in their decades of analysis of the Roman Catholic church and Russia? When they finally own up to the anti-Semitism of Britain, will it not be they will find it hard to maintain faith in a God whom they had hitherto believed had prophesied that Tarshish / Britain would save Israel? And yet, the Gospel will be accepted world-wide in the final preaching of it; and when it has gone into all nations, then shall the end come.

There is another possible translation of these words for "run back and forth / to and fro". The Hebrew *shut* is literally to rove, turn about, despise. Hence, to do despite (Ez. 16:57; 28:24,26). But if we spell the word *sut*, removing the dots added by the Masoretic scribes so that we read 's' rather than 'sh', the meaning is to swerve, turn aside, apostatize, as in "those who turn aside" (Ps. 40:4; 101:3; Hos. 5:2); hence the LXX "till many shall have gone raving mad". Likewise "knowledge" is LXX "wickedness". This verse thus connects with the description of wickedness in :10. The idea is of a time in the very last days when sin and wickedness will be unbridled and unrivalled. This was exactly the Lord's picture of the last days in Mt. 24:12: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall turn cold".

Dan 12:5 *Then I Daniel looked*- The section called "the scripture of truth" which began at the start of Daniel 11 has now finished; what follows now is a kind of appendix to it.

And behold, two others stood, one on the river bank on this side, and the other on the river bank on that side- "Others" suggests that they too were Angels, like the Angel who has been telling Daniel the things noted in "the scripture of truth"; and that Angel seems to be "the man clothed in linen" of :6. "The river" is the Hiddekel or Tigris of Dan. 10:4; but it is called "the great river" in Dan. 10:4, a term usually used of the Euphrates. The Tigris is joined to the Euphrates by the Hiddekel. Effectively, the Hiddekel is the Euphrates. This would have been the north eastern border of the land promised to Abraham. Angels also stand guarding this river in Rev. 9:14, and they signal the time of the end by releasing the latter day invaders of Israel to come pouring across the river to dominate the land, crush God's people, and thereby lead the remnant to repentance. Perhaps the idea of the two Angels (Michael and Gabriel? Although Gabriel is the man clothed in linen of Dan. 10:4) is that they were witnesses to the utter truth of the words of the Angel who stood above the waters of the river (:6), representing God, and made a solemn oath (:7). The two Angels of Dan. 8:13 seem to serve a similar witnessing function.

Dan 12:6 *One said to the man clothed in linen*- The Septuagint makes Daniel the speaker: "And I said to the man clothed in linen, who was standing over the waters of the river, When shall be the end of these marvels?". His words in this case would be the basis for those of the disciples in Mt. 24:3, who likewise wanted to know "How long?", as do all the saints.

Who was above the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?- There were two Angels seen, one on each side of the river. One of them had power over the waters [was "over" them]. The other asked him "how long...?". This was precisely Daniel's question. That Angel therefore represented him. The idea of guardian Angels is not far off the truth; although the Hebrew Bible portrays a court in Heaven, a heavenly throne room, where Angels represent men and situations on earth before God. And that is what we have here. The Angels likewise have genuine questions, seeing they don't have total knowledge (Mk. 13:32); they desire to look into these things (1 Pet. 1:12). In this case therefore the Angel was not merely representing Daniel but was himself genuinely in his position before God.

The "wonders" refer to the deeds or words of Antiochus in Dan. 8:24 and Dan. 11:36. There was the potential that the 'end' would come with Antiochus Epiphanes. It didn't, and the kaleidoscope turned again to present another possible scenario in the truly 'last days'.

Dan 12:7 *I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river,*

when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever- This is the scene of Rev. 10:5. I suggested on :5 that the other two Angels were as it were legal witnesses in the court of Heaven as to the utter truth of these things. The "man clothed in linen" may represent God Himself; for He Himself swears by Himself as He can swear by no greater (Heb. 6:13), and lifts up His own hand to Heaven and swears by His own eternity (Dt. 32:40).

That it shall be for a time, times, and a half- If "time" is taken for one year, and "times" as two years, then we have the three and a half year tribulation period, the 42 months or 1260 days, comparable with the ministry of the historical Elijah. This period is so relatively common that we can indeed expect such a period in the chronology of the last days. It could possibly have had a primary fulfilment in the period between Antiochus entering Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple by the Maccabees. But all such primary applications are hazy and problematic; clearly the idea is that from Daniel's time there could have been a three and a half year period to the full restoration, but this didn't happen, and so the time period definitely refers to the last days for its main fulfilment. The original word for "time" can refer to a feast day; perhaps the idea is of a period of events featuring significant things on the Jewish feast days. The book of Revelation is structured around the Jewish feast days, which are frequently alluded to, and one possible interpretation of Revelation is that it is an account of the final three and a half year tribulation. Paul Wyns has demonstrated that the 'feast' allusions in Revelation make up a total of three and a half years. But it is difficult to understand Revelation as a strictly chronological prediction of latter day events, which would be required by this approach.

And when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished- LXX "When the dispersion is ended they shall know all these things". This suggests that the understanding of the prophecies would only be at the time they were fulfilled. Daniel of course was hoping and expecting that the return of the exiles under Cyrus would be the end of all things, and would herald the re-establishment of the Kingdom of God. This indeed was the intended initial scenario. But it was only a potential scenario. For generally the dispersion chose not to return. And so Daniel died not understanding, although trusting.

The Hebrew for "breaking in pieces" can mean as AV "to scatter". The idea seems to be that Daniel would not understand these time periods, but they would become clear "when the dispersion is ended". This is in line with the purpose of prophecy generally- not to provide a timeline of events ahead of time, but so that when the fulfilment comes, we realize that prophecy has been fulfilled. Fulfilled prophecy gives meaning to event when it happens; but not beforehand. All we know beforehand is that events are not random, God is in control, and they are all moving towards a final end in the Lord's return and establishment of the Kingdom. If the Masoretic Text reading is correct, then the holy people must be broken in pieces before the time period is fulfilled. That breaking in pieces is allusive to the actions of the little horn and fourth beast against God's people. Israel must be "broken" in the last days, and then the salvation will come. The Lord alludes to this by saying that we can fall upon Him and be broken right now, so that we shall surely be saved at the last day (Mt. 21:44). The latter day tribulation would be avoidable if they would only fall upon the rock of Jesus the Christ right now. And the purpose of the latter day tribulation is to bring Israel to this point, of accepting Jesus as Christ. The AV and other texts read "He" instead of "they", as if referring to God; "finished" or "accomplished" is often used of the accomplishing of God's anger with Israel. It was

ultimately God who broke or scattered them. If there had been a total return of scattered Jewry, then their judgments would have been finished and the Messianic Kingdom re-established. But most of them preferred to remain scattered, by remaining in the lands of their captivity. And so the prophecy will have its final fulfilment in the last days, when again the holy people are broken into pieces, a clear figure of judgment.

We may ask how can the power of the holy people be broken or smashed. I discussed on Dan. 8:11 the extent to which such shocking language is used of God Himself, so closely identified with His people that what is done to them is *apparently* done to His power. This is the time of Dt. 32:36, when God's people perceived "that power has vanished and nothing is left to keep or abandon".

Dan 12:8 *I heard, but I didn't understand: then I said, my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?*- Daniel came to "understand" the vision of Dan. 9, but only in that he understood that he would not see its fulfilment; hence he was so shocked, depressed and disappointed that the fulfilment would not be in his days (Dan. 10:1). But he is set up as a representative of those of us in the very last days who shall likewise "understand" (s.w. Dan. 12:10) the very same prophecies which Daniel studied. Daniel is described as both understanding, and also not understanding (Dan. 10:1; 12:8). Surely the idea is that he understood the principle of deferment and the outline meaning of the prophecy; but he didn't understand the details. And so perhaps it is with us who will, or do, likewise "understand" as Daniel did.

Daniel began his life as a young man by being famed for understanding visions (Dan. 1:17). He ends his long life not understanding. This perhaps was his final humiliation. For we are progressively humbled under God's hand in this life, that we might be exalted in due time. He was given understanding, but perhaps he died 'not understanding' in that he struggled to the end to 'understand' that the restoration of God's Kingdom would not in fact happen in his lifetime. Possibly this is the only hint at anything negative in Daniel's character. He had to resign that little personal hope he had laboured with and for all his life long. Just as all God's children have to.

"The issue of these things" or AV "end of these things" fails to properly reflect the Hebrew original. The idea is 'what will be the closing stage of the wonders / sufferings of Dan. 12:6, which will be a sign that the actual 'end' is near?'. The Hebrew means not the absolute close of a thing, but the closing or latter part of it, as in Job 8:7; Job 42:12.

Dan 12:9 *He said, Go your way, Daniel; for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end*- Daniel was to 'go his way', but to rest in the sleep of death (:13). Death, although it is not consciously experienced, is all the same part of our journey. It is a going away, towards a certain future. Daniel was to understand that this prophecy of the three and a half years would not be understood until "the time of the end"; "the end" often refers to the end of Israel's judgments. Daniel wanted it of course to be "the end" of them in his day; but all he knew was that there was to be a time period before they ended. Like all the prophets, Daniel was made to understand that he was not reporting these things for himself, but for later generations (1 Pet. 1:12 surely alludes here). Only when the prophecies come true will the faithful at the time perceive the fulfilment. As noted on :4 and Dan. 8:26, the meaning was shut up to Daniel; and yet the same word is used of how Daniel was famed for having no "secret" (s.w. "shut up" thing) hidden from him (Ez. 28:3). This was therefore a way of humbling him; and we all have to be brought down, particularly in our last days in

this world, that we might be exalted in due time. The sealing of the words, as in a scroll, is obviously alluded to in Revelation, when the scroll is unsealed, and the opened seals refer to events of the last days. The unsealing of the book is therefore in the last days; any historical application of the seals is incidental or at best only a primary fulfilment compared to the major fulfilment, when believers of the last days shall see these things unambiguously fulfilled before their eyes, and shall be encouraged thereby in their tribulation.

Dan 12:10 *Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined*- The day of judgment will involve the Lord sitting "as a refiner of silver... for he is like a refiner's fire" (Mal. 3:2,3). And yet these very Hebrew words are used about how in the final tribulation, God's people will be "refined as silver is refined" (Zech. 13:9), and "be made white and refined" (Dan. 12:10). So the essence of judgment day will be worked out for us in our response to the latter day tribulation. This makes sense- the generation that are alive and see the Lord's return will effectively experience the judgment seat as they pass through the tribulation. It is to prepare them for being the only mortal generation to be alive at His return, the generation who shall greet Him, and never actually die. The faithful will be "tried" (AV) by the latter day invader, as Israel were by the Babylonian invasion of the past (Jer. 9:7). The same word is used in Zech. 13:9 and Mal. 3:2 concerning the faithful remnant in Jerusalem enduring their future sufferings. The idea seems to be that prior to this refining process in the final tribulation, they were impure and not refined. For both natural and spiritual Israel, the tribulation functions to prepare that generation for acceptance at the Lord's return. The returned exiles ought to have purified themselves from Babylon when they left (Is. 52:11; Ez. 20:38 s.w.); but they did not. And so this three and a half year tribulation, perhaps initially envisaged at the hands of Antiochus and then the Romans in AD66-70, was intended to purify them. But instead their love of materialism and self-righteousness would not be purged, and the fulfilment was delayed until our last days. Likewise the word for "made white" is used of how Judah could have made themselves white by repentance (Is. 1:18); but they didn't, and needed this final tribulation to bring about that repentance; and also the word for "refined" is used in just the same way (Is. 1:25). Judah's experience at the Babylonian invasion and in exile in Babylon was the intended refining (Is. 48:10 s.w.); but they didn't respond. The refiner refined in vain (Jer. 6:29 s.w.). The latter day tribulation will be successful in this refining attempt; a third will be refined when Jerusalem is taken (Zech. 13:9 s.w.). And then immediately, the Lord will come; He will in that sense appear on earth as the ultimate refiner of Israel (Mal. 3:2,3). And it is why we ought to be breaking up the ground for it by preaching repentance to Jewish people.

But the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand- This is the spirit of Rev. 22:11 which may allude here, in concluding the visions of Revelation just as this concludes the visions in Daniel: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still". As noted earlier on this verse, not all will respond to the refining process of the tribulation; the wicked shall do wickedly, but a minority of wise "shall understand", and it is that understanding which is the intellectual basis for their moral purification and repentance in practice.

Daniel didn't understand the 2300 evening-morning period (Dan. 8:27), and in Dan. 9 he is given understanding (Dan. 9:2,22,23). The answer was in the 70 weeks prophecy. "Understand the vision" (Dan. 9:23) prefaces the 70 weeks prophecy, and

the vision in view is that of Dan. 8, repeatedly called "the vision" (Dan. 8:1,2,13,15,17,26). The issues of Dan. 9:24 are exactly those of Dan. 8:12-14: transgression will be finished, everlasting righteousness will be brought, and a holy of holies anointed. But just as the 2300 period differs from the 1260 day period of Dan. 7, so the interpretation in Dan. 9 differs. Because the 70 weeks period is not 2300 evening-mornings. Likewise the 1260,1290 and 1335 day periods of Dan. 12 seem to offer yet another scenario. The language of Dan. 12:10,11 is that of Dan. 11:31-35, initially about the possible fulfilment in Antiochus Epiphanes. Surely we have to conclude that the time periods are flexible and changeable, as God factors in all the possible fulfilments in line with human freewill decisions. This really has to be the case, for otherwise Divine prophecy would be simply deterministic and rob man of any freewill. But they will somehow come obviously true in the last days, or at least one of them will. There is a stress on the wise then understanding, when Daniel couldn't at his time. And this surely was what the Lord had in mind in Mt. 24:15: "let him that reads understand"; possibly too in Rev. 13:18, addressed to those of the last days: "Here is wisdom. He that has understanding, let him count the number of the beast" (cp. Rev. 17:8 "Here is the mind that has wisdom"). Likewise Mt. 24:13: "he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved" may refer to the language of Dan. 12:12 LXX about the blessedness of those who endure to "the end" of the 1335 days. These time periods of Dan. 12 were surely in the Lord's mind when He spoke of how "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles [of Gentile domination of Jerusalem] be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24).

"That understand" if read as a hiphil would mean 'those who give heed', i.e. those made wise and understanding.

Dan 12:11 *From the time that the continual burnt offering shall be taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days*- The LXX is clearer that the abomination is set up exactly when the daily sacrifice is ended: "And from the time of the removal of the perpetual sacrifice, when the abomination of desolation shall be set up". There could have been a 1290 day period from the ending of the daily sacrifice by Antiochus and then also by the Romans in AD70, which would have terminated in the establishment of the Kingdom. But that didn't happen. This is an example of potential prophecy which didn't come about because the various preconditions, not least the repentance of Israel, didn't come about. Rather like the detailed descriptions of the restored temple in Ez. 40-48 didn't come about, because the Jews didn't build it that way and didn't truly repent. If this approach is correct, then we need not particularly worry about working out the meaning of this time period. If it is to apply in the last days, then the Jews would have to re-take the temple mount, build a temple and institute the daily sacrifices there. For the significance of the 1290 days in the latter day chronology, see on :12.

Dan 12:12 *Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days*- As noted on :11, there was a potential fulfilment of significance at the end of the 1290 period from the establishment of the abomination by the desolator. And 45 days later there could have been another significant event. Perhaps these were all only potential scenarios after the daily sacrifices were ended by Antiochus and then later in AD70. Just as the Lord could have returned in AD70, but Israel didn't bring forth the fruit of repentance, and so the potential fulfilment was lost.

And yet it would seem that the three and a half year period [time, times and a half, or 1260 days / 42 months] occurs often enough in latter day prophecy for us to

understand it literally, as going to happen in the last days. "Comes" here is Heb. 'to reach, stretch unto' the (end of) the 1335 days. This suggests the difficulty in enduring to the end. But those who spiritually endure to the end of the tribulation period will be saved (perhaps the Lord in Mt. 24:13 had Dan. 12:12 in mind). There are forty five days between Passover and Pentecost; the difference between the 1290 and 1335 day periods. And there are thirty days between Purim and Passover- the difference between the 1260 and 1290 days (:11). So nearly all these time periods will start or finish on a Mosaic feast day. It is not without relevance that the period of the last days is described often as "the day of the Lord"- but "the day of the Lord" is a phrase very commonly used to describe the Jewish feast days. Good cases can be constructed for thinking that the Lord will return on Jewish feast days; but the whole period of the last days may well be based around significant events which occur on each of the feast days. If this proves nothing else, it shows that it is quite legitimate to view the time periods as literal days.

We must note that when we read of "time, times and half", we read of times and not years. The idea of a time being one year and times being two years has become an assumed truth. There are other options. The rabbis translate "Until the time of two times and half a time". There were 480 years from the founding of Israel at Sinai to the building of the temple, followed by 410 years from the building of the temple to its destruction. This makes 890 years, and half of that time is 445 years. Together this makes the figure of 1335 found in Dan. 12:12. Which would then be a cipher for the sanctuary being restored rather than a literally time period of days. We note that 1335 is the numerical value of "And I will hide My face" (Dt. 31:18). The "times" are in God's hands and He changes times and seasons. The length of the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were flexible. Their "tranquility" could have been lengthened and in Belshazzar's case it was shortened. So attempts to work out time periods and fix their calendar end point is in fact not at all the spirit of what we see about God in Daniel.

We naturally enquire why the more common 1260 day / year period now morphs into 1290 and 1335 as if there were significant incidents then too. One explanation may be that in the very last days, the Lord Jesus comes but is not openly revealed until a while later; or it may take 30 or 45 days to achieve various points in the establishment of His Kingdom on earth.

Daniel was having to learn that the delay in fulfilment was actually to bring about a far greater salvation and an eternal Kingdom of God on earth, with eternal life for the faithful like himself. And so a special blessing is here given to whoever 'waits and attains' to the 1335 days. It is the spirit of Is. 30:18,19: "Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him. For the people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you will weep no more".

Dan 12:13 *But go you your way until the end; for you shall rest, and shall stand in your lot, at the end of the days-*

As in Dan 12:9, there is nothing in the Hebrew corresponding to ‘your way'. The idea is "But you, you go to the end". The end which Daniel had longed to see in his lifetime was effectively going to be the day of his death. This has been the similar comfort to those who realize they are going to die without having seen the second coming in their lifetime.

The allusion is to the way that Daniel has just heard that the faithful who "sleep" shall be resurrected at the Lord's return; and he is being told that he will be among

them (:2). If the false doctrine of the immortality of the soul and life after death in heaven were true, this would be the place we should read of it. But instead, Daniel is comforted with the Biblical hope of the resurrection of the body at the last day. He was however told to go his way "until the end". Although death is not a conscious experience, it is all the same part of our spiritual journey; he was to go his way to his grave, but he was going his way on a journey unto "the end", when he would stand in his lot. We each have a specifically designed, unique eternal future, a name written which nobody else knows apart from us and the Lord; and Daniel too will have his unique "lot" or inheritance. He would receive it "at the end of the days", perhaps referring to the various periods of days just spoken of; they were to terminate in the resurrection of the dead at the last day. Any attempts to interpret them with end points other than that are therefore faulty, or at best only primary fulfilments.

There are some definite links between the Greek text of Matthew's record of the commission, and the LXX of the end of Daniel 12:

Matthew	Daniel 12:13 LXX
Go ye into all the world (Mt. 28:20)	Go thou thy way
"…then shall the end come" (when the Gospel has been preached to all the world)	till the end
I am with you all the days (28:20 Gk.)	for still there will be days
unto the end of the world	to the end of the world.

Daniel being sent away with God's promised blessing, the very picture of spiritual calmness and peace with his maker, sure in hope, yearning for the day… this is the very picture which the Lord gives of His preachers as He sends them forth. If we are to understand the time periods at the end of Daniel as literal days, i.e. a three and a half year period at the end, then we have in the great commission a specific hint that it will be fulfilled during the three and a half year tribulation.

We reflect that Daniel's life had been focused upon the hope of restoration from Persia once the 70 years were fulfilled. He had lived through that entire period, and his hope was clearly very great that he would see the Kingdom of God and the Davidic throne re-established in Jerusalem. He is assured now at the end of his long life that his expectation wasn't going to happen and his prayers for it weren't going to be answered- in the form he expected. But they would be answered ultimately and in a far greater way- he would not simply live to return home from exile, but he would arise from the exile of sin and death to life eternal. In a Kingdom of God far greater than it had ever, or could ever have, existed in the form of Israel with a mortal Davidic king. Daniel would have understood from Ez. 37 that Judah's restoration would be a political 'resurrection'; but he was going to experience a real personal resurrection, to eternal life and not just a political mortal kingdom. Daniel had had

hints of resurrection when the stone was removed, as if from a tomb, and he emerged alive from the den of lions. He had collapsed feeling dead and unworthy in Dan. 10, to be 'resurrected' and assured of salvation. Those experiences paved the way for this final message about actual resurrection.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: HOSEA

HOSEA

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

HOSEA CHAPTER 1

Hos. 1:1 *The beginning of the word of Yahweh that came to Hosea*- We will note on :2 that the word which came to Hosea was a call to live a life which reflected God's grace and anguish for Israel. The word that comes to us is likewise not simply lexical items and sentences of words, but a life lived in practice after the pattern of the Lord Jesus, the word made flesh as to a lesser extent Hosea was.

That came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel- Let's remember that the events in Hosea's life, according to the information in Hos. 1:1, occurred over a span of at least 30, and perhaps even 50 years. His love for Gomer was the love of a lifetime, the hope and pain of a lifetime. He was an amazing man, as Yahweh is an amazing God, to love to the end such a bad woman. It could be argued that the word that came to Hosea was to love and marry such a bad woman. For the book of Hosea appears to be entirely relevant to Israel at the end of their time in the land, just prior to the Assyrian invasion; and the appeals to Judah reference their partial faithfulness, which was relevant to Judah at that time. None of it, e.g., appears relevant to the time of Hezekiah. But Hosea's ongoing love for his wives was God's word to Israel and Judah throughout this long time period. And this in its turn reflects the long term love of the eternal God for His people. The judgments threatened in Hosea are sometimes hard to pin down, and this may be because his words were equally relevant to the judgments upon both Israel and Judah; hence as explained on :5, "the day of Jezreel" could refer to incidents within the judgments of both Israel and Judah.

Hos. 1:2 *When Yahweh spoke at first by Hosea*- The first time the word of the Lord came to Hosea, he was told to marry "a wife of whoredoms". Note that this was "the beginning of the word of the Lord" to him (Hos. 1:2- NEV "When Yahweh spoke at first by Hosea"). He'd have been tempted to just ignore it, to think he'd been dreaming something, to run away from it. But to his credit, he obeyed. According to the Mosaic Law, a whore should be burnt. She shouldn't be married. Hosea was told to break the letter of the Law, and marry a prostitute. And he was told to be a father to her "children of whoredoms". And so he began what was to be quite a theme in both his life and his prophecy- that in the face of sin, God shows His grace. We've likely all seen this in our own lives- at our very weakest moments, the kindness and care of God for us is revealed. Humanly, when someone does something wrong to us, we respond in anger and dissociation from them. The grace of God is quite the other way. In the very depths of Israel's unfaithfulness, God reminds them through the prophets of His love for them, and His plan to ultimately save them. But God's grace can't be abused endlessly. ..

Yahweh said to Hosea, Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and children of unfaithfulness; for the land commits great adultery, forsaking Yahweh- See on Hos. 2:4 *Her children*. The extent of God's grace is powerfully reflected through the life of Hosea. Hosea was asked to manifest the love of God towards Israel, with all the emotional pain that this involved. The unfaithfulness of Gomer to Hosea represented Israel's idolatry and unfaithfulness to God. The ten commandments taught that adultery was to be paralleled with idolatry. The two tablets each contained five commandments, and each of them were related to the other- thus the second

commandment "You shall have no other gods" corresponds to the seventh, "You shall not commit adultery".

We could read this as saying that the word of Yahweh came to Hosea in that he was told to marry a prostitute. Prostitutes were to burnt under the law. Not loved and married. Israel were condemned to destruction. But God wanted to marry them and offer them a new covenant and another marriage. Hosea was to live this out with Gomer. That word of God became flesh. In that Hosea's love for Gomer and feelings towards her were God's word of appeal to Israel. In this case, we can assume that the Hosea - Gomer relationship was very public knowledge to many in Israel.

There is the possibility that Hosea writes this looking back at what had happened, proleptically- just as Joseph after the event declared that God had sent him into Egypt (Gen. 45:5). Joseph didn't get a command to go into Egypt. He only later perceived that he had been sent there, and when he first went into Egypt, this was not because he was obeying any command to go there. Likewise Paul's conclusion that he had been set apart for missionary ministry from before his birth (Gal. 1:15). Possibly this is another example. Hosea, like God, married Gomer / Israel believing she was going to be faithful, but she wasn't. Or perhaps Hosea like God married this woman foreknowing what she would be like, but hoping that his love would change her and make her loyal to him.

The reference to "the land" in Hos. 1:2 ["a wife of prostitution and children of unfaithfulness; for the land commits great adultery"]. is because the idea was that worshippers slept with cult prostitutes to symbolize how the gods slept with the land and made it fertile. Gomer's literal infidelity was in order to get material benefit from her lovers; she was addicted to both sex and materialism. She was probably herself a cult prostitute. And this spoke of how Israel literally slept with the cult prostitutes and committed spiritual prostitution against Yahweh, hoping for material blessing from the Baal cults. Hence Hos. 2:5 "I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water". Yet Hosea provided Gomer all she needed, just as Yahweh did for His people.

Receipt of God's true revelation involved dialogue with God, even disagreement with Him for a moment, response, pleading, speech and counterspeech. It wasn't a case of merely passively hearing a voice and writing it down. Part and parcel of hearing the word of God and being inspired with it was to react to it in daily life- hence Ezekiel couldn't mourn for his wife, Hosea had to marry a whore as a reflection of God's love for Israel, Isaiah had to walk naked (Is. 3:17). Truly "The prophet threw his whole self into his prophecy, and made not his lips alone, but his whole personality, the vehicle of the divine 'word'" (H.H. Rowley, *The Servant Of The Lord* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) p. 118.). The inner accord which the prophets had with the mind and word of God led to their personalities being like God's.

Adultery of course implies that she wasn't adulterous at the time of marriage. Additionally, Andersen and Freedman argue on grammatical grounds that "a wife of whoredoms" in Hos. 1:2 means a wife who would become adulterous (F. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Hosea* (London: Doubleday, 2004 ed.) p. 159.). No young man would surely marry a woman whom he knew would be adulterous later on. And yet perhaps in a way Hosea is saying that he did know this, but, his love for her was so strong, he married her. Just like God, when He met idol-worshipping Israel in the wilderness. They carried through the desert their god Remphan and the tabernacle of Moloch with them, as well as Yahweh's tabernacle. And yet it was there that Yahweh, the God who knows the future and the destiny and spiritual path of every man, fell in love with them and spread His skirt over them in love and delight and betrothal (Ez.

16,23). Just as Hosea did. For he married Gomer bat Diblaim (Hos. 1:3)- which was apparently the name for a temple prostitute (H.W. Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), p. 17).

Hos. 1:3 *So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; and she conceived, and bore him a son*- See on :2. The usual Biblical rubric for describing conception and birth is to say that a man goes in to a woman, she conceives, and bears a child. Hos. 1:3 says that Gomer conceives and bears a son to Hosea; there is no mention that he 'went in' to her, and in Hos. 1:6,8 we are told simply that Gomer conceived. The way the final child is called Lo-ammi was because "ye are not my people" (Hos. 1:9). This suggests that although Hosea did presumably have sexual relations with Gomer, these children were not actually conceived from him- i.e. she was continuing her relations with other men. This suggestion is confirmed by the way that Hosea asks the children when they are older to plead with their mother to stop her adultery (Hos. 2:2). Hosea explains further: "Their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers…" (Hos. 2:5).

"Gomer" means 'Enough!' or 'complete'. Hosea prophesied at the time the 10 tribe kingdom of Israel were about to go into captivity for their prostitution. His book and his life were therefore a last mintue appeal to them to repent and accept God's love for them- even though their sin was complete, it had gone far enough, and they had to be judged. But even then, Yahweh was desperate to save them, and still desperately loved them. "Diblaim" in Hebrew rhymes with "Ephraim", Hosea's favourite description of "Israel". So again the connection between Gomer and the 10 tribes is further cemented.

Hos. 1:4 *Yahweh said to him, Call his name Jezreel*- Hosea has to name the subsequent children Jezreel, speaking of God's plan to avenge Himself and "to cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel", Lo-ruhamah ("for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel") and Lo-ammi ("for you are not my people") (Hos. 1:4,6,9). Hosea isn't the only example of a person being taught by personal experience how God Himself feels. The whole parenting experience is another example. Or take Amos' message to Amaziah: "Your wife shall be a harlot in the city [Bethel- the house of God], and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land [i.e. Amaziah's personal family plot] shall be parcelled out by line" (Am. 7:17 RSV). It was God's wife who acted as a harlot in the house of God, it was God's children who fell by the sword, it was God's land which was divided to others. But He wanted Amaziah to know how it feels, to some extent, to be God. And in our lives there are multiple examples [if we perceive them] of Him doing likewise, in seeking to explain to us how He, our Father, really feels.

For yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu- God sees that our behaviour can be read on more than one level; the same action has elements of righteousness and sin within it. Thus Jehu's massacre at Jezreel was commanded by God, and Jehu was praised for his obedience in doing it (2 Kings 10:30,31), but he was also condemned for it (Hos. 1:4). Yet we simply cannot make such analysis, although we must recognize that this is in fact how God analyzes. And for this reason alone, we are quite unable to anticipate the outcome of the judgment with regard to other believers.

We see an example of God's sensitivity in this prophecy that the blood of Jezreel would be visited upon the house of Jehu (Hos. 1:4). At Jezreel, Jehu had killed Ahab's family in a quite literal bloodbath. And God had commented that because Jehu had

done this and thus fulfilled His word, Jehu's family would reign for the next four generations (2 Kings 10:30). So why, then, does Hosea start talking about punishing the house of Jehu for what they did to the house of Ahab? Jehu became proud about the manner in which he had been the channel for God's purpose to be fulfilled, inviting others to come and behold his "zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings 10:16). Jehu and his children showed themselves to not really be spiritually minded, and yet they prided themselves in having physically done God's will. And because of this, Hosea talks in such angry terms about retribution for what they had done; the house of Jehu's act of obedience to God actually became something his family had to be punished for, because they had done it in a proud spirit. We see this all the time around us. Men and women who clearly are instruments in God's hand, like the Assyrians were, doing His will… but being proud about it and becoming exalted in their own eyes because of it. And Hosea is so sensitive to the awfulness of this, he goes ballistic about it.

And will cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease- This would have reference to the ending of Jehu's dynasty with the death of Jeroboam II at Jezreel (:5).

Hos 1:5 *It will happen in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel*- This could refer to judgments upon both Israel and Judah at different times; see on :1. "The bow" refers to human strength. And this was to be broken. It was whilst Israel felt strong that they committed adultery against God, and we see this reflected in how men who feel 'strong' in various areas of human life tend to then become sexually promiscuous. Judah were defeated here by the Assyrians, to whom Hosea refers specifically in his later prophecies,; but even then, through the ministry of Isaiah and Hezekiah there was the possibility of salvation. And this grace and opportunity within Divine judgment is to be typical of Hosea. The more obvious fulfilment is to the ending of Jehu's dynasty with the death of Jeroboam II at Jezreel (:4); this may also be the reference of Hos. 10:14. Zechariah who followed him was not from that dynasty, and in that sense the "bow" or dynasty ended (Ps. 127:4).

To break a bow is a figure common in Assyrian reliefs and inscriptions; it refers to a military defeat. But when were Israel militarily defeated at Jezreel? Perhaps this was a threat made that God didn't carry out, just as Hosea threatens Gomer with things that he doesn't carry out. But "Jezreel" also means 'God sows'. Within this threat of destruction there is the hint of hope, that a phoenix will arise, some potential new life will be sown. Likewise we read that the calley of Achor, the symbol of Achan's permanent destruction and barring from entering the Kingdom, will become a "door of hope". And so Hosea's threats to Gomer also include within them the latent hope that somehow, their hopeless relationship will come to loving fruition.

Hos 1:6 *She conceived again, and bore a daughter. Then he said to him, Call her name Lo-Ruhamah*- See on :4. "I will no more have grace" was how Hosea doubtless felt, having had mercy upon Gomer over so many incidents; and now again she conceives by another man. This reflects the just anger of God at sin, that as it were flares up in His face. But the tortured prophecy and experience of Hosea comes to the conclusion that God like Hosea will in fact allow mercy to triumph over judgment. "I will not have pity / mercy / compassion" alludes to how pity / mercy is at the heart of God's Name and covenant relationship (Ex. 34:6). We will see on :9 that God was abrogating His own Name and being by saying this. So it was said with difficulty, as a reflection of the extreme difficulty God felt in ending His covenant relationship with His people. Even if they from their side had long ago broken that covenant.

For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, that I should in any way pardon them- Even if this is applied to the 'utter taking away' [Heb.] of the ten tribes, there were still plans for their restoration and ultimate salvation, as various of the prophets make continually clear. "Have mercy" effectively means 'to forgive'. Here we see how Hosea is going to vacillate between such feelings, and on the other hand, an amazing forgiveness. Likewise, there are statements in Hosea that Hosea / God will slay Gomer / Israel, send them to Egypt... and yet also, "love them freely" and save them. This merges seamlessly into an explanation of how God feels, with "repentings kindled together", wanting to not forgive but coming to forgive. His forgiveness is hereby demonstrated to certainly not be automatic, to involve a process and a struggle, and to be painful.

Hosea spoke in God's Name. He would've known how that Name was a memorial of the characteristics of God, His pity, mercy, forgiveness etc. as outlined in Ex. 33:19. And yet Hosea uses those very words in saying that now, God will not have mercy, pity or forgiveness toward Israel. But Hosea spoke in the Name of Yahweh; and predicted that the Yahweh who had been their *elohim* from the land of Egypt, would still be their God (Hos. 12:9). In this we see Hosea's personal involvement in the tension of God; for he spoke in God's Name, with all that Name implied. And we too carry that Name, having been baptized into it. And we speak in that Name to this world, bearing within us the same conflict between the reality of future judgment, and the earnest grace of God to save this world. Hosea's prophecy concludes by declaring the victory over the pole of God's graciousness over that of His necessary judgment of sin. "I will love them freely", with the freedom of Divine grace. And yet that final Divine position is arrived at through all the anger against sin which there has to be.

Hos 1:7 *But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and will save them by Yahweh their God, and will not save them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen*- As noted on :6, this was how God felt at the time. As I will note on :11, God's purpose changed in this matter of rejecting Israel and saving Judah. But later prophecies indicate His desire for the repentance, salvation and final ingathering of the ten tribes as well as Judah; and eventually He has to judge Judah as He judged Israel, with Ezekiel pointing out that Judah ended up even more sinful that Israel. We see here that just as Hosea's feelings ebbed and flowed, so it is with God. He is not capricious nor unstable; it's just that His gracious, saving love ends up stronger than His desire and necessity of judging sin. When we say that "God is love", we must remember the tortuous internal path that He has travelled to that point.

"I will save them..." alludes to the meaning of 'Hosea'- 'to set free, to save' or 'he has set free, he has saved'. It is the component of 'Ya-hoshua', Yah saves, 'Jesus'. This was what Hosea stood for- saving his wife, through much internal suffering. God is saying 'I will be Hosea to them'. Clearly we have established that Hosea is going to represent the saving love of Yahweh. And he plus 'Yah' becomes 'Yahoshua', Jesus, so here we see an OT anticipation of the spirit of the Lord Jesus.

A fair translation of :6,7 would be:

"No longer will I have compassion on the house of Israel
let alone that I would forgive, yes forgive them
but on the house of Judah I will have compassion
and I will set them free by Yahweh their God".

This would imply that Judah had also sinned, but they would be shown compassion and given freedom, a figure for forgiveness. The truth was that God did forgive Israel. But in the short term, recalling that Hosea prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah, He did send Israel into captivity whereas He forgave Judah and saved them- at Hezekiah's time. But that forgiveness was on the basis of grace alone, for there was no evidence that there was much loyalty to Yahweh in Hezekiah's time. As Isaiah often says, they were saved from the Assyrian encirclement of Jerusalem not by human sword, bow etc., but by Yahweh's Angelic cherubim.

Hos 1:8 *Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived, and bore a son*- Breast feeding is often a natural form of contraception. For her to become immediately pregnant as soon as she had finished breast feeding could indicate a sexual obsession on her part, which will be noted later. And the child she conceived was not Hosea's people (:9), again, she had been unfaithful to him.

Hos 1:9 *He said, Call his name Lo-Ammi; for you are not My people, and I will not be yours*- The implication is that Gomer fell pregnant not by Hosea but by her lovers at the idol sanctuary. This is confirmed by God's later statement that Israel had been unfaithful to Him (as in Jer. 3:20) and had given birth to foreigners' children (Hos. 5:7).

Lo-Ammi- See on 1:3,4. Hosea names his child [if indeed he was the father of it], ‘Not my people’. Consider his hurt, to reject a child from his family. This was God’s hurt. God, like Hosea, had no other children, no other people. For God to say to Israel ‘You are not My people’ would leave God without a people, as it were alone in the earth. Hosea shared the tragic loneliness of God. In the end, God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. But that final position of God was as it were arrived at through the traumatic process of feeling just as Hosea did, that 'these are not My children'. We are left to imagine the web of lies, crocodile tears and fake repentances all spun by Gomer, and the endless tug upon the heart strings of Hosea because, quite simply, he so loved her. And all this God experiences oftentimes with man, with us, with you and me. For all our sins and modern day idolatries are symbolized in her behaviour.

"I will not be yours" is literally "I will not be". It is a play on the Yahweh Name. Literally 'I will not be', the inversion of 'I will be who I will be'. The same root verb "to be" is used as in the YHWH Name. The Hebrew simply reads as the negative of the Yahweh Name. To the Hebrew mind, to this day, this is just a terrible thing to say, read or hear. It verges almost on the blasphemous and inappropriate, as does so much in Hosea. Yahweh was the covenant Name, and the idea is surely that just as Hosea wanted to break his marriage covenant with Gomer, so Yahweh wanted to stop being Yahweh for Israel and thus end the covenant. "I will not be" Yahweh is also tantamount to suggesting the death of Yahweh, who by nature is "I who will be". This shocking idea is found in similar passages that speak of Israel as a young woman who was left widowed- her husband, Yahweh, had as it were died. The figure reflects how God felt He had died in the death of Israel, showing for all time the truth of the oft observed fact: that something of us dies in the death of those we love. Poets, writers, artists of all human societies have come to that realization. For in this way, man in his usual path through life, losing loved ones along the way, is prepared for his own death. For Hebrew man, to be bereft of wife and children was to become nothing, to 'not be'. And this is how Yahweh felt. Without Israel, He 'was not'. In this we see the extent to which God is as it were in need of man. Without His woman Israel, He like

Hosea was left ashamed, humiliated, a laughing stock to other men, the rejected lover whose honour has been violated, and who is seeking another path for that love. Yahweh presents as having great internal pain and torture of mind, eaten up with unresolve, failing to resolve the situation- just as Hosea experienced. He emerges as a wounded God, bent on resolution. Which is where, finally, we come in to the picture. And where at the end of Hosea we read of Yahweh planning to *make* His people loyal in ways only He can- through His Spirit. The whole story is amazing and even mysterious, such is the insight into God's love. Thus Hosea concludes with the challenge, 'Who can understand this?'.

Hos 1:10 *Yet the number of the children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, which can't be measured nor numbered*- The promises to Abraham would be fulfilled, despite such unfaithfulness; and they are the basis of God's new covenant with all those baptized into the Lord Jesus. Constantly in Hosea we see the paradoxes within grace, or at least, so they appear to men. Those who were "not My people" (:9) were still going to be God's people because they were beloved for the fathers' sakes, they were the seed of Abraham which would be as the sand of the sea. It is this paradox of utter grace which is the context in which this verse is quoted by Paul in Romans.

The "yet" has massive implications. Although Yahweh / Hosea threaten to end the marriage covenant, there is hope [as made explicit in Hos. 2] that the marriage will be restored. A new marriage covenant will be entered into. The reference to blessing like "the sand of the sea" in Hos. 1:10 alludes both to the promises to Abraham [which were the basis of the new covenant] and to common marriage blessings. The wife was wished fertility like the sand of the sea. So it is the new covenant which is offered to Israel- which Paul says is based on the promises to Abraham rather than the law given on Sinai.

And it will come to pass that, in the place where it was said to them- "In the place..." is hard to interpret. It may not have any geographical reference. it may simply mean "instead of being told 'You aren't My people', you will be told 'You are sons of the living God'. Perhaps it is Jezreel, or Jerusalem, although there is no specific reference to that being the place where they were told of their rejection. It was in exile that they were "told" they were not God's people; so the Chaldee reads: "And it shall come to pass in the place where they lived in exile among the peoples...". The potential possibility was that there in Babylon they would have a spiritual revival and return to being God's children. But most of the exiles preferred to remain there when the time for restoration came. This then becomes one of many prophecies of what could potentially have happened at the restoration which didn't come to pass because Israel would not.

'You are not My people', they will be called 'sons of the living God'- When Lo-ammi was born and named "you are not my people", *immediately* the prophet is inspired to make a tender prophecy of Israel's final glory: "You are not my people, and I will not be your God. *Yet* the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea…it shall be said unto them, You are the sons of the living God" (Hos. 1:9,10; another example is in Hos. 12:8,9; 13:8,9). The word to circle in our Bibles is "*yet*". In the face of all Israel's sin, in the face of the inevitable judgment which this attracted, in the very moment when it is declared, God goes on to speak of His loving salvation. This is so hard for humans to take on board, called as we are to manifest this same grace of God. In the heat of the moment of others' sin against us, we rarely find it in us to think let alone speak of their ultimate hope of salvation by grace. But this is the challenge of Hosea.

The reference to "the living God", the God who gives life, is because the Baal cults claimed to give life. Yahweh would be accepted, He hoped, as the source of life. Not Baal.

Hos 1:11 *The children of Judah and the children of Israel will be gathered together*- Remember that Hosea was a prophet to both Judah and Israel. Again we have a paradox, for in :7 we read of God's original plan to end things with Israel but save Judah. This apparent irrationality, or bouncing between two opposite positions very quickly, is exactly how Hosea would have felt each time he realized Gomer had fallen pregnant by another man. The potential possibility was that at the time of Judah's restoration from Babylon, the ten tribes would also return, and the Kingdom of God re-established in the land with a Messiah King, and the temple rebuilt in Zion according to the plans of Ez. 40-48. But this didn't happen, because Israel and Judah didn't repent, and most preferred to remain in the lands of their exile; they preferred exile to restoration, just as many do in essence today. For the gospel of the restoration of the kingdom under the new covenant is in essence the same Gospel preached by us today.

And they will appoint themselves one head, and will go up from the land- The allusion is to how Israel had appointed themselves a leader to return to Egypt (Num. 14:4). But that will be changed; instead they "will go up from the land" under this chosen ruler, just as they went up from Egypt towards Canaan (Ex. 13:18). That exodus is continually alluded to in the restoration prophets, as the prototype of the restoration from Babylon and even Assyria. It was God's dream that they would reverse their previous unfaithfulness, just as Hosea dreamt that Gomer would; we see the same kind of reasoning in Hos. 2:15, where the valley of Achor, symbol of Israel's previous unfaithfulness, is to be turned into "a door of hope".

For great will be the day of Jezreel- "Jezreel" is literally 'the sowing of God', and the same word for 'sow' is found in Hos. 2:23, where God says that "I will sow her unto me in the earth". In line with the reversal of Israel's historical shame mentioned earlier in this verse, so the place of their previous defeat and judgment (see on :4) would be turned into the place of their being sown by God, to rise up in resurrected life. For this is how the metaphor of sowing is understood in 1 Cor. 15. Israel and Judah had been sown amongst the nations of their dispersion, but God's hope was that they would arise from there and again enter covenant relationship with Him and bring forth fruit to Him (Jer. 31:10). This was Hosea's hope of Gomer, but that never seems to have come true; and in a sense it was the same for God in that His people were unwilling to make the restoration which He had envisaged and potentially enabled.

HOSEA CHAPTER 2

Hos 2:1 *Say to your brothers, 'Ammi! [My people]!' and to your sisters, 'Ruhamah! [I will have mercy!]'*- In an attempt to bring about Gomer's repentance, Hosea addresses his children as "Ammi" and "Ruhamah", i.e. 'my people' and 'I will have mercy'- purposefully changing the names God had given them. On this basis he appealed for Gomer's repentance: "Let her therefore put away her prostitution" (Hos. 2:2). As Paul was to later say in so many words, the mercy and grace of God is intended to lead us to repentance. Rather than that grace leading to a laissez-faire indifference and continuance in sin, the very reality of His grace to us in our weak moments should of itself inspire our repentance. But there is of course a limit, if we continually refuse: "Lest I strip her naked…and slay her" (:3). We too at baptism are given the new name, righteousness in Christ is imputed to us, but we must live in

practice how we are considered in status. Through appealing to the children, Hosea was hoping to win back the heart of their mother. And something similar was going on in God's prophetic appeal to the children of Zion. "Not my people" being called "my people" is understood by Paul as referring to the Gentile converts to Christ who are counted as spiritual Israel. And their conversion was intended to provoke the mother, Zion, Israel after the flesh, to repent and turn to God again.

"Say to your brothers..." may be a message to Judah, to take the good news to their brothers in Israel- that a new start, a new covenant was possible. The imperative plural of the "say..." means it is addressed to a group of people. They are to appeal / contend (:2) with the ten tribes, appealing for them to return to Yahweh. Although we note that Judah are also severely criticized as the prophecy goes on, with Judah being the second whore whom Hosea marries in Hos. 3. In the Hosea-Gomer relationship, we can assume that by this point the children have grown to be old enough to appeal to their mother and brothers.

It was part of God's purpose, tied up in His very Name, that "I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:7). There are seven statements of "I will..." in Ex. 6, making these statements part of the meaning of the Name "I will be who I will be". But by saying Israel were not His people, and He was not their God, Yahweh was denying His very own Name. Just as we noted on Hos. 1:9 that God negated the very "I am that I am" Name of Yahweh, by saying "I will *not* be...". As if to say, "I am not I AM for you". Yahweh presents as so eager to be who He really and essentially is, a God with a people, and not a wayfaring man without a home and a people (Jer. 14:8 "why should You be as a foreigner in the land, and as a wayfaring man"). Just as we can infer that Hosea was a man built and wired to be married, to be a good husband and father to the children that would ensue. So God's fantasy here is understandable- that the people He had disowned would become His people truly, in spirit and truth.

Hos 2:2 *Contend with your mother! Contend, for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband*- This is Hosea feeling that he has divorced Gomer, and yet he continually affirms his total love and commitment to her as his wife. He calls the children to "contend", a word usually used in a legal context of pleading, as if the children were to be involved in the divorce case. This fluctuation of emotion is understandable for Hosea. But it points forward to the internal conflict within God as regards His people. "She is not my wife, neither am I her husband" is a verbatim quotation from various Babylonian divorce formulas, and was later incorporated into the Talmud as a divorce formula (Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973) Vol. 1 p. 122). Likewise the threat to strip her naked (Hos. 2:3) was what was done in the case of divorce for adultery; Hosea's threat to withdraw her clothing, her "wool and flax [linen]" in Hos. 2:9 likely refers to the same thing. Yet Hosea keeps wanting Gomer to return to him; he wishes to divorce her, and yet in his heart keeps coming back to her. This was an exact reflection of God's feelings for His people. Remember that it was enough then, as it is today in some societies, for a husband to simply proclaim "You are not my wife". And that was enough for divorce. Here Yahweh / Hosea say this. It is a divorce. But we immediately read: "Let her *therefore"* stop her adultery. It was a divorce uttered with the passionate hope of a remarriage.

And let her therefore put away her prostitution from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts- Song 1:13 speaks of myrrh between the breasts being used as an aphrodisiac; and prostitutes paint their faces in Jer. 4:30 and Ez. 23:40. The judgment of removing the signs of adultery from Gomer's face and from between her

breasts also give a window into the level of her sexual addiction. They were likely the signs that she was a cult prostitute. "Her adulteries" is proof enough that she had committed adultery against Hosea and the children were not his; see on 1:3 *She conceived.*

2:3 *Lest I strip her naked, and make her bare as in the day that she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land*- This was the punishment for a prostitute, a punishment which she should've had right back at the start. But instead of this punishment, Hosea had married her. We are perhaps nervous to equate our sinfulness, our rebellion, our unfaithfulness, with Gomer's prostitution. But this, surely, is what we are intended to do, and to thereby perceive the extent of God's patient love toward us, to the end that that grace and goodness might lead us to repentance. Because Hosea had loved this woman, he had feelings of anger- he desired to strip her naked and slay her, to "discover her lewdness in the sight of all her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand" (Hos. 2:10). These feelings were quite natural. Hosea was the wounded lover, the betrayed man. And these are exactly the feelings of God over the unfaithfulness of His people.

The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers; all similar to the language of having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (Ez. 23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (Ez. 16:7,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (Ez. 16:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (Ez. 23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are modern readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word… realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism. Those who find this language over the top... need to ask whether they have rightly understood the nature of sin, and the undoubted existence of the wrath of God [just read Romans 2, as well as the prophets]. The fact we in Christ are "saved from wrath through Him" only has wonder and meaning if we appreciate that God's wrath is real. Even though, as with the wrath of Hosea, it is all a part of love. For truly "the wrath of God is the love of God". So often the wrath of God is considered an outdated idea, never to be

mentioned. But it's rather like the Victorians thought of sex- never to be spoken of, but accepted as present.

And kill her with thirst- The punishment intended for Hagar, which was again rescinded by grace. All the allusion to the wilderness and thirst is to give insight into how God felt toward Israel in the wilderness, when He wanted to destroy them for still worshipping the Egyptian idols; but by grace alone He did not.

Let's remember that God's own law was pretty clear about adultery. The adulterous woman was to be punished with death- for one act of adultery. Even if she repented. And in any case, it was a defiling abomination [according to the Mosaic Law] to remarry a divorced wife. But Hosea doesn't strictly keep the law; his love and grace are beyond it. He lets his wife commit multiple acts of adultery, and he still loves her and pleads with her- even though he was a man in love with God's law. And this reflects the turmoil of God in dealing with human sin, and His sinful people. Hosea outlines his plan in Hosea 2. He will hamper her movements so she can't find her lovers; if she does find them, he will take away her food and clothing, so she appreciates his generosity to her; and if she still doesn't return, he will expose her naked and shamed in front of her lovers. But there's no evidence Hosea ever did that. He just… loved her, was angry with her as an expression of that love, loved her yet more, yet more… And this perhaps too reflects God's mind- devising and declaring judgments for Israel, which are themselves far less than what He has earlier stated in His own law, and yet the power of His love means He somehow keeps bearing with His people. Even in the context of speaking of His marriage to Israel, God says that He will punish them "as women that break wedlock are judged" (Ez. 26:38; 23:45). And yet, He didn't. His love was too great, His passion for them too strong; and He even shamed Himself by doing what His own law forbad, the remarriage to a divorced and defiled wife. Perhaps all love involves a degree of paradox and self-contradiction; and a jealous, Almighty God in love was no different. This, to me, is why some Bible verses indicate God has forsaken Israel; and others imply He hasn't and never will. Somehow, even right now, the Jews you meet… are loved still by their God. And he still fantasizes, in a way, over their return to Him. Imagine His utter joy when even one of them does in fact turn to Him! That alone motivates me to preach to Israel today.

Hos 2:4 *Indeed, on her children I will have no mercy; for they are children of unfaithfulness*- Hosea appears to have been speaking about the children on his own account, whilst also thereby manifesting the spirit, feelings and words of Yahweh about His people Israel. Hosea's mood swings, alternating between love and anger, reflected God's.

Hosea had initially been told to marry Gomer and also take on her "children of whoredoms" into his family (Hos. 1:2), so it would seem unlikely that his rejection of Gomer's children because "they be the children of whoredoms" refers to them. Surely he refers to what appeared to be 'his' children, whom she had borne after her marriage to him. Note how he calls them "her children". The children are described by Hosea as "her children" rather than "my children" (Hos. 2:6,7)- as if they were not his, although she bore them whilst newly married to him. Indeed, Gomer appears to reason in Hos. 2:14 that the children were her lovers' payment to her for her sexual services. And in the parallel relationship between God and Israel, Israel were unfaithful to Yahweh and "engendered foreign children" (Hos. 5:7). We can learn

much about the nature of Gomer's behaviour with Hosea by seeing how Israel are described subsequently in Hosea's prophecy. So often they are spoken of in terms of an unfaithful woman, and we are surely intended to understand that they were epitomized by the woman Gomer. So we can 'read back' from what is said about Israel in the prophecy to Gomer personally. God made the accusation that "[Israel] have dealt treacherously against the Lord: for they have begotten strange children", whilst at the same time claiming to keep the sacrifices and Sabbaths of the Law (Hos. 5:6,7; 2:11). This would confirm that Gomer acted as Hosea's wife, assuring him of her faithfulness, in the same way as the sacrifices and Sabbaths were intended to reflect Israel's exclusive faithfulness to Yahweh.

Throughout the book, Hosea clearly speaks on God's behalf, even though he at times speaks in the first person. It's hard at times to realize whether Hosea is talking about his own marriage, or about God's feelings to Israel. And that's understandable, given the view of inspiration we have been discussing. The feelings of Hosea were God's feelings; He was inspired with the spirit / mind / attitude of God Himself. Thus here in Hos. 2:4-25 we appear to have a monologue in which Hosea speaks to his wife and kids; but he speaks to them as if it's God speaking. So close was his identity with God's feelings as a result of the pain of his failed marriage and family life. See on Hos. 3:2.

Hos 2:5 *For their mother has played the prostitute. She who conceived them has done shamefully; for she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink'*- See on Hos. 1:3. Notice how her conception of the children is said to have been "shameful". And in addressing the children, Hosea never calls them 'his' children. The list of things here refer to basic food and clothing, and these were what a husband was bound to provide for his wife. But what Hosea provided for her, she liked to understand as what her lovers had given her. "My lovers" presumably refer to the men with whom Gomer had relationships before she married Hosea, and to whom she returned ("I will go..."). This clearly speaks of how Israel returned to the idols of Egypt which they brought with them through the Red Sea, and which they continued worshipping after their marriage covenant with God at Sinai. The good things Yahweh provided for Israel as the blessings of the covenant, they assumed arose from their idol worship. And they thanked their idols for what Yahweh had in fact provided. All this has strange and biting relevance for us. We too can assume that the idols of careers, investments and hard work are what give us the daily blessings which are ultimately from God and not anything else.

The reference to "the land" in Hos. 1:2 ["a wife of prostitution and children of unfaithfulness; for the land commits great adultery"]. is because the idea was that worshippers slept with cult prostitutes to symbolize how the gods slept with the land and made it fertile. Gomer's literal infidelity was in order to get material benefit from her lovers; she was addicted to both sex and materialism. And this spoke of how Israel literally slept with the cult prostitutes and committed spiritual prostitution against Yahweh, hoping for material blessing from the Baal cults. Hence Hos. 2:5 "I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water". Yet Hosea provided Gomer all she needed, just as Yahweh did for His people.

To "go after" can refer to both going after a partner (as in Ruth 3:10, 'you didn't go after other men'), and to go after idols or a God to worship. Gomer's going after other men represented Israel's going after idols. But Yahweh / Hosea would block her path to this 'going after' (:6), just as God desperately tries to stop men from apostasy

from Him. Possibly Hosea built a literal wall and planted a thorn bush to stop Gomer leaving the property. He didn't shrug and let a bad woman go her miserable way. Neither does God with us. Just as the Valley of Achor was a blocked entrance into the Kingdom that was to be turned into a gate of Hope, so the hope was that the blockage of Gomer / Israel would lead to her entrance into a renewed relationship under a new covenant, with Yahweh / Hosea.

Hos 2:6 *Therefore behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, that she can't find her way*- In Ezekiel, building a wall against Zion God's people refers to the siege of Jerusalem. Hosea planned to put Gomer in a position where she couldn't find her way to her lovers, and then she would return to Hosea. We can assume from the language of going and returning in :5 and :7 that she had left Hosea and was living with them. Hosea planned to make her 'way' there difficult, hedging the path with thorns and building a wall to stop her in her path. "Thorns" were the punishment for Adam and Eve's sin; the consequences of her sin were intended to lead her to repentance. Rather like God tried to stop Balaam on his path to apostacy from Him. And this was all reflected in God's besieging Zion through their invaders; and being hedged in is the language of the Babylonian invasion in Lam. 3:7,9. It was judgment, but it was all intended to bring Israel back to Him. And thus in wrath God remembers mercy; His judgments are not simply statements of anger, but designed to elicit repentance, at least on a national scale.

Hos 2:7 *She will follow after her lovers, but she won't overtake them; and she will seek them, but won't find them. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now'*- See on 2:8. In the same way as Hosea had this plan to get Gomer to "return" to him, so God likewise planned that "afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God" (Hos. 3:5). Both God and Hosea thought that "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence… in their affliction they will seek me early" (Hos. 5:15). But it didn't work out like this. Both God with Israel and Hosea with Gomer ended up pleading with her to return (Hos. 14:1); "and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this" (Hos. 7:10). It was and is a tragedy. In our preaching to Israel, indeed to mankind generally, we are pleading with them to accept this most unusual love. The pain of God, the way He is left as it were standing there as a tragic figure, like Hosea was, of itself inspires us to plead with people all the more passionately. Notice in all this that 'return' is probably an idiom; neither Hosea nor Gomer appear to have physically split up, but both of them had 'left' the other one, as in so many marriages today. The intention was that Gomer would "go and return" to Hosea as Israel and Judah would. But when the opportunity for the restoration came, most of them preferred to stay in the lands of their exile. And this was prefigured in how it seems Gomer didn't in fact fully return to Hosea. The call to return to God was because He was still married to Israel (Jer. 3:14; Is. 54:5).

The image of the unfaithful wife played deeply on male fears of female sexuality. Hosea was a Hebrew male. And they all feared their women in one way- that she might be unfaithful to him. And this was and is the fear of God for our sin, our unfaithfulness. The Jews who first heard Hosea and others would've been led into taking sympathy with the man, agreeing that the punishment for the woman was appropriate to her sin (Jer. 2:30-37; 13:20-27). And yet of course the point was that it was they who were the woman in all this. We've all seen jealous men in relationships, querying every guy who calls their home number, wanting to know whom the wife's

been out with… and on a far higher and altogether not petty level, this is the kind of God with whom we are in relationship. The men of Old Testament times feared their woman's unfaithfulness as it placed his whole honour and status as a man at stake. Hos. 2:7,12 reveals Hosea's hurt and anger that his wife considered other men to be the providers of her food and needs; for this was his honour, to provide for his wife, and for other men not to do that. And so we could say that in our unfaithfulness, in our turning to other supports other than Him… no less that God Himself is at stake. God is at stake. That's how he sees it. That's how much He's risked Himself for us, when He could have never even gotten involved with us. No less than God Himself is at stake. And perhaps I need to stop writing and you need to stop reading for a moment, to reflect on the tragedy of that.

Hos 2:8 *For she did not recognize that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied to her silver and gold, which they used for Baal*- By allowing her lovers to provide her food and clothing, she was insulting her husband Hosea (Hos. 2:7); for these were the basic necessities which a husband provided for his wife. And as God does with us, Hosea gave Gomer far more than that- he multiplied silver and gold to her. The silver and gold were 'hers' in that they were the betrothal gifts demonstrating she was Hosea's. See on 2:13.

That Israel "did not know / recognize" God's love was so painful, for Yahweh and also for Hosea in his unrequited, unappreciated love for Gomer (Hos. 2:8; 5:4; 11:3). God wanted to destroy Israel for this lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6,14).

At the time of this prophecy [under Jeroboam II and Uzziah], there was great prosperity in Israel. Amos prophesied at the same time, and has much to say about the prosperity of the nation and the related rampant materialism. This was all God's undeserved blessing- but the people liked to think this was due to their loyalty to the fertility cults of Baal. Gomer likewise presents as materialistic, sleeping with other men in the hope of material benefit. Perhaps she did because she was a cult prostitute.

Our lack of faith that God really will provide, our seeking of those things from others apart from Him, is a similar insult to Him at the most essential level of His being and our relationship. The parallel in the God / Israel relationship is clear. The Baal cult was a fertility cult. The idea was that by sleeping with the temple prostitutes, Baal would provide fertility in family life and also good harvests and fullness of bread. Yet Yahweh was the giver of bread to Israel (Ex. 16:29 cp. Dt. 8:18; Ps. 136:25; Ps. 146:7). For Israel to trust Baal for these things was a denial of Him.

Hosea did everything for this worthless woman. He gave her "corn, wine, oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they [her lovers] prepared for Baal". He was presumably a wealthy man, and yet gave it all to his wife, who in turn blew it all with her boyfriends on Baal worship. And once he gave it to her, he had given his all; I will suggest on Hos. 3:2 that afterwards he had little else to give her. It's like the billionaire marrying a worthless woman who manipulates him into giving her his money, which she blows down at the casino day by day, and sleeps with the guys she hangs out with down there. But "she did not know that I gave her…" all these things (2:8)- i.e. she didn't appreciate it one bit. And so Hosea decides that he will withdraw this generosity from her, and then, he surmises, "she shall say, I will go and return to my first husband" (2:7). This was Hosea's hope, and in his own mind, he put these words in her mouth. The hopefulness of Hosea was a reflection of the love he had for her. And all this speaks eloquently of the hopefulness of the Almighty Father who thought "surely they will reverence My Son" when He sends Him. And the purposeful

anti-climax of the parable is that no, they don't and won't reverence His Son, and even worse, they kill Him.

Hos 2:9 *Therefore I will take back My grain in its time, and My new wine in its season, and will pluck away My wool and My linen which should have covered her nakedness*- It was a husband's duty to provide food and clothing for his wife. To "take [them] back" is therefore tantamount to a divorce. This is how Hosea and therefore God felt about Gomer / Israel. The historical fulfilment would have been in how droughts and famine plagued the Jews who returned from exile at the time of Haggai. Their apparent faithfulness to the covenant was hypocritical, and in their hearts they were still with their idols- which morphed from literal idols to the idols of hypocrisy and self-righteousness. We see here Hosea's anger as a reflection of God's. The wrath of God, His grief at sin and being rejected, is intertwined with His amazing grace and love. That the extent of God's anger arises from the degree of His love is perhaps reflected in the way the Hebrew words for "lover" and "hater" are so closely related- oheb and oyeb. The gravity and emotional enormity of each 'side' of the total equation, the huge tension of the equilibrium that keeps them in perfect balance in God's character and words, was reflected in the prophets personally; and it will be in us too. The result of this is that the anger of both God and His prophets becomes understandable as more an expression of His and their sorrow, the hurtness of their love, even their weariness.

According to Ex. 21:10,11, a husband should provide for his wife food, clothing and sex. The ancient Near Eastern cultures generally felt that in the case of divorce, a husband could recover everything from his wife, on the basis that they had never become part of her property, as she had not been a faithful wife. This could be the idea behind the Hebrew here: "I will take back the grain to myself", along with "my grain… my must… my wool… my flax" [i.e. material for her clothes]. Gomer had taken these things from her lovers, and thus she declared herself not to be Hosea's wife. Israel had 'taken' these things from the Baal fertility cult, and thus declared themselves not to be Yahweh's wife. And if we trust in our own strength to provide these things- our jobs, salaries, investments, pensions, families- we are effectively denying our relationship with God. He has promised to provide the basics- and this we need to accept in faith.

The linen was to cover her nakedness. Uncovering "nakedness" is used in Gen. 9:22,23 as a euphemism for her genitals. This uncovering of her nakedness is parallel with exposing her lewdness (Hos. 2:10). This will be the shame of the rejected at the day of judgment; and it's why any personal game plan that depends upon looking good to our brethren when we're rotten in God's sight will end in the most acute shame ultimately. But the promises and prophecies and even fantasies of Israel's future glory always occur within a few verses of such outpourings of wrath. The prophets are full of this, and Hosea especially, following the feelings of Hosea toward Gomer.

Hos 2:10 *Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one will deliver her out of My hand*- The idea is that she would be made naked. To strip a woman naked was the punishment for adultery. But this was to be done before or "in the sight of" the lovers, who represented Israel's idols. Idol worshippers made themselves naked before the idols (Ex. 32:25; and it is especially used of the idolatry at the time of Ahaz, 2 Chron. 28:19, in whose time Hosea prophesied, Hos. 1:1). So the punishment was in fact their sin. Sin is its own punishment. Sinners live out their own condemnation by what they do. "No one will deliver her..." refers to the "lovers".

None of the idols in whom Israel trusted could deliver them from Yahweh's judgment and jealous wrath. Or "None shall deliver her" could suggest that previously God had not judged Israel fully for the sake of faithful ancestors like Abraham and David. We see that third parties can affect others' salvation as in Mk. 2:5, but only within limits. Those limits had now been exceeded.

Hos 2:11 *I will also cause all her celebrations to cease: her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her solemn assemblies*- Hosea was prophesying in the context of the reforms of Jeroboam II, which had appeared on the surface to root out Baal worship- but in reality, the people remained deeply committed to it. All this was reflected in the surface level commitment of Gomer to him whilst committing adultery with multiple partners. God through Hosea said that He despised Gomer and Israel's keeping of the Sabbaths, sacrifices and solemn feasts. Gomer and Israel offered sacrifices with flocks and herds (Hos. 5:6). Gomer was an observant Jewess- all part of her deceptive life with Hosea. The feasts ["celebrations"] may refer to the extra feasts which the Jews inaugurated upon their return from Babylon (Zech. 7:5; 8:19). This apparent devotion to Yahweh when they were self-centred, materialistic and self-righteous were abhorrent to God, and the latter half of Isaiah's prophecies make the same point. They were matched by Gomer's apparent devotion to Hosea.

Hos 2:12 *I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, about which she has said, 'These are my wages that my lovers have given me; and I will make them a forest', and the animals of the field shall eat them*- Gomer received vines, fig trees and forests from her lovers. She even became "rich" because of this (Hos. 12:8). All of this was done whilst married to Hosea. His patience and love for her must have been amazing. And even that was and is a poor reflection of the depth of God's love and grace for Israel, and for us too. It's more than sobering, to be in a relationship where we are loved so much more deeply than we love back. It's worrying and challenging, to the point that every fibre in our being should be crying out to love this wonderful God far, far more than we do. Gomer must have lied to Hosea *so* much. And Israel are criticized throughout his prophecy for just the same. "Ephraim compasses me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit… they have spoken lies" (Hos. 11:12; 7:13). In fact, the untruthfulness became compulsive and obsessive: "He daily increases lies" (Hos. 12:1). Gomer would've lied about where she was going, about how she spent Hosea's money, about whose the children were… And the key proof of our spiritual sincerity is whether we are in the core of our beings truthful , both with our God and with ourselves.

Israel offered to the Baals, and claimed the Baals in return gave them their blessings. But in reality, the Baals only took- and gave nothing. Because their blessings were from Yahweh, by grace. So it is with all idolatry. Gomer likewise paid men to sleep with her, but liked to think that what Hosea had given her was in fact the payment from her lovers.

Presumably Gomer went to the idol shrines and was a prostitute. She describes the things she supposedly possessed in her own right as what she received from her lovers. And the idols of Israel are described by Hosea as their lovers, with whom they were unfaithful to Yahweh (Hos. 2:7-15; 8:9; 9:10). It all fits together. Gomer got pregnant with the idol worshippers, she was unfaithful to Hosea by sleeping with them, just as Israel were doing the same to Yahweh by worshipping those idols. No wonder Hosea came to know the heart of God through his experience with Gomer. He

knew, it seems, ahead of time, that Gomer was a wife who was going to become adulterous.

Hos 2:13 *I will visit on her the days of the Baals, to which she burned incense, when she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and went after her lovers*- She wore a nose ring and pendant in order to 'go after' her lovers. And yet these things would've been understood as wedding gifts, akin to a woman today wearing a wedding ring. The awful thing is that she used the very things Hosea had given her as an expression of his unique commitment to her- as a means for adultery. Likewise the silver and gold of her dowry, she used in Baal worship (Hos. 2:8). She wasn't doing it for money or because she was in need; the implication is that she was using the aphrodisiac to excite and sexually stimulate herself rather than her lovers, and was *therefore* going in search of them. We have to ask what wilful stimulations to sin, to unfaithfulness to our Master, we allow into our lives.

And forgot Me, says Yahweh- God's lament through Hosea, "but me she forgot" is an insight into His broken heart. And how many hours of our days slip by with no conscious thought of Him… does He feel the same?

Hos 2:14 *Therefore behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness*- The allusion is to Israel redeemed from Egypt and allured into the wilderness (:15). It was there that Hosea intended to appeal to Gomer, just the two of them together far from anyone else. It was in the desert that God appealed to the redeemed Israel to become His covenant people at Sinai. And it is after baptism that we are taken into the wilderness, and God sets up situations in our lives so that we are fundamentally alone with Him, away from our idols and other influences, in order that we might become solely His. Whether we are located within large families or congregations, this process will be discernible. There in those isolated situations, God wishes to speak tenderly, to our hearts.

"Allure" can as well mean "persuade". There was no deception implied, just a desperate attempt at persuasion. And here we have another insight into just how proactive God actually is. He again presents as desperate for relationship.

And speak tenderly to her- "Speak tenderly to her" is Heb. 'to her heart'. This is an idiom elsewhere used about seeking to win the heart of a woman by persuasive words (Gen. 34:3; Ruth 2:13; Jud. 19:3); Hosea dreamt of winning Gomer back to him by his words. This has a direct equivalent in the restoration context- for the same term is used in Is. 40:2, where God through the prophets seeks to speak to the heart of Zion and persuade her to return from Babylon to Him in Jerusalem and enjoy the married life of His Kingdom. And yet like Gomer, they either didn't want to hear, or responded on a merely surface level.

Hos 2:15 *I will give her vineyards from there*- From the desert, Israel entered immediately into the vineyard region of Israel. Hence "from there", the desert, was she to be given vineyards. And they would be "her vineyards", not "my vineyards", reflecting how we are genuinely given blessing from God which becomes legitimately ours. Hosea was perhaps wealthy, and had given Gomer vineyards as part of the marriage contract. Just as God gave the land and its fruitfulness to Israel. He bankrupted himself in his love for this woman, despite knowing her nature and history as a whore. It recalls the Father's love in giving all to the prodigal son, surely knowing his likely abuse of it all.

And the valley of Achor for a door of hope- The valley of Achor was the symbol of Israel's unfaithfulness to God and their punishment for coveting Babylonian idolatry. That exactly fits the context of the returned exiles, who brought Babylonian

idolatry with them. See on :22. But the fantasy was that at the point of Israel's most shameful weakness, the point where they had been barred from entering the Kingdom because of Achan and his Babylonian idolatry- there all would be reversed, and that weakness and shame would in fact become a "door" into the Hope of Israel, the reestablished Kingdom of God. And so God uses the worst human failure, and attempts to make it a door of entrance to the sure Hope.

And she will respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt- Israel became God's covenant wife at Sinai. Just as Hosea fantasized about having a second marriage ceremony with Gomer, so God had the hope that Israel would again enter covenant with Him as they had done at Sinai. But they would not, and the new covenant is now sealed with every believing Christian heart.

Hosea speaks of how Yahweh is still Israel's God from the land of Egypt (Hos. 12:9,13; 13:4). There, Yahweh had revealed Himself as their "I am", who would always be "I will be" for them (Ex. 3:14; 6:7). But He has stated in wrath that "I am not I AM for you" (Hos. 1:9). But on the other hand, He assures them that He is still just as much "I am" for them. In the Hosea-Gomer drama, Hosea remembered Gomer's apparent love for him when they first met, just as Yahweh remembered Israel's apparent love for Him when they left Egypt ["she will respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" Hos. 2:15]. The truth was, both Israel and Gomer were unfaithful to their amazing lover even then. Yahweh like Hosea could never actually tear Himself away from being who He essentially was- the One who was "I am" and "I always will be" for His people.

Hos 2:16 *It will be in that day, says Yahweh, that you will call Me 'my husband', and no longer call Me 'my master'*- "My master / owner / possessor", or, 'Baal'. Gomer called Yahweh 'Baal'- in other words, she thought that by worshipping Baal she was in fact worshipping Yahweh. This was how Israel justified their Baal worship, reasoning that actually they had never left Yahweh, they still kept His feasts and sacrifices, but they worshipped Him through their Baal worship. This implies that Israel even called Yahweh "my Baal". And so when Gomer participated in these fertility rituals, she was living out the very picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to their God. Indeed, Gomer may have been a cult prostitute. There is strong archaeological evidence for the worship of Yahweh as Baal, just as today we can seek to worship God through materialism and modern idolatry. The tendency to mix Yahweh worship with Baal worship was very strong, and is the abiding essential temptation to all God's people. The inscriptions show that the Israelites liked to believe that Yahweh had a consort, Asherah, and worship of the asherah was therefore Yahweh worship. "The inscriptions recount a blessing on different individuals "by Yahweh of Samaria and by his Asherah". Moreover, from a pillar in a burial tomb near Khirbet el-Qom is an inscription, "May Uriyahu be blessed by Yahweh, my guardian and his Asherah". All this was reflected in how Gomer had professed genuine loyalty to Hosea whilst enjoying being a cult prostitute.

In Hos. 2:16-23 we appear to have a fantasy of Hosea about his family. After nostalgic dreaming about the early days of their relationship, Hosea fantasizes about once again wooing Gomer, becoming betrothed to her, marrying her in some sort of outdoors wedding ceremony in which the animals and physical creation witness the vows and enter the joy, entering a new covenant with her, and renaming their children from 'Not my people' to 'My people'. As the children were to be renamed, Lo-ammi

becoming Ammi, so the valley of Achor would become a door of hope (Hos. 2:15), and Jezreel, scene of Israel's rebellions, would become the place of joyful reconciliation between God and His people. The valley of Achor had previously been a block to Israel's entry to the land; now it becomes the entrance to it. In that awful place, God wanted to stage an outdoor wedding ceremony with His re-married people. Is. 65:10 mentions Achor as a place of special blessing in the Kingdom of God on earth- it's as if God's grace rejoices in inverting things, pouring out His richest blessing upon the places of our darkest failures. And we in daily life, in the interactions we have with others, are asked to reflect this same kind of grace.

This fantasy was and is the fantasy of God for His people. For doesn't love involve an element of fantasy, imagination, wild hope? If God loves His people with passion, is it so inappropriate that He should have such fantasy about them? And this God is our God! Although He may appear silent, our response to the new covenant must give Him great joy, although this doesn't cancel out the sorrow and tragedy of all His other rejected love. It makes me for one want to preach the harder to persuade men and women of His love. Let's remember that the events in Hosea's life, according to the information in Hos. 1:1, occurred over a span of at least 30, and perhaps even 50 years. His love for Gomer was the love of a lifetime, the hope and pain of a lifetime. And this in its turn reflects the long term love of the eternal God for His people. Hosea's fantasy for Gomer was unbounded. He fantasized of how when she returned to him with all her heart, with the children renamed, actually the whole of creation would join with him and her in some sort of ceremony of renewal (Hos. 2:16-23). The heavens would echo back the earth's joy. The wonderful thing is that this will happen when finally the Lord Jesus returns and Israel returns to their God. His fantasy was also God's. And God's fantasy for His people will in the end come true. And yet the whole language of Israel's rejection and then a *new* covenant being made between God and her is in essence marriage language.

Hos 2:17 *For I will take away the names of the Baals out of her mouth, and they will no longer be mentioned by name*- The Baals of our day are sin in all forms; and such things are "not to be named amongst us" now (Eph. 5:3). God here promises to stop Israel serving Baal. This suggests a psychological miracle- the work of the Spirit directly on human hearts, and the new covenant we too are in promises the same- the gift of a new heart and spirit, and a desire for God in truth. "Take away" is the same Hebrew word in :2 where Israel are asked to "put away" their adulteries. Their adultery was with the Baals. And now God says that He will even do this for them, such is His desire to have them. This is the power of the Spirit in the new covenant.

The plural "Baals" is repeated elsewhere in Hosea. Israel weren't going after just one other god. There were various Baals, just as Gomer had many lovers rather than just one lover with whom she had an affair. Her sexual addiction therefore represents Israel's psychological obsession with having many gods. That there is only one true God was accepted in theory by them- only as much as Gomer claimed to be the wife of only one man. We see here how hard it was to believe in just one God, and that difficulty is perhaps reflected to this day in how man wishes to turn the one true God into a trinity.

Hos 2:18 *In that day I will make a covenant for them with the animals of the field, and*

with the birds of the sky, and with the creeping things of the ground. I will break the bow, the sword, and the battle out of the land, and will make them lie down safely- This covenant with the animals recalls the covenant in Eden and also with the earth / *eretz* after the flood. Judgment would come, but the faithful Israel were to have part in a wider covenant with all creation, looking forward to the restoration of their Kingdom being the re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth under Messiah. Dwelling safely without war and in harmony with the natural creation, who would also be blessed, is also the language of the blessings for obedience to the old covenant detailed in Lev. 26 and Dt. 28. I suggested on :17 that God's intention was to make them obedient, to make them blessed, to take away sin from them. All that is within us cries out that they themselves had to be obedient, and then get the blessings. But God's love goes even beyond that; measure for measure and crime and punishment is all subsumed beneath the power of His saving grace.

God wanted to make a new covenant with them, and this involved a new creation- hence the allusions to the Genesis creation here. The animals here are mentioned in the order of their creation in Gen. 1. As Hosea loved Gomer but so wished she would be different in some ways, so God was and is prepared to re-create His beloved- if they are willing. All they have to do is say yes. His Spirit will do the rest. Animals, birds, creeping things all repeats the order of the creation found in Gen. 1:30 "To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth". God had in view a new creation to go along with His redeemed, permanently faithful people; after the uncreation discussed on Hos. 4:3. And this is a theme of the new covenant. The new covenant offered to Gomer and to Israel, seeing they had broken the first one, broken it in the sense of rendering it broken in pieces, is the new covenant we have accepted. We memorialize it in the cup of the new covenant. And we have accepted it because Israel, as Gomer, refused it.

Hos 2:19 *I will betroth you to Me forever. Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion-* On the level of Hosea and Gomer, this reflects Hosea's fantasy of remarrying Gomer, starting over, with him reflecting all the characteristics of God's Name which are declared here. On the higher level of God and Israel, it speaks of the articulation of God's deepest character in bringing Israel again into covenant with Him. The penalty for adultery was death under the old covenant. So we have here implied a new covenant, of grace, and yet within that grace, there was "justice". This is exactly the theme of Paul in Romans 1-8. Israel were about to be destroyed as they had been unfaithful to the covenant; but Yahweh is offering them a new covenant, and the new covenant is an eternal covenant- 'betrothal forever'. The reference to blessing like "the sand of the sea" in Hos. 1:10 alludes both to the promises to Abraham [which were the basis of the new covenant] and to common marriage blessings. The wife was wished fertility like the sand of the sea. So it is the new covenant which is offered to Israel- which Paul says is based on the promises to Abraham rather than the law given on Sinai.

But we must note that the idea of remarrying a once unfaithful wife is a direct allusion to Dt. 24:4: "Her former husband who sent her away may not take her again to be his wife after she is defiled, for that is abomination before Yahweh". Grace was overriding law. Both Yahweh and Hosea were doing, or offering to do, what was abomination to them and what would make them a laughing stock amongst men. Just as Hosea was asked to marry a whore instead of stoning her to death.

Hos 2:20 *I will even betroth you to Me in faithfulness; and you shall know Yahweh-* The faithfulness of God is here emphasized apart from the other characteristics which comprise His Name (:19). Gomer had been unfaithful, and yet Hosea, reflecting God's feelings toward Israel, assured her of his utter faithfulness. "You shall know Yahweh" uses 'knowing' in the Hebraic sense of relationship. Through experiencing His utter grace toward their unfaithfulness, they would know Him. And this is the amazing paradox which continues to this day; through serious failure we come to know Him in spirit and truth. And that knowledge is quite separate to the academic, theological truth which is thought by many to be so important- until they face up to their own sins and the wonder of God's grace. The Hebrew idea of "faithfulness" is that of truth; the deepest truth is not a set of theological propositions, however accurate and faithful to the Biblical text; but rather the experience of God's eternal faithfulness to His covenant to us, and His immense desire to make the relationship work.

The idea was that as the ten tribes were about to go into captivity, Yahweh through Hosea was desperately offering them the chance to remarry Him and enter the new covenant. But they refused, as did Gomer to Hosea.

Hos 2:21 *It will happen in that day, I will respond, says Yahweh, I will respond to the heavens, and they will echo down to the earth-* I suggested on :16 that Hosea has been fantasizing about an outdoor remarriage ceremony with Gomer in which even the natural creation gets involved, but the emphasis is now upon God. He will "respond" to the marriage vows with a voice so mighty that it reaches from earth to heaven, and echoes back to earth. That was how Hosea felt he would cry out in response to the "I do!" of a marriage covenant. And this is the force of God's word to us- it is a powerful voice, louder than that heard at Sinai, which endlessly assures us of His "I do!" toward us. God places Himself at this point as if on earth; for His voice uttered on earth ascends even to Heaven and then echoes back to earth. This is how closely identified God is with us. The whole idea of course recalls the Sinai covenant, but as we read in Heb. 12, the new covenant involves a voice more powerful even than that. "Respond" is the same word used in Ex. 19:8,19 of how God "answered" the people and they "answered" to Him. Heb. 12 interprets the voice associated with the new covenant with the word made flesh in the blood of God's Son.

Hos 2:22 *And the earth will respond to the grain, and the new wine, and the oil-*

These were the very things mentioned in :8 "she did not recognize that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil". They were the things guaranteed to a wife by a husband. Hosea had provided them for Gomer but she had spurned them and sought them from her lovers. But now Hosea fantasizes about a remarriage, and again giving these things to Gomer; she represents Israel, referred to as the earth or land because as explained on Hos. 1:2, the land was seen as the recipient of the blessings of either Yahweh or Baal. So at the time when Israel were to go to their destruction, God through Hosea is appealing for them to enter a new covenant with Him, as Hosea offered Gomer a remarriage and a new covenant and marriage ceremony.

Corn, new wine and oil are the three things consistently associated with blessings for obedience to the old covenant (Dt. 7:13; 11:14; 28:51; 33:28). But these blessings are brought upon Israel simply in response to the returned echo of God's great cry of solemn fidelity to Israel. "The earth", the *eretz* promised to Abraham, often stands for the people of that land, God's covenant people. They will respond to the echo of God's

word of covenant fidelity, His "I do!" toward Israel (see on :21). And this was Hosea's hope, that Gomer would respond to His gracious offer of remarriage to her, and the blessings he would give her despite her unfaithfulness.

And they will respond to Jezreel- Jezreel, the scene of Israel's judgment by her Divinely sent invaders, would be the scene of blessings for obedience, just because God wanted to give those blessings. In the same way, the valley of Achor, scene of Israel's apostacy and preference for Babylon over Canaan, was to be transformed into a door of hope; see on :15.

Hos 2:23 *I will sow her to Me in the earth; and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy*- "Jezreel" means 'the sowing of Yah'. Sowing implies fruit, spiritual fruit; and the return of the exiles to their land was intended to be the basis of their spiritual fruit, filling the face of the earth with it (Is. 27:6). But this sowing in the earth by Yahweh, 'Jezreel', was to arise out of their judgment at Jezreel. And so out of judgment for sin comes spiritual fruit. That was God's intention, just as Hosea's intended outcome from the open air remarriage ceremony he envisaged was "fruit", children by Gomer, rather than the children she had had by her adulterous liaisons. But this intention didn't work out for Hosea, and it only did for God by redefining "Israel", as Paul explains in Romans.

The intention was that Israel and Judah would return from captivity and be sown in the land ["earth"], and produce fruit. This is an image of the restoration also found in Jeremiah. God's plan and passion for the restoration was reflected in Hosea's fantasy about Gomer's return to him with all her heart.

And I will tell those who were not My people, 'You are My people;' and they will say, 'You are my God!'- Through it all, Hosea was hopeful. He looked and hoped for a day when he could say to Gomer's children: "You are my people". If Gomer came back to him truly, then he longed to call those children of adultery his very own children. The allusion here is again to wedding vows; as the woman accepted her husband as her lord, so Israel were to accept God as their God; and "You are my wife" became for God "You are My people". This was God's intention for Israel as it was Hosea's for Gomer, but the tragedy is that such love, such huge heart for the beloved, was not appreciated nor ultimately accepted. It is for us, to whom God has now turned, to resolutely vow to do all we can to respond to it and be His faithful woman to the end.

HOSEA CHAPTER 3

Hos 3:1 *Yahweh said to me, Go again*- This could refer to God's relationship with Judah. But I take this to mean that God was telling Hosea to as it were re-marry Gomer, to try to start the marital relationship over again, just as some couples desire to have a 're-marriage' after a period of difficulty between them. Notice how Hosea was commanded to "love" her. We may think that love is something spontaneous, that can't be 'commanded'. But the essence of love, even the love that binds a marriage together, is the love that is an act of the will rather than pure emotion. Hosea's offer to Gomer to start over and as it were re-marry was made when she was "yet an adulteress". He didn't say 'If you stop whoring around, then we can maybe have some sort of re-marriage'. His very offer of the re-marriage was made whilst she was still doing it, such was his love and hope for her, according to the principle that the grace

of God leads to repentance. And God does the very same with us, day by day, if only we will perceive it. He reveals His amazing love and grace when we are furthest from Him, in order to bring us back to Him. And this must set the pattern for the way in which we deal with those who sin against us, in things great or small, in family life, in church life, in the workplace…

Note that when God tells Hosea to "go again" and marry this woman, He uses 'Yahweh' about Himself, rather than speaking in the first person: "Go yet, love a woman… according to the love of Yahweh toward the children of Israel" (Hos. 3:1). Perhaps this was in order to demonstrate the grace and passionate love so inherent within God's very Name.

"Again" translates a Hebrew word elsewhere translated "all life long" (Gen. 48:15 "the God who fed me all my life long"), and can carry the idea of 'keep on repeatedly'. We noted on Hos. 1:1 that Hosea was married to Gomer over a long life time. His love for her "all life long", "again and again" forgiving and hoping for her to respond to his love... was reflective of God's amazing, abiding and enduring love for His people. The same word is used of how Yahweh and Hosea felt that "I will no more [not continually] have mercy" upon Gomer / Israel. But now they both vow to "more", more and more, again and again, love and have mercy on her.

Hos. 2 has offered Gomer / Israel a remarriage under a new covenant. One option worth considering is that Hos. 3 describes what happened, as Hosea forced this through- despite Gomer not really wanting it. Just as God did with His people.

Love a woman loved by another, and an adulteress, even as Yahweh loves the children of Israel- It's hard to understand what was happening in Hos. 3:1- it appears Hosea attempted to force through to realization his fantasy about re-marrying Gomer and starting over, and so he redeemed her again to himself for marriage. But still she went astray from him. Another suggestion is that Hos. 3:1 actually speaks of a second wife, who according to the analogy of Ez. 23, might have represented Judah. In this case we see the extreme love of Hosea, and God; having gone through all that heart break over Gomer, he was still so full of love that he was prepared to risk all yet again in another relationship. The reference to "Israel" rather than "Judah" could be problematic for this interpretation, but it was always God's intention that the community restored from Babylon would include both Judah and Israel.

Here for all time we see "love" portrayed as an act of the will and not the mere emotion of in-loveness. Hosea was commanded to go and love a woman, despite his deeply painful disappointment with Gomer. This challenge of "love" remains, no matter how we interpret the woman in view- as a second woman, or again Gomer. We note the contrast with Hos. 1:2: "Go and take a woman" now becomes "go again and *love* a woman". Hosea was being led further in his own understanding of love. We also see reflected here how God loves people as they are, not because of their loveliness or love worthiness. But, as with Hosea, in hope, desperate hope, that they will respond to that love and be transformed towards Him.

"I know Ephraim" (Hos. 5:3), but Ephraim wouldn't know Yahweh, "they do not know Yahweh" (Hos. 5:4). It's just as Hosea was told to love a woman who was in love with another man (Hos. 3:1,2). God loved them, He wanted to know them, to experience intimate relationship- but they looked elsewhere for love and intimacy, just as Gomer did.

Though they turn to other gods- This is the amazing thing. As Hosea was eager to push through his fantasy of remarriage with Gomer even though she was impenitent,

so God too had the same kind of love. Even though Israel were worshipping other gods, He wanted them to re-enter covenant with Him. Repentance and moral purity are of course critical to the human response to God. But His grace is such that He wishes to save His people and have relationship with them even whilst they are yet in their sins. This is the powerful lesson we take away from Hosea. Many troubled marriages feature an affair and then an agreement to start over- and yet the adulterer is still continuing their liasons even then. Truly God's love for Israel enables Him to enter into human situations so completely. The allusion is to "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3). This was at the very core foundation of the covenant. The same term "look / turn to other gods" is used frequently in the law. To do so was to break the covenant: "They will turn unto other gods... and provoke Me and break My covenant" (Dt. 31:20). Yahweh and Hosea made the choice to love a woman / people who provoked Him, and who were breaking the marriage covenant even at the point of betrothal. Just as Hosea had been commanded to marry a prostitute. To love one who provokes you... again shows that "love" is an absolute act of the will.

And love cakes of raisins- This reflects Israel's mixture of Yahweh worship with Baal worship. According to 2 Sam. 6:19 ("He distributed to all the people, even throughout the whole multitude of Israel, both to men and women, to each one a portion of bread, dates and raisins"), these cakes appear to have been part of the legitimate worship of Yahweh- and yet in Song 2:5 ("Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am faint with love") they are referred to as an aphrodisiac. There was a heady mix of Yahweh worship with participation in the sexual rituals of the Baal cult. It was this mixture which was so abhorrent to God- and time and again, in essence, we likewise mix flesh and spirit. A brother may express the most awful hatred and spite in 'upholding the faith' against one whom he perceives as apostate- and thus show the same mixture of flesh and spirit. A sister may indulge in gossip, kidding herself it's all for the cause of Christian love and concern… and the examples multiply, hour by hour, in daily Christian experience. We see it again in Hos. 3:4. The word for "cakes" refers to the *dibla*, the raisin cakes used in the Baal cult, from which the word Diblaim comes, the father of Gomer. Hosea knowingly married a temple prostitute, just as God married Israel, in the hope that their intense love and covenant relationship would reform her and make her responsive to their love.

Raisin cakes can be understood also as simply delicacies. And so many commit prostitution against the Lord for the sake of seeking the luxury life now. We must note the contrast between the "love of Yahweh" and the way the object of that love was loving materialism and idols. Loving someone who loves someone else, who doesn't respond to your love... is love. This is God's love to us, to Israel, to the world. And we are asked to reflect that love, as Hosea was.

Hos 3:2 *So I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley*- The way Hosea redeems his wife, partly in cash and partly in kind, suggests he now wasn't wealthy. He had given her all his wealth (see on Hos. 2:8,9). Now he gave absolutely all he could scrape together for that worthless woman. And this was the cost to God, even His feelings, in redeeming His people- ultimately, through the blood of His own Son. And think of how Hosea accepts the children Gomer produced as his children- when they were the children of her whoredom. But it's also possible to argue that he redeemed her for the proposed second marriage from one of her lovers. But the price asked was very low, half the price of a slave (30 pieces of silver, Ex. 21:32), and he made up the rest with barley- the feed of animals,

the cheapest grain. Or threw in just a bit extra. This could indeed reflect his poverty, having like God given his all for this worthless woman. Or it could be that she was now reduced to a sex slave, and not a very valuable one at that, worth only half the stipulated price for a slave, with some barley thrown in on top. Judah were redeemed from servitude in Babylon, and were weak, unattractive servants anyway. But it was God's intention, and potentially possible, for them to remarry Him and re-establish Israel's Kingdom, filling the face of the earth with the resultant fruit of that grace (Is. 27:6).

It has been suggested that "a homer and a half of barley" means '15 shekels of silver paid in barley'. This plus 15 shekels of silver would total 30 shekels, the price of a slave (Ex. 21:32). In this case, the woman to be loved, redeemed and married would be a slave. Hosea was prophesying as Israel were about to go into captivity in Assyria, and as Isaiah was threatening Judah with captivity in Babylon. The idea would then be that Hosea's desperate love for this unworthy woman / wife, giving all he had left, spoke of God's extreme love and grace in redeeming His people from the slavery of captivity. He bankrupted Himself... the God of the universe. Just as God as it were "died" in Israel's death. "A half-homer" is LXX "a bottle of wine". This would again speak of how hard pushed Hosea was to raise the price. And it would speak of our redemption through the wine / blood of the new covenant. For Hosea was offering her a new covenant, seeing she had broken the old marriage covenant.

"For fifteen pieces of silver" is the numerical equivalent of "Nissan". This was the day after Passover when Israel were redeemed from Egypt.

Hos 3:3 *I said to her, You shall stay with me many days. You shall not play the prostitute, and you shall not be with any other man. I will also be so toward you*- The allusion is clearly to “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). After the second marriage, Hosea's idea was that they would both abstain from sexual relationships for a period. She was not to be a prostitute, nor [additionally] have relationships with men. He too would be focused solely upon her despite their lack of intimate relationship. But Gomer was still unfaithful. This period may speak of the 70 years of captivity in Babylon, where Judah were still God's people, but there was a period of abstaining from intimate relationship whilst they repented and reflected. But God's total focus was to be upon them, just as it is upon us. This amazing and unique, exclusive focus of God, king of the cosmos, upon a few mixed up people on this tiny planet... is love and grace indeed.

The idea is that Hosea purchased this woman to be his wife- but then she has to enter a period of isolation, to reflect on her sins and demonstrate her commitment and response to her redemption. And then the marriage can begin (:5). This in a way is what we are going through, redeemed but still in some kind of isolation from our redeemer, until the marriage begins at the Lord's return. In the context of Judah, this 'sitting down' in this strange isolation (:4) would refer to Judah's sitting down in exile in Babylon (Lam. 1:1; 2:10; Ps. 137:1). "You shall..." isn't so much prediction as command. But Judah and Israel went into captivity "many days" (:4) without the temple and with no king- but they didn't become faithful to Yahweh, they were not purged from their idolatry. Indeed they assimilated with the pagan world of their captors. Likewise, Hosea's plan for Gomer just didn't work either. Even God's choosing of the Gentiles as a faithful bride... didn't work much better. For Paul in Romans, Hebrews and 1 Corinthians is clear that the Gentile bride is not necessarily much better than the Israelite one had been. To the point that we cannot say "We are better than them". The church too were presented as a chaste virgin to the Lord, but

prostituted themselves. To the point that some interpretations conclude that the whore of Revelation is both Israel / Jerusalem, and the prostituted, unfaithful church / Zion. Or we could say that the defiled bride of Christ is presented in terms of unfaithful Israel- a whore. It's not that God as it were struck lucky in His second marriage. You only have to enquire how many Christian converts remain faithful to the end of their days... You only have to think back over all those you know who were once baptized into the Lord, who were His betrothed virgin, who are now long gone back into the world. The ministry of the prophets to Israel, Paul and Peter's desperate appeals to the corrupted church, our appeals... don't work, at least not on any mass level. Only a few respond, a remnant of the remnant. Just as Gomer never really repented and returned.

We see here the simple fact that we are to be only for God, and He is also only for us. He has no other people out there somewhere. We are uniquely His. That the King of the cosmos should have nobody else but us... in infinite space... is a marvel. If we go wrong or are unfaithful to Him, He has nobody else. This is why He is so passionate about our response to Him.

Hos 3:4 *For the children of Israel shall live many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice*- I suggested on :3 that the "many days" may refer to the 70 years of captivity. They had no princes, for they were slain and the line of Zedekiah brought to an end (Ez. 21:25-27); and they could not offer sacrifice as the temple was in ruins. "Live" is the usual word for 'sitting down', referring to Judah's sitting down in exile in Babylon (Lam. 1:1; 2:10; Ps. 137:1). However this didn't really work, as they became paganic in Babylon and most didn't want to return to the land and they rejected the new covenant offered (:5). Likewise Hosea's second woman it seems rejected this plan.

"Sacrifice" is LXX "altar". These are the pagan altars and pillars of Hos. 10:1, which Israel made in order to get fertility blessings from Baal. But this is a command, a hope, rather than a prediction. Because in captivity, both Judah and Israel still worshipped local pagan deities. LXX “Without a sacrifice, without an altar, without a priesthood, and without oracles”, i.e. the urim and thummim. This clearly describes how Israel and Judah would be in captivity, but the plan still didn't work. For they turned to the idols of their captors.

"King and princes" are seen as responsible for the state of Judah's downfall. God laments that He has given them a king and princes (Hos. 13:10); they were addicted to alcohol (Hos. 7:3). And so Yahweh says they are to abide many days without a king and princes, so that they might learn faithfulness to Him (Hos. 3:4). He gave them a king and princes, knowing what this would lead to. Unfaithfulness to Him. But we see here how in the end, God gives man what he wants, as He did to the prodigal son. The issue is desiring the right things- His Kingdom and His righteousness.

And without sacred stone, and without ephod or idols- As noted on :1, the people were using “cult pillars… ephods” in their Baal worship. The patriarchs set up pillars in faith; and an ephod was part of Yahweh worship. But yet again, the same external things were used in a wrong context with wrong motives. Excavations of the Elephantine community reveal that the Jews mixed Yahweh and Baal worship to such an extent that they believed that Yahweh , like Baal, had a consort called Anat. Inscriptions from Quntillet Ajrud show the names Yahweh and Baal mixed together, including one which appears to speak of “Yahweh and his asherah”. Ez. 16:21 and Ez. 23:39 are quite specific about this anyway- Israel offered sacrifice to idols in Yahweh’s own temple. The lack of ephod may mean that Yahweh would not be in

communication with them, just as Hosea was going to leave Gomer in silence but within His care, in order to reflect upon herself and her relationship with Him. We recall that Gideon's ephod became an idol for Israel, and they prostituted themselves to it. It could be that Yahweh's ephod had been turned into a pagan object, whereby Israel thought they could worship Yahweh through worshipping idols. And this is the age old temptation for God's people.

Hos 3:5 *Afterward the children of Israel shall return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king, and shall come with trembling to Yahweh and to His blessings in the last days*- This "return" referred initially to the potential for "Israel", Judah and the remnant of the ten tribes, to together return from captivity and re-establish God's Kingdom in Israel under a Messianic king in the line of David, trembling in repentance, and receiving Divine blessings. See on :3,4. It reflected Hosea's plan that his lavishing of grace upon Gomer would lead her to return to him. But this didn't happen as intended. God has set objectives in history, but He doesn't force their fulfilment. Finally all this shall come true, in the coming of a new Israel to Zion in repentance and acceptance of the Lord Jesus, the Messianic seed of David- "in the last days".

Yahweh's hope was that His people would finally "seek Yahweh their God" with "trembling" (Hos. 3:5). This was Hosea's fantasy for Gomer; as in Hos. 2:7, his hope was that Gomer would "seek" her lovers and not find them, and return to him. This was God's hope for Israel too; "in their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hos. 5:15). But they didn't. But it can happen- people "seek" the wrong things and give up, and then "seek" Yahweh. But sadly, most people, like Gomer, like Israel, waste their lives "seeking" the end of a rainbow and never get there.

"David their king" is the language of the Messianic ruler in the line of David who could have arisen had Judah really returned from exile, both to their God and to their land (Jer. 30:9; 33:15-21; Ez. 37:24-26). The hope was that the great effort to redeem Judah, as shown by Hosea loving his second unfaithful wife and giving all he had for her, would elicit a "return" to God and His land. But it didn't, overall. All so tragic.

For those who really 'got it', the marvel of God's grace would lead them to come trembling to Him (Hos. 3:5). He has this hope in view also in Hos. 11:11 "They shall come trembling out of Egypt". Jer. 33:9 hopes that at the restoration, they "shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure to [Zion]". The awesome grace would make men tremble as they accepted it, and so it should be with us. Likewise Is. 60:5 "Then you shall see and be radiant, and your heart shall thrill [s.w. "tremble"] and be enlarged". Then we will have the opening of mind to perceive how great is His grace, something which we sense but only see from far in this life. Truly "I see from far / They beauteous light". But we will only appreciate that grace to the extent of trembling, if we first accept our deep guilt and whoredom against the God of all grace and love.

HOSEA CHAPTER 4

Hos 4:1 *Hear the word of Yahweh, you children of Israel; for Yahweh has a charge against the inhabitants of the land*- Hosea 4 described a "charge" or law suit (Hos. 4:1 Heb.) between God and the inhabitants of the land- and it's over lack of integrity, mercy and knowledge of God. This parallels Hosea's projected divorce with Gomer. Verse 4 and Hos. 5:1 continues the legal language. These things are paralleled in the law suit with murder, stealing and adultery- things which most people would

shrug at are considered by Him to be criminal matters. At the end of chapter 3 we find God hopeful that His relationship with Israel might be re-established at the return from exile. But here, the tone changes. However it could be that we have here a prophecy from earlier in Hosea's ministry, where he explains why Israel is to be judged.

Indeed there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land- These are the very things we have read of in Hos. 2. As noted on Hos. 2:20, the knowledge of God meant relationship with Him, based upon repentance and being given God's grace. This was the ultimate "truth". Israel didn't want this, and yet God wanted to give it to them anyway, just as Hosea so loved Gomer that he wanted by all means to force through the restored relationship with her, just as God wanted the restored community of exiles to be His. The lack of truth reflects Gomer's deep dishonesty with Hosea; the "lying" (deceit) of :2. The key to understanding Hosea 4-14 is perceiving that God's feelings are reflected in Hosea's towards Gomer due to the situation in Hos. 1-3. We have a unique window onto the feelings of Yahweh Himself towards His people.

Hos 4:2 *There is cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break boundaries, and bloodshed causes bloodshed*- There is a downward spiral in sin, both on an individual and communal level. It is evident on the communal level, where "bloodshed causes bloodshed". "Break boundaries" translates a word meaning literally "to increase". It is used in :10; they had thought that they had increased, but all such human gain is in fact not any gain, and this is even perceived by those who so seek it.

The allusion in Hos. 4:2; 6:9; 7:1,4 is clearly to breaking of the ten commandments. These formed the basis of the old covenant. They had broken that covenant by doing these things, just as Gomer had. But the point was that a new covenant was being proposed to Gomer / Israel, seeing they had broken the old covenant- not simply in the sense of disobeying its terms, but thereby they had broken that covenant. It was no more. Just as Gomer's adultery had broken the marriage.

Hos 4:3 *Therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells therein will waste away. All living things in her, even the animals of the field and the birds of the sky; yes, the fish of the sea also die*- This repeats the language of other prophets, especially Isaiah, about the calamity to befall Judah in order to appeal for her repentance (Is. 19:5,8; 24:4; Joel 1:10,12). The words and language is so similar. But famine and drought were God's way of not simply punishing His people for their sins, but appealing for their repentance; just as Hosea in Hos. 2 had thought of punishing Gomer so that she repented. And there was, as always, collateral damage due to sin; the physical creation would suffer. For "the land" is here paralleled with God's people upon it. The 'mourning' of the land was a hint at God's hope that they would mourn in repentance, just as Hosea hoped of Gomer.

We are reading here of a de-creation, alluding clearly to the order in Gen. 1:30: "To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky". The order of creation was fish, birds, beasts of the field and people- but that is reversed here. Yet this was in order for a new creation when Gomer / Israel entered the new covenant offered to them, as discussed on Hos. 2:18.

Hos 4:4 *Yet let no man bring a case, neither let any man accuse; for Your people are like those who bring charges against a priest*- As noted on :1, God has brought a legal case against Israel. But the tendency of Israel was to argue back against God, as the

returned exiles did: "Wherein have we despised Your Name... polluted You?" (Mal. 1:6,7). The parallel was in Gomer insisting to Hosea that she'd done nothing wrong. And actually he was the one at fault. Bringing charges against a priest is an allusion to Dt. 17:12, where the sin of presumption is defined as arguing back against the judgment of God's priest. To argue back against God's judgments was effectively to put God in the dock and condemn Him. Paul uses exactly this concept in Romans, perhaps picked up from Hosea 4, in saying that if we seek to justify ourselves when in court with God, we are putting God in the dock; see on Rom. 3:4 ["let God be found true, but every man a liar. As it is written: You must be justified in Your words and must prevail when You come before judgment"]. Hosea wished his audience to accept that they had sinned and were in the dock before God; to not accept this was the sin of presumption. And doubtless he had lived all this out in discussions with Gomer, who endlessly justified her conscienceless behaviour. And this is what we are doing if we refuse to recognize our sin, or shrug it off with excuses.

Hos 4:5 *You will stumble in the day, and the prophet will also stumble with you in the night*- This stumbling spoke of what was to happen at the invasions of Assyria and Babylon (Is. 8:15); but they had spiritually "stumbled in [lack of] justice" (Is. 28:7), and so their judgment was but a living out of their own attitudes and behaviour. Sin is its own judgment, and in that sense "we make the answer now", constantly standing before the judgment throne of God in daily life. Stumbling at noonday was what the returned exiles did (Is. 59:10) because they "had no eyes", no spiritual vision. The prophet who also stumbles with them could refer to false prophets. But as Hosea spoke these words to his audiences in Israel and Judah, he was "the prophet". He is thereby professing his unity with them, just as both God and himself were united with their unfaithful wives even in their fall. Such was their love.

Stumbling is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:37). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

And I will destroy your mother- This initially reflects Hosea's anger with Gomer's children, whom she had apparently born to him, when they were the children conceived in her adultery. Hosea had thoughts of deep anger against Gomer, telling her / his children that he would "destroy" their mother. Just as in Hos. 2 Hosea angrily says he will strip Gomer naked and kill her in the wilderness. But then his passionate love for her gets the better of him; and this all reflected the feelings of God for Israel, and His feelings for us who are sinners and unfaithful to the covenant. Jerusalem was seen as "the mother" (Gal. 4:26), so the Babylonian invasion and destruction of Jerusalem may specifically be in view.

"I will destroy..." is perhaps clarified by :6; the people had destroyed themselves by refusing knowledge / intimacy / relationship with God.

Hos 4:6 *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*- Although God has just threatened to "destroy your mother" (:5), this was a reflection of how they had destroyed themselves (Hos. 13:9) through "lack of knowledge". The "knowledge" in view is not academic, theological propositions. Genuine intellectual failure is not a reason for the wrath of God, nor of any reasonable person against another who simply fails to understand. "Knowledge" is being used in the Hebraic sense of 'knowing', having a relationship. Just as Gomer rejected intimacy of relationship with Hosea, "knowledge" in the relational sense.

That Israel "did not know / recognize" God's love was so painful, for Yahweh and also for Hosea in his unrequited, unappreciated love for Gomer (Hos. 2:8 " she did not recognize that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied to her silver and gold, which they used for Baal"; 5:4; 11:3 "I taught Ephraim to walk. I took them by his arms; but they didn't know that it was I who healed them"). God wanted to destroy Israel for this lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6,14).

Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you- As noted above, this doesn't mean punishment for intellectual failure. One doesn't get angry with a child who adds up a sum in math and comes to a wrong answer. "Knowledge" is being used in the Hebraic sense, of relationship. And again, God's judgment upon His people is only reflective of the position they had adopted themselves. They rejected intimate relationship with Him, and so the relationship was over. And it was therefore axiomatic that He also rejected them.

That you may be no priest to Me- It was God's intention that not just the Levites but all Israel should be a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6), mediating relationship ("knowledge") of Him to the surrounding Gentile world. But instead they committed spiritual adultery with them. So they precluded their own potential, as being a priest to the world. Just as we do, if we become indistinguishable from the world. The word must become flesh in us as it was in the Lord, like Him we are to live amongst them that we may be the light of the world, but if we become as them then we can no longer be their light.

"No priest" means they were no longer His people, which meant being a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6 "If you will indeed obey My voice, and keep My covenant, then you shall be ... to Me a kingdom of priests"). Being a nation of priests was conditional upon their obedience. Although disobedient, God had still counted then as His priests, just as Hosea had married a prostitute, in the hope that they would live as He considered them. But this failed, and so they are stripped of that title and role.

Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children- Mal. 2:7 clearly applies Hosea's argument in this verse to the returned exiles: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth". As noted on Hos. 1:1, Hosea prophesied over a long time in various contexts, to both Israel and Judah. What was true of God's people at the time of the prophecy before the exile was sadly true of them once they returned from it; in essence they repeated the same failures which had led to their exile. "I will also forget your children" again has a basis in Hosea's momentary feelings about Gomer's children, whom she claimed were his when he knew they were hers by reason of her adultery. The law of Israel's God was their covenant with Him; they had forgotten that covenant and committed adultery with the Gentiles, just as Gomer had forgotten her marriage covenant with Hosea and had children by her lovers. But although that was how Hosea felt, it was not how he finally was with Gomer. And God likewise; He would never forget Zion's children, although He felt like doing so and disowning them completely. The "hope of Israel" speaks partly of the hope Israel have of final restoration to God, despite being so hopelessly separated from Him by their unfaithfulness. This is indeed a blessed hope, and the fact Israel have such hope to this day is a profound window onto God's grace. Israel forgot their God and their covenant with Him (Jer. 2:32), but of Zion's wayward children God said: "Yes they may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is. 49:15).

Hos 4:7 *As they were multiplied, so they sinned against Me-* The multiplication refers to the material wealth of Israel under Jeroboam, and also the literal multiplying of

Israel's seed in accordance with the promises to Abraham. The more Hosea showered Gomer with material blessings, the further she went from him, using it to pay her lovers to sleep with her (Hos. 2). And God had the same experience with Israel, both new and old. If we seek material blessing from God, we must remember that it is likely to lead us astray spiritually; "Jeshurun became fat, and kicked" (Dt. 32:15).

I will change their glory into shame- Again, it was Israel who had changed their glory [which should have been in their relationship with Yahweh] into the shame of idolatry (Ps. 106:20; Jer. 2:11). So God was only confirming them in what they themselves had done. Hos. 10:5 is clear that the glory of Israel was their idols. But they were to be ashamed of them; and here again there is the hint of repentance, for shame is intended to lead to repentance. This was and still is the intention of all God's anger and judgments- to elicit repentance. Perhaps Hosea's hard words to and about Gomer and her children were likewise spoken with the intention of provoking her to repentance. The pain of it all was that Gomer, like Israel with God, went through the motions of being the faithful wife.

Hos 4:8 *They feed on the sin of My people, and set their heart on their iniquity*- The "they" could be the priests, who ate the sacrifices of the people. Those sacrifices were a smoke in God's nostrils, and were "sin" (Is. 66:3). But the "they" could also refer to the idols of :7, who were thought to 'eat' or feed upon the sacrifices placed before them. The Hebrew is difficult here, and the GNB may have the idea about right: "You grow rich from the sins of my people, and so you want them to sin more and more". Gomer spent Hosea's wealth on getting men to sleep with her, and Israel squandered the riches of their spiritual inheritance on their idols. This was why the lovers wanted Gomer to sleep with them more and more. Or it could be that the priests of Yahweh were also working as priests of the shrines; for :9 goes on to say that priest and people shall perish together. They had turned Yahweh, Israel's glory, into the shame of idolatry (:7).

Hos 4:9 *It will be, like people, like priest; and I will punish them for their ways, and will repay them for their deeds*- The parallel of people and priest was perhaps because the worship of Yahweh had become mixed with that of idols; or maybe the same Levitical priests who ministered in the temple also worked at the idol shrines, as suggested on :7 and :8. Whilst leaders or spiritual facilitators [the priests] have a greater responsibility, those willingly led by them are still culpable of sin. They would alike be punished. The parallel between "ways" and "deeds" is typical of how Hebrew poetry rhymes in terms of ideas, but the two rhyming ideas are not identical, although having the same referent. Each individual deed or act of sin was felt by God, just as each of Gomer's adulteries were felt by Hosea. But the "way" of life is made up of the stream of such deeds. We can deduce from this that individual "deeds" of sin are felt and yet passed over by God; the question is whether they are so consistent and habitual that they become a "way" of life. And we need to likewise not focus upon the isolated failures of a person, but see them within the overall way of life the person has. See on :18.

Hos 4:10 *They will eat, and not feel satisfied*- This again is the theme of the prophets who criticized the Jews who returned from exile, having apparently re-entered covenant with their God. They focused upon their own satisfaction, and were not satisfied (Hag. 1:6 s.w.). I suggested on :8 that the eating in view was in the practice of eating the sacrifices offered to idols, intended to symbolize the idol eating or

feeding upon the sacrifice. But this would not 'satisfy'. The same word is used in the curses for disobedience to the old covenant; Israel would eat and not be satisfied (Lev. 26:26). They looked for their satisfaction from alliances with Egypt and Assyria (Lam. 5:6 s.w.), which were spiritual adultery against Yahweh. But their relationships with Egypt and Babylon left them unsatisfied (Ez. 16:28,29). They treated wealth as their satisfaction (Ez. 7:19). As Ecclesiastes makes clear, seeking satisfaction in anything other than God's ways will leave us not satisfied. And this is the tragedy of secular man; he is never satisfied. There always has to be more travelling to reach the end of the rainbow, another million, a better house or car. Gomer was sexually addicted; but she was insatiable sexually (Ez. 16:28,29). Being unsatisfied is the nature of all addiction; see on Hos. 5:11. The same word is so often used of the righteous being satisfied in God. This is a huge blessedness.

Eating and not being satisfied is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:26). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

They will play the prostitute- They had thought that they had increased, but all such human gain is in fact not any gain, and this is even perceived by those who so seek it. See on :2. As noted above, Gomer was sexually addicted and yet never satisfied (Ez. 16:28,29), even paying men to sleep with her, and therefore only 'playing the prostitute'.

And will not increase; because they have abandoned giving to Yahweh- This could mean that Israel like Gomer would become barren, and not bear children any more to her lovers (Hos. 9:14). "Giving to" might be better translated "holding to".

Hos 4:11 *Prostitution, wine, and new wine take away the heart*- Alcohol and illicit sex are addictive; Gomer's heart had been "taken away" by them. She was sexually addicted, even paying men to sleep with her, and her heart was taken away by wine- perhaps a reference to the psychological disease of alcoholism, as well as to the wine drunk by Israel before their idols (Hos. 7:14). Alcoholism is wrong because it is largely a disease of the mind, in that the alcoholic keeps drinking because of a mindset which they are in; and therefore the cure is related to the things of the spirit / mind. The alcoholic cannot trust himself, their thoughts, feelings or best intentions. They persuade themselves they will really only have one drink; and invariably they end up drunk. The desire for alcohol and the need to survive as an active alcoholic makes them totally self-centred; people become [sub-consciously] merely things to be manipulated to allow the alcoholism to continue. It's a disease the mind persuades them has to be continued in at all costs. Alcoholism thus becomes the epitomy of all sinful living.

Hos 4:12 *My people consult with their wooden idol, and answer to a stick of wood*- These sticks were phallic symbols. The idea of the original seems to be that they asked of their idols and [felt they] received answers from them, or that Israel answered to the idols. Although the idols were but wood and inanimate, yet Israel "answered" or responded to them. They felt a call from them; but that call they felt from something inanimate was really the call of their own lusts which they had transferred to the idol. And that is the essence of modern day idolatry.

Indeed the spirit of prostitution has led them astray, and they have been unfaithful to their God- As Gomer was sexually addicted and insatiable, even paying

men to sleep with her, so the spirit of Israel was wrong. It wasn't a case of occasional, out of character failure; but a spirit of living. They were led astray by a mindset or spirit which sought self satisfaction, rather than the satisfaction which is from God alone. And it was this spirit which "led them astray". The essential issue in our day is whether we have the Spirit of Christ, without which we are none of His, or that of the world.

Hos 4:13 *They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks and poplars and terebinths, because its shade is good*- The idolatry involved sleeping with the priests or priestesses (:14); therefore "shade" and some seclusion was required.

Therefore your daughters play the prostitute- "Your daughters" may have initial reference to other children of Gomer whilst married to Hosea. They did these things because "they", Israel, their parents, did them. The implication would be that those children of Gomer also grew up to live highly immoral lives. Again the problem with sin is the collateral damage done; others are influenced to sin. We have more influence upon others through our example than we think. Bearing in mind that the punishment for such whoredom was death, we see how God's grace in Hosea's lovely character actually contradicts the letter of the law, and certainly contradicts all natural human desire for judgment and expiation against those who have wronged us. Here was grace, pure and wonderful.

And your brides commit adultery- The sexual addiction in Israel was at such a tempo that brides committed adultery, sleeping with the male priests at the idol shrines, just as Gomer paid men to sleep with her.

Hos 4:14 *I will not punish your daughters when they play the prostitute, nor your brides when they commit adultery; because the men consort with prostitutes, and they sacrifice with the shrine prostitutes; so the people without understanding will come to ruin themselves*- Perhaps we are to read "I will not only punish your daughters..." for being whores- because the men are equally or more guilty, in that it was the men of Israel who slept with the women of Israel in this fornication. Possibly we have here a warning against blaming prostitution simply upon the female- her behaviour is in fact dependent upon males wanting her services. The idea is that God need not additionally punish Israel because sin is its own punishment; they would ruin themselves. And I have noted throughout this chapter that so many of the Divine judgments upon Israel were merely a reflection of how they themselves acted. Punishment for adultery, sexual sin and idolatry was very clear within the Law of Moses. But God says He will do this; He would let sin be its own punishment. Hosea likewise thought of punishing Gomer for her unfaithfulness, including judging her as a prostitute was to be judged under the Law; but he refrained. All this behaviour was because the people lacked "understanding". The reference is not to incorrect theology, but to the "understanding" which is part of 'knowing' God in a relationship (Is. 6:10; Jer. 4:22). Hosea concludes with an appeal for "understanding" in the sense of walking in God's ways (Hos. 14:9).

Hos 4:15 *Though you, Israel, play the prostitute, yet don't let Judah offend*- In the end, Judah behaved more immorally than Israel did (Ez. 23:4,11,18). I suggested on Hos. 3:1 that perhaps Hosea married two wives who were both prostitutes. Hosea's hope was that the second one would not be so bad, and this reflected God's hope for Judah. It is so tragic that God's dearest desires for people often don't come true. He so

respects human freewill that He will never force obedience or devotion to Him, just as Hosea would not force this to come about.

And don't come to Gilgal, neither go up to Beth Aven, nor swear, 'As Yahweh lives'- These locations were just over the border from Judah, in the territory of Israel. Judah could just cross over briefly into Israelite territory and perform idolatry at the shrines there and then return to Judah. "Beth Aven" is literally 'house of vanity / idols'; perhaps the idea is that Beth El, the house of God, had become a house of idols as Israel had made Yahweh worship into idol worship. Gilgal had shrines (Jud. 3:19; Hos. 12:11) and was very attractive to Judah as a place of sin (Am. 4:4; 5:5). "All their wickedness is in Gilgal" (Hos. 9:15) shows how utterly abhorrent this is to God; to maintain an appearance of superior devotion to Him, whilst briefly slipping over the border to sin. This is the besetting weakness of our age; quietly, online, unseen by others, we can slip over the border to regular idolatry and then return. The oath "As Yahweh lives" was the oath of exclusive loyalty to Him; and yet God's people swore by Him and also by their idols (Dt. 10:20; Zeph. 1:5). Just as Gomer appeared faithful to Hosea, and yet slipped off to her lovers. It is a powerful challenge to us, demanding our total and exclusive loyalty to God; for anything less is adultery and idolatry.

When they swore falsely, they would mention God's Name. Jer. 5:2 observes the same. "They swear 'As the Lord lives,' they, nevertheless, swear falsely".

Hos 4:16 *For Israel has behaved extremely stubbornly, like a stubborn heifer. Then how will Yahweh feed them like a lamb in a meadow!*- There is an intended dissonance between the images of a stubborn heifer in a stall refusing to be goaded or coaxed and backsliding (AV) away from her owner; and a lamb being fed by a shepherd in a meadow. This was how things could have been; but Israel would not. God dreamed of it, as Hosea fantasized about a remarriage with Hosea. This was the whole tragedy of the Hosea-Gomer relationship, and of that between the God of all passionate love and His unfaithful people. The ten tribes to whom Hosea was prophesying had made God in the image of a heifer or calf (1 Kings 12:28). And they had become like that which they worshipped. That principle is true for us all.

Hos 4:17 *Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone!*- "Joined" alludes to how a man is "joined" to a woman in marriage and the sexual act. Again the simile continues; Israel's worship of idols was adultery against God. And in practice, they worshipped idols through performing the sexual act of joining. It could be that this verse is a direct warning from God to Hosea to stop trying to appeal to Ephraim, the ten tribes. The way Hosea apparently kept trying with them would therefore have been a reflection of his lifelong efforts with Gomer. And yet God like Hosea has never left Ephraim alone, despite his being joined / married to idols. We see throughout the wonderful passion of God, expressing His rightful sense of hurt and disengagement with Israel, and yet His love and grace continuing that engagement.

"Leave him alone" may be God's word to Hosea, telling him to stop trying to win them back. But Hosea does continue, just as he gave up with Gomer at times, or felt like doing so, but kept trying with her.

Hos 4:18 *Their drink has become sour. They play the prostitute continually. Her rulers dearly love their shameful way*- See on 7:4 *Burning*. This is the last stage of the addiction process; the drink is distasteful, "sour", but is still drunk. The "way" is loved to the end, despite the shame. "They play the prostitute continually" is just two words in the Hebrew: "Prostitution, prostitution". They were sexually addicted just as Gomer

was. This is the end result of dabbling in sin, like dabbling with narcotics. What is of the essence is our "way"; see on :9. Occasional sin becomes a way of life, or an addiction.

Hos 4:19 *The wind has wrapped her up in its wings*- This ultimately came true in Zech. 5:9: "Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven"- and carried it back to Babylon. As explained on :18, their dabbling in sin, hopping over the border to commit idolatry in Israel (:15), had led them to shameless addiction. They were now to be carried by the wind- both into captivity in Babylon and scattering in Assyria, and also spiritually or literally scattered back to Babylon even after they returned from exile, which is the context of Zech. 5.

And they shall be unfulfilled in the offering of their sacrifices- As noted on :10, there is a major theme of unfulfilment. Gomer was not satisfied by her affairs; she became sexually addicted, even paying men to sleep with her. This is the tragic end of all who follow the flesh. Their sacrifices to the idols, or to Yahweh, would not bring satisfaction because of their deep psychological devotion to their own flesh and their resistance of 'knowing' Yahweh, having a relationship with Him which was exclusive and took their entire heart.

HOSEA CHAPTER 5

Hos 5:1 *Listen to this, you priests! Listen, house of Israel, and give ear, house of the king!*- The royal family, the priests and the ordinary people are all addressed; we note on :9 that Hosea went throughout the land appealing to the ordinary people. The masses cannot pass off responsibility to their leadership, neither can the leadership blame the people. For God values the human person, and judges our individual response to Him. We note Hosea's bravery in witnessing against the royal family and those in religious power. The motivation for such bravery was surely love, in that he hoped for their repentance. For that is what his message is all about. The appeal for them to "listen" to their judgment was because even though judgment had been pronounced, there was still room for repentance. According to :7, it could have been just one month or new moon after which judgment would come.

For the judgment is against you- As noted on Hos. 4:1,4, there is a legal case between God and Israel; and the judgment is against them.

For you have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread on Tabor- They were condemned for their negative influence upon others, acting as a snare and trap. Making others stumble is so abhorrent to God; we need to carefully search our positions and our ways lest we are making others stumble. Mizpah ['watchtower'] was in the east and Tabor ['high place'] in the west; the idea was that all the high places across the land were used by the priests to ensnare people. There is a Jewish tradition that these two places were where sentries were placed to stop people going to the Jerusalem temple; they therefore became the scene of ambushes and murders of those Israelites who were on their way up to Jerusalem for Yahweh worship; and they were murdered there (:2). Hos. 6:9 seems to support this.

We must recall that Gomer was a cult prostitute, and the priests were priests of both Yahweh and Baal. For Israel never formally abrogated Yahweh. They claimed to worship Him through Baal. Gomer slept with the priests, but the priests are accused by Hosea of murdering the faithful Yahweh worshippers and seeking to lead them

astray. He was a Yahweh worshipper. His wife was sleeping with the very men who were out to take his life, and who murdered his faithful friends and brethren. His abiding love and commitment to her looks forward to that of Yahweh towards an Israel who slew His Son and His true people.

Hos 5:2 *The rebels are deep in slaughter; but I discipline all of them*- As noted on :1, this could refer to ambushes of the faithful Israelites on their way to Jerusalem for Godly worship, as in Hos. 6:9. But the text is difficult; hence GNB "A deep pit at Acacia City, and I will punish all of you" and LXX: "Which they that hunt the prey have fixed: but I will correct you".

Hos 5:3 *I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me*- As noted on :1, Hosea is pleading with Israel to "listen" to God's judgment, and to realize the most basic reality- that God sees and knows all, and nothing can be hidden from Him. The basis for this was in Hosea obviously knowing that Gomer was acting as a prostitute whilst married to him. We can like her go on in sin, comfortably numb to God's knowledge and judgment of all.

For now, Ephraim, you have played the prostitute; Israel is defiled- Ephraim is sometimes used as a title of Israel, the ten tribes; but here and in :5 there appears to be a difference. Perhaps Hosea had a ministry in the tribal area of Ephraim and warned them specifically. Perhaps it was geographically within Ephraim that there were many idol shrines, which in turn caused defilement to all Israel.

Hos 5:4 *Their deeds won't allow them to turn to their God; for the spirit of prostitution is within them, and they don't know Yahweh*- As explained on Hos. 4:12, Israel were addicted to idolatry just as Gomer was sexually addicted. See on Hos. 7:4 *Burning*. It wasn't that they sinned so awfully that they could never repent; repentance is always possible. But the problem with sin is that it gains a psychological grip upon people. Their deeds of sin were done due to a "spirit of prostitution", and they would not allow the influence of God's Spirit to create within them a new psychology. We see this in people today, who continue in sin up until their graveplanks because they will not accept a new pair of eyes, the new psychology and structuring of desires which only God's Spirit can give. They resisted the Holy Spirit, which sought to turn them to God (Is. 63:10; Acts 7:51). Acts 3:26 is clear that the blessing of the gift of the Spirit is to be turned to God away from our sins. But God will not force His way upon the human heart or spirit if we are resistant to it. If we are open to it, then indeed we find that strength to think and act differently. They refused to know Yahweh, to have a relationship with Him, instead seeing their duty to Him as merely a few ritual acts which were isolated from their heart. See on Hos. 6:6 for what is implied in knowing Yahweh.

That Israel "did not know / recognize" God's love was so painful, for Yahweh and also for Hosea in his unrequited, unappreciated love for Gomer (Hos. 2:8; 5:4; 11:3). God wanted to destroy Israel for this lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6,14). The contrast is with how "I know Ephraim" (Hos. 5:3), but Ephraim wouldn't know Yahweh, "they do not know Yahweh" (Hos. 5:4). It's just as Hosea was told to love a woman who was in love with another man (Hos. 3:1,2).

Hos 5:5 *The pride of Israel testifies to his face. Therefore Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their iniquity, Judah also will stumble with them*- As noted on :3, Ephraim is sometimes used as a title of Israel, the ten tribes; but here and in :3 there appears to

be a difference. Perhaps Hosea had a ministry in the tribal area of Ephraim and warned them specifically. It is pride which hinders human repentance (Hos. 7:10; Jer. 13:17). They knew it; for in the legal language of the courtroom which fills these chapters, their pride testified against them. But they refused to do anything about it. There is a difference between the stumbling and the iniquity; it could be that the sin of pride made them stumble, and call into sin. And Judah were influenced by Israel's pride.

It's hard to know if the prophecies in Hosea are chronological; he prophesied over a long period in various geographical areas, to both Israel and Judah. It's interesting to speculate as to whether the appeal of Hos. 4:15 was before or after Hos. 5:5. Hosea now clearly knew that both Israel and Judah would fall together in condemnation for the same sins (Hos. 5:5; 6:4,10,11; 12:1,2); and yet Hosea appeals to Judah to *not* sin as Israel had so that they would avoid that same condemnation (Hos. 4:15; 11:12). Likewise, knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would saved (1 Pet. 3:20).

Stumbling is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:37). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Hos 5:6 *They will go with their flocks and with their herds to seek Yahweh; but they won't find Him- He has withdrawn Himself from them*- See on Hos. 2:11 *Her feasts*. Sacrifice alone will not please God (Is. 1:11-15). Yet God promises that He will always be found of those who seek Him. So their seeking of God with herds of sacrifices would not "find" Him; for He desires mercy and knowledge / relationship with Him, not sacrifice and ritual (Hos. 6:6). The fate of the rejected will be to seek God at judgment day, when it is all too late; for life is the time to seek Him. The Lord quotes these words about an Israel who all too late will seek Him, at judgment day (Jn. 7:34).

It was of course Yahweh's desire they would seek Him (:15), but their seeking was on a surface level. We can seek but not seek. Yahweh's hope was that His people would finally "seek Yahweh their God" (Hos. 3:5). This was Hosea's fantasy for Gomer; as in Hos. 2:7, his hope was that Gomer would "seek" her lovers and not find them, and return to him. This was God's hope for Israel too; "in their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hos. 5:15). But they didn't. But it can happen- people "seek" the wrong things and give up, and then "seek" Yahweh. But sadly, most people, like Gomer, like Israel, waste their lives "seeking" the end of a rainbow and never get there.

Hos 5:7 *They are unfaithful to Yahweh; for they have begotten foreign children*- See on Hos. 2:4 *Her children*. As Gomer had children by her lovers whilst married to Hosea, so Israel bore fruit to the Gentiles through worshipping their idols. Jer. 3:20 speaks of this unfaithfulness to Yahweh as what brought about the Babylonian invasion of Judah. But Hosea's words have relevance to the Assyrian invasion of the ten tribes as well.

Hosea married Gomer knowing she would be unfaithful, and Yahweh likewise married Israel at Sinai. The same word is used in Is. 48:8 "For I knew that you would deal very treacherously [unfaithfully]". Isaiah was contemporary with Hosea. This foreknowledge of human rejection makes God's love the more amazing.

Now the new moon will devour them- Or as AV "Now shall a month devour them" (as in Zech. 11:8). Maybe Hosea uttered this judgment just one new moon or month before judgment was going to fall. God states judgment to come, giving Nineveh 40 days to repent, but in the gap between His word and its execution, we can repent. This gives intensity to our lives.

With their fields- Literally, "with their portions", a term used about their idols in Is. 57:6; Jer. 10:16. We become like what we worship; they were identified with their idols, and would be destroyed along with them. We worship God who is eternal, and are thus identified with eternity.

Hos 5:8 *Blow the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah! Sound a battle cry at Beth Aven, behind you, Benjamin!*- These towns in Benjamin were where the invader was to come. The picture is of Benjamin having turned their backs and being chased by the invaders uttering their battle cry. The scene of these towns fleeing before the Assyrians is found again in Is. 10:29. Hosea may have been consciously repeating Isaiah's message. The trumpets were blown to warn of invaders; I suggested on :7 that Hosea's audience had but a month to repent. The invaders were upon them. There was an urgency in this call to repentance, as there is for us. For "the judge stands before the door", now as never before in human history. Again we see Hosea prophesying immediately before the Assyrian invasion; even at that late point, he was offering Israel a new covenant, just as Hosea was offering Gomer a remarriage on a new covenant before he has to judge her. Likewise :7 "Now shall a month devour them" could mean that in a month's time the king of Assyria would be upon them.

Perhaps the judgment was for the sin of crowning Saul, who was in Gibeah, and for disobeying Samuel, who was from Ramah. Beth Aven is another name for Bethel, where the calves were (Josh. 7:2).

Hos 5:9 *Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke*- The "desolation" was a "rebuke", and a rebuke is aimed at reformation. The terrible judgments at the hands of Babylon and Assyria were to be used positively as an appeal for repentance, and not simply the outpouring of the anger of an offended omnipotent being. "A desolation" can also mean 'they shall be bewildered and unable to say anything'. That is exactly the position of the condemned at the day of judgment.

Among the tribes of Israel, I have made known that which will certainly be- This is Hosea's summary of his mission amongst the ten tribes; he had gone up and down, as we should, imploring people desperately to repent. His mission was not simply a one time statement to the royal family and priesthood; see on :1. It would "certainly be" on one hand, and yet the whole purpose of Hosea's proclamation was so that it would not be. This is no sign of any capricious, not serious God. Rather does it reflect how sensitive He is to human repentance, and how our appeal for repentance can really make an eternal difference in outcomes which are otherwise "certain".

Hos 5:10 *The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark. I will pour out My wrath on them like water*- "Landmark" is literally "border"; the reference may not be so much to removing ancient landmarks, but specifically to the removal of the borders on the laver by Ahaz and his princes in 2 Kings 16:17 in order that the Assyrian idol altar could be placed there. This would explain the pouring out of God's wrath because of the removal of borders. If the reference is to princes literally removing landmarks, we can perceive that such apparently small, secret, unnoticed attempts to expand our wealth base at others' expense call forth the uttermost anger of God Almighty. The removal of the landmarks may allude to how this was secretly

done bit by bit over the generations by bad neighbours, and it spoke of how Judah had edged closer to their wicked neighbours in Israel.

Hos 5:11 *Ephraim is oppressed, he is crushed in judgment*- The "judgment" of :1, which had been uttered and was yet future, but could be averted. But it was as if the judgment was already upon them, hence the present tense. We too live under Divine judgment, yet can repent and change the judgment, as Paul explains in Romans. They had "crushed" the needy (Am. 4:1 s.w.), and so their judgment was appropriate to how they had acted toward the needy. See on Hos. 6:5.

Because he is obsessed in his pursuit of idols- This obsession is the language of addiction; see on Hos. 4:10. They were judged not for individual acts of failure, but because of their way of mental being, their obsession with sin; see on :4. The AV "Because he willingly walked after the commandment" could refer to the commandment of Jeroboam to worship the calves rather than at the Jerusalem temple; likewise the commands of king Omri to perform idolatry were kept religiously as if they were Divine commands (Mic. 6:16).

Hos 5:12 *Therefore I am to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house of Judah like rottenness*- In Hos. 4:15, God had earlier entertained hope that Judah would be different; but now He speaks as if both Israel and Judah would alike be judged. This reflects how God's hopes and intentions, like those of Hosea for Gomer, were so often disappointed. We as it were feel for Him. The language here still continues the marriage reference; for "She that makes ashamed is (to her husband) as rottenness in his bones" (Prov. 12:4). Is. 50:9 uses the same figure about the restored community being a moth-eaten garment, and the New Testament understands that as meaning that it was permanently destroyed and would be replaced by the covering which is in Christ.

Hos 5:13 *When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound*- Again, this is Isaiah's language for the state of Judah (Is. 1:6); Jer. 30:12 says that the wound was "incurable", but we must remember that Hosea here is desperately appealing for repentance so that they could be cured. So it was "incurable" by human help.

Then Ephraim went to Assyria- Menahem in 2 Kings 15:19 gave 1000 talents of silver to Pul, and Hoshea likewise appealed to Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:3). Likewise also to Ahaz of Judah. He gave a bribe to Tiglath-pileser to assist him against Rezin the king of Aram (2 Kings 16:8). "He is not able to heal you" would then refer to 2 Chron. 28:21 : "and he gave it to the king of Assyria, but he did not help him".

And sent to king Jareb- This clause matches what Judah did when he saw his wound. Jareb ought rather to be translated, 'their defender'; in Jud. 6:32, Jerub, as in Jerubbaal, means 'to plead one's cause'. This is another example of courtroom language. God had made the case against His people; but He would also be the pleader of their cause. But instead they turned to human strength.

But he is not able to heal you, neither will he cure you of your wound- Hosea prophesied in the time of Hezekiah (Hos. 1:1). He was contemporary with Isaiah, whom he often quotes or alludes to [or did Isaiah quote from Hosea?]. At this time, Judah had sent to Jareb, just as Hezekiah sought help from Egypt to avert God's judgment. But it was not yet manifest that this "Jareb" would be unable to heal them. So Hosea may have been prophesying this at the time of Hezekiah's sickness, during which it seems Hezekiah sent to Egypt for help. All this became so relevant for

Hezekiah; his incurable sickness at the time was comparable to that of Judah. But he was saved out of it, just as Judah were saved from the Assyrians. But like Judah, he was ungrateful and unresponsive to such great grace, just as Gomer was to Hosea's grace.

Hos 5:14 *For I will be to Ephraim like a lion, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I myself will tear in pieces and go away; I will carry off, and there will be no one to deliver*- "I myself" reflects the intensity of God's manifestation through the 'lions' of Babylon and Assyria. Even if we were to read that the Lord Jesus was 'God Himself', this would not justify the erroneous idea of the Trinity; God can be intensely manifested in individuals who are not Him personally. God can be manifest in a tiny moth (:12) as well as like a roaring lion who tears in pieces; Hosea here is quoting Ps. 50:22. The 'carrying off' of Judah to Babylon was therefore done by God; and yet the analogy requires that God took them to Babylon as a lion carries the prey. So in wrath He remembered mercy, and as it were went with the to Babylon. Thus Ezekiel saw the cherubim of glory leave Jerusalem and then reappear amongst the captives in Babylon.

Being ravaged by wild animals is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:22). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Hos 5:15 *I will go and return to My place, until they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face*- The allusion is to a lion returning to his "place" or lair. But the lion does so with his prey. Again there is grace in these judgments; God would as it were go with His judged people to Babylon. The Hebrew idea may be of 'accepting the punishment of their offence'. The hope of God, as of Hosea with Gomer, was that they would repent after a period. The prophecies of the restoration were contingent therefore upon Judah and Israel repenting in their captivity. But they did not, and therefore Dan. 9 explains that the 70 years captivity prophecy of Jeremiah had to be recalculated because they had not repented. See on Dan. 9:26. To seek someone's face was to beg their grace and favour. But this would only happen because they repented.

"I will go and return" matches the words He placed in the mouths of Israel in :1: "Let us go and return to the Lord". He hoped that His actions would elicit theirs, there was to be a parallel between them. But they didn't respond.

"Offence" translates the Hebrew word also translated "guilt". Unlike in English, Biblical Hebrew has no direct term for "guilt". The word is sometimes translated "guilt" and sometimes "sin", or similar. The offence, the sin, is the guilt. Repentance is about taking guilt, and realizing that it is in God [through the Lord Jesus] that guilt is dealt with and taken away. The guilty can still seek His face. But Israel, like Gomer, refused to take guilt. They bought in to the modern narrative that they were 'awesome', sin was merely a technical matter. And so there was no desperate seeking of God's face.

In their affliction they will seek Me earnestly- This was God's hope, as it was that of Hosea for Gomer. But it didn't come about as He hoped and intended. The exiles who returned did so largely in the hope of personal betterment in Judah, and most of them remained in Babylon and Persia. This was God's hope for the holocaust... but still it didn't happen.

HOSEA CHAPTER 6

Hos 6:1 *Come, and let us return to Yahweh; for He has torn us to pieces, and He will heal us; He has injured us, and He will bind up our wounds*- This threatened attack by the lion of Hos. 5:15 has now happened. In the analogy, an animal torn to pieces by a lion is dead and cannot be healed. But Hosea appeals for repentance amongst the remnant in line with God's hope that they would repent in Hos. 5:15. Their revival would be a miracle because it would be like resurrecting (:2) and healing an animal torn to pieces by a lion. Hosea urges them to understand that it was God who had done this; the invading armies were His hand. The idea of returning to God and being healed is found in Jeremiah in the context of the potential for the exiles to return from Babylon and re-establish God's Kingdom in the land (Jer. 30:17). Hosea's prophecy was encouraging them to do this. But the exiles who did return didn't do so seeking for such healing, and most preferred not to return to the land at all. The prophecy therefore looks ahead to the latter day repentance of Israel before the reestablishment of God's Kingdom in Israel under the Lord Jesus. But :1-3 are the fantasy of Yahweh that His people would say these words, just as Hosea fantasizes about Gomer's return to him and acceptance of his offer of a new marriage under a new covenant.

Healing is a major theme in Hosea. The other nations [cp. Gomer's lovers] could not heal Israel (Hos. 5:13), but Yahweh could, if they repented (Hos. 6:1 "Let us return / repent to Yahweh and He will heal us"). But He was hindered in that by their refusal to accept that healing (Hos. 7:1). The healing was in fact potentially done- they just had to accept it: "they didn’t know that it was I who healed them" (Hos. 11:3). Finally God simply states in Hos. 14:4 "I will heal their waywardness ["backsliding", "disloyalty"], I will love them freely", and they would again be fruitful. For Him. Despite 'healing' being predicated upon repentance (e.g. Jer. 3:22 "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness", Ps. 30:2 "I cried to You [in repentance] and You healed me", Is. 6:10 "Understand... convert... and be healed"). It's as if God scraps even that basic requirement and wants to force through His desire for them to have a heart for Him; just as Hosea fain would have done this to the heart of Gomer but lacked the power to do so. Just as so many unrequited lovers would do for the object of their love.

In Hosea 2, Yahweh and Hosea offer their women a remarriage under a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. The offer of a new covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah involves the gift of a new heart to God's people, His spirit, His mind, a heart solely for Him. Jer. 3:22 is clear: "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness". "I will restore... I will heal you... I will heal them and reveal unto them the abundance of peace [with God]" (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). The wonder of Jer. 30:12-15 is that the wounds which are "incurable" would be healed by God. He could do the psychologically impossible, through the gift of His spirit which would accompany the new covenant. This is available to us who have accepted the new covenant today. It's why and how believers are psychologically transformed.

This is the same idea as in Hos. 14:4. Their disloyalty would be healed, their unfaithful mind would be changed. We are helped to understand this by the Hosea-Gomer situation. He desperately wanted her to love him, to have a heart for him, and not constantly looking at other men and committing adultery. It was His hope that she would one day love him, and he would do anything to give her such a heart. Israel had a heart for the idols and not for Yahweh, just as Gomer is presented as a sex addict

who is mentally enslaved to her addiction. But Yahweh earnestly wanted to heal their heart. This is Hosea's form of the offer of a new heart and spirit to Israel, which was part of the new covenant offered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That healing is offered to Israel, but they refuse. Until at the very end, in Hos. 14:4, God seems to as it were force through His plan with them. We who have willingly signed up to the new covenant have even more ample access to this spirit. If we want it- we will be given it. And we potentially have it.

Hos 6:2 *After two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up, and we will live before Him*- The two and three days may simply mean that if Israel were to repent and seek healing (see on :1), then literally in a matter of days afterwards they would have a national revival, akin to resurrection. 'Two or three' means 'a few' in Is. 17:6; Lk. 13:32,33. See on Hos. 8:10. Another option is that the two days are two days of judgment, upon Israel and Judah. The third day or time of judgment was intended to be their salvation, but still the Divine program had to be extended. The Assyrians were about to overrun Israel and the Babylonian threat was about to burst upon Judah, later in Hosea's ministry. We could just read this literally- that Yahweh could turn things around within a matter of a few days. But Israel would not. It is not over interpretation to see these words as applicable to the Lord's death and resurrection. After all, we must give due weight to 1 Cor. 15:4: "Christ rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures". Which Scriptures speak of a resurrection on the third day? The pattern of Jonah is only an indirect teaching. This passage in Hosea would appear the only diret prophecy of a resurrection on the third day. And we can also legitimately translate "he will raise him up". "And we shall live in his sight" then becomes the message that His resurrection becomes the pattern and possibility for that of all God's people.

As explained on :1, an animal caught by a lion and torn to pieces is dead. To speak of it being healed is therefore tantamount to a belief in resurrection. The wounds which were to be healed speak of the spiritual sickness of Israel; this was to be cured, so that the spiritually revived nation would live with new life "before Him". Sin would no longer be a barrier precluding being in His presence, and again they would be "before Him" as His covenant people. Literally the Hebrew is "to live in His sight", which would imply in the land of promise (2 Kings 17:20). The restoration fro exile is in view. The same word for "revive" is repeatedly used in Ez. 37 of how the dry bones of Israel in captivity would be revived, given life by the Spirit which was to be the gift of the new covenant they would enter with God. And Hosea concludes with the hope that such revival would come to Israel (Hos. 14:7). The gift of revival, of spiritual life, would be given when they sought the Lord (Am. 5:4 s.w.). Hosea likewise in his distress over Gomer had oscillated between wanting to kill her and yet dreaming of an outdoor wedding ceremony when he remarries her and they then bring forth fruit (Hos. 2). But this didn't happen. And neither did it happen between God and His people after the restoration from Babylon. And so the prophecy and the promised gift of spiritual life has been recalculated and reapplied- to us. Note that it is God who does the reviving; always the work of the Spirit is of His initiative. We see a clear reference to the idea of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus "on the third day". And it becomes a description of Israel seeking to repent in the last days, wishing to associate themselves with the resurrection of Christ, so that when He returns they might share in it. Israelite repentance is a condition for the Lord’s return.

Hos 6:3 *Let us acknowledge Yahweh. Let us press on to know Yahweh*- Again this is the fantasy of God for Israel, as it was Hosea's for Gomer, that they would say these words. Israel, like Gomer regarding Hosea, never denied Yahweh. They acknowledged Him as their God, as Gomer acknowledged Hosea as her husband. But they only knew *about* Yahweh, rather than knowing Him in personal relationship. To "know Yahweh" would bring about the appearance of a Messianic Kingdom in the terms of the second stanza of this verse. But it was repentance which would bring that about (see on Hos. 5:15). This is to know God. And so often, Christian groups have become so fixated with knowing *about* God, correctly interpreting this or that Bible passage or theme, enshrining it in their statements of faith, that they have not known Yahweh in terms of personal relationship. All the failures of natural Israel are warnings to Israel after the Spirit. True theology is all about the radical transformation of human life in practice. The AV is helpful: "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord". If we seek that relationship - knowledge with Him, "then shall we know". The Lord maybe alluded to this passage in teaching that if anyone seeks to know God's will and do it, i.e. to have relationship with Him, then he will intuitively know or discern true doctrine or teaching; see on Jn. 7:17.

As surely as the sun rises, Yahweh will appear. He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain that waters the earth- Ps. 72:6 and Mal. 4:2 use exactly this imagery to describe the Messianic Kingdom to be established at the return of the Lord Jesus. The gift of rain was to be the result of obedience (Dt. 11:14), but the obedience required was simply repentance and a desire for relationship with God. The return from exile could have potentially seen the Kingdom of God re-established in Israel under a Messianic king. But so much potential was wasted. Yahweh would have appeared, so that as Ez. 48 concludes, the rebuilt temple was known as the place where 'Yahweh is there', in some form. But the Jews did not repent, nor did they rebuild the temple nor manage it according to the commands of Ez. 40-48.

Yahweh's love for Israel is as certain as the dawn, as the sun coming up. He loved them with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). But this figure is repeated in :4; Israel's love for God was like the dew that appears at dawn but is banished away by the rising sun. It's a pathetic figure of Divine love being rejected and not achieving response. God desired steadfast love, like His for Israel (:6), not temporary love.

Hos 6:4 *Ephraim, what shall I do to you? Judah, what shall I do to you? For your love is like a morning cloud, and like the dew that disappears early*- As often in the prophets, the personal pronouns change. Hosea has been speaking in :3, and now God Himself directly appeals to the people; Hosea is so taken over with God's Spirit and identity with God's cause that he speaks for God in the first person. God's feelings here were exactly how Hosea had felt about Gomer, desperate to do something which would make her love him in truth rather than just as an appearance. The morning dew cloud disappears as the sun rises; but in :3, the sunrise has been used of the coming of Messiah and reestablishment of the Kingdom (as in Mal. 4:2). Instead of that sunrise, there was another one. The same language of the morning cloud vanishing is used of Israel themselves in Hos. 13:3; their attitude to God was them. And so we too are ultimately defined by our attitude towards God.

Hos 6:5 *Therefore I have cut them to pieces with the prophets; I slew them with the words of My mouth. Your judgments are like a flash of lightning*- God's word hewed

Israel like a hammer (Jer. 23:29); and the lightning flashes recall the cherubim of Ezekiel's visions. God's word is presented here as His actions. His word of slaughter was as if they had been slain; just as in creation, He spoke and it was done. As noted on Hos. 5:11, God's judgements against Israel happened as soon as they were spoken; yet there was a gap between the statement being uttered and it being actualized on earth. In that gap, with Israel already under condemnation, they could change the verdict by their repentance. Paul develops this theme in his legal argument in Rom. 1-8. We too stand in that gap, condemned at the present judgment seat of God; and yet in Christ we can change the verdict. This gives intensity to life, and deep gratitude for the freedom from condemnation we now experience in the Lord Jesus. See on Hos. 8:8.

The "flash of lightning" or "storm" may refer to Baal as the supposed storm god who threw bolts of lightning in judgment. Yahweh would act as they imagined Baal to act.

Hos 6:6 *For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*- Showing mercy is here paralleled with the knowledge of God. I explained on :3 that the knowledge of God in terms of relationship meant repentance and the grateful receiving of forgiveness by His grace. This is here paralleled with our showing mercy. For we cannot really experience that forgiveness without in turn showing mercy to others. We will forgive, as we have been forgiven. If we do not forgive, then we have not really known forgiveness on a personal level. The simple cure for unforgiveness is to let ourselves be convicted of the weight of our personal sins, and on that basis to allow our forgiveness of others to follow as part of a natural process. Mic. 6:6-8 makes the same point- that ritual sacrifice, even of ones own child, is not required [even under the old covenant] as much as loving mercy and humility before God as a result of realizing our sinfulness.

"Mercy" [*hesed*] is parallel with 'knowing God'. Experience of relationship with God, if it is legitimate, results in a merciful attitude to others. But Israel were abusive of others within their society, because they had not been humbled by God's mercy towards them. But *hesed* can as well mean 'covenant love'. To know God is to be in covenant love with Him. To love God is to know Him, and vice versa. Knowledge of God is thus defined not as technical knowledge in brain cells, but intimacy in relationship. And that is what divides those claiming the Name of Jesus- those who know Him, and those who still have only technical knowledge of Him. The conversion to intimacy in relationship often comes at some point after initial 'conversion' to Christ. In the Hosea-Gomer parallel, we see Hosea so earnestly wishing for intimacy with Gomer, when instead she only gave him the external signs of her loyalty. "I desire mercy" can as well be translated "I love covenant love". We can touch the heart of God by loving Him and being intimate with Him.

In the Hosea-Gomer context, Hosea wanted Gomer to love him, with *hesed* love, rather than excuse herself by saying she must offer sacrifices- which involved her sleeping with the offerers. For she was a cult prostitute. So "love me, rather than offering your sacrifices supposedly to Yahweh but actually to Baal, with all the sex stuff that goes with that" is what Hosea felt with her. He wanted her *hesed* , her covenant love, the love of marriage and commited relationship, her intimacy in relationship; he wanted the gift of her love for him, not physical gifts, tokenistic love. The Lord in His quotations of Hos. 6:6, sees this as being no better than trusting in works rather than grace for salvation, and refusing to fellowship with sinners.

Hos. 6:6 is twice quoted by the Lord (Mt. 9:13; 12:7). He clearly saw it as programmatic. He used it as the rationale for why He had an open table for sinners:

"Why does your Teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?... He said: They that are sick need a doctor, not they that are healthy. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. I come not to call the righteous but sinners". The context of Hos. 6:6 (from where the Lord was quoting) was of God appealing to a deeply apostate Israel through the situation of Hosea and Gomer. He appeals for her to show *hesed*, covenant love ("mercy"), and not just give the external appearances of a marriage relationship (cp. offering sacrifices). Here in the Capernaum incident, the Lord is saying that He fellowships with sinners because God loves the display of grace rather than technical obedience. If God wishes *hesed*, covenant love, from us, then how do we show it? By fellowshipping with sinners and thereby calling them to repentance. The love which God wishes us to show to Him is channelled in practice through calling others to repentance. For that is the greatest display of love for Him. And if that principle is followed, then we will be lead through the practice of such grace to never condemn the guiltless (this is how the Lord uses Hos. 6:6 in Mt. 12:7). Covenant love, *hesed,* meant for the Lord- an open table to sinners, not being critical in a casuistic sense, showing grace. If we don't do this, we fail to be truly in covenant with God. Israel had broken the old covenant, which required animal sacrifices. This demand for *hesed* covenant love, rather than sacrifice, can be read as part of God's offer of a new covenant. Based on love and grace rather than sacrifice, just as Hosea offered Gomer a new marriage on the basis of love, without sacrifices and the sex rituals that went with them.

If the Pharisees had grasped grace, they would not have condemned the disciples for a technical infringement of the law by making flour on the Sabbath. It is in this context that Hos. 6:6 is quoted by the Lord in Mt. 12:7. These two Hebrew words sound similar to each other- mercy / grace is so identified with God's passion and desire. The same Hebrew words are to be found in the statements that He *desires* / delights in grace / mercy (Jer. 9:24; Mic. 7:18). If He delights in forgiveness and grace, then we should also; His passion should be ours. This of itself outlaws the critical eyes of the Pharisees, noticing the disciples' infringement of a law and feeling the need to 'take up the matter' with them. And it will be the same with us. The human tendency to observe others with eyes of criticism and sensitivity to their weaknesses will be displaced if we simply delight in mercy. The Hosea passage goes on to condemn the Jewish religious leadership in language which the Lord clearly used in constructing the parable of the good Samaritan: "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent" (Hos. 6:8). But there's a subtle twist- the priest in the Lord's story passed by on the other side and simply did nothing. That inaction is paralleled with being as bad as the thieves themselves. The priest was returning from having offered sacrifice, but he didn't show mercy- and God wants mercy and not sacrifice. Note that the passage in Hos. 6:6 is perhaps purposefully ambiguous. It could mean 'I want to see you showing mercy, and not [so much offering] sacrifice'; or it could mean 'I myself want / love / delight in [showing] mercy rather than [receiving] sacrifice'. The ambiguity is because God's will / love / delight should be ours. And we can read the quotation of that passage in Mt. 12:7 with the same double meaning. His passion for grace must be ours, and this precludes looking critically at others, eager to perceive their breaches of our perceptions of God's law.

Just as Gomer claimed to "know" Hosea, so Israel cried out that “My God, we [do] know You” (Hos. 8:2). Israel’s attitude to the Law can so easily be our attitude to God and to the first principles of the Gospel, the New Covenant, in which we stand. We can ‘know’ it all, and externally keep it… but in reality not know it at all,

focusing on the external sacrifices whilst knowing nothing of the God we supposedly worship. All this was exemplified by Gomer being an observant Jewess, whilst worshipping Baal and living a shameful life. She broke the marriage covenant as Israel like Adam "transgressed the covenant" (6:7; Hos. 8:1). Israel / Gomer knew the Law on one level, but "the great things of my law… were counted as a strange thing" (Hos. 8:12). They called upon the Most High, but refused to exalt Him in their hearts (Hos. 11:7). The very experience and fact of 'knowing' God's word on a surface level, as academic theology, can mask the fact that to 'know' Him in practice is quite a different thing. The simple possession of the right knowledge *about* Him can of itself deceive us. This ought to provoke constant self-examination. As Gomer protested that she 'knew' Hosea and was in covenant relationship with him, so Israel did to God. Hosea's reference to *daath elohim*, the knowledge of God, has been observed as strikingly intimate, hinting as it does of God 'knowing' His people and them knowing Him, in the same way as a man 'knows' a woman. Hence the utter pain of Hos. 5:4: "The spirit of harlotry is within them, and they know not [i.e. sexually] the Lord"- although they 'knew' so many others, they were sexually obsessed. This was God's pain, lived out by Hosea. It was that very "knowledge of God" which He desired, rather than burnt offerings (Hos. 6:6). For as Amos put it, "You only have I known…" (Am. 3:2).

Hos 6:7 *But they, like Adam, have broken the covenant*- The basis for this was Gomer breaking her marriage covenant with Hosea by adultery. Covenant breaking is as marital unfaithfulness. Adam's sin was in attempting to cover his sin and refusing to repent (Job 31:33). But we may well ask, What covenant did Adam break by his simple act of disobedience? I suggested in commentary upon Gen. 1-3 that the land of Eden with its sanctuary was the *eretz* promised to Israel, with the temple within it; and Adam's exile eastward for breaking the covenant was matched by Israel's exile to the east. The covenant was simple- he was to care for the land / garden, and not eat the forbidden fruit. Although he was not immortal, if he did that, he would live for ever. Eternity is that simple. Or it could have been for Adam, and also for Israel.

Adam being a sinner is used here as representative of the Jews, inadequately covered by the fig leaves which represented the Jewish way of covering sin. Their glossy appearance which soon faded well represented the inadequacy of this method.

They were unfaithful to Me, there- The "there" is very hard to interpret unless we accept that as suggested above, there was a parallel intended between the garden of Eden with its sanctuary, and the *eretz* promised to Israel with its sanctuary in Jerusalem. Adam and Israel broke their covenant relationship in the same place, the *eretz* of Eden. Alternatively we can read "Adam" as the geographical location at which they entered the promised land. Hence, "there" they were unfaithful to me, and this would fit with the geographical references in the next verse.

Hos 6:8 *Gilead is a city of those who work iniquity; it is stained with blood*- "Blood" often stands for guiltiness for blood, and in :9 we see that the priests were actually murdering the faithful. There may also be reference to the men of Gilead killing the king Pekahiah (2 Kings 15:25). Gilead was perhaps a location where this happened, and Hosea went there to rebuke them. It was a shrine of false worship, where pagan sacrifices were made in the name of Yahweh worship (Hos. 12:11). Gilead had been intended as a city of refuge from the guilt of innocent blood, but instead it was stained with its own guilt for blood. So much Divine potential was

wasted, as it is today; it all makes God an almost tragic figure. How thrilled He must be that we at least try to perceive the potentials and realize them.

Hos 6:9 *As gangs of robbers wait to ambush a man, so the company of priests murder in the way toward Shechem, committing shameful crimes*- As noted on Hos. 5:1,2, this could refer to ambushes of the faithful Israelites on their way to Jerusalem for Godly worship. The road near Shechem was where such pilgrims would have passed. The LXX supports this view by rendering: "The priests have hid the way". Shechem as Gilead was a city of refuge; those seeking refuge were slain by the priests who should have saved them. Or perhaps here we have an example of extreme language [here, of murder] being used about those things which would be judged far less severely in human eyes; akin to the Lord teaching that hatred in the heart is the same as murder. The road to the main idolatrous shrine at Bethel passed by Shechem, and perhaps the encouragement of the priests to go there and worship the calves was tantamount to spiritual murder. "The company of priests" is elsewhere translated 'the charming / enchantment'. Hosea was a faithful worshipper of Yahweh, married to a woman who slept with the priests as part of her cult prostitution. And those men were murdering Hosea's brethren. For all we know he may himself have been a priest.

Hos 6:10 *In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing. There is prostitution in Ephraim. Israel is defiled*- The "I" in the context appears to be God. But this could also be an interjection from Hosea, as if he was shocked now that he realized the extent to which Ephraim had been adulterous against God Himself. We certainly get the impression of shock. God is omnipotent and yet He limits His power; and He may limit His omniscience in order to enter into relationship with us. Hence He speaks of His disappointments and dashed hopes; "surely they will reverence My Son" is the acutest example. And so even God was as it were shocked at the realization of the extent of Israel's unfaithfulness, just as Hosea was with Gomer. See on Hos. 7:1. The idea that 'God has now seen the prostitution in Israel' reflects how on one hand, Hosea knew Gomer was a whore. Even before he married her. But the full realization of it only dawned later. And so it was with God almighty. If we enquire *why* there was this delayed recognition of reality... the answer is one word. Love.

Hos 6:11 *Also, Judah, there is a harvest appointed for you, when I restore the fortunes of My people*- The idea may be that the men of Judah at that time would reap a harvest of condemnation when the fortunes of Israel were restored at Messiah's coming, and the dead raised and judged. This is the idea expressed in Mt. 23:39; see note there. This will be the reason for the weeping and gnashing of teeth by the rejected; seeing others saved and themselves rejected eternally. The restoration of the fortunes of God's people was intended to happen at the return from exile in Babylon (Jer. 30:3; Am. 9:14); but it did not, and has been reinterpreted and recalculated as our restoration in Christ, to be literally realized at the Lord's return to earth (Zeph. 3:20). Judah and Israel were sowing, as we are, according to our way of life now; and there will for sure be the harvest of this at judgment day (Hos. 8:7; 10:13).

Judah's "appointed" time of judgment was when the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time. For this is when Hosea was prophesying. But just as Hezekiah's time of death was delayed, God is so open that this appointed time was also delayed.

HOSEA CHAPTER 7

Hos 7:1 *When I would heal Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered, also the wickedness of Samaria*- I suggested on Hos. 6:10 that God as it were limits His omniscience as He limits His omnipotence, so that He can enter into legitimate real time relationship with us humans. Hence the expressions of Divine shock and disappointment we meet in the Bible. The healing of Israel was intended to come at the restoration from Babylon (Jer. 30:17). I explained on Hos. 6:1 that God had promised to "heal" an Israel already torn to pieces and slain by the invading lions. This on one hand points to a resurrection from the dead. But it also speaks of God's ability to heal the apparently incurable. He was prepared to do that at the restoration, and perhaps at earlier points in Israel's history, including during Hosea's lifetime. One such time would have been during the apparent restoration in the time of Jeroboam II, who "restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain". But He could not, because the extreme sin of Ephraim and Samaria was as it were revealed to Him. The long term effects of those sins, in terms of influence upon later generations, precluded the later healing of Israel. This is the nature of sin- it affects not only ourselves but others, including even generations after our death who suffer the result of our decisions.

The Hosea-Gomer parallel is clear. Hosea thought of just playing on, acting like so much had never happened... but then he remembered the reality of her past and present actions. We have a profound window onto the heart of God here. And that struggle occurs again later in Hosea, but then He finally accepts that for all His struggles, He cannot give them up- His love for them is too great.

Healing is a major theme in Hosea. The other nations [cp. Gomer's lovers] could not heal Israel (Hos. 5:13), but Yahweh could, if they repented (Hos. 6:1 "Let us return / repent to Yahweh and He will heal us"). But He was hindered in that by their refusal to accept that healing (Hos. 7:1). The healing was in fact potentially done- they just had to accept it: "they didn't know that it was I who healed them" (Hos. 11:3). Finally God simply states in Hos. 14:4 "I will heal their waywardness ["backsliding", "disloyalty"], I will love them freely", and they would again be fruitful. For Him. Despite 'healing' being predicated upon repentance (e.g. Jer. 3:22 "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness", Ps. 30:2 "I cried to You [in repentance] and You healed me", Is. 6:10 "Understand... convert... and be healed"). It's as if God scraps even that basic requirement and wants to force through His desire for them to have a heart for Him; just as Hosea fain would have done this to the heart of Gomer but lacked the power to do so. Just as so many unrequited lovers would do for the object of their love.

In Hosea 2, Yahweh and Hosea offer their women a remarriage under a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. The offer of a new covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah involves the gift of a new heart to God's people, His spirit, His mind, a heart solely for Him. Jer. 3:22 is clear: "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness". "I will restore... I will heal you... I will heal them and reveal unto them the abundance of peace [with God]" (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). The wonder of Jer. 30:12-15 is that the wounds which are "incurable" would be healed by God. He could do the psychologically impossible, through the gift of His spirit which would accompany the new covenant. This is available to us who have accepted the new covenant today. It's why and how believers are psychologically transformed.

This is the same idea as in Hos. 14:4. Their disloyalty would be healed, their unfaithful mind would be changed. We are helped to understand this by the Hosea-

Gomer situation. He desperately wanted her to love him, to have a heart for him, and not constantly looking at other men and committing adultery. It was His hope that she would one day love him, and he would do anything to give her such a heart. Israel had a heart for the idols and not for Yahweh, just as Gomer is presented as a sex addict who is mentally enslaved to her addiction. But Yahweh earnestly wanted to heal their heart. This is Hosea's form of the offer of a new heart and spirit to Israel, which was part of the new covenant offered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That healing is offered to Israel, but they refuse. Until at the very end, in Hos. 14:4, God seems to as it were force through His plan with them. We who have willingly signed up to the new covenant have even more ample access to this spirit. If we want it- we will be given it. And we potentially have it.

For they commit falsehood, and the thief enters in, and the gang of robbers ravages outside- This alludes to the huge sin of Hos. 6:9, which is not specifically defined. However the language could be more figurative than literal. They robbed God (Mal. 3:8) by not truly and exclusively sacrificing to Him. Their entry into the sanctuary or temple under the guise of "falsehood", falsely claiming to worship Him, was in effect forcing entry and stealing. This is how seriously God views our relationship with Him and doing of mere rituals- if we are not exclusively His. That principle remains to this day.

The allusion in Hos. 4:2; 6:9; 7:1,4 is clearly to breaking of the ten commandments. These formed the basis of the old covenant. They had broken that covenant by doing these things, just as Gomer had. But the point was that a new covenant was being proposed to Gomer / Israel, seeing they had broken the old covenant- not simply in the sense of disobeying its terms, but thereby they had broken that covenant. It was no more. Just as Gomer's adultery had broken the marriage.

Hos 7:2 *They don't consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness*- The state of the heart is of critical importance to God. There is an assumption that if we forget our sins, then God does too. The passage of time and fading of memory thereby works a kind of pseudo atonement for us. But God remembers. And we must ever consider this in our hearts. Israel's lack of self-examination is quite a theme; see on :9. AVmg. is correct "they say not to their heart"; self talk is of the essence to God. There was no introspection, no real self dialogue; just as Gomer hooned around to different men, suppressing the voice of conscience, never deeply thinking nor engaging in self dialogue.

Now their own deeds have engulfed them; they are ever before My face- See on :4. Human sin remains "ever" before God; as noted above, the passage of time doesn't somehow remove sin. And their come days of judgment, even in this life, when the cumulative weight and moment of those sins engulf a person. And yet despite this, Hosea will conclude with God protesting His eternal love for Israel.

Hos 7:3 *They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies*- The "they" refers therefore not to the political leadership. It could be the priesthood that is in view, but the "all" of :4 seems to suggest that it was the common people. They were "all adulterers". "Lies" could refer to their idols (as in Is. 44:20). The peoples' idolatry and apostasy encouraged their rulers in the same. See on :7.

Hos 7:4 *They are all adulterers. They are burning like an oven*- "Burning" refers to their adultery, which was exemplified in Hosea's experience with his wife. The reality

was that Gomer was sexually addicted, burnt up by her lust- as Jerusalem was to be burnt in fire because of the burning of her list. Gomer was a prostitute before her marriage, after her marriage she was an adulteress. Consider the language used about her / Israel: “committed whoredom continually” (Hos. 4:18), “the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them” (Hos. 5:4), “adulterers as an oven… hot as an oven” (Hos. 7:4,7), a woman even paying lovers to sleep with her, using Hosea’s money (Hos. 8:9 cp. Hos. 2:8), although she had other lovers who gave her gifts to sleep with them (Hos. 2:12), “they sin more and more” (Hos. 13:2). This is the language of addiction. Gomer was a sex addict. Like Israel, she didn’t consider in her heart that Hosea / God remembered / felt all her wickedness (7:2). She thought, as addicts do, that others are as insensitive as they are.

That the baker stops stirring, from the kneading of the dough, until it is leavened- GNB "Like the fire in an oven, which is not stirred by the baker until the dough is ready to bake". A baker doesn't keep stirring up the embers until the dough is ready. But this baker stirs up the fire all the time, he is so consumed with burning, then goes to sleep because he is drunk (see on :6), and the oven catches alight (:7) and the cake is ruined (:8). Perhaps Hosea was a baker.

Another reading is that just as the baker rests from the kneading of the dough until it leavens, when he can bake it, so these men planned evil, slept on it, and got up and did it. Mic. 2:1 says the same: “Woe to those who plan iniquity and work evil on their beds; when the morning lights, they do it”. Or "stops stirring" can be "ceases from kindling". The idea would then be "when the oven has reached a certain heat, and then he leaves the fire to smoulder, till the fermentation of the dough is complete, and a fresh heating is necessary. So after passion has once been gratified, it smoulders for a time, but is afterwards kindled to a greater heat than before". This matches Gomer's sexual insatiability, typical of how the flesh is never gratified.

Hos 7:5 *On the day of our king, the princes made him sick with the heat of wine so that he joined his hand with mockers*- The "day of our king" may refer to his birthday. Perhaps Hosea is commenting upon a drunken birthday party which resulted in the king making an agreement with "mockers". "*Our* king" reflects Hosea's continued identity with his sinful, wayward people; the very opposite of the guilt by association mindset which seeks to separate from and shun sinners. Or "The day" may refer to the day of the King's coronation. Perhaps Jeroboam's coronation descended into a drinking party. It could also refer to the day of the king's death. Hosea prophesied just as Israel were about to go into captivity, and we read of the murders of their last few kings in quick succession (Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah and Pekah, 2 Kings 15:8-31). Here in Hos. 7:3-7 we may have allusion to the murder of one of them. Probably Pekahiah, who was murdered in his palace by his military commander Pekah (2 Kings 15:25). "Mockers" or scorners are in view when Isaiah, contemproary with Hosea, calls the politicians of Judah ‘men of scorn’ (Is. 28:14).

Hos 7:6 *For they have prepared their heart like an oven, while they lie in wait. Their baker sleeps all the night- in the morning it burns as a flaming fire*- The earlier allusions to drunkenness suggest that this baker slept because he was drunk, and the fire in his oven destroyed his bread; see on :4. This fire or burning represented their hearts; and we noted on :4 that their burning represented their lust. Those who "lie in wait" could refer to the enemies or assassins poised to strike. "The baker" would then be one of the kings of Judah or Israel who led to the burning of Jerusalem; Zedekiah is spoken of by Jeremiah in these terms. But the essential problem was in their hearts.

Hos 7:7 *They are all hot as an oven, and devour their judges. All their kings have fallen. There is no one among them who calls to Me*- The "they" in view appear to be the common people. This would continue the theme noted on :3; that the people were influencing the leadership to sin, rather than vice versa. Hosea spoke at a time when at least four kings had been murdered in succession, and "all" the kings in the royal line were dead. This was because of their burning in lust (see on :4). The murder of kings resulted from their unbridled minds.

Hos 7:8 *Ephraim, he mixes himself among the nations*- A reference perhaps to Israel's intermarriage with the Gentiles even whilst living in the land. Their exile to those lands therefore was a judgment which was really just a continuation of their own chosen path. Sin so often is its own punishment.

Ephraim is a pancake not turned over- The idea is as the Geneva Bible: "Baked on one side and raw on the other". See on :4.

Hos 7:9 *Strangers have devoured his strength, and he doesn't realize it*- Just as Gomer's lovers devoured her wealth, the wealth Hosea had given her from his life savings. The Gentiles "devoured" Israel and Judah when they attacked them; but this, again (see on :8) was but a continuation of their own chosen path. This comment of Hosea's also surely refers to how Menahem and Pekah paid huge sums of money to get their invaders to turn away from them (as noted in :11)- instead of turning to Yahweh. So these Gentile "|strangers" would be the likes of Hazael, Benhadad, Pul and Tiglath Pileser.

Indeed, gray hairs are here and there on him, and he doesn't realize it- Israel's lack of perception is often pointed out; see on :2. They looked in the mirror, but refused to see their true image- a bald old man with a head sprinkled with a few grey hairs.

Hos 7:10 *The pride of Israel testifies to his face; yet they do not return to Yahweh their God, nor seek Him, for all this*- In :9 the analogy of a mirror has been used; Israel looked in the mirror but refused to notice their grey hairs, the sign that the end was drawing near. Their pride also was surely visible to them, testifying against them in the Divine court case. But they turned away from the mirror and refused to repent and turn to Yahweh, just as our self-examination can be just a momentary few moments. It is the stnading before the cross of Christ which elicits the most powerful self examination.

Hos 7:11 *Ephraim is like an easily deceived dove, without understanding. They call to Egypt; they hop to Assyria*- This was what was criticized in :9- Menahem and Pekah, probably along with Hezekiah, paying money to Gentiles to save them. "Without heart" or "understanding" again emphasizes that they had no heart for God, as we will see in :14. Having a heart for God was and is the essence of it all- it is a question of whether we have His Spirit in our spirit. This is the picture of Gomer, running from one man to another, serving as cult prostitute for multiple idols. Superficial, refusing to stop and consider, doing what feels and seems good for the moment- and ignoring the huge love of God for her, represented by Hosea's love.

Our instinctive tendency is to rely upon human strength in time of trouble, to take the insurance policies of the world, to do what seems the humanly sensible thing to do, to take humanly wise precautions. If a person does that and also proclaims a trust in God, we tend to think that's fair enough. But Hosea absolutely lambasts Israel for trusting in political alliances. He calls them a silly dove, fluttering between Assyria and Egypt. Hosea seriously advocated a national defence policy of total trust upon Yahweh, and nothing else. What he was suggesting was against every human instinct. But the spirit of the prophets was to live and proclaim life to be lived in a counter-instinctive way, to do what seems humanly foolish, because of our faith. We have ample opportunity to show that spirit of the prophets, in a society which increasingly seeks to insure and re-insure itself against every possible 'act of God'. Yet Hosea went even beyond all this- he spoke of how Israel would be left "without a king" (Hos. 3:4), and that the ruling dynasty would be overthrown. This would've been seen as seditious and revolutionary, a desire to overthrow the King.

Hos 7:12 *When they go, I will spread My net on them*- Their trusting in human strength, like a dove flying off to Egypt and Assyria, was what provoked God's judgment of them. And yet we all so easily do this. For in the figure, He caught them in the net whilst they were in flight.

I will bring them down like the birds of the sky. I will chastise them- Chastisment is language which carries with it the hope of correction. Although God would catch the Israel of that moment in a net and bring them down, He sees "Israel" His people on a collective level, outside the time-space construct. His motivation of 'chastising' them through the suffering of one generation was therefore in hope that later generations would learn. "Bring them down" alludes to how the fowler brought down a net hung on a pole, with the captured birds within it.

As their congregation has heard- From Hosea's public proclamation of these prophecies to the congregation of Israel.

Hos 7:13 *Woe to them! For they have wandered from Me. Destruction to them! For they have trespassed against Me. Though I would redeem them, yet they have spoken lies against Me*- As Gomer lied to Hosea despite the fact he had redeemed her (Hos. 3:2), so Israel despised God's redemptive love for them. Their professions of loyalty to Him were lies, as :14 will exemplify (Ps. 78:36). If we don't mean the words of our prayers said and hymns sung, we are doing the same to God.

"Destruction" is what God's people had done to each other by not forgiving debt, talking harshly and abusing each other with injustice (s.w. Is. 59:7; Jer. 6:7; Ez. 45:9). Their "destruction" was again a judgment of themselves by themselves. Likewise they "wandered" from God to others, and so their judgment was to "wander" among the Gentiles in their dispersion (s.w. Hos. 9:17). Their wandering was in going to Egypt and Assyria for help (:12); they therefore were sent into Assyria in exile.

The Hebrew for "redeem" is literally 'to sever'. By being intimate with the world, we are denying God's redemption of us; both that historically achieved on the cross, or in the Passover lamb redeeming Israel from Egypt, and also that final redemption which is potentially possible for us. Or we have the same idea as in :1. God, like Hosea, thinks of redeeming His woman... but decides not to, at this point, because their protestations of loyalty to Him in :14 are insincere. But finally He will decide to redeem them by sovereign grace alone.

Hos 7:14 *They haven't cried to Me with their heart, but they howl on their beds*- Perhaps they really did howl to God on their beds, as a desperately sick person does. But even that howl to God was not from their heart, and so God would not respond. Here again we see the critical importance of the heart. We can pray, even howl to God, not just in church but from our own bed- and yet not pray from the heart.

They assemble themselves for grain and new wine. They turn away from Me- The peopled synagogued or assembled themselves before God to pray for corn and wine, the blessing for obedience. But like Gomer with Hosea, they turned away from God. The juxtaposition is intentional and is a favourite device of Hosea's prophecies. They howled even privately on their beds to God- but not from their heart. They begged Him to take away drought and famine, to give them grain and wine- whilst turning away from Him to other gods. This potential for dualism is a sad feature of human nature.

Or "they assemble themselves" can mean "they store up". The idea would then be 'They have many granaries of corn; therefore, they turn away and rebel against Me'. Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked; Gomer like Israel, turned against her husband the more he gave her. But LXX has "they cut themselves", as Baal worshippers did in order to plead with their god, as on Mount Carmel. They were thus crying both to Yahweh and to Baal. And this was not acceptable to God for Him to redeem them (:13).

Hos 7:15 *Though I have taught and strengthened their arms, yet they plot evil against Me*- Hosea has pointed out the dualism within their approach to God, begging Him for blessings of corn and wine, just as Gomer did to Hosea, whilst at the same time turning away from Him to other gods. And God says that even as babies, whilst He taught them to walk and strengthened their arms by exercise (the figure is repeated in Hos. 11:3), yet even at that young age they plotted evil against God their loving Father. Or perhaps the idea is that now in their maturity they refused to remember God's tender grace to them in the past, both personally and on a national level in the wilderness, and plotted evil against Him. They of course would have denied making such plots; but their plans to get help from Egypt and Assyria were "evil" and were "against" God.

To seek human help rather than Divine appears a mere common failure. But Hosea uses the same Hebrew words to describe his wife's desertion ["she walked / departed from me", Hos. 2:7,15] as he does to describe the embassage to Assyria as departing / walking there (Hos. 7:11). To seek human help in distress is to be unfaithful to our God. And yet when health fails, a lump appears, the car won't start, we lose our job… to whom do we instinctively turn? Here is the huge relevance of all this to modern humanity, who have striven to insure and protect themselves against calamity to an unprecedented extent.

Hos 7:16 *They return, but not to the Most High*- Just as they howled to God in prayer and through attending religious meetings, yet they did so whilst turning away from God (see on :14). Their return or repentance was not genuine; they indeed had the motions of returning to God, but such feelings are not of themselves repentance. This is a chilling warning to us as we ask ourselves whether our self-examination and repentance is in fact genuine, or just the external appearance of it in time of need. Likewise Israel's return from captivity was indeed a return, but not to God; just as Gomer returned to Hosea when in need, but not from her heart.

Or the reference may be to their return to Egypt for safety there, rather than trusting in God.

They are like a faulty bow- Ancient bows had the string as a C-shape, curving towards the archer. If misfired, then the string came powerfully back against the archer. Their 'return' was as if God had fired them as an arrow back toward Judah. But the arrow didn't fly and the string lashed back against Him. His efforts to get them to return, like Hosea's to bring about Gomer's return, badly backfired. And He was personally shocked and hurt.

Their princes will fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue- This continues the theme of God uttering apparently extreme judgments against His people for things such as 'having a rant' which we might consider surface level failure. Or it could be that quietly sending princes with a charmingly worded message to Egypt for help, as in 2 Kings 17:4, was seen as raging against God,

Perhaps there is a prophecy here against Jonathan son of Kareah and all the officers of the armies who returned to Egypt.

This will be their derision in the land of Egypt- See on Hos. 9:11 *Glory.* They would return to Egypt and be derided there. God says this clearly in Hos. 8:13; 9:3,6. But just as clearly He says that they will not return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). Here we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn.

HOSEA CHAPTER 8

Hos 8:1 *Put the trumpet to your lips!*- The trumpets were blown to warn of invaders; I suggested on Hos. 5:7 that Hosea's audience had then but a month to repent. The invaders were upon them. There was an urgency in this call to repentance, as there is for us. For "the judge stands before the door", now as never before in human history.

Something like an eagle is over Yahweh's house- The invasion was imminent, "an eagle" giving the idea of rapidity (Dt. 28:49; Hab. 1:8). They had flown as a dove to Assyria for help, and the Assyrians had returned as an eagle. But there was still chance to repent and change the outcome, so that the eagle didn't swoop; see on :8. We continually get the impression that the invasion was about to happen; the word "now" occurs often, as in :8. God was teetering on the edge of bringing it... throughout Hosea's ministry. Just as Hosea was on the brink of divorcing Gomer, but didn't. Because love won out over necessary judgment and legitimate anger.

Because they have broken My covenant, and rebelled against My law- The law of Moses was God's marriage covenant with Israel. As Gomer broke her marriage covenant with Hosea by adultery, so Israel broke the covenant they had entered with God at Sinai (Dt. 29:12). But we should not conclude too easily that breaking the letter of that law was thereby breaking the covenant. Hosea never condemns Israel for a lack of technical, casuistic obedience. Even though the ten tribe kingdom clearly were not legally obedient to the Mosaic law. Instead he repeatedly accuses them of not being with God in their heart. It is our hearts, the overall direction of our lives,

which is the issue- rather than particular stellar examples of individual acts of obedience or disobedience. We note the constant condemnation of Israel for unfaithfulness to the covenant- individual sins are one thing, but breaking covenant is quite another. Failure within the covenant is assumed by God, it seems. But breaking the covenant is to walk away from His love. Hence His demand for our *hesed*, covenant love, loyalty, faithfulness to and recognition of the covenant.

Hos 8:2 *They cry to Me, 'My God, how we know You!'*- See on 6:6 *The knowledge of God.* Hos. 5:4 explains why: "the spirit of prostitution is within them, and they don't know Yahweh". It was finally God's dream that "you shall know no god but Me, for besides Me there is no saviour" (Hos. 13:4). "Saviour" is 'yasha', from whence Yahoshua, Yah saves, Jesus. Knowing God involves knowing Him as saviour; and a husband is to be trusted as a saviour: "the husband is the head of the wife and Christ is the head of the church- himself being the saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). "Saviour", "king" and even "your God" were terms which in Hebraic thought were titles for a husband. And yet Israel like Gomer looked to other gods and nations as their saviour. The New Testament presents the Lord Jesus as our "only saviour", Yahshua, Yah's salvation. It is knowing / experiencing Yah's salvation in the Lord Jesus which is to know Him. But Israel like Gomer, saw their salvation as coming from many sources- various Baals, Assyria, Egypt, Yahweh etc. As Gomer claimed to "know" / be in relationship with Hosea, so did Israel with God. They drew near with their lips, but their heart was far from Him (Is. 29:13). Israel prayed intensely to God, but not from their heart (see on Hos. 7:14). Prayer alone is not enough; we can pray, but not from the heart. Elijah prayed within his prayer- from his heart, beyond the words (see on James 5:17). And likewise knowing *about* God is not the same as knowing God. The very knowledge *about* Him of itself can lead us to assume that therefore we know Him in relationship; but this crucial difference needs to be realized by us. And the more knowledge we accrue, the more likely we are to be tempted to assume this is enough. In this lies the problem of defining fellowship with God on the basis of a set of theological propositions; fellowship / knowledge / relationship with God is a moral and not a solely theological issue.

Hos 8:3 *Israel has cast off that which is good. The enemy will pursue him*- This is God's answer to their prayer of :2. He says they have cast Him off, just as the Lord will reply to those who knock on the door at the last day by saying that He never knew them, i.e. they never 'knew' Him (Mt. 7:23).The LXX has "they have pursued an enemy"; by going to Assyria for help (:9), like Gomer chasing after her lovers, they were chasing after those who would later be their enemy. And by so doing they were casting off relationship with God who would do them good rather than evil; for He is "God who is good, and is always doing good" (Ps. 119:68). There is an ambiguity in the text- they pursued their enemies, and the enemies pursued them, as threatened in the Mosaic curses for disobedience. By chasing after the Assyrians for help, they brought about the Assyrians chasing them.

Hos 8:4 *They have set up kings, but not by Me. They have made princes, and I didn't approve*- Jeroboam became king of the ten tribes after the revolt against the house of David and Judah. There is an allusion to his calves in :5. This was not God's will; and yet He also brought the situation about as judgment upon His people, and it was according to His word that Jeroboam became king (1 Kings 11:37). Likewise it was not God's wish that Jerusalem be destroyed; and yet it was His prophetic word which

brought it about. If we will not do God's will, then He propels us further in that path; there is both an evil and a holy spirit which alike proceed from the Lord. But His propulsion of evil men in their path does not mean that He approves their actions. Later God will comment that He gave them a king in His anger, and took him away in His wrath. But this was "not by Me". He didn't "approve"; but like the Father to the prodigal, He gives man what he wants. Because of love... just as Hosea would've done to Gomer.

Being pursued by enemies is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:36). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant (see on :1). But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Of their silver and their gold they have made themselves idols, that they may be cut off- As Gomer used Hosea's wealth to hire lovers and serve idols. They "cast off" relationship with God (:3), and He in turn cut them off. The term for "cut off" is used of cutting / making a covenant; and they had despised God's exclusive covenant and cut covenants with the Assyrians (s.w. Hos. 10:4; 12:1). Those covenants involved agreements to worship the idols of their lovers / helpers. The silver and gold they paid to the Gentile armies required them to make the idols of those peoples (2 Kings 16:17).

Hos 8:5 *Let Samaria throw out his calf idol!*- The calf idols of Jeroboam were to be destroyed anyway by the invaders (:6), so they were to throw them down now. We feel Hosea's personal anger reflecting that of the God whose Spirit was inspiring him. We too need to throw away our idols for they shall be destroyed anyway by the Lord's coming. Ahaz had 'thrown out' the vessels of the temple (2 Chron. 29:19 s.w.); Hosea was calling for a radical inversion of values. The call of the prophetic word is no less radical in our day. Again we see an intentional ambiguity in the Hebrew- it could read (as AV) that Samaria's calf had led to her being thrown out / cast off by God; but that would not be the case if Samaria threw out her calf idol.

My anger burns against them! How long will it be until they are capable of purity?- The existence of the calf idols meant that purity was impossible for them. "Purity" has sexual overtones, and we again note that Gomer's impurity was the basis of Israel's idolatry. But even in this we see God's power to restore; sexual impurity can be read as making the offender permanently impure. But God like Hosea could restore her to a former innocence, by the grace of His imputed righteousness and cleansing spirit of forgiveness. And in Christ we likewise can become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), with the psychological effects of past sins dealt with and cleansed in God's sight. Again we see a juxtaposition- God's anger burnt, and yet at the same time He wished ["How long...?"] for their repentance and restoration. Hosea felt the same about Gomer.

AV "How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?" is not simply Divine frustration, but the expression of His hope- that they will at some point come to the innocency of a young woman totally devoted to her husband. This was what God was willing to do for them psychologically through the gift of His Spirit that would accompany the new covenant. And those who receive it today likewise can return to innocency, despite the most mentally profligate lives and minds. Cleansing is absolutely possible. "Innocency" is s.w. "guiltless". Even the guilt of the past could be removed. But this is only possible through God's Spirit. The Lord Jesus as the guilt offering (Is. 53) can as Paul says, cleanse the conscience from past sins / dead works. This is something which human forgiveness can't do. And perhaps that's why we

struggle with it. Israel like Gomer had "the spirit of prostitution", a mind addled with addiction; and that could be cleansed to "innocency". Truly a born again virgin. But this innocency / being guiltless is only attained through confession of sin. And Israel / Gomer refused. Jer. 2:35 uses the same word for "innocent": "Yet you said, 'I am innocent. Surely His anger has turned away from me'. Behold, I will judge you, because you say, 'I have not sinned'".

The Divine "how long...?" matches the same words recorded as being the feelings of His faithful throughout history. Here we see the mutuality possible between God and man. God entertained this strong hope for Israel whilst in the previous clause having stated that "My anger burns against them". So often we read these same Hebrew words, "Yahweh's anger was kindled". For all time, we see that God for sure has emotion and passion. Often we read these words of God's anger when His covenant was broken. And Israel like Gomer had broken the covenant. He says that "the anger of Yahweh would be kindled against you and He would destroy you quickly" (Dt. 7:4 and often; over 50 times in the OT we read that Yahweh's anger was kindled). If His anger is kindled, He wants to destroy His people suddenly. "The wrath of Yahweh was kindled against His people so that He hated / abhored His inheritance" (Ps. 106:40). Just as Hosea is saying; "I hated them... will love them no more". But here we read that His anger was kindled, but He desperately longed for the day when they would attain to "innocency". He had those feelings at the very same time as He wanted to destroy them. Just as Hosea understandably oscillated between such feelings for Gomer. And this is how God feels over every single one of us. The on balance position is that indeed God loves us and awaits our repentance and return to innocency. But that position is arrived at through such a painful and tortuous path.

Hos 8:6 *For this is even made in Israel! The workman made it, and it is no God*- The true God is not made with hands. The characteristic of idols is that they are humanly created. God alone is uncreate; but there is a constant tension within us between wanting to worship human works, and worshipping God. The desire to worship is coded within our natures; but it is for us to decide what we worship.

Indeed, the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces- Therefore, they were to destroy it now (:5). One reason why Israel wouldn't destroy the calves was because they were such a long standing symbol of their argument with Judah; it would be rather like spitting upon the flag of one's birth nation. But loyalty to God ought to have been stronger than these cultural, socio-historical loyalties.

Hos 8:7 *For they sow the wind, and they will reap the whirlwind*- We would expect to read that they sowed to the flesh, and so of the flesh would reap a whirlwind of judgment (as in Gal. 6:8). But sowing to the flesh is sowing the wind. They were wasting their lives, as Gomer did, on wind, on light things of no eternal moment. And for that, would reap the whirlwind of judgment. This repeats the great prophetic theme- that what might appear of little consequence in secular terms will result in eternal judgment and even now provokes the wrath of God. We live in a world which as never before sows the wind, glorifying the inane, vapid and meaningless. Life and human personality is increasingly superficial, life is no more than a day at the races. Most are no different to the light hearted, empty headed Gomer who disregarded Hosea's great love and ran for this or that which offered immediate gratification and solution. "Wind" and "whirlwind" are related ideas; the "wind" of lighthearted

thinking and living will gather together into a mighty whirlwind of judgment. Social media, art and entertainment are full of it. We can spend our hearts and our time on it- and reap the whirlwind. Whatever we do, we are sowing. All human thought, action and living is a sowing, and we shall one day reap accordingly. We can take no time out from this sowing; life, every moment of it and every thought, has eternal consequence. The things of God's ways are 'heavy' and not wind; the Hebrew word for "glory" is literally "weight". The things of the eternal weight of glory are being prepared for us now (2 Cor. 4:17). But Israel sowed the wind in their lives, and became themselves light, or vain and "worthless" (:8).

He has no standing grain; the stalk will yield no head of grain. If it does yield, strangers will swallow it up- Israel had sowed, but sowed the wind. No grain would therefore be found upon them. They were as stalks without any head of grain. Their prayers and ritual obediences were but a stalk. The fruit of the Spirit was lacking. Any apparent spiritual fruit they had would be the food of the Gentiles, and not unto God. But 'swallow up' really means 'to destroy'. They would be unable to spiritually cope with their judgment by the Gentiles, and any spirituality they might have developed would be destroyed by it. As Hosea gave Gomer grain (Hos. 2:8), so God had enabled Israel to bear such fruit; but they had given it to the idols of the Gentiles.

Hos 8:8 *Israel is swallowed up*- Again, the present tenses are used about future events. The word of judgment had gone forth, it was as good as done; but in the gap between word and fulfilment, they could repent and change God's present reality. This is the time gap we too stand in, as Paul reasons in Romans. This gives intensity to our repentance and our grateful acceptance of the changed verdict. See on :1 and Hos. 6:5.

Now they are among the nations like a worthless thing- Israel were "worthless" in that they had sowed the wind, they had been "light" rather than "heavy" (:7). The same Hebrew term is used of Coniah in Jer. 22:28.

Hos 8:9 *For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has hired lovers for himself*- Because they had sought help from Assyria, it was as if Assyria had already attacked and destroyed them (:8). As Gomer paid men for sex, so Ephraim hired "lovers", the help of flesh against their invaders. Menahem and Pekah paid huge sums of money to get their invaders to turn away from them (as noted in Hos. 7:11)- instead of turning to Yahweh. Quietly trusting in human help was for God- adultery. And this principle comes down hard upon us in our age, where savings and human security are perhaps the equivalent. Seeking this help was likened to being "a wild donkey wandering alone". The allusion may be to a donkey in heat, wandering around looking for a female to inseminate (as in Jer. 2:24 "a wild donkey used to the wilderness, that snuffs up the wind in her desire. When she is in heat, who can turn her away?"). This would continue the connection between adultery / sexual infatuation and going to Assyria for help, instead of turning to God. The roaming donkey literally has wander lust. Israel weren't going after just one other god. There were various Baals (note the plural in Hos. 2:17), just as Gomer had many lovers rather than just one lover with whom she had an affair. Her sexual addiction therefore represents Israel's psychological obsession with having many gods. That there is only one true God was accepted in theory by them- only as much as Gomer claimed to be the wife of only one man. We see here how hard it was to believe in just one God, and

that difficulty is perhaps reflected to this day in how man wishes to turn the one true God into a trinity. The judgment upon Israel was to wander in unfulfilled lust like a single wild ass in the wilderness- and this is the picture of being so alone in unfulfilment. It is the picture of the rejected, wandering alone in the darkness with no hand to hold.

Hos 8:10 *But although they sold themselves among the nations*- Like Gomer who paid men for sex, so Israel had given money to the nations around them for salvation (:9). But this was also a selling of herself; what she was given was apparent material support against her enemies. But what did Israel sell? What did Gomer sell? What does a prostitute sell? Her very self. Israel's inner heart was not with God, as Gomer's was not with Hosea. They gave it away to others. Anything less than a heart exclusively devoted to God is as prostitution. We therefore need to watch our heart, our mind, our spirit; for out of it are the issues of life eternal (Prov. 4:23). We need to ask whether the visual images and sounds and words we willingly subject ourselves to are going to help us maintain that heart for God.

I will now gather them; and they begin to waste away because of the oppression of the king of mighty ones- In the LXX there is a juxtaposition of ideas: "Therefore shall they be delivered to the nations: now I will receive them, and they shall cease a little to anoint a king and princes". Repeatedly, God's words of judgment contain within the same sentence or paragraph the promise of restoration. Those judgments were therefore not uttered in the blind anger of an offended deity. Yahweh was not like that. His love and pity are an intrinsic part of His anger with sin; "for the wrath of God is the love of God". The various aspects of our characters tend to manifest themselves at different times; one moment we are angry with someone, and then we cool down and pity them. But God is outside of time as we experience it; His characteristics are more holistically manifested, all articulated at the same time in His every word and action. According to the LXX, God's hope was that after "a little [time]" they would again choose a Messianic king and be received again by God, having been regathered by Him. This was Hosea's hope for Gomer. This is the two or three day period of Hos. 6:2 (see note there). But it didn't work out like that for Hosea with Gomer, neither did it for God at the time of the restoration, when most of His people preferred to remain in exile from Him.

Hos 8:11 *Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning, they became for him altars for sinning*- The more possibilities we give ourselves to sin, the more we will. This applies today in terms of what we watch and with whom we mix. This all began with Jeroboam saying that Israel could worship Yahweh at the calf idol altars, rather than going up to the Jerusalem temple. That multiplication of altars, just two to begin with, in turn multiplied, and became "sin" (1 Kings 12:30; 13:34). There was to be but one altar, and this was sternly emphasized (Dt. 12:5,6,13,14). God foresaw what would happen; the tendency would be to serve God as they thought and wanted, rather than as He wanted, and to mix idolatry with worshipping Him. This tendency to worship idols in the name of God is strong to this day- we may seek a better kitchen, a holiday home, a nicer car... supposedly in order to serve God. But after all those things do the Gentiles also seek.

Hos 8:12 *I wrote for him the many things of My law*- See on Hos. 6:6 *The knowledge of God.* I noted on :1 that the Mosaic law given at Sinai was the marriage covenant

between God and Israel. As Gomer despised her marriage covenant with Hosea, so did Israel. "I wrote" is literally "I write"; the covenant was written in the handwriting of God. It could not have been a more intimate contract between God and Israel, and was as it were written for each member of Israel in an ongoing sense. "Many things" is the same word as "multiplied" in :11. They had many idols, whereas there were many things written in God's law. Their obedience to those many things was precluded by their many idols; as if each Divine commandment had an idol precluding obedience to it. His commandments are designed to help us not have idols; if we obey them, then we will not serve idols.

But they were regarded as a strange thing- The Hebrew would be better translated: "They were woven / turned into a foreign / Gentile / adulterous thing". This speaks of how they worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship, claiming that their various idolatrous rituals were in fact obedience to God's commandments. Thus the "many things of My law" became parallel with their "many" idols (:11). And again we have to note that this is our tendency- to justify wrong behaviour, be it gossip or materialism, as some kind of service of God.

Hos 8:13 *As for the sacrifices of My offerings, they sacrifice flesh and eat it; but Yahweh doesn't accept them*- Israel didn't stop sacrificing to God, just as Gomer never ceased going through the motions of being married to Hosea. I noted on Hos. 7:14 that Israel prayed to God, even intensely, but their heart was not with them. Isaiah likewise condemns Israel for offering sacrifice whilst serving other gods. The motions of religious worship, attending meetings, sacrificing money, prayer to God... all this of itself is not what God seeks. Even fasting didn't make God "accept them" (Jer. 14:12 s.w.). It is not accepted if our hearts are not with Him. If we have not the spirit of Christ, we are none of His. The same word is used of how if the returned exiles rebuilt a temple according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48, then Yahweh would "accept" their offerings (Ez. 43:27); in this way He would "accept" the returned exiles as His people (Ez. 20:40,41 s.w.). Just as Hosea would have accepted back a repentant Gomer. But they didn't build as required, and despised the temple they did build, according to Haggai and Malachi. There is a desire to worship and to sacrifice coded into human beings, a desire to give to a good cause. But this is not the same as acceptable sacrifice. He has all material things and needs nothing. What He seeks is the sacrifice of a broken, humbled and repentant spirit. And that is rarely offered to Him.

The Hebrew can mean 'Let them slaughter the flesh and eat [it]'. As if to say, 'Why do I need them to bring them? Let them slaughter so that they have flesh to eat and eat them, for I do not desire them'.

Now He will remember their iniquity, and punish their sins- The words of Jer. 14:10. It's not clear who was quoting who, Hosea or Jeremiah; or it could be that God inspired them both with the same words at around the same time. As noted on Hos. 7:2, there is an assumption that if we forget our sins, then God does too. The passage of time and fading of memory thereby works a kind of pseudo atonement for us. But God remembers. And we must ever consider this in our hearts. Just as Hosea never forgot Gomer's betrayals, despite his love for her and desire to rebuild the relationship.

They will return to Egypt- They would return to Egypt and be derided there (Hos. 7:16). God says this clearly in Hos. 9:3,6. But just as clearly He says that they will not

return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). Here we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn. Just as Hosea oscillated between totally ending it with Gomer, even having her executed, and on the other hand, continuing to desperately love her and hope for her response.

Hos 8:14 *For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities; but I will send a fire on his cities, and it will devour its fortresses*- Israel and Judah were zealously religious for Yahweh (see on :13). But they forgot their maker because they trusted in human fortifications for defence rather than God (Jer. 5:17); their heart was lifted up and therefore they forgot God (Hos. 13:6). Again, it was a question of the heart. They forgot God, their hearts were not with Him in daily life. Their technical obedience and religion were of no account compared to that. They kept parts of the Mosaic law (:13), and yet they "forgot the law of your God" (Hos. 4:6). External obedience is nothing if the covenant is not in our hearts. Forgetting God is associated with adultery in Ez. 23:35; Hos. 2:13. "Palaces" here is also translated "temples", which were the source of their literal and spiritual adultery. That God is our maker ought to be an imperative to ever remember Him and not forget Him; our very bodies are witnesses to Him as we are created in His image (Dt. 32:15,18). This is where faith in the creation record strengthens our further faith in daily life; and vice versa.

HOSEA CHAPTER 9

Hos 9:1 *Don't rejoice in jubilation, Israel, like the other nations; for you were unfaithful to your God. You love the wages of a prostitute at every grain threshing floor*- Perhaps Hosea uttered this prophecy at some harvest festival. The "jubilation" was the joy of harvest, at the threshing floor (:2). Baal was a fertility cult. Blessings of good harvests, corn and wine, were promised to Israel for their loyalty to the covenant. But they prostituted themselves to Baal, trusting Baal for such harvests. And now like the other nations, in a year of good harvests, they joyfully thanked Baal. But the difference between them and the other nations was that they had thereby been maritally unfaithful to Yahweh. The apparent blessings of corn and wine were a reward not for their obedience to His covenant, but were the wages received for their prostitution with Baal. Hosea experienced the same with Gomer, who received payment in terms of food and clothing from her lovers, when these were what Hosea was obliged to give her as his covenanted wife.

Hos 9:2 *The threshing floor and the winepress won't feed them, and the new wine will fail her*- Threshing floor and winepress are also figures for judgment. By rejoicing in the apparent fertility given by the Baal cult, probably sleeping with the cult prostitutes on the threshing floors, Israel were living out their own judgment. They would be threshed / judged for this.

Hos 9:3 *They won't dwell in Yahweh's land; but Ephraim will return to Egypt*- They would return to Egypt and be derided there (Hos. 7:16). God says this clearly in Hos. 8:13. But just as clearly He says that they will not return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). Here

we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn. See on :6.

Another possibility is that returning to Egypt is meant to be understood as God saying that just as He had brought them out of Egypt and entered a marriage covenant with them at Sinai (see on Hos. 8:1), now He was sending them back to their land of origin- which was Egypt rather than Canaan. He was divorcing them, sending away His wife. So often in Hosea we read as if God / Hosea is on the very verge of divorcing Israel / Gomer, and is making a literally last minute appeal to her to change. Thus we keep reading that the invasion is about to happen, the eagle is circling and about to dive. But Hosea lived with Gomer for at least 50 years. He is never recorded as divorcing her. Although he so often says he is about to. So we have here an extraordinary window onto the feelings of God in the run up to Israel being sent into captivity in Assyria, and Judah in Babylon. This was the culmination of a heart wrenching period of teetering on the edge of the divorce. And even then, His actions, like Hosea's, were studded with dreams of reconcilliation. In no way did He act with raw, offended anger that is the dominant emotion rather than love. Absolutely not.

And they will eat unclean food in Assyria- God confirms men in the downward path they choose. Israel didn't want to be obedient to God's laws, and so they would go to Assyria where they would have to break those laws. Both an evil and holy spirit come from God, confirming us in the paths we choose. The next verse continues this theme.

Hos 9:4 *They won't pour out wine offerings to Yahweh, neither will they be pleasing to Him*- As noted on :3, Israel didn't want to be obedient to God, and so He sent them into a situation in exile where they could not properly offer to Him, as they had no temple nor acceptable altar. God confirms sinners in the downward spiral they themselves desire. The ten tribes had declined to go up to the Jerusalem temple and now in captivity they would be left without that possibility at all. If we don't take our spiritual opportunities, they are taken away from us; it's a case of use it or lose it. Their offerings were not "pleasing" to God whilst within the land (Jer. 6:20; Mal. 3:4 s.w.); and they would now be put into a position where their offerings in exile could not "please" Him.

Their sacrifices will be to them like the bread of mourners; all who eat of it will be polluted. Their bread will merely be for their hunger, it will not come with acceptance as an offering into the house of Yahweh- "Bread of mourners", "like food eaten at funerals" (GNB) is literally the bread of *aven*, of sin, of idolatry. Their eating pagan sacrifices in the name of Yahweh worship had amounted to this; and their attempts to worship Yahweh in captivity would be seen likewise. The ten tribes hadn't wanted to go up to "the house of Yahweh"; and so their attempts to consider that somehow their sacrifices offered in exile came into His house were not going to be acceptable. All too late they would wish to somehow have fellowship with His house; but too late. This is the tragedy of the rejected, that they will want all too late to enter God's house, knocking on the closed door.

Hos 9:5 *What will you do in the day of solemn assembly, and in the day of the feast of Yahweh?*- As noted on :3 and :4, in captivity they would have no opportunity to acceptably keep the feasts. They had no temple nor functioning priesthood. But this was because they themselves had sacrificed to Baal in the name of Yahweh worship.

"The day of solemn assembly" may refer to the day of atonement. They had not wanted to keep it as intended whilst they could, and in exile it wouldn't be possible.

Hos 9:6 *For, behold, they have marched off to destruction; Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them*- The references to death at Memphis in Egypt sound as if for sure, God would send them into captivity in Egypt. The GNB has: "When the disaster comes and the people are scattered, the Egyptians will gather them up- gather them for burial there at Memphis!". This was clearly stated in Hos. 7:16; 9:3,6. But just as clearly He says that they will not return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). Here we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn. We note the past tenses, when the threatened captivity was yet future. God's word of judgment is sure, but in the gap between statement and fulfilment, we can repent and change it. This is the intensity of the human moment in which we live hour by hour.

Nettles will possess their pleasant things of silver, thorns will come up in their tents- This may refer to the high places and tents set up for pagan rites on the high places of Israel. They would be abandoned and overgrown with nettles and thorns, the sign of the curse for sin in Eden.

Hos 9:7 *The days of visitation have come, the days of reckoning have come. Israel will consider the prophet to be a fool, and the inspired man to be insane*- They considered Hosea to be mad. And indeed the stress within Hosea was so enormous that he may indeed have had some kind of breakdown; not only from his relationship with Gomer, but because he had real insight into God's feelings for Israel. The psychological strengthening of the prophets (see on Ez. 2:4-6) was absolutely necessary- for no human being can live in a constant state of inspiration without breaking. The composer Tchaikovsky commented: “If that condition of mind and soul, which we call inspiration, lasted long without intermission, no artist could survive it. The strings would break and the instruments be shattered into fragments” (Rosa Newmarch, *The Life And Letters Of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky* (New York: Vienna House, 1973 ed.) pp. 274,275). The whole tremendous experience of having God’s mind in them, sharing His perspective, seeing the world through His eyes, made the prophets appear crazy to others. There’s a marked emphasis upon the fact that they were perceived as madmen (e.g. Jer. 29:24,26; 2 Kings 9:11). For us to walk down a street for even ten minutes, feeling and perceiving and knowing the sin of every person in those rooms and houses and yards, feeling the weeping of God over each of them… would send us crazy. And yet God strengthened the prophets, and there’s no reason to think that He will not as it were strengthen us in our sensitivity too.

Because of the abundance of your sins, and because your hostility is great- Like Gomer with Hosea, Israel would never have considered themselves hostile to God. But this is how He sees our behaviour. But perhaps there was indeed some level of anger with God, and anger with Hosea by Gomer. Like addicts, she came to hate Hosea, the very one who enabled her as a person, who alone had loved her truly (9:7,8). And yet Hosea loved her to the end. All this is of course a simple warning against sexual addiction, which is one of the most untabulated and significant addictions in our society. But for a man to love a woman like this is a marvellous picture of God’s love for His Israel, both then and now.

Hos 9:8 *A prophet watches over Ephraim with my God. A fowler's snare is on all of his paths, and hostility in the house of his God*- The GNB captures the sense: "God has sent me as a prophet to warn his people Israel. Yet wherever I go, you try to trap me like a bird. Even in God's Temple the people are the prophet's enemies". God watches over His word to perform it (Jer. 1:12). But He did so through Hosea and the prophets. Yet the people tried to trap him in his words and were openly hostile to him in the temple courts- just as happened to the Lord. Hostility in the temple would have come from the two tribe kingdom of Judah; despite the Mosaic rituals being observed there, the people opposed God's word as represented by Hosea.

Hos 9:9 *They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah*- The sin of Gibeah was the rape and murder of the Levites' concubine, and the Levite sending parts of her body throughout Israel (Jud. 19). The sin of Gibeah was performed by the Benjamites, and Hosea has just lamented the opposition he faced in the Jerusalem temple at the hands of Judah and Benjamin (:8). It was the priests with whom Gomer was sleeping; the very people who were murdering Yahweh's prophets, Hosea's brethren. And yet he still desperately loved her, as God loved those who slew His Son.

Hosea twice claims that the "sin of Gibeah" was the sin of all Israel: "These men are steeped in corruption as in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their iniquity, He will punish their sins... Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, Israel. There they stand. Shall not war overtake the guilty in Gibeah?" (Hos. 9:8,9; 10:9). Yet the sin of Gibeah historically was the sin of the men of Gibeah, defended from judgment by the tribe of Benjamin. But Hosea says that all Israel sinned as the men of Gibeah did. And that is what the Judges record brings out in Jud. 19-21. The tribes who judged Gibeah for their sin also suffered judgment- because in essence they were equally guilty. See on Jud. 20:24.

He will remember their iniquity, He will punish them for their sins- As noted on Hos. 7:2; 8:13, there is an assumption that if we forget our sins, then God does too. The passage of time and fading of memory thereby works a kind of pseudo atonement for us. But God remembers. And we must ever consider this in our hearts. This is a basic theme in Hosea, arising no doubt from Hosea's noticing and remembering all of Gomer's unfaithfulness, even though she thought he hadn't noticed.

Hos 9:10 *I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree at its first season*- God fell in love with Israel in the wilderness, according to Ez. 16 and Jer. 2. The parallel is with how Hosea had indeed fallen in love with the prostitute Gomer, and had seen her "as" perfect and wonderful- which is what love does. Grapes are not found naturally in the wilderness, that is not their normal habitat; the idea is that God saw them as something they naturally were not. This seems to imply that in the same way as God fell in love with Israel in the wilderness, even though they were worshipping idols even then, so Hosea did actually find Gomer attractive initially. The emphasis is upon how God "found" and "saw" them to be attractive at Sinai, and entered into a marriage covenant with them. But as Ez. 20 reminds us, they carried the idols of Egypt with them at this time, carrying the star of Remphan and the tabernacle of Moloch with them along with that of Yahweh. But despite that, God imputed righteousness to them and saw them as wonderfully attractive, just as Num. 23:21; 24:6 say that God did not see iniquity in Israel but saw them as beautiful trees. The idea of imputed righteousness was there in the Old

Testament; it is part of love. In Hosea's terms, God says He saw them as grapes and ripe figs, as if they had spiritual fruit when they did not. Grapes and figs don't grow in the desert; but God saw them like this. We struggle to believe that God and His Son really see us so positively, "unblameable... without spot... in His sight". But this is what faith in the love of God is all about.

God 'finding' Israel could mean, as suggested above, that this is how they appeared to Him, how He saw them. But it could equally mean that God searched for them and found them. God's search for man is a repeated theme of the prophets. "He found him in a desert land… He encircled him, He cared for him, He kept him as the apple of his eye" (Dt. 32:10). "I said, Here am I, here am I… I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people… I called, no one answered" (Is. 50:2; 65:1,2; 66:4). "I have found David my servant" (Ps. 89:20). God is in search of man. If we are in search of Him, there is an electric moment when His search for us and ours for Him come to meeting point. And yet in another sense, we don't so much as find God, as realize that He already is earnestly with us. Every man and woman is somehow a life "bound in the bundle of living in the care of the Lord" (2 Sam. 25:29). We come to realize that before we were formed in the womb, God knew us (Jer. 1:5).

But they came to Baal Peor, and consecrated themselves to the shameful thing- I noted above that God saw Israel encamped in beauty and without sin, and the visions of Balaam state this clearly. But immediately after those visions, Israel sinned with Baal Peor and joined themselves sexually and spiritually to Baal (Num. 23:28; 25:18; 31:16). So Balaam's visions may be in view in Hosea's words. Israel were now being judged for the sin at and with Baal Peor, and we recall the comment of Josh. 22:17, that "we are not cleansed from the iniquity of Peor even until this day". This was because the essence of that sin was continued in subsequent generations, including Hosea's. Despite God looking so positively at Israel, imputing righteousness to them, yet they prostituted themselves to Baal and slept with the Moabite Baal prostitutes. This of course was reflecting exactly the situation between Hosea and Gomer.

And became abominable like that thing which they so loved- We become like what we worship. And we have a desire to worship coded within our natures. We must therefore make a conscious election as to what we will worship, knowing that we shall become like it in due course. We become like what and whom we love. If we are transfixed by the gracious salvation that is in the Lord, we will become like Him in thought and deed.

9:11 *As for Ephraim, their glory will fly away like a bird*- There was a tremendous sensitivity in Hosea to both God and to the sin of His people, honed and developed by his own relationship with Gomer. At the start of Hosea's prophecy, Israel were prosperous. They worshipped Yahweh, and assumed He was with them. And yet Hosea discounts their worship of Yahweh as being effectively idolatry. Time and again Hosea accuses Israel of idolatry, using words to describe their idolatry which are word plays on language associated with Yahweh. He speaks of their *kabod* [glory] (Hos. 9:11; 10:5)- a word usually used about the glory of Yahweh. They worshipped *lo'al* (Hos. 7:16)- and he uses *al* to refer to Yahweh in Hos. 11:7. They worshipped *sor* (Hos. 9:13)- the same consonants as *sur*, the "rock" of Yahweh (Dt. 32:31). He calls Yahweh *qados* (Hos. 11:9), but they worshipped *qedosim* (Hos. 12:1). We tend to assume that Hosea's denunciation of idolatry meant that Israel worshipped both Yahweh and various other images and idols of their pagan gods. But

that seems to be an over-simplification. Archaeologists have actually not found much evidence of such gods as stand alone entities. Summarizing much research, Cogan concludes: "There is no evidence of Assyrian interference in the Israelite cult prior to the 720 BCE annexation of Samaria [after Hosea's time]… Israel was free of any cultic obligation" (M. Cogan, *Imperialism And Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974) pp. 103,104). And yet, Hosea speaks for all the world as if there were shrines etc. to other gods all over the place. My conclusion is that the idols, shrines etc. to which Hosea refers were therefore actually understood by Israel as a form of Yahweh worship. But he points out to them that actually, their worship of Yahweh is a form of idolatry. And all this has relevance to us. For actually things like daily Bible reading, attending church, going through the formalities of a religion, can become a form of fetishism rather than parts of the dynamic, Spirit filled life which they ought to be a vital part of. Worshipping Yahweh in the "high places", i.e. the pagan shrines, was Israel's besetting sin. It's rather like the way they turned the bronze snake of the wilderness into an idol. They, like us, never simply turned their back on the true Way. Rather did they mix it with the way of the flesh, the way of the world, and pronounced that as in fact Yahweh worship. And it was all this which Hosea was so deeply sensitive to, as demonstrated by the careful word plays he made, in order to demonstrate that their worship of Yahweh was in fact idol worship.

There will be no birth, none with child, and no conception- Gomer had no conception from Hosea, and became infertile, just like Israel were to God (:14).

No conception, barren wombs, dead children, wandering (Hos. 9:11,15-17) is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:26). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Hos 9:12 *Though they bring up their children, yet I will bereave them, so that not a man shall be left. Indeed, woe also to them when I depart from them!*- It would seem from :12-15 that Gomer's children were killed during one of the invasions, and she became infertile, with "a miscarrying woman and dry breasts" (:14). In Jewish terms of those days, to marry such a woman was pointless and absurd. But still, Hosea dreamt of the way when she would return to him in her heart and they could re-establish their relationship. She had nothing at all to offer him. Just like us with God. But such is His senseless love… "O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself: but in me is thine help" (Hos. 13:9). Gomer's sexual addiction was a reflection of the way she was crying out for love. The crying tragedy was that the love of Hosea, reflective as it was of God's love, was just surpassing. And yet she didn't perceive it, didn't want it... and so her mad search for love led her to the chronic sexual addiction which destroyed her and left her barren. And finally, God would depart from them, but only because they had first departed from Him (Hos. 7:14 s.w.). This was the final "woe", that the most amazing lover had now gone. We wonder whether this was ever realized in Hosea departing from Gomer. We sense that he never did, just as God has never fully left His natural people.

Hos 9:13 *I have seen Ephraim, like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place*- The analogy with Tyre is perhaps because Israel had accepted the idols of Tyre into their worship, not least because Ahab and his descendants had married into the royal family of Tyre; Jezebel was from there. The appropriacy goes further, however. We see from Ez. 27

[see notes there] that Tyre presented itself as another Jerusalem, as the "pleasant place" [s.w. "holy habitation" of Yahweh, Ex. 15:13; Is. 33:20], the city where in fact the true sanctuary of God was to be found. Ephraim would not go to worship at the Jerusalem temple, but instead chose Tyre. And this would lead to Israel's children being slain as Tyre's would be.

But Ephraim will bring out his children to the murderer- I suggested on :12 that this was matched by Gomer's illicit children being killed during one of the invasions or raids upon Israel.

Hos 9:14 *Give them--Yahweh, what will you give them? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts*- As noted on :12, Gomer became infertile, the result of her idolatry and promiscuity. The children she had from her illicit affairs were killed by the invaders; so infertility was a curse with a slightly silver lining in her case. Hosea loved her all the same; but she would be a useless partner for him, in Hebrew terms. And the same was true of God's love for Israel. Israel in this section is addressed as "Ephraim", meaning 'fruitful'. Ephraim was now to have the possibility of bearing fruit taken away, because they didn't wish to bear fruit anyway. Again we encounter the idea of spiritual capacity and opportunity being removed from us unless we use it. Yet all this is backdrop to the final intention of God expressed in Hos. 14, that Israel like Gomer would still miraculously bring forth fruit / children to Him.

Hos 9:15 *All their wickedness is in Gilgal; for there I hated them*- The mention of Gilgal is difficult because we are unaware that there was any more idolatry there than elsewhere. But probably the reference is to the way that Israel's demand for a human king at Gilgal was the epitome of their unfaithfulness to Yahweh; they thereby rejected Him as their king, master and husband; see on :17 and Hos. 10:3. They of course claimed to still have Him as their king, just as Gomer protested she was still Hosea's wife whilst having affairs with others. As Hosea went through flashes of hatred against Gomer, so did God. But His hatred was for a moment, because Hosea's prophecies go on to declare His undying love for His people. See on Hos. 10:9. And yet Gilgal apparently was a centre of idolatry at this time (Hos. 4:15; 12:11; Am. 4:4; 5:5). Yahweh hated how He was worshipped there in the form of Baal worship. Possibly Gomer worked there as a cult prostitute; so there Hosea hated her.

God several times speaks of His "hate" for persons and behaviour. And the Hebrew word means just that, not "to love less". His love is not unconditional; that is a myth of humanism, even if it has become a buzzword within liberal Christianity. God's love did evolve throughout Hosea, and it did from the Old Testament to the New, but it still required acceptance of it. Even if it is so that the conditions are waived or amended [we think of the progressive urging of anyone to come in to the marriage supper, or to go work in the vineyard even for an hour]. But there has to be some "Yes!" to the offer of love. God's love and our response to it is *chesed*, covenant love... love within a covenant, loyalty. This doesn't mean we won't sin nor fail. Nor are we any kind of equal in the Divine-human encounter. But still, there must be a "yes" and a willful abiding within the covenant. Outside of that is the darkness of separation from God, albeit self chosen.

Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house!- This part of the prophecy is directed at Ephraim, the ten tribes who refused to go to the temple. Now, they were barred from it. But being driven out of a husband's house is

also a figure for divorce; the same language is used of how Hagar was driven out of her husband Abraham's house. The Hebrew for "drive out" here is specifically used of divorce (e.g. Lev. 21:7,14; "her that is put away" Ez. 44:22). So often God and Hosea had these flashes of desire to divorce their partners, which given the gross adultery involved, they could have quite legitimately done. The protestation of God's eternal love for Israel is the more meaningful and intense once we realize that He had these feelings of hatred towards them at times. Our sins likewise anger God, and His love for us must be seen in that context and against that background.

I will love them no more- It was because of his great love for Gomer that Hosea came to feel the passionate anger with her which he did at times; and in this his spirit was that of God toward Israel. “I will love them no more” has to be balanced against his later profession that “I will love them freely” (Hos. 14:4). In the end, because he loved her, as God loved Israel, finally giving up this terrible woman proved impossible: “How shall I give you up?... My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger…” (Hos. 11:8,9). The offer of the new covenant relationship with Judah is made with the comment that God loves Israel with "an everlasting love" (Jer. 30:3). But this wonderful fact is nuanced by the way God arrived at that conclusion- through times when He felt that He would not love them any more. And covenant relationship with Him is so often predicated upon His people remaining faithful to the covenant (Dt. 7:12,13). Just as Hosea felt to Gomer. Here for all time we have the answer to the assumption that God's love is unconditional. More correctly, He says that it is conditional, and says He withdraws love; but in reality, His love for Israel continued, through all the wrath of judgment. To speak of His love as "unconditional" is to over simplify the profound. The fact is, some objects of God's love are not reached by that love, because they refuse it. And some who were reached by it withdraw themselves from it.

All their princes are rebels- The "princes" were represented by the children of Gomer, whom we can assume rebelled against their quasi father Hosea. The princes of Israel and Judah are mentioned several times as rebellious.

Hos 9:16 *Ephraim is struck*- God smote Israel in His anger (Is. 60:10 s.w.); but the word is used of how God struck His children in order to discipline them (Jer. 2:30 s.w.). God smote them, but intended to bind them up at the restoration (Hos. 6:1 s.w.). His judgments are designed to elicit repentance and are not the outpouring of pure anger alone. We note the present tense: "Is struck", although they had not yet been smitten- see on :6.

Their root has dried up. They will bear no fruit. Even though they bring forth, yet I will kill the beloved ones of their womb- As noted on :12 and :14, Gomer like Israel was to become barren; and the children of adultery were to be killed by the invaders. Here the figure is changed to a crop with a dry root and therefore no fruit. They had never borne fruit to God, as Gomer had not for Hosea; and so the opportunity for spiritual fruit bearing was taken away from them. But the same word for "dried up" is used of the lifeless, dried bones of Ez. 37:11, which could be revived by the Spirit given under the new covenant.

Hos 9:17 *My God will cast them away*- God has been speaking in the first person in the previous verses. But Hosea's feelings and spirit were those of God. He now

interjects with his own summary of the situation, and that too is inspired or in-spirited by God. He was no mere printing device pumping out a message. God did "cast them away", and yet finally "God has not cast away His people" (Rom. 11:1), just as Lev. 26:44 had promised He would not, even though He send them into exile. I suggested on :15 that Israel's sin in choosing a human king was there in view; this had been the ultimate action which epitomized their rejection of God as their king and husband. The same word for "cast away" is used in this context in 1 Sam. 10:19; they thereby "rejected your God". Because they "rejected" [s.w. "cast away"] knowing God, having relationship with Him in the Hebraic sense of 'knowing', He rejected them (Hos. 4:6).

Because they did not listen to Him- If by this God meant 'They weren't obedient to My specific commandments', then a different word would have been used. God is not a casuist nor a legalist. The Hebrew for "listen" better means to perceive, to literally listen to a person, as one listens to the lover with whom you wish to develop a relationship. This is not to say that obedience to specifics is unimportant to God; but essentially He sought a relationship with Israel, as Hosea did with Gomer. But Gomer refused to 'know' Hosea, perhaps sexually, but also in terms of relationship; and so it was with Israel toward their God.

And they will be wanderers among the nations- The same word has already been used in Hos. 7:13 for how Israel wandered from God, and went to the nations not only in idolatry but in seeking their help against their invaders, rather than God's help. Always, the judgments upon Israel are only a reflection back to them of how they had been with God. Quite simply, all who truly with all their hearts "love His appearing" shall be saved (2 Tim. 4:8). If we don't want to be in His Kingdom, then we will not be; if with all our hearts we do, then we shall be. If we wander off from God and prefer the world, then we shall go to the world and be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). We make the answer now. The analogy with Hosea-Gomer is that Gomer wandered from lover to lover and never found stability. And this category, Jude says, will wander in darkness like lost stars. That is what the condemnation experience will be about- living out the essence of how they chose to live in this life.

HOSEA CHAPTER 10

Hos 10:1 *Israel is a luxuriant vine that puts forth his fruit*- This continues the imagery of Hos. 9:10 a few verses before; God in love saw Israel like this in the wilderness, imputing goodness to them, even though they did not have real spiritual fruit. "Luxuriant" rather than "empty" [as AV] seems the right reading, because the next clause talks of this vine's abundant fruit. The prophecy concludes with a picture of Israel just like this in Hos. 14:5-7. This is what they were capable of- repenting, and becoming the reestablished Kingdom of God as a blessing to others. Even in condemning Israel and divorcing them, Yahweh still held to this final vision for them. Just as Hosea fantasized of how the now barren and bereaved Gomer would somehow bring forth fruit to him.

According to the abundance of his fruit he has multiplied his altars- Baal was a fertility cult, and so the more God blessed them with good harvests, the more they worshipped Baal. This was the ultimate abuse of God's love. Material blessing so often leads to something far worse than the spoilt child syndrome; it led Israel to Baal,

because they abused the Divine blessings. The fruit on the vine however, as explained on Hos. 9:10, was how God perceived them. The more He loved them and imputed beauty to them, the more they abused it. We are in a relationship with God whereby His love for us is far greater than ours for Him; and it is so easy for us to abuse that. We note the plural- "altars". Repeatedly, the prophets condemn Israel for following "other gods" in the plural. Israel worshipped many gods, many baalim, a baal for this and for that; just as Gomer had many lovers, and served as a cult prostitute at various shrines to many gods.

As their land has prospered, they have adorned their sacred stones- "Prospered" and "adorned" are the same word. The AV is better: "according to the *goodness* of his land they have made *goodly* images". Baal was a fertility god. The more blessing Yahweh gave them in terms of good harvests, the more they made "good" idols to Baal. They attributed the good harvests to Baal and not Yahweh. This was all reflected in how Gomer took Hosea's material blessings and offered them to Baal, and also received payment from the men she slept with. She attributed those 'blessings' of payment to the blessing of Baal. The more God blessed His people by grace, the more they abused it. Israel were indeed prosperous at the time of Jeroboam II, and there is archaeological evidence of her prosperity at the time, and for the marked growth in size of Jerusalem. This was the love of Hosea for Gomer reflecting God's apparently senseless love for Israel.

Hos 10:2 *Their heart is divided, and so now they will be found guilty*- Yet again, the essential guilt of Israel was because of the state of their hearts. Just as Gomer claimed to be married to Hosea whilst having affairs, so Israel's heart was divided between God and idols. It is this state of division which is so painful to God and which is the basis for guilt. If we are in relationship with God, He absolutely must have our entire heart. We think of the Lord's desire that the Laodicean church would be either hot or cold, but not lukewarm. A divided heart makes us far worse than those who are ignorant of Him. Perhaps James alludes here in soberly warning against having a double heart toward God (James 1:8; 4:8). We stand before God's judgment "now". Hosea realized the critical intensity of the moment; right now, they were found guilty in court before God. The judgment "will be" [demolition of altars, etc.]- and in that gap, they could repent. This is the intensity of our position before God. This is the crucial importance of life and living now.

"Will be found guilty" may mean that it was God's hope, as it was Hosea's for Gomer, that they would recognize their guilt. This is the same hope as in :3, "Surely they will now say...". This repeated hopefulness for their repentance is such a major theme in Hosea. It was rooted in love, for love "hopes all things". And it is part of our love for this world and for individuals. Even if that hope, as in Hosea, is never realized. To love someone is to hope for them."The hope of Israel" is an ambigious genetive. The hope that Israel has, or, the hope for Israel which God has. Not all Israel will experience that hope, certain as hope, *elpis*, really is. Israel's hope is the hope they have, but like "the world's redemption" it will not save / redeem all the world. The hope of Israel, the hope for and about Israel, is God's hope for them. It was Hosea's hope for Gomer. But very few of "Israel" will experience it.

He will demolish their altars, He will destroy their sacred stones- Presumably the invaders destroyed the gods of those they conquered. The Canaanite idols were not those of Babylon or Assyria.

Hos 10:3 *Surely now they will say, We have no king; for we don't fear Yahweh; and the king we have, what can he do for us?*- Often in Hosea, God appeals to Israel to let Him be their 'king' (Hos. 13:10). But there is a Hebraism whereby a husband is called the 'king' of his wife. God's appeal was reflected in Hosea's desire for Gomer to as it were re-marry him, to let him truly be her king / husband. And yet she felt like Israel: "What then should a king do [for] us?". She was so selfish that she didn't see anything in it for her… when so much love was being offered to her. All this explains why God felt that Israel's rejection of Him at Gilgal when they asked for a human king was the epitome of their marital unfaithfulness to Him (see on Hos. 9:15). Israel in exile were without God as their king, and without the human king of their choosing. This is the indescribable agony of the rejected; they are left without that which they loved, and also without God.

Hos 10:4 *They make promises, swearing falsely in making covenants*- The preceding verse, as explained there, is in the marital context. Israel had despised their marriage covenant with God (see on Hos. 8:1) as Gomer had with Hosea. They had made a false oath. But they had likewise made false oaths in their secular lives, breaking the covenant they made with Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:4).

Therefore judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field- This continues the theme of Israel reaping what they had sown (see on Hos. 8:7). By not being serious about their promises, the harvest was poisonous weeds ruining their crop. The result seems out of proportion, in secular terms, to 'just' not being serious about their promises. But this again is a great theme of the prophets- that apparently 'little sins' reap massive and eternal consequences. The mention of the furrows prepares us for :12. They had ploughed and sown, but to evil. Hosea will go on to appeal for them to do so to righteousness. "Poisonous weeds" is the same word used in Deuteronomy, of how Israel's grapes (:1) would become poison because of their idolatry (Dt. 29:18; 32:32,33). The word is used of how the Lord Jesus on the cross was given such poison to drink (Ps. 69:21); there, He carried the condemnation of Israel (Jer. 8:14; 9:15 s.w.). All His sufferings were their judgments. In this sense He bore [the condemnation for] our sins.

Hos 10:5 *The inhabitants of Samaria will be in terror because of the calves of Beth Aven*- Beth Aven is how God and Hosea saw Beth El. The house of God had become the house of idols and sin. "Be in terror" is the same word translated "assemble themselves" [in prayer and worship] in Hos. 7:14. The people loved their idols, and begged their gods that these idols not be removed from them. Bethel [where the golcden calf was] is called Beth Aven in Josh. 7:2.

For its people will mourn over it, along with its priests who rejoiced over it; because its glory has departed from it- See on Hos. 9:11 *Glory.* The people mourned the loss of their beloved calves and their removal by the Assyrians as a trophy for their gods (:6). This is the measure of idolatry; when the worshippers mourn when their idol is removed. They should have removed the idols, and so God does so- and they weep and pray that they be not removed. Again, God's issue with Israel was not concerning individual acts of obedience or disobedience, but a general state of heart and direction in life.

Hos 10:6 *It also will be carried to Assyria for a present to a great king*- The golden calves were carried off by the Assyrians. As noted on :5, they ought to have removed them themselves, and so God removed them. And they were terribly upset about it. This is the measure of a man; if at the Lord's return our idols of wealth,

homes, cars, devices... are removed from us, will we like Lot's wife look back in anger and sadness? Or count all such things as nothing that we might press on and be with the Lord? "A great king" is AV "Jareb", the avenger / defender. The idea is 'A present to the king (whom they looked to as) their defender / avenger'. They should have treated Yahweh as their king, defender and avenger. But they turned to Assyria for help, and now were destroyed by Assyria. In terms of the Hosea-Gomer relationship, the lovers turned against them.

Ephraim will receive shame, and Israel will be ashamed of his own counsel- Hitzig translates: "He (the Assyrian king) shall take away or carry off the shame of Ephraim; that is, the calf-idol". The calves should have been their shame, but instead they mourned for them (:5). They went where their calves went- to captivity in Assyria. We become like that which we worship. The calves were built by Jeroboam after "taking counsel" (1 Kings 12:28); hence "his own counsel" refers to the calves. Yet Israel collectively are accused of Jeroboam's sin; he "made them sin", but they did so willingly, and so we see clarified the principle that even if we are led into sin by others, we still remain responsible for our sin. And the person, such as Jeroboam, who led us into the sin is also as it were charged for it. See on :8. "His own counsel" would be a reference to I Kings 12:28: “The king took counsel and made two golden calves”.

Hos 10:7 *Samaria and her king will float away, like a twig on the water*- The ten tribes and their king were taken captive; the Assyrian invasions are likened to an overflowing river which carried them away. Again we have the figure of lightness, seen in the lighthearted and not serious attitude of Gomer to Hosea's great love.

Hos 10:8 *The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed. The thorn and the thistle will come up on their altars*- Thorns and thistles are the punishment for sin, as clearly stated in Eden. Their altars would not be used by others, but would be left as ruins, covered by the judgment for sin. "Aven" or Beth Aven is how God and Hosea saw Beth El, no longer the house of God but the house of idols. Although Jeroboam built the shrine there and made Israel sin thereby, it was still "the sin of Israel", their sin. See on :6. Bethel [where the golcden calf was] is called Beth Aven in Josh. 7:2.

They will tell the mountains, Cover us! and the hills, Fall on us!- Instead of calling out to Yahweh in repentance as they were carried into captivity, Israel instead just wished to die; the hills or high places were associated with their sins, and they would choose death rather than repentance. They would prefer to die at the hands of their high places rather than repent. The Lord quoted these words to the women watching Him carry His cross, applying them to the Jews in AD70, whom He sensed would likewise be impenitent; His quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. Israel were a useless tree (:1), a twig cut off (:7). If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot or twig, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel…? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. The Lord’s following words as He carried the cross were: "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?", and they are packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations

flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

Hos 10:9 *Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah, there they remained. The battle against the children of iniquity doesn't overtake them in Gibeah*- The idea of the Hebrew could be 'More even than in the days of Gibeah'. "The battle" in view is based upon that against the Benjamites by the other tribes of Israel because of the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine in Gibeah (Jud. 18). That "battle" in judgment of their iniquity didn't stop there, it didn't "overtake them" or end there; because they continued the essence of that sin, sinning like that from that day onward, Benjamin was yet to suffer. "There they remained" would mean that they adhered to that trait since then. Yet it is "Israel", the ten tribes, who addressed; and yet Benjamin, one of the two tribes of Judah, is also to be judged. This is another example of the two kingdoms being judged with the same judgment. The Divine hope that Judah would be more repentant didn't come true. The Hebrew however is difficult here, and the GNB may be correct in suggesting a particular judgment against Judah at Gibeah, which was the home of Saul, the king / partner they chose after rejecting Yahweh as their king / partner / husband: "The LORD says, "The people of Israel have not stopped sinning against me since the time of their sin at Gibeah. So at Gibeah war will catch up with them". See on Hos. 9:15.

Hos 10:10 *When it is my desire, I will chastise them; and the nations will be gathered against them, when they are bound to their two transgressions*- Binding them to their sins presumably means judging them for their sins. The two sins could refer to the two calves set up by Jeroboam; or to the equal sins of Israel and Judah; see on :9. But again we note that their judgment at the hands of the nations was intended as a chastisement, with the hope of reformation [s.w. "correct", "reform"]. Not of the generation who perished, but the hope was that others would be chastised by what happened at the invasion, and be reformed. Yet this intention and possibility didn't really come about. The gathering of plural nations could be understood by the Assyrians and Babylonians using mercenaries from the surrounding nations; but as the Lord understood the judgment to apply to AD70 and the last days (see on :8), so these judgments look ahead to the final tribulation of Israel when "all nations shall be gathered" against them.

"Their two transgressions" can be "their two rings". The two rings may refer to goads placed near the eyes of the ox. Verse 11 Heb. speaks of Ephraim as a goaded heifer.

Hos 10:11 *Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh*- The idea may be that they preferred the easier work of threshing than of ploughing. Ephraim had been trained or taught, but they refused to listen (Jer. 32:33 s.w.). But threshing is a figure of judgment, and the great prophetic theme is that Israel received the judgments which they themselves had lived out through their profligate living.

So I will put a yoke on her beautiful neck- "Her beautiful neck" reflects how much God loved Israel; even in putting them under the yoke, He saw her beauty and loved her. It seems that Hosea's attraction to Gomer, even when she became barren, likewise continued despite all her unfaithfulness.

I will set a rider on Ephraim, Judah will plough, Jacob will break his clods- We note the parallel between the ten tribes and the two tribes. They had sinned together, and would both be judged, but it was the Divine hope that they would come together out of exile and reestablish God's kingdom in the land. The rider upon them could be

a Messianic figure; or it could be that their dominators in exile would be the means of their ploughing and sowing to righteousness rather than sin, as noted on :4. But the returned exiles didn't really live up to this; the pain of God through Hosea was that so much potential was wasted by Israel's short term outlook and desire for the immediate and the sinful.

Hos 10:12 *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness. Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek Yahweh, until He comes and rains righteousness on you*- As noted on :4, they had ploughed and sown, but to evil. Now they were to do so to righteousness. This new approach to living, to sowing, was to be achieved whilst in captivity (see on :11). They were to realize their spiritual potential, their fallow ground, and seek Yahweh so that the Messianic rain of righteousness could come down upon them. The Messianic kingdom could have come then, but they would not, and so it has been delayed until God's people truly seek Him. The faithful few such as Ezra encouraged the exiles to "seek Yahweh" (Ezra 7:10; Is. 55:6 s.w.); but generally they weren't interested. "Rains" is also the word for "to teach", and has been used in :11 of how previously, Israel had been 'taught' but had refused to listen. If they sought Yahweh, if they opened up their fallow ground, then He would teach them. We find God not by academic Bible study alone; it is the heart's desire to seek God which results in Him teaching us. It's not that God hides behind the pages of the Bible until we find Him. He comes to us and teaches us; but in response to our broken hearted seeking of Him.

Hos 10:13 *You have ploughed wickedness and you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies*- See on :4. "Lies" here effectively stands for idols. The "wickedness" they sowed was "the wind", a superficial life with a lighthearted approach to the heavy things of God's glory; and they reaped the whirlwind (see on Hos. 8:7). "The wind", the lighthearted attitude to God which characterizes so many in our age, is here "wickedness" and "iniquity". Again we see how such attitudes which are seen as totally excusable and understandable in secular terms are seen by God as great wickedness.

For you trusted in your way, in the multitude of your mighty men- Israel are repeatedly condemned in Hosea for hiring foreign warriors to defend them rather than turning to Yahweh for help. They trusted in those men, who were effectively "your way". The way of Yahweh is total trust in Him. To trust in human strength is to depart from His way; and this sets us a huge challenge, in an age where as never before there are all manner of schemes to apparently save us from the consequences of sin.

Hos 10:14 *Therefore a battle roar will arise among your people, and all your fortresses will be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth Arbel in the day of battle. The mother was dashed in pieces with her children*- Shalman could be a contraction for Shalmaneser, the Assyrian king who destroyed the ten tribe kingdom. But Hosea here speaks in the past tense, and Shalmaneser destroyed Samaria forty years after Hosea. So there may here be reference to a historical incident which we don't know about, by a king called Shalman. Or the reference could be to the first invasion by Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:3), when one border fortress at Beth Arbel was destroyed. Israel trusted in their fortresses (see on Hos. 11:6), and they were intended to learn from the destruction of just one of them. God works in such a gentle way with us; we may see one aspect of our human defences destroyed, one bank fails, one insurance policy fails to cover us. And this should lead us to not depend upon the others we have and throw

ourselves completely on Yahweh. The massacre at the otherwise unknown little fortress of Beth Arbel was intended to be a warning of judgment to come; and they could have avoided it if they had been perceptive. We too see dry runs of judgment to come, in our own lives and in the experiences of others we are aware of. And we are to take the lesson.

Hos 10:15 *So Bethel will do to you because of your great wickedness*- Bethel and its shrine would bring about their judgment at the hands of the Assyrians (:14); their idols were the ones who were to destroy them, just as Israel had turned to Assyria and its idols for help, and then Assyria turned upon them and destroyed them.

At daybreak the king of Israel will be destroyed- This could have been literally uttered the night before the assassination or death of one of the kings contemporary with Hosea, perhaps Hoshea. "In a morning" (Heb.) might mean 'suddenly, unexpectedly'. Or it could have been a prophecy whose fulfilment was delayed or even cancelled by repentance. Or again, the night of judgment is perhaps portrayed as daybreak because there is always the hope of reformation and the final dawn of the Messianic age hinted at in all the Divine threats of judgment. Just as Hosea intended to make Gomer suffer in order than she would quit her lovers and return to him.

HOSEA CHAPTER 11

Hos 11:1 *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt*- As noted on Hos. 8:1, God had entered into marriage covenant with Israel at Sinai. He had called them out of Egypt for that to be possible; but they had in their hearts returned to Egypt and thereby despised their marriage covenant. So often in Hosea, God seeks to remind Israel of their national beginnings, and the grace He showed. His calling of them was the sign of pure grace, Paul reasons in Romans. That call was not because they were righteous, just as Hosea didn't call Gomer to marriage because she was righteous. The call is in the Gospel; we who have heard it only heard it by grace. So we should never doubt His grace and intention toward us. We note that God's love for Israel was shown by His call of them. Paul argues the same in Romans, that Divine love is instanced through our being predestinated, chosen and therefore called. This calling was all of grace, both for Israel and for the new Israel.

So often in the prophets, Hosea especially, God idealizes His past with Israel, and then bitterly laments their present unfaithfulness. The truth was that they were unfaithful from the start. But again we see in this something very human, something we can imagine in Hosea's feelings towards Gomer. He idealized their past relationship, even though she was a whore when they married; and laments her present unfaithfulness. He now actualizes in his mind the knowledge he had all along; that she was a whore. And God is revealing Himself as going through the same process. This does not make Him capricious or somehow not all knowing. It simply reflects how we are made in His image and therefore this 'human' capacity to be like this- is in fact a reflection of how He also is.

God had said that Israel would return to Egypt (Hos. 8:13; 9:3), but then says here that they would not (:5). He comes to that feeling on remembering how He had brought them out of Egypt. But these words are quoted about the Lord Jesus as a child being brought out from Egypt. Perhaps the connection of thought is in the fact that His same grace toward His people was supremely in His Son. Or it could be that the

failed 'son' of God, Israel, becomes a type of the Lord Jesus in an inverse sense, just as the way the High Priest *stood* serving is seen as the intended inverse of the way the Lord Jesus is *seated* whilst serving in the heavenly sanctuary.

These words are quoted about the Father calling Joseph and Mary to bring His Son out of Egypt (Mt. 2:14,15). But that is hardly the context here. It is not necessarily so in Bible study of quotations that "context is king". The New Testament sometimes seems to quote the Old Testament *without* attention to the context- at least, so far as human Bible scholarship can discern. The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Hosea's plans for Gomer ultimately failed, and so did God's desires to save the Israel of Hosea's days and subsequent generations. But this doesn't mean that His word was falsified, nor that the objectives He has set in human history didn't ultimately work out. "Israel" here becomes the Lord Jesus; just as the "servant" prophecies of Isaiah were initially about Israel as a nation. They didn't live up to them at the restoration, and so they were reinterpreted and reapplied to the Lord Jesus. He and then those in Him became the Israel of God, who did respond.

The passage condemns Israel's behaviour from a child. It has been observed that it has many similarities with documents which are formal disownings of a child, giving all the reasons. Rather like some of the criticisms of Israel are expressed in terms of contemporary divorce statements. This is God disowning His own child, just as Hosea disowned 'His' children by Gomer, calling them Lo-Ammi, not mine. And yet Yahweh is unable to finally do this for His beloved child Israel. Such disownings of a child even to having them executed were known by the Israelites from Dt. 21:18-21. We have a similar passage in Is. 1:2-20, where hope is still held out that the child may repent. Here, God is as it were the plaintiff before a court. He presents the evidence, but then in :8 and onwards He as it were withdraws the case, overcome by love for His child. Death was the punishment for a rebellious child (Dt. 21:18-21), but here God decides not to go ahead with this. His reactions and feelings are those of every parent of wayward children- they remember the infanthood and early childhood of the child, and this pulls at their desire to discipline and judge.

Hos 11:2 *The more I called to them, so they went away from Me. They sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to engraved images*- The more God revealed His word of call and invitation to Israel, the more they rebelled against Him. This is also how God's word function now; it elicits either our response or our rejection. Hosea knew all this from his personal experience of being the vehicle of God's call and word to Israel. The more he tried, both with Israel and Gomer, the more they turned away (Jer. 2:27). "I called" is AV "They called", referring to the ministry of the prophets. God's intention was that a reborn Israel, born again by the Spirit which would be given as part of the new covenant, would again as it were come out of Egypt to Him, and this had been Hosea's hope of Gomer too (Hos. 2:15). "They went away" is literally, 'they walked away from My face'. The Divine call to Israel was a revelation of His very face, an invitation to intimate relationship. But they turned away from it, telling Moses that they didn't want to hear the voice of Yahweh nor come near to Him; they wanted mere religion instead, Moses going near and telling them what he heard. And Gomer likewise rejected Hosea's desperate desire for an intimate, exclusive relationship with him.

Hos 11:3 *Yet I taught Ephraim to walk. I took them by his arms; but they didn't know that it was I who healed them-* God likens Himself to Israel's father, teaching His little child to walk for the first time; or more precisely, teaching the child to walk despite a handicap that required healing and the strengthening of its arms. We noted the same on Hos. 7:15. As the child 'makes it' into the Father's arms for the first time, there must be a tremendous *excitement* for the Father. A few uncertain, jittering steps- and He is thrilled and telling the whole world about it with joy. No matter how clever or powerful that man is in the world. And so this is how God was with His people, it's how it is with us too as we take our first unsure steps after baptism. He has the capacity for thrill and excitement, just as we do, who are made in His image.

The statement that God "healed them" is in the context of His teaching Israel to walk as an infant. He graciously saw their sins and resultant bruises as being the result of their attempts to walk, and falling over. Teaching an infant to walk involves a lot of comforting and 'healing' of them because they inevitably fall over. In reality, their sins were rank rebellion, but Yahweh kindly, lovingly viewed them as mere mistakes made whilst learning to walk with Him.

That Israel "did not know / recognize" God's love was so painful, for Yahweh and also for Hosea in his unrequited, unappreciated love for Gomer (Hos. 2:8; 5:4; 11:3). God wanted to destroy Israel for this lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6,14). He had called them out of Egypt, but they in spirit had returned there. Perhaps He calls them "Ephraim" because Ephraim had been born in Egypt [Joseph's son by Asenath]. They had forgotten that calling out because of the massive material blessings which Yahweh had spoilt them with, thus fulfilling the scenario envisaged in Dt. 6: 12, "Then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery". Forgetting Him was not knowing Him.

Healing is a major theme in Hosea. The other nations [cp. Gomer's lovers] could not heal Israel (Hos. 5:13), but Yahweh could, if they repented (Hos. 6:1 "Let us return / repent to Yahweh and He will heal us"). But He was hindered in that by their refusal to accept that healing (Hos. 7:1). The healing was in fact potentially done- they just had to accept it: "they didn't know that it was I who healed them" (Hos. 11:3). Finally God simply states in Hos. 14:4 "I will heal their waywardness ["backsliding", "disloyalty"], I will love them freely", and they would again be fruitful. For Him. Despite 'healing' being predicated upon repentance (e.g. Jer. 3:22 "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness", Ps. 30:2 "I cried to You [in repentance] and You healed me", Is. 6:10 "Understand... convert... and be healed"). It's as if God scraps even that basic requirement and wants to force through His desire for them to have a heart for Him; just as Hosea fain would have done this to the heart of Gomer but lacked the power to do so. Just as so many unrequited lovers would do for the object of their love.

In Hosea 2, Yahweh and Hosea offer their women a remarriage under a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. The offer of a new covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah involves the gift of a new heart to God's people, His spirit, His mind, a heart solely for Him. Jer. 3:22 is clear: "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness". "I will restore... I will heal you... I will heal them and reveal unto them the abundance of peace [with God]" (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). The wonder of Jer. 30:12-15 is that the wounds which are "incurable" would be healed by God. He could do the psychologically impossible, through the gift of His spirit which would accompany the new covenant. This is available to us who have accepted the new covenant today. It's why and how believers are psychologically transformed.

This is the same idea as in Hos. 14:4. Their disloyalty would be healed, their unfaithful mind would be changed. We are helped to understand this by the Hosea-Gomer situation. He desperately wanted her to love him, to have a heart for him, and not constantly looking at other men and committing adultery. It was His hope that she would one day love him, and he would do anything to give her such a heart. Israel had a heart for the idols and not for Yahweh, just as Gomer is presented as a sex addict who is mentally enslaved to her addiction. But Yahweh earnestly wanted to heal their heart. This is Hosea's form of the offer of a new heart and spirit to Israel, which was part of the new covenant offered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That healing is offered to Israel, but they refuse. Until at the very end, in Hos. 14:4, God seems to as it were force through His plan with them. We who have willingly signed up to the new covenant have even more ample access to this spirit. If we want it- we will be given it. And we potentially have it.

Remembering how He had felt towards His child Israel in earlier days, God cries out in :8 with a stab of pain: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?”. The memory of Israel’s childhood was just too much. It made God change His mind with regard to totally rejecting His wayward son. In preaching to Israel, we are beseeching the prodigal child to return to the desperately grieving Father... for His sake we do this. It is too much for me to think of God so hurt... we surely *have* to do something about it, to appeal to His people.

The strengthening of their arms was an act of 'healing', and the same word is used of how God healed Israel as they left Egypt (Ex. 15:26), so that there was not one feeble amongst all their tribes (Ps. 105:37). They were not an attractive child, in this sense. But God loved them as His very own, just as Hosea did Gomer.

Hos 11:4 *I drew them with cords of a man, with ties of love; and I was to them like those who lift off the yoke on their necks; and I bent down to him and I fed him*- This all continues the baby / toddler analogy; swaddled tightly in swaddling clothes, which were wrapped by "a man", when this was and is stereotypically a mother's work. Likewise it is the mother who bends over to breastfeed. But it was God, who lifted the yoke of Egypt from them, who is presented as performing these classically feminine, motherly roles. It was all a most unusual image for the Israel of those days. But this was God's most unusual care for Israel. Acts 13:18 emphasizes it: "For about the time of forty years, as a nursing father He carried them in the wilderness". Or we can read this as: "I was drawing them with human cords, with bands of love, I was with them like those who lift an infant to their breasts; I bent down to feed him". In this case, God is expressing His ability to relate to Israel as their mother as well as their Father. He is presented as Father but can be compared also to mother. Dt. 32:18 speaks of God as the woman who gave birth to Israel: "You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth”.

God as a kind farmer released the yoke so that it didn't weigh so heavily. But they abused that.

Hos 11:5 *They won’t return into the land of Egypt; but the Assyrian will be their king, because they refused to repent*- Because of the memory of how He had saved them from Egypt, God now changes His planned judgment- instead of returning to Egypt, they would go to Assyria. God can change His plans, and He has emotions. He had earlier stated that they would return to Egypt and be derided there (Hos. 7:16). God

says this clearly in Hos. 8:13; 9:3,6. But just as clearly He now says that they will not return to Egypt but rather experience captivity in Assyria. Here we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). But then in :11 He speaks as if they will go into Egypt. In all this we see an example of His terrible churnings of heart spoken of in :8. He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn.

For a man to be someone's king was a Hebraism for being a husband to a wife. As Gomer committed adultery against Hosea, so Israel had done with the Assyrians. And so Assyria would be their king, the husband they had chosen. Exile there and becoming part of the Assyrian kingdom was therefore what they had chosen.

Hos 11:6 *The sword will fall on their cities, and will destroy the bars of their gates, and will put an end to their plans*- Instead of trusting in Yahweh for help, Israel had trusted in their fortresses (see on Hos. 10:14) and barred gates; and they had made clever plans to get help from other nations. But all such scheming would fail. "The bars of their gates" can also be translated "their branches", continuing the allusions to Israel as a tree without fruit. Their very branches would be cut off, used as a figure of Israel's rejection in Rom. 11:17. They would now be unable to bear spiritual fruit, the possibility to be spiritua

Falling by the sword is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:25). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

l would be taken away from them. Similarly Gomer was made barren, because she would not bring forth fruit unto Hosea.

Hos 11:7 *My people are determined to turn from Me. Though they call to the Most High, they certainly won't exalt Him*- See on Hos. 6:6 *The knowledge of God*. They would not exalt Him in the way which true repentance requires. "Judah has not turned unto me with her *whole* heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John's teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they'd repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it. Israel called both to Yahweh, but also to Egypt for help (Hos. 7:11 s.w.). They didn't therefore accept Him as "the Most High". He was just another possibility to try. They prayed, they repented- but just on a surface level. This ability of human nature to display pseudo spirituality must provoke our endless self-examination. In Israel's case, they did all these things whilst "determined to turn from Me". Yahweh as "Most High" was therefore to be lifted up high. But they did not put meaning into words. They said He was "most high" but wouldn't lift Him high, just as we can use terms and phrases in prayer and worship- without at all living according to them.

But we could translate "And My people waver whether to return to Me". As if, when the prophets teach them to return to Me, they are in doubt whether to return or not to return; the allusion is to Gomer.

Hos 11:8 *How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim?*- God recognized that Israel and Judah and Jerusalem were as Sodom, as the prophets make

clear (Judah particularly is likened to Sodom- Is. 1:10; 3:9; Jer. 23:14; Ez. 16:46). But all the same, remembering their childhood (:1), He could not bring Himself to judge them as Sodom and her surrounding towns of Admah and Zeboiim; even though Jerusalem had sinned worse than Sodom (Ez. 16:48). Jeremiah's complaint that God had judged Jerusalem more harshly than Sodom (Lam. 4:6) therefore totally failed to take into account His internal struggles. And those who too quickly accuse God of being too harsh or unfair likewise need to consider these passages in Hosea, which reveal just how God struggles over judging sin. Admah and Zeboim are mentioned because Isaiah had observed that God's people were as Sodom. But God would not punish Israel for being as Sodom, even though He punished Sodom for being Sodom. The argument is full of intentional conflicts and paradoxes because it reflects God's own internal conflict.

Clearly the contrast is with God's own words in Hos. 4:17 "Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone!". But God Himself cannot leave Ephraim alone. We see the intense disquiet and trouble within the soul of Yahweh Himself; between 'letting them go' and the desire to never let go of the beloved. We have here in Hosea 11 a unique window onto "God against God", His wrath against His love, His judgment against His pity, His requirement for repentance against His pure grace. There is no space in the cosmos for any 'God against Satan'. The essential struggle is revealed as God's internal struggle. All because of His love. We see "Ephraim" spoken of in the same way in Jer. 31:20: "Is Ephraim still my dear son, a child in whom I delight? As often as I turn my back on him, I still remember him".

My heart is turned within Me, My compassion is aroused- The Hebrew for "turned" is a form of the verb "overturned" used about the overturning of Sodomon, Gomorrah and the surrounding cities just referenced. Instead of overturning Israel as He had done to those cities, His heart is overturned. We must understand that the heart is understood in Hebrew not simply as the center of emotion, but the center of decision making. "I said in my heart..." clearly means "I decided...". And that is the context. God's decision to punish and destroy Israel (as Hosea's regarding Gomer) is now overturned by other emotions and considerations, so that it is His very decision making which is "overturned" or traumatized. The tension within God is apparent. This verse is one of the deepest insights into God's internal struggle. God wants nothing more to do with His adulterous people; and then He pleads with them to come back to Him, breaking His own law, that a put away woman can't return to her first husband. As Joseph's heart was 'warm' for his younger brother Benjamin, so the same word is used about how the heart of God is 'warm' in yearning for His ungrateful people (Gen. 43:30 cp. Hos. 11:8). This is the Divine emotion revealed as never elsewhere. And Jeremiah has something similar: "How can I pardon you… shall I avenge myself on a nation such as this? Shall I not punish them for these things?" (Jer. 5:7-9,28,29). God reveals Himself as oscillating between punishing and redeeming, judging sin and overlooking it. God is open to changing His stated plans (e.g. to destroy Nineveh within forty days, to destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation). He isn't like the Allah of Islam, who conducts a monologue with his followers; the one true God of Israel earnestly seeks dialogue with His people, and as such He enters into all the contradictory feelings and internal debates which dialogue involves. 'God loves the sinner and hates the sin' has always seemed to me problematic, logically and practically. Love is in the end a personal thing; in the end love and hate are appropriate to persons, not abstractions. And the person can't so easily be separated from their actions. Ultimately, it is persons who will be saved or condemned. The prophets reveal both the wrath and love of God towards His people,

in the same way as a parent or partner can feel both wrath and love towards their beloved.

Another translation is "My heart recoils within Me", as if deep within God's heart He sees His anger and neccessary judgment, but turns away from it. So often do we read of God 'turning from His anger', and this refers to the same thing- turning away deep within His own heart from His wrath. This is arguably the Bible's most intimate window onto the heart of God Himself.

God's threats to punish His people and His desire to forgive them don't somehow cancel each other out as in an equation. They exist within the mind of God in a terrible tension. His many 'repentings' or changes of mind are "kindled together" (AV) as He struggles within Himself to give up His people as He has threatened. And this struggle was reflected within the emotions and through the speeches / writings / poetry of Hosea concerning Gomer. Therefore Hosea's speeches have an air of turbulence and struggle about them, which reflected the spirit / mind of the God who inspired him. The very way he was told to marry, in marked contrast to Jeremiah who was told not to marry (Jer. 16), perhaps indicates the duality of God's feelings toward Israel- a desire to marry them and yet not to do so. The extent of God's wrath with Israel, and His harsh, angry language against her, was an outcome of His love for her. "For the wrath of God is the love of God", wrote Emil Brunner long ago. It's like when we see a child run out in front of a car and narrowly escape death; the mother is angry and shouts at the child. Whilst we the onlookers breathe a prayer of thanks to God in much calmer terms. And this may help explain to us what appears the harder side of God at times. See on 9:15 *Love them no more.*

Insofar as we realize that God is not passive, but has feelings toward us far more deep and passionate than we can ever know, so far we will realize that life with Him is a daily, passionate experience. It cannot be 'the same old scene'. Consider the passion of God also in Is. 42: "For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant". The prophets are full of such passionate intensity. The prophets are not just predictions of the future. They reveal the passion of God's feelings for His people. At the very time when He condemns them for their adultery against Him, their ingratitude, their worthlessness, He cries out His belief in the blessedness He will one day grace them with.

Almighty God struggled awfully with all this. The way He did it can be read as an omnipotent God bringing about tragedy. Yes, they were taken to captivity, but not without the acutest grief and pain of God Himself. The reality is, God can be aggrieved, hurt, feel rejected. Even though He is Almighty and could avoid all the situations that cause Him these feelings from arising in the first place. Or take Jer. 31:20: "Is Ephraim my dear son?…for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him", or "Is Ephraim still my dear son, A child in whom I delight? As often as I turn my back on him, I still remember him". And the later grief and emotional breakdown of Jeremiah in Lamentations, sitting by the street with none to comfort him, tears dropping in the dust, clutching his hair with his hands… was an intended statement to Judah of God's feelings for them.

This internal struggle of God is found also in Ezekiel. He says that He decided to destroy Israel, but "worked", within Himself, for His Name's sake, not to do so (Ez. 20:8,9,13,14,21,22).

Hos 11:9 *I will not execute the fierceness of My anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of you-* See on Hos. 9:11 *Glory.* As discussed on :8, God struggles with His feelings; He has said He would destroy Ephraim and now He relents. He can do this, because He is God, the one true God, and not the stone faced gods of the nations, for whom any change of their apparent position was seen as a sign that they weren't really gods. And yet finally God did not turn away His anger from His people, and destroyed them at that time (2 Kings 23:26; Jer. 4:8); but He ultimately will turn away His anger, due to the work of the Lord Jesus. See on Hos. 14:4. His mercy and grace is far greater than human parental love. In this sense He is God "and not man". God is kinder than man. This for all time removes the problem of people assuming God has the very limited love and compassion which they found in their parental figures. As Jeremias put it: "For Hosea, the true distance between God and human beings is not marked by inaccessible eminence but by his victory over his justified anger, by his decision to save those who are guilty and condemned to death. In face of this divine self-control all analogies of human thinking and acting fail". "I will not execute the fierceness of My anger" implies His anger was within Him, but He exercise painful self restraint in order not to execute it.

We note that "man" is *ish* and not *adam*. God is saying that He is acting to His woman in a way that no mere mortal male ever would. Amazing as Hosea's love for Gomer was, Yahweh's love was even greater, to the point of the all powerful God whose word is truth actually not operationalizing that full word. Because of His love. The Biblical God is so far from the concrete, unemotional gods of other religions, whose will must simply be submitted to. The triple "I will not..." is perhaps an inversion of "I will be who I will be", just as earlier God has said in Hos. 1:9 that "I will not be" [your God]. But now "I will not [be]" as I said I would be. We see here a struggle within God, within the very core principles and characteristics that are part of His Name, His most essential personality.

God says this fully aware that He is not a man who repents / changes, but does what He says (Num. 23:19). He alludes to this when He says that He changes because He is God and not man. Because of this, He can sct beyond His own nature and principles. Just as love leads us all to transcend our own intrinsic bounds. We would do for our child what we would do for nobody else, and find strength beyond our normal natural limits.

Hosea dreamt or fantasized about the day when, he hoped, Gomer [cp. Israel] would return to him. And we find God through the prophets doing this often, as an expression of His love for them. He dreamt of how Israel as His vineyard would again be fruitful: "In that day: A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!... I [will] guard it day and night; I have no wrath" (Is. 27:2,3). He had wrath, and yet at the thought of Israel's blessed future with Him, He could say "I have no wrath". And so here, the God who spoke of slaying Israel with thirst in Hosea 2 could then comment: "I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man… and I will *not* come to destroy" (Hos. 11:9 AV).

God utters His word of judgment, but there is a gap between that point and the execution of it. It is in that gap that we can repent, and He can change His intended judgment. However it seems that during that gap, God also carries on thinking; and in this case, His memory of Israel as a child in the desert was so overpowering and choking that He Himself changed the execution of His threat, despite their lack of repentance.

He was still in the midst of them. And yet the visions of Ezekiel visually demonstrate His presence in the cherubim removing from Jerusalem. So even this relenting was still only temporary. The only other reference in Hosea to "in the midst" is in Hos. 5:4: "The spirit of prostitution is in the midst of you". There, in the midst of their very heart, a heart filled with prostitution and lust- there was God, in all His holiness in the midst of their unholy hearts. And despite being there, He within His heart would not bring Himself to destroy them as He had said He would, and as His own Name and inner heart required Him to do. It is a strange figure- the depth of God's holy heart is revealed, and also the depth of their unholy heart. Through all this we at least learn that love is not painless and involves suffering.

And I will not come in wrath- Perhaps Paul had this in view when he asks the Corinthians rhetorically whether he should come to them in judgment with the rod of wrath, or in the spirit of meekness (1 Cor. 4:21). Or as AV "I will not enter into the city". This could refer to how Sennacherib appeared all set to enter Jerusalem, but this was averted; not simply by the prayers of the faithful remnant, but by God's own change of plan. But finally God did, at the head of the Babylonian and Roman armies. So again we see God's desire to relent, even His decision to relent, overturned by His need to judge rightly.

Hos 11:10 *They will walk after Yahweh, who will roar like a lion; for He will roar, and the children will come trembling from the west*- The "trembling" in view here and in :11 is trembling in repentance; "When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he exalted himself in Israel" (Hos. 13:1). "Afterward the children of Israel shall return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king, and shall come with trembling to Yahweh and to His blessings in the last days" (Hos. 3:5). The idea seems to be that when God roared upon the lands of their exile, which were imagined to be Egypt and Assyria, then Israel would repent, both Judah and Ephraim, and would return to Zion in repentance, 'walking after Yahweh'. Just as Hosea planned to make Gomer suffer so that she would then return to him completely, so it was God's intention that the exiles in Babylon and Assyria would lead to a humbled people returning to Him spiritually and literally, to Jerusalem. He would judge their captors like a lion, and the Messianic Kingdom would have been established in the reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel. But this scenario didn't happen, just as Gomer never really returned to Hosea.

"The west" here is the Hebrew word *yam,* which simply means "the sea". The reference could be to a second exodus from the Red Sea, which other prophets also envisage.

Hos 11:11 *They will come trembling like a bird out of Egypt, and like a dove out of the land of Assyria; and I will settle them in their houses, says Yahweh*- This was God's fantasy for Israel, as it were. He assumed that they will indeed go into captivity in Egypt, but He would bring them out of it. This never happened; see on :5. God twisted and turned within Himself (:8) as to whether to send them to Egypt in exile, speaking as if He would, imagining Him again bringing them out of there (:1) and remarrying them at Sinai (see on Hos. 8:1). They had gone to Egypt and Assyria for help as a dove without a heart (Hos. 7:11); but He would bring that dove out again.

For those who really 'got it', the marvel of God's grace would lead them to come trembling to Him (Hos. 3:5). He has this hope in view also in Hos. 11:11 "They shall come trembling out of Egypt". Jer. 33:9 hopes that at the restoration, they "shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure to [Zion]". The awesome grace would make men tremble as they accepted it, and so it should be with

us. Likewise Is. 60:5 "Then you shall see and be radiant, and your heart shall thrill [s.w. "tremble"] and be enlarged". Then we will have the opening of mind to perceive how great is His grace, something which we sense but only see from far in this life. But we will only appreciate that grace to the extent of trembling, if we first accept our deep guilt and whoredom against the God of all grace and love.

Hos 11:12 *Ephraim surrounds Me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit*- Despite the amazing love of God for Israel, resulting in such torments in the heart of Almighty God (:8,9), Israel like Gomer just refused to perceive the amazing love and grace being shown to them. As Gomer lied and deceived, so Israel did to God. They surrounded God with these lies, perhaps alluding to a woman like Gomer hugging her husband, when she was in fact having an affair with others. But even in this there is hope and potential for repentance, for Hos. 12 will go on to demonstrate that Jacob / Israel was a deceiver who repented.

Judah still remains with God, and is faithful to the Holy One- But just two verses later: "Yahweh has also a controversy with Judah" (Hos. 12:2). Hosea clearly knew that both Israel and Judah would fall together in condemnation for the same sins (Hos. 5:5; 6:4,10,11; 12:1,2); and yet Hosea appeals to Judah to *not* sin as Israel had so that they would avoid that same condemnation (Hos. 4:15; 11:12). These positive words about Judah are therefore irrational, because Judah has so often been bracketed together with Israel in Hosea's prophecies. But this desperate hope that the unfaithful beloved is in fact faithful, just as Hosea hoped for Gomer, speaks of the desperate love of God for His adulterous people. And God has shown this kind of desperate hope at other times, hoping against hope and His own foreknowledge that there would be different outcomes. For desperate hope is all a function of true love. Thus knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would saved (1 Pet. 3:20). We are not so perfect, but we are left to imagine God's joy that we have responded...

But the text can be translated: "and Judah vacillates still with God".

HOSEA CHAPTER 12

Hos 12:1 *Ephraim feeds on wind, and chases the east wind*- As noted on Hos. 8:7, Israel like Gomer gave their hearts to that which was light and vapid rather than to the heavy things of God. And for that, they reaped the whirlwind. The wind from the east may refer to Assyria (as in Hos. 13:15), whose help they sought. But they were chasing or seeking help from a destructive wind that would itself turn and destroy them. "Chases" translates the same word used in Hos. 2:7 of how Israel / Gomer "*follow after* her lovers" but find no support from them.

He daily lies more and more and multiplies his desolation- See on Hos. 2:12 *Vines... fig trees.* There is an upward and downward spiral in spirituality. Just as Gomer was sexually addicted, so Israel were in the grip of deceit, and they were unfaithful and dishonest in every department of life. Jacob the reformed deceiver is therefore quoted later in this chapter as their role model. Their lies involved deceiving Assyria.

They make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried into Egypt- See on Hos. 9:11 *Glory*. The reference is to 2 Kings 17:4, where Israel made a covenant with Assyria and yet sought help against Assyria from Egypt. "Covenant" is the language of marriage. They were in covenant relationship with God (Hos. 8:1), and yet sought covenants with others, just as Gomer did. And they were not even faithful to those other covenant relationships they had made.

Hos 12:2 *Yahweh also has a controversy with Judah*- Hosea was mainly speaking about the ten tribe Kingdom of Israel. Elsewhere in Hosea, God praises Judah's faithfulness, imputing righteousness to them, despite the fact wicked king Ahaz was then in power (Hos. 11:12). This is typical of how God changes His feelings just as Hosea oscillated between tender love and anger with Gomer. He says He will love Israel no more (Hos. 9:15), and then that He will love them freely (Hos. 14:4); that the city will not be entered into (Hos. 11:9 AV), yet also the city would be taken, according to multiple prophecies. They would return to Egypt (Hos. 8:13; 9:3); but He would not let them return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). This is God at His most vulnerable. The "controversy" is based upon the 'charge' Hosea had against Gomer (Hos. 2:2 s.w.) for her adultery; it is legal language.

Hosea clearly knew that both Israel and Judah would fall together in condemnation for the same sins (Hos. 5:5; 6:4,10,11; 12:1,2); and yet Hosea appeals to Judah to *not* sin as Israel had so that they would avoid that same condemnation (Hos. 4:15; 11:12). And in similar vein, knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would saved (1 Pet. 3:20).

And will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will repay him- Because Israel believed a lie, they lied and were generally dishonest (see on :1). The repentant deceiver Jacob is therefore held up as their pattern. Here and in Hos. 11:12, God charges Israel with continuing the family characteristic of Jacob by being deceitful and untruthful. Abraham and Jacob especially were characterized by great dishonesty. The excursus about Jacob is perfectly in context with Hosea's struggles with Gomer, and therefore God's anguish with Jacob / Israel. Hosea saw the necessity of disciplining Gomer; she was as fickle with Hosea as Jacob had been with God. But Jacob was brought through all that to repentance and a desperate clinging on to God's covenant grace; and this was always Hosea's hope for Gomer, that she

would follow the spiritual path of Jacob, fickle as he was for much of his life. Just as God became vulnerable to Jacob because He loved Jacob so much, and allowed Jacob to win because He let him… so Hosea's love for Gomer left him vulnerable to her and eager for every and any sign of repentance.

But Hos. 4:14 uses the same word in declaring that "I will not punish…". And so often the point is made that God did not punish Israel according to their sins (Ps. 103:10). Here we see another example of how God in His passion, like Hosea in his, does not actually do the things He states He will do. Adam not dying in the day of his sin would be the first of many examples. It is this openness of God to change which is now exemplified in this chapter by the remarkable incident of Jacob prevailing against God and likewise not being punished 'according to his ways'.

Hos. 12:3 *In the womb he took his brother by the heel*- Gen. 25:26 says that Jacob did this *after* the birth, and not within the womb. A baby in the womb enveloped in water cannot do this; this was counted to Jacob by God's gracious imagination, just as Hosea fantasized about and imagined the repentance and faithfulness of the faithless Gomer. Or perhaps the idea is that genetically, Jacob was set up as a deceiver and grasper. Just as Gomer was wired as a light hearted, empty headed person who went for what looked attractive to her eyes and senses. Just as Israel were. And exactly as we naturally are. But the idea is that although that's how Jacob was, by nature and by nurture, he changed. This chapter concludes with a lament that Israel remained as Jacob and even as Canaan, "a merchant".

Likewise Jacob didn't 'win' his wrestling match with the Angel, but here he is spoken of as if he did indeed 'prevail' over God. The power in view was that of God's grace. The very weak 'power' of a baby in the womb is paralleled with the 'power' by which he struggled and prevailed with the Angel (:4). That power was very weak and practically non-existent- it was a function of God's desperate love and sensitivity to him. This was reflected in Hosea's love for Gomer. For true love means weakness and sensitivity to the beloved, and the imputing of rightness. For this reason, Jacob is here counted as having won the wrestling match when he lost it, and as having done in the womb what he could not have done in his own strength.

The idea of the wrestling incident is that the Angel like Esau came out to destroy Jacob because of his deceit- which is a major complaint of God against Israel, and Hosea against Gomer. She cheated, lied, deceived and was immoral. Just as it seems Jacob was by nature from the womb. But through the wrestling incident, he was changed. And thus there was hope for Gomer / Israel, by God's grace. Jacob began life in the womb in a wrestle with Esau, and the Angel represents Esau. For later Jacob admits that that seeing Esau's face "is like seeing the face of God" (Gen. 33:10). We read here in Hosea 12 that Jacob wept to the Angel [a detail not recorded in Genesis]; but in Gen. 33:4 that Jacob wept before Esau. The Angel was indeed Esau's representative, guardian Angel. That's why the Angel tells Jacob that "you have struggled with God [the Angel representing Esau] and with men [Esau, Isaac], and have prevailed". Hosea repeatedly warns that destruction is just around the corner for Israel. The Assyrians / Babylonians are about to pounce, like an eagle hovering above God's house. But Jacob wrestled with the Angel, and ended up getting a blessing, with his life preserved. And in the wrestling, both Jacob and the Angel changed or matured. And so it could have been between God and Israel. The tortured mind of God revealed in Hos. 11:8 was reflected in the Angel whilst wrestling with Jacob. Jacob is alluded to, as he was a deceiver like Gomer / Israel had been. Yet even he came to faith and covenant with God, as Gomer / Israel could do. And just as the

wrestling produced literal intimacy between Jacob and the Angel, so intimacy between God and Israel, as between Hosea and Gomer, could be created. Jacob had been a wrestler from the start; as :3 notes, he had wrestled in the womb. Like Gomer, like Israel, it may have appeared that Jacob by nature, from birth, was born to wrestle and deceive. Thus Israel surrounded Yahweh with deceit (Hos. 11:12), just as Gomer did Hosea. But as Jacob came through that wrestling to intimacy with God, so could Gomer / Israel. Within God there was a struggle between His grace and His judgment, His love and His wrath [so well revealed in Hos. 11], and the pole of His love and grace emerged triumphant. In the same way, Jacob wrestled with the destroying Angel and came to grace and blessing rather than destruction. And so could Israel and Gomer- if they engaged.

The Hebrew word used for wrestling is *abaq*, related to the word *yabboq*, the Jabbok river which Jacob crossed to wrestle with the Angel. And these words likewise sound like 'Jacob', *Yaaqob*. The word for "heel" likewise is *aqeb*, and Jacob's first wrestling was with the heel of Esau. In Gen. 33:4, Jacob embraces Esau, and the word *habaq* is used. The wrestling [*abaq*] resulted in the intimacy of embrace, *habaq*. Just as it did with the Angel. Literally, the Angel *'yabboq*'ed Jacob, he Jacobed Jacob. And yet "struggled with" in "he [Jacob]struggled with" contains the Hebrew letters for "Israel". Jacob 'Israeled' the Angel. This is what it is to be Israel, to struggle with God and attain His grace, as God 'Jacobed' Jacob. We have here a picture of the mutual intimacy achieved through the wrestling.

And in his maturity- We can read this as meaning that he was a grasper in the womb and early infanthood, and in his manhood, in his maturity, he was the same. Until he was changed by that night of wrestling. Or the point may be that Jacob's spiritual maturity was in resigning all human strength and clinging on to the blessing of grace. But the Hebrew word really means "strength" and recurs in 12:8, where Ephraim "found myself wealth" in his own strength. Jacob reached spiritual strength or maturity that night. To be that familiar with God that we can reason with Him, struggle with Him in prayer, seek to change His will over an illness or situation... this is spiritual maturity. This whole characteristic of striving with God was memorialized in his new name: Israel, implying 'striver and prevailer with God and men'. And this must be the characteristic of Israel after the Spirit too. There is a confusion in the Hebrew between 'striver' and 'prince'- for the struggle comes before the crown. Our relationship with Him, our attaining of salvation, is a struggle, a wrestling, a desperate, desperate clinging on, a pleading with tears. Yet this is almost the opposite of the spirit of organized religion; a comfortable drifting through life, attending the same round of meetings, largely hearing pleasant platitudes, no tears, no little real self-sacrifice, little realistic self-denial, little self-examination and daily struggle to be the more spiritual in the 'small' things of life, hiding behind the institutionalization of spirituality which denominational history has inevitably resulted in... Yet Jacob that night really is a type of us all. For "there He spoke [keeps on speaking] with us".

He had power with God- The reference to "maturity" could simply be in contrast to how he was as a baby; and "power with God" could just refer to his struggle with the Angel. Hence GNB: "When Jacob grew up, he fought against God". But this rather misses the wider picture presented in Hosea, of a God whose great love for us makes Him vulnerable and open to our prayers and desires, just as Hosea was hopelessly vulnerable to Gomer. The Angel who came to slay Jacob as Esau's representative, as an Angel came to slay Moses, was turned away by Jacob's wrestling in prayer. Esau came out to kill Jacob, but Esau changes his mind, by grace; and so

Jacob comments that as he wrestled close up with the Angel that night, he saw Esau's face in the face of the Angel (Gen. 33:10). Hence the Angel's comment that by holding his own in the wrestling match, Jacob had prevailed with both God and men, i.e. Esau (Gen. 32:28).

Hos. 12:4 *Indeed, he struggled with the Angel*- The AV is better, “had power over”. The same word is used in Hos. 8:4 of how Israel “made princes” but not by God. Jacob is being read negatively here. And yet the idea of having power over God was only because God let him win, as a father playing a game with his son. God’s love is such that as with any true love, it makes the lover vulnerable, and gives power to the beloved. 'Israel' is the most common title God uses for His people; and it can mean 'one who struggles with God and prevails'. This, therefore, will be the characteristic of all His people. Note the humility of God, the Almighty, in desiring to articulate our relationship with Him in terms of us struggling with Him and winning. Hos. 12:4 seems to emphasize this, by saying that Jacob in his prayer and pleading had power over the Angel. His strength was in his humility; by his strength he had power over God, but it was by his weeping and pleading that he did. This, then, was the true strength 'over' God.

And prevailed- I explained on :3 that God and Esau's intentions towards Jacob were changed by his prayer and repentance; and the Israel of Hosea's day could have done the same, and averted the destruction which was heading for them just as Esau and his men were on their way to destroy Jacob. The idea that God's purpose is signed and sealed unchangeably and the Angels are just putting it into practice militates against our faith in prayer. Jacob "had power over the Angel, and prevailed"- not physically, because the Angel eventually had power over him that way; but spiritually, through his wrestling in prayer, he succeeded. "He wept, and made supplication unto Him... even the Lord God of Hosts (Angels)". Because the Angels do change their mind and God's purpose is in many ways open-ended, we should be greatly encouraged in our prayers. God, like Hosea with Gomer, is open to dialogue and change. The intended judgment and result of sin will not come if we truly repent.

Jacob "prevailed" in that he received the blessing which he didn't deserve, by grace. But this was only after he had been touched in the groin by the Angel. It has been observed: "Three biblical scholars, S. Gervitz, L. Eslinger, and S. H. Smith, also argue that Jacob’s injury occurs to his genitals.The *kap yareh*, they point out, refers either to the “hand of the thigh”—the penis, or to the “hollow, pouch-like” scrotum. Citing J. Skinner, L. Eslinger suggests that when Genesis says that Jacob’s hip was put out (Gen. 32:25), what it means is that “Jacob had a hernia at the place of the scrotum’s attachment to the body in the course of the struggle.” This interpretation of Jacob’s injury as sexual has far-reaching implications...". He was as it were unmanned, and limped the rest of his life in awareness of that fact. Possibly we could argue that his wasted years with Laban were a result of his sexual list for Rachel, and now this was revealed to him- by one gentle touch of the Angel. This has huge relevance in the Hosea context. Gomer was sexually addicted, and Israel likewise had the spirit of postitution within them, for other gods. The whole story of Jacob's wrestling is introduced to show both Gomer and Israel that they could wrestle there way to a resolution of this. It was after this touch that Jacob clung to the Angel, not in combat, but for dear life, for blessing, for grace, for salvation, clinging now to the

Angel's body until they end up live two lovers rather than opponents. And that is the path of all who are truly Israel.

The whole incident begs so many questions, but this is so that we might analyze it, brood upon it, and come to this conclusion. That God's grace won. We ask the question: "So who won?". And it is hard to answer because the text is intentionally ambiguous. If Jacob merely fought a man and won, it is insignificant. If he wrestled God and won, that is blasphemous. Yet Hos. 12:4 says that Jacob "prevailed" over God. If God won, then we suspect that God must always win and any wrestling with Him was futile and the whole thing was unfairly loaded from the start. The wonder of it is quite enough anyway: "as a man he contended with God". But Jacob didn't see himself as having won. He called the place "Peniel, for I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved"; he had as it were escaped with his life (Gen. 32:31). And yet the Angel disabled Jacob's manhood because "he saw that he could not prevail". Just as Hosea saw with Gomer, and God with Israel at Hosea's time. We are invited to navigate a course of interpretation in between these poles, and this "magnificent defeat" seems the intended conclusion. Jacob was unmanned and 'lost' but thereby attained grace and he "prevailed" against God's intended destruction of him at the hand of Esau. The name given him in commemoration, "Israel", is intentionally enigmatic- it can mean 'Prevailer over God', or 'God prevailed over'. Similarly "He found him at Bethel" is unclear as to who found whom. Because in a sense Yahweh found Jacob, but Jacob found Yahweh. Likewise there is an ambiguity both in Gen. 32 and in Hosea 12:5 as to who "won": "He struggled with the angel; he overcame him". Who overcame whom is left intentionally ambiguous. And this intimacy was possible for Israel, and for Gomer with Hosea. Jacob who by nature was Jacob, a deceiver and struggler with God, was changed to Israel. The nature of Gomer and Israel could be changed, just as Yahweh and Hosea so desperately wished. But they walked away from it. It is for the new Israel to accept the challenge. For "there He keeps on speaking to us".

He wept, and made supplication to him- This is clearly behind the language of Heb. 5:7 about the Lord's desperate prayer in Gethsemane. The Hebrew means 'to bow or stoop towards'. Yet the same word is used in the account of that night of wrestling to record how God was gracious unto / bowed down to Jacob (Gen. 33:11). We encounter here a wonderful mutuality between God and Jacob. Jacob bows down to God, throwing himself upon His grace as Esau approaches him to destroy him; and God as it were bows down to Jacob. This is why Jacob marvels in Gen. 33:11, in reflecting upon that night, that God had bowed down to him. It also explains why the pronouns in these verses in Hosea are ambiguous- it's not altogether clear who is making supplication to whom. This is what happens in genuine reconciliation; each side stoops to the other. God's love is such that it makes Him vulnerable enough to stoop before Israel His beloved. We recall how elsewhere He feels apparently guilty for having as it were forsaken His bride Israel, leaving her as a woman forsaken in her youth (Is. 54:6). He takes blame which He need not have taken at all; but this is what love leads to. And God deeply loves…

God dealt "graciously" (the same word here translated "supplication") with Jacob (Gen. 33:11). At that time, God "recompensed" to Jacob according to his sins, and Jacob responded by "turning" (same word translated "recompensed") to his God (Hos. 12:2,8). By the end of his life, this spirit of mutuality between him and God had become perfected. And so with us; we too can live our lives thinking that if we do this, that and the other, God will do this and that for us. The idea of a two-way

relationship with Him, of His Spirit, with all that implies, dwelling in us, until our will is His will; all this takes time to develop.

He found him at Bethel- God had encouraged Jacob to return from Laban because He was the God of Bethel, i.e. what He had revealed there of His seeking, saving grace, He was going to continue (Gen. 31:13). This is why Jacob later builds an altar in Bethel to the God who had answered his prayers in the "day of my distress"- a reference to Jacob's prayers on the night he wrestled with the Angel as Esau approached him (Gen. 35:3). So we could fairly interpret "He found him at Bethel" as meaning that God had also found Jacob at Bethel, just as He 'found' Him in that night of wrestling. The same Hebrew word translated 'found' is used about how Jacob 'found' grace before both Esau and God that night (Gen. 32:5). God found Jacob and Jacob found God; another example of mutuality and purposefully ambiguous pronouns. God is in search of man, and yet man is in search of God. When we meet, there is an indescribable mystery of communication, portrayed graphically for all time in Jacob and the Angel hugging each other as the wrestling match dissolves into an intense clinging on to each other, bowing to each other and blessing each other, the essence of Emmanuel, God with us.

The significance of Bethel is that it was where Israel's idol shrine was, and it seems it was there that Gomer worked as a cult prostitute. But there, God was willing to speak with Israel. In the midst of their human strength and humanity, as He had done with Jacob. There, the very location of their faithlessness and treachery, He was willing to speak with them of His grace as He had done with Jacob.

And there He spoke with us- At Bethel, after the night of wrestling, God renewed the covenant with Jacob. Likewise Hosea was asking Gomer to renew their marriage vows, to enter a new covenant, just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel urge Israel to do with God. Bethel was where Israel were now worshipping idols; Hosea's point is that in that very place, a spiritually weak Jacob had been found by God and repented. The Angel twice 'found' Jacob in Bethel (Gen. 28:11-19; 35:1). "He spoke with us" in that Hosea's audience could likewise have wrestled with God in prayer and repentance, and avoided the approaching destruction.

Hos 12:5 *Even Yahweh, the God of Armies; Yahweh is His name of renown!*- As explained above, the approach of Esau with 400 men to destroy Jacob was also the approach of an army of Angels, Yahweh of armies, to do likewise. But this was averted by Jacob's desperate prayer and repentance, his clinging on to God. This explains why the title "God of Armies" is used here. The allusion is to the memorial Name of Yahweh; His final personality and Name was expressed through His grace to Jacob despite the struggle within Him and between Him and Jacob, the struggle discussed on Hos. 11:8.

Hos 12:6 *Therefore you also turn to your God*- Hosea's audience could likewise have wrestled with God in prayer and repentance, and avoided the approaching destruction. Biblical history is a living word. The historical incidents, such as Jacob's wrestling with the Angel and obtaining grace, speak directly to us and urge us to act likewise; it is as if we were involved in those historical incidents. Thus David invites us to come and see the works God did at the Red Sea, commenting: "There did *we* rejoice in him" (Ps. 66:5,6). He praises God for saving him in the language of Israel's Red Sea deliverance, speaking of it as "the day of *my* trouble" (Ps. 86:7,8 = Ex. 15:11). He saw how their circumstances and his were in principle the same; he personalized the Scripture he had read. When Israel kept the Passover, they were to say that this was

the deliverance God had wrought “for *me*” (Ex. 13:8). “You *also* turn to *your* God” as Jacob did in the struggles of *his* life.

Keep grace and justice, and wait continually for your God- These were the two things which Hosea dreamt of as being the basis of his remarriage to Gomer (Hos. 2:19 "I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion"). They were seen by him as the basis of marriage. And so Israel are urged to repent as Jacob did, and like him, focus upon a life of grace and justice in covenant relationship with their God.

Hos 12:7 *A merchant has dishonest scales in his hand. He loves to defraud*- The wonderful potential for intimacy with God, achieving what Jacob achieved despite being wired in a very unspiritual way, was turned down. Israel loved dishonesty and self justification rather than repentance. As noted on :1, the worship of lies, the idols, led Israel to be dishonest in other aspects of life. They deceived the Assyrians as well as their God, and were also dishonest in their business dealings. And they 'loved' this fraudulent life, just as the web of lies spun by Gomer became a lifestyle she loved. The same word for "defraud" is used in Hos. 5:11 of how Ephraim was defrauded; like Jacob before his conversion, the deceiver was deceived, "deceiving and being deceived... worse and worse" (2 Tim. 3:13), just as "he daily lies more and more" (:1). Gomer and Israel were caught up in treating others as they were treated; they didn't allow grace and repentance to break the cycle which was leading them in an ever downward spiral.

"Merchant" is literally 'a Canaanite'. They were like the Canaanites rather than as God's people; hence they are described in Ez. 16:3 as being Canaanites: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh to Jerusalem: Your birthplace is in the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was your father, and your mother was a Hittite".

Hos 12:8 *Ephraim said, Surely I have become rich, I have found myself wealth*- Alluded to in Rev. 3:17 about the new Israel. The very same words were said by those who later sold Judah into captivity (Zech. 11:5). Gomer and Israel considered good harvests to be a result of their faithfulness to the Baal cult. See on Hos. 9:1. They considered their wealth a sign that they were blessed by both Yahweh and the Baals. But this was wrong on both counts. And it serves to disprove the prosperity Gospel; material wealth is not necessarily a sign of blessing.

In all my wealth they won’t find in me any iniquity that is sin- Israel were not without any religious conscience. But they had carefully analyzed their ways of acquiring wealth and concluded that they had not committed any sin. Yet God's comment was that their wealth arose from unjust balances and loving to defraud (:7). But they had carefully worked out a justification for everything which they said left them without sin and guilt. This was casuistic legalism at its worst. Human nature has the propensity to justify anything, and we must bear this in mind in our self-examination. In particular, they considered that "iniquity" and "sin" weren't the same. Thus we could translate: "All my gains do not amount to an offense which is real guilt". It's like excusing our materialisms by saying that yes, they are sins, but... I need not be guilty about them. In Israel's case, they considered their wealth from good harvests to have been the blessing of the Baalim. Their iniquities were indeed to be a source of guilt.

Hos 12:9 *But I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt. I will yet again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the solemn feast*- Having condemned Israel for their deceit and materialism in previous verses, we expect the Divine comment to be of judgment. Instead it is of grace, looking ahead to the day when God will enable them to keep the feast of tents, rejoicing in His grace. In wrath He remembers mercy; always, even in the heat of His despair with Israel, there is the hope that they will repent, and He focuses upon His own dream of their restoration. This is how much God wants human restoration, and His strongest will and blessing is therefore behind our every effort to preach it. The feast of tabernacles or tents kept by the exiles in Neh. 8:17 was a pathetically small attempt by them to fulfil this; the reality was that most preferred to remain in exile.

Hosea spoke in God's Name. He would've known how that Name was a memorial of the characteristics of God, His pity, mercy, forgiveness etc. as outlined in Ex. 33:19. And yet Hosea uses those very words in saying that now, God will not have mercy, pity or forgiveness toward Israel (Hos. 1:6). But Hosea spoke in the Name of Yahweh; and predicted that the Yahweh who had been their elohim from the land of Egypt, would still be their God (Hos. 12:9). In this we see Hosea's personal involvement in the tension of God; for he spoke in God's Name, with all that Name implied. And we too carry that Name, having been baptized into it. And we speak in that Name to this world, bearing within us the same conflict between the reality of future judgment, and the earnest grace of God to save this world.

"I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt" suggests Yahweh had always been their God from their first marriage to Him. But Hosea, in line with God's Spirit, had called Gomer's child "Lo Ammi", I am not yours. But God's love was such that although He said that, in His heart, they were still His people. Even at this late stage of Hos. 12:9 and Hos. 13:4, perhaps many years later in Hosea's hopeless marriage. He never withdrew His love, although salvation is a different question as it has to involve a desire for it by those who are saved.

Hosea speaks of how Yahweh is still Israel's God from the land of Egypt (Hos. 12:9,13; 13:4). There, Yahweh had revealed Himself as their "I am", who would always be "I will be" for them (Ex. 3:14; 6:7). But He has stated in wrath that "I am not I AM for you" (Hos. 1:9). But on the other hand, He assures them that He is still just as much "I am" for them. In the Hosea-Gomer drama, Hosea remembered Gomer's apparent love for him when they first met, just as Yahweh remembered Israel's apparent love for Him when they left Egypt ["she will respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" Hos. 2:15]. The truth was, both Israel and Gomer were unfaithful to their amazing lover even then. Yahweh like Hosea could never actually tear Himself away from being who He essentially was- the One who was "I am" and "I always will be" for His people.

Hos 12:10 *I have also spoken to the prophets, and I have multiplied visions; and by the ministry of the prophets I have used parables*- This may be God's way of trying to back up Hosea's credibility as a prophet, as we will see also in :13. He had always communicated with His people through prophets, starting with Moses and Aaron; and no less was He appealing through Hosea. "Parables" is better "similitudes", literally "I was represented by the ministry of the prophets". Hosea's hopeless marriage with the unfaithful Gomer was the greatest example of this in his day. Everyone would have known of her unfaithfulness; Hosea's love, grace, anger and struggle would also have been the talk of many towns in Israel and Judah. The prostitute and the prophet would

indeed have grabbed everyone's attention. And God says that He was indeed represented by Hosea.

Hos 12:11 *If Gilead is wicked, surely they are worthless. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls*- Gilead and Gilgal were the eastern and western divisions of the ten tribe kingdom. Gomer became barren and therefore, in Hebrew male terms, worthless. But still Hosea loved her and sought to win her heart back to him. Just as Israel were useless for any labour but God still used them and loved them (Ez. 15:2,3).

Indeed, their altars are like heaps in the furrows of the field- The allusion is to the way that stones were gathered out of the fields into piles. This connects with the reference to "Gilead" at the start of the verse; for the same word is used of how Jacob had called the heap of stones marking his departure from Laban 'galeed' (Gen. 31:47). Gilead signified" "heap of witnesses" and Gilgal "heaping heap". The heap of stones celebrated a covenant; but Israel's covenant was with idols, just as Gomer had covenants with both Hosea and other men.

Hos. 12:12 *Jacob*- The names "Jacob" and "Israel" are often used together to show how God saw the Jacob as Israel, without forgetting he was still Jacob.

Fled into the country of Aram- Just as Jacob had to go into exile to bring about his turning to God, so Israel would have to go into exile towards Aram / Syria, just as Jacob had done.

And Israel served to get a wife, and for a wife he tended flocks and herds- It was God and Hosea who paid so much to get a wife. By their experience in exile, Israel would learn how much sacrifice God had gone to in order to claim them as His own wife. At least, that was the intention; Israel as a whole didn't respond, and we may assume that Gomer likewise didn't. Speaking in the context of Israel's punishment for idolatry (remember, in God's eyes Israel = Jacob), we are told, apparently out of context, that Jacob served for a wife (singular), and for a wife he kept sheep. Yet this is in the context of :2, which says that God would punish Israel for their idolatry, according to their ways. The terrible 14 years of keeping the sheep which their forefather Jacob went through therefore represented their punishment for idolatry. As Jacob *served* for Rachel, so Israel served idols and would have to *serve* those idolatrous nations as an appropriate punishment. Keeping sheep in Gentile lands is the basis of the prodigal parable; the young man who left home, tricked his father, sidled past his hostile elder brother with what he was sure was his inheritance by rights, squandered it, kept sheep, and came back a new man. Clearly the Lord had His mind on Jacob, although that parable is full of reference to prophetic descriptions of the nation of Israel, too. Hos. 12:4-6,12,13 seem to say that Jacob's humiliation at the hands of Laban is a type of the future suffering of Jacob, before their final homecoming.

This idea of servitude because of a woman was so relevant to Hosea. Jacob served 14 years to marry a woman he was madly in love with, although from the get go, through going along with Laban's trickery, she did not much love him. She wanted to die rather than be his childless wife, she blamed God and Jacob wrongly, was addicted to teraphim, lied to her father, gave her children names reflected her seething bitterness, and died in narcissism, wanting to call her last child "Son of my sorrow". But for all this, Jacob devoted his life to her and loved her during her life and reflected that love after her death, in his feelings towards her sons Joseph and Benjamin. Hosea loved Gomer likewise, as God loved Israel.

Hos 12:13 *By a prophet Yahweh brought Israel up out of Egypt*- This is added surely as encouragement to Hosea. Hosea is being likened to a prophet like Moses- which of course is a Messianic title (Dt. 18:15; Acts 3:22). His saving passion towards Gomer was to be understood by him as representative of Messiah's passion for Israel's salvation.

"By a prophet (Moses) the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet (Joshua?) was he preserved [s.w. "keep"]" (Hos. 12:13). Joshua and Moses were working and walking in harmony with an Angel in their work. For an Angel 'brought Israel out of Egypt' , and it was an Angel who 'kept' Israel (Ex. 23:20). This shows how prophets and Angels were in tandem with each other. In the work of bringing out and 'keeping' a people for God's Name, we too can have this sense of working in tandem with a guardian Angel every step of the way.

And by a prophet he was preserved- Literally, "kept", as a shepherd keeps his sheep. It is the same word used in :12 for how Jacob kept sheep. Again we see the mutuality between God and Jacob / Israel; they were to keep His sheep, and He would keep them. But the contrast between Jacob and Moses presents Jacob in a poor light. He spent his years keeping sheep for the sake of his infatuation with Rachel. Moses kept the sheep of Israel to guide them to God's Kingdom. This connects with the earlier reference to Jacob's wrestling, where his manhood was disabled, perhaps in reference to his infatuation with a woman, Rachel.

Clearly we are intended to see Moses' mediation as typical of the Lord's. His freewill mediation was the basis of Israel's salvation: "By a prophet (Moses: Dt. 18:18), the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved". This last clause may be a hint that Moses prayed for the gift of life-preserving manna, and thus sustained Israel, all unbeknown to them. Likewise the intensity of his prayers and the supremacy of his willingness to sacrifice himself for them was tragically unknown to them at the time. But the preservation in view may specifically refer to a single incident and not general preservation in the desert; the reference may well be to Moses' prayer for Israel to be forgiven of their idolatry and spiritual adultery against God, when God wished to destroy them and make of Moses a new Israel. This would be very relevant in the Hosea context. See on Hos. 14:4.

It should be noted that Moses as a type of Christ was not the High Priest. He mediated for and thereby "preserved" Israel on a voluntary basis; not because he was under any duty to offer up their prayers or "preserve" them. Indeed, they didn't make any prayers for him to offer up. He pleaded with God for them on his own initiative, rather than being asked by them to do so. And this is the basis of Christ's mediation for us; he pleads for us even when we know not what to pray for, even when we don't realize the need to beseech the Father. Moses' mediation, not so much Aaron's offerings, are the prototype which the New Testament uses to explain the Lord's present work. In the Apocryphal *Assumption of Moses* (1:14), Moses is made to say of God: "He designed and devised me and he prepared me before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator". These words are alluded to in a number of NT passages.

The emphasis upon "by a prophet..." was surely to show that through heeding the words of Hosea the prophet, Israel again could likewise be preserved from destruction. He was prepared to try to act as Moses for them.

12:14 *Ephraim has bitterly provoked anger*- Just as Hosea was provoked to anger by Gomer; God "hated" Israel for their rejection of Him (see on Hos. 9:15). We noted on Hos. 11:8 the very deep provocations of feelings within God's heart.

Therefore his blood will be left on him, and his Lord will repay his contempt- As noted on :13, Hosea is as the watchman prophet who is telling Israel what is coming upon them. Their blood is therefore no longer on his head but on theirs, according to the principle of Ez. 33:6-8.

HOSEA CHAPTER 13

Hos 13:1 *When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he became guilty in Baal, he died*- The "trembling" in view here and in Hos. 11:10,11 is trembling in repentance; "When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he exalted himself in Israel" (Hos. 13:1). "Afterward the children of Israel shall return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king, and shall come with trembling to Yahweh and to His blessings in the last days" (Hos. 3:5). Humility is the true exaltation. We can deduce that the second half of the verse therefore contrasts such "trembling" with the guilt of Baal worship; and exaltation with death / condemnation. Idolatry was and is therefore rooted in pride, the ultimate root of all sin and barrier to repentance. See on :16. The hoped for, fantasized about trembling in repentance had only been for a moment. Like Gomer, they slipped back to Baal worship.

Hos 13:2 *Now they sin more and more*- See on Hos. 7:4 *Burning*. As noted on Hos. 12:1, Israel were in a downward spiral of sin, portrayed by Gomer's sexual addiction.

And have made themselves molten images of their silver- The reference is to the golden calves of Jeroboam, so "silver" is better understood as 'wealth'. But the word strictly means "money", and is that used of how Menahem and other kings paid silver to the Assyrians rather than trusting in Yahweh (2 Kings 15:20; 16:8; 18:14). This trusting in human strength and personal wealth was effectively idolatry.

Even idols according to their own understanding- The tabernacle was made by craftsmen with God given understanding (Ex. 31:3; 35:31; 36:1 s.w.). The images and idols are presented as a fake tabernacle; it was all idolatry performed in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is our subtlest temptation today.

All of them the work of the craftsmen- There were two calves, but "all of them" sounds as if there were many. There were other shrines established, but it may also be that just as the singular calf in the wilderness was addressed in the plural (Ex. 32:4), here too there was an element of plurality within unity. This was the pagan background for the false doctrine of the Trinity.

They say of them, 'They offer human sacrifice and kiss the calves'- Israel were famed amongst the Gentiles for the calves made by Jeroboam, to which they offered human sacrifice. It was observed as ironic that they kissed in adoration that which they sacrificed their children to. Child sacrifice was typically associated with Baal; but here, to the calves. So again we see that Israel were mixing Yahweh worship with paganism, rather than having shrines for Yahweh and separate shrines for the idols. See on :16.

Hos 13:3 *Therefore they will be like the morning mist, and like the dew that passes away early in the morning, like the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the threshing floor, and like the smoke out of the chimney*- Israel threshed themselves (Hos. 10:11), they sowed the wind (Hos. 8:7), chased the wind in going to Assyria for help (Hos. 12:1), and were now driven by the wind in condemnation. The driven chaff is representative of the destruction of the nations around Israel in Dan. 2:35. God's apostate people are "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32) in sharing that same fate. The arising of the sun is understood in Mal. 4:2 as the arising of Messiah at the restoration of the Kingdom. So the idea seemed to be that apostate

Israel would be judged and destroyed, but this would usher in the Messianic kingdom. All this could have happened in some form when the exiles returned. But it was deferred and recalculated until our days.

Hos 13:4 *Yet I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt; and you shall acknowledge no god but Me, and besides Me there is no saviour*- As in Hos. 11:1; Ez. 16:22,43 and elsewhere in Hosea, God finds the memory of Israel's youth and the beginning of His relationship with them in the marriage at Sinai (Hos. 8:1) a memory which causes Him great pain. Just as in the breakup of any human relationship, it is the memories of the early days which crack us up. We again see God's humanity and the emotional nature of His being. All of Hosea contains allusion to Hosea's marital relationship with Gomer. "Saviour", "king" and even "your God" were terms which in Hebraic thought were titles for a husband. And yet Israel like Gomer looked to other gods and nations as their saviour. The New Testament presents the Lord Jesus as our "only saviour", Yahshua, Yah's salvation. Any practical, moral or intellectual turning to other saviours is tantamount to adultery. Despite all her adultery, Hosea was still Gomer's husband, just as likewise Yahweh was still Israel's God. They should "acknowledge" or "know" no other; and this too can be understood as a euphemism for the sexual act. To know other gods was adultery.

"Saviour" is 'yasha', from whence Yahoshua, Yah saves, Jesus. Knowing God involves knowing Him as saviour; and a husband is to be trusted as a saviour: "the husband is the head of the wife and Christ is the head of the church- himself being the saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). It is knowing / experiencing Yah's salvation in the Lord Jesus which is to know Him. But Israel like Gomer, saw their salvation as coming from many sources- various Baals, Assyria, Egypt, Yahweh etc.

"I am Yahweh *your God* from the land of Egypt" suggests Yahweh had always been their God from their first marriage to Him. But Hosea, in line with God's Spirit, had called Gomer's child "Lo Ammi", I am not yours. But God's love was such that although He said that, in His heart, they were still His people. Even at this late stage of Hos. 12:9 and Hos. 13:4, perhaps many years later in Hosea's hopeless marriage.

Hosea speaks of how Yahweh is still Israel's God from the land of Egypt (Hos. 12:9,13; 13:4). There, Yahweh had revealed Himself as their "I am", who would always be "I will be" for them (Ex. 3:14; 6:7). But He has stated in wrath that "I am not I AM for you" (Hos. 1:9). But on the other hand, He assures them that He is still just as much "I am" for them. In the Hosea-Gomer drama, Hosea remembered Gomer's apparent love for him when they first met, just as Yahweh remembered Israel's apparent love for Him when they left Egypt ["she will respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" Hos. 2:15]. The truth was, both Israel and Gomer were unfaithful to their amazing lover even then. Yahweh like Hosea could never actually tear Himself away from being who He essentially was- the One who was "I am" and "I always will be" for His people.

Hos 13:5 *I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought*- Ez. 16 is likewise full of such Divine memories, of how fragile and desperate Israel were in the desert, totally dependent upon Him for food, clothing and water- the very duties of a Hebrew husband toward his wife. Yet Gomer sought these things from her lovers, as explained in Hos. 2. God's 'knowing' of Israel should have resulted in their exclusive 'knowing'

of Him (:4). The knowledge in view is in the Hebraic sense of relationship, not academic knowledge of theological propositions as enshrined in a statement of faith.

Yahweh knew Israel in the desert (:5), but they didn't know / ackowledge Him (:4). It was a relationship where one party loved and was intimate with the other, but the beloved didn't respond with the same intimacy. It is our awkwardness, that we are in a relationship where He loves us more than we love Him.

Hos 13:6 *According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted*- As explained on :1, it is pride which leads us away from God and true repentance, and it is material blessing which often leads to pride; and it is humility which exalts before God. Israel "waxed fat and kicked" (Dt. 32:15). As explained on Hos. 2, the parallel was with how Hosea provided Gomer with all she wanted, even giving her his entire wealth, quite simply because he loved her; but she used it on her lovers and idolatry, then claiming that the payment and apparent blessings she received from both her lovers and her idolatry were her own legitimate personal income. Materialism is the reason why men forget their God. So any desire to be rich / wealthy is hereby automatically outlawed for God's people.

Therefore they have forgotten Me- Pride is associated with forgetting God in Dt. 8:14. This is where the prosperity Gospel is so wrong. The more human strength we have, the more likely we are to forget God. It's why most believers have not been given wealth; because God doesn't want us to forget Him.

Hos 13:7 *Therefore I will be like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk by the path*- Lion, leopard, bear and wild beasts (:8) were all elements of Daniel's prophecies concerning the powers who would dominate the land promised to Abraham. But God was behind all those powers. All these beasts are significant because of what they do to Israel; that is the territory and arena of their domination. But they are all acting as it were on God's behalf, like the four beasts of the cherubim. There is no radical evil, evil out of control in the cosmos, with God's people at risk from being dominated by it. God is completely in control, and even the terrible things done to Israel by the beasts are under His total control.

"Lurk" is literally 'to observe' and the Hebrew word is soon used again when we read that God will observe His people for good on their reconcilliation and restoration (Hos. 14:8).

Being ravaged by wild animals is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:22). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Hos 13:8 *I will meet them like a bear that is bereaved of her cubs*- "Bereaved" is the same word used of how Zion would be bereaved of her children during the invasions which God would bring (Is. 49:21; Jer. 18:21). God is saying that although He had brought the invasions and was totally identified with them, yet He was also totally identified with Israel in the suffering and pain they would bring. This is the other side to the complaint that God brings suffering into our lives; He does, but He is totally identified with us in that suffering and suffers with us and even, in His Son, for us.

And will tear the covering of their heart. There I will devour them like a lioness, tear them like a wild animal- The language is extreme; but this is the extreme wrath of God at human unfaithfulness to Him, as so often mentioned in Hosea (see on Hos. 11:8; 12:14). The extent of the damage is fatal; surely the idea is that Israel would be killed by this bear. This is the force of Hos. 6:1 (see note there): "He has torn, and He will heal us". That 'healing' was therefore nothing short of a resurrection from the dead, and this was the extent of power available to Israel in the miraculous restoration from exile which God potentially enabled. But Israel for the most part didn't want to know.

God would rend their hearts, like a furious lion. But the same term is used in Joel 2:13 in an appeal for Israel to rend their hearts in repentance. On one hand, the idea is that if they didn't rend their hearts in repentance, then God would rend their hearts in judgment. But as will be developed in Hos. 14, the idea could be that through death, death as a result of Divine judgment, their hearts would at resurrection be as He wanted then.

Lion, leopard, bear and terrible beast sounds like the succession of beasts in Daniel 7 who would dominate Israel, ruling over the earth / *eretz* / land promised to Abraham. God was in and working out His anger through these various powers that would dominate and judge Israel.

Hos 13:9 *You are destroyed, Israel, because you are against Me, against the One who is your help*- As noted on :8, God through the invaders had mortally ravaged Israel, and yet even from that desperate situation, He who had torn could also heal, restore and resurrect (see on Hos. 6:1). But Israel didn't want that help. Or we can read as AV: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help". Here we see grace even beyond grace. Although God had destroyed them through the wild beasts of the invaders (see on :7); yet still He offered them His help. And that amazing offer is there to this day for all Israel.

Hos 13:10 *Where is your king now, that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges, of whom you said, 'Give me a king and princes?'*- Often in Hosea, God appeals to Israel to let Him be their 'king'. But there is a Hebraism whereby a husband is called the 'king' of his wife. God's appeal was reflected in Hosea's desire for Gomer to as it were re-marry him, to let him truly be her king / husband. And yet she felt like Israel: "What then should a king do [for] us?" (Hos. 10:3). She was so selfish that she didn't see anything in it for her… when *so* much love was being offered to her. We noted on Hos. 9:15 that Israel's desire for a human king was a rejection of God as their king / husband, and had been tantamount to adultery. This verse appears to be spoken to Israel at a time when they have no king (:11). It is hard to determine when that might have been during Hosea's ministry (Hos. 1:1); so this can be taken as a future prophetic word. We note too that Israel's demand for a king as recorded in 1 Samuel graciously omits to record that they also asked for "princes", even though they had already had "judges" raised up by God. They wanted a king and a royal family, to be the equivalent to the Divine "judges" or saviours whom He had raised up. So often the Divine record reflects God's grace.

The AV may be correct: "I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities?". Understanding "king" as metaphor for husband, we have a reference to Hosea's desire to truly be Gomer's husband. This is a continued expression of hope for further relationship. But it comes right after the language of

death and total destruction of Israel expressed in the previous verses. The implication is of resurrection in order to achieve that relationship, and this will be stated explicitly in :14 and the idea developed in the next chapter.

"King and princes" are seen as responsible for the state of Judah's downfall. God laments that He has given them a king and princes (Hos. 13:10); they were addicted to alcohol (Hos. 7:3). And so Yahweh says they are to abide many days without a king and princes, so that they might learn faithfulness to Him (Hos. 3:4). He gave them a king and princes, knowing what this would lead to. Unfaithfulness to Him. But we see here how in the end, God gives man what he wants, as He did to the prodigal son. The issue is desiring the right things- His Kingdom and His righteousness.

However the initial reference was to the 10 tribes. They were dissatisfied with the Davidic line and likewise wanted a king; and God gave them Jeroboam. This is probably the initial reference here.

Hos 13:11 *I gave you a king in My anger, and have taken him away in My wrath*- As explained on :10 and Hos. 9:15, Israel's rejection of God for a human king made God "hate" them. It was effectively a divorce from Him; this is how seriously God sees our turning to visible human help rather than to Him. God so respected human freewill decisions that even when His wife wanted to go off with another man, He "gave" her this; and even worked through the system of human kingship in order to continue some level of relationship with Israel, such was His love for them. God sees a connection between His giving of a king, and His taking away of a king. Before they had a king, they were exclusively His. So the taking away of their king was in fact not simply a punishment, but in wrath He remembered mercy, and hoped that this would in fact be the path back towards their accepting Him as their king. So often we see God's hope for restoration expressed within and next to His angry statements of judgment. His anger is therefore unlike human anger; there is always the love which seeks longer term restoration.

Hos 13:12 *The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sin is stored up*- It was stored up within God's memory. Often He seeks to remind Israel that He has not forgotten their sins. There is an assumption that if we forget our sins, then God does too. The passage of time and fading of memory thereby works a kind of pseudo atonement for us. But God remembers, and there has to come some form of judgment. And we must ever consider this in our hearts. Israel's lack of self-examination is quite a theme; see on Hos. 7:2,9.

Hos 13:13 *The sorrows of a travailing woman will come on him. He is an unwise son; for when it is time, he doesn't come to the opening of the womb*- Male Israel are likened to a woman; the rather awkward grammar which is necessary for this to be expressed ["woman... him"] is to flag up the continued connection between Israel and Gomer. But Israel are likened to both the travailing mother, and the baby boy who refuses to be born. The travail of Israel in exile (Jer. 22:23 "how greatly to be pitied you will be when pangs come on you, the pain as of a woman in travail!") was intended to bring forth new birth, making all her travail worthwhile; and if they had repented, they could have brought forth before they travailed (Is. 66:7). But most of them preferred to remain in exile, to remain within the womb; and those who did return were not spiritually reformed. And so it was pain and suffering all round, as there is in the lives of all those who refuse the birth of the Spirit and are left just with the pains of travail with nothing to show for it (Jn. 3:3-5). They were "unwise"; and

the word is only used again in Hosea in the final appeal of Hos. 14:9 to repent. This was the true wisdom, which would enable the birth of the reborn, restored Israel.

Hos 13:14 *I will ransom them from the power of Sheol, I will redeem them from death! Death, where are your plagues? Sheol, where is your destruction?*- This is quoted in the New Testament regarding resurrection from the dead at the last day. Resurrection is completely in line with the context here. As noted on :9, He who had torn Israel to the death could also heal, restore and resurrect (see on Hos. 6:1). We noted on :13 that God's intention was that the suffering community in exile would give birth to a man child at the restoration; and Ez. 37 speaks of resurrection to new life at this time. But most of the exiles didn't return, and the child refused to be born (:13). The same was true of the revival of the remnant at the time of Hezekiah; there was no strength to bring forth the child (Is. 37:3). And so this promise of restoration to new life from the dead comes true in the birth of the Spirit in the hearts of a new Israel; for the promises of new life are part of the new covenant intended for the exiles in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And it comes to its final term in the resurrection of the body at the last day. It could be that historical Israel will all be resurrected at the last day, as God somehow forces through His purpose of love with them. Because He does force through at times, over and above human freewill. The wages of sin is death, but still He finds a way, as love does. Israel had been ransomed and redeemed from captivity (Is. 35:10; Jer. 31:11). But although "I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me" (Hos. 7:13). This ransom from death therefore became reapplied to the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus, resulting in our entry of the new covenant, the birth of the Spirit in our cleansed hearts, and finally the resurrection of the body from death. The power of death [its "plagues"] was finally destroyed in the work of the Lord Jesus- these words are clearly alluded to in Heb. 2:14.

Compassion will be hidden from my eyes- AV "repentance". It could be that this is simply saying that although He has changed His mind over things, He would not do so over this. God knows He has changed His position on Israel to and fro, just as Hosea had with Gomer. He says that He will not change again; and yet such is His grace and eternal love for Israel, that He does change again. Or He could be determining as chapter 14 will develop, that He will save them anyway, through resurrection. Likewise we read that "I have purposed it, and will not repent" (Jer. 4:28); and yet God does. Such is His apparent humanity, the depth of His internal struggles between anger and grace, judgment and mercy, hate and love. The fact He as it were comes down on the side of "God is love", upon the pole of grace rather than anger, is not simply because that is how He is. He has come to that position through terrible internal struggle; see on Hos. 11:8.

Hos 13:15 *Though he is fruitful among his brothers, an east wind will come, the breath of Yahweh coming up from the wilderness, and his spring will become dry, and his fountain will be dried up.* - As noted on Hos. 12:1, the east wind was Assyria, whom Israel had once chased after for help, and which would now return as a whirlwind to destroy them. Their armies approached from the desert (1 Kings 19:15). But God was intensely identified with that wind or spirit, it was as it were His very own breath. As noted on :7, the invaders of Israel were all totally identified with Yahweh, and yet He was also absolutely identified with His people in their resultant sufferings. "Ephraim" means 'fruitful'; the idea is that although he has been fruitful, yet he will "become dry". This exactly fits Gomer, who after her marriage to Hosea

bore children to her lovers. We have noted earlier that these children were destined to destruction at the hands of the invaders, and she was cursed with infertility. Her fertility therefore was worthless; "though he is fruitful...".

He will plunder the storehouse of treasure- Perhaps a reference to the kings contemporary with Hosea using the temple treasures to buy off invaders or hire human help. Or the reference could be to the invaders plundering the wealth of Israel and Judah at the invasions; the inscriptions in Sargon's palace at Khorsabad list the treasures taken from Israel. The wealth they had trusted in could not save them, and that is an abiding lesson.

Hos 13:16 *Samaria will bear her guilt; for she has rebelled against her God. They will fall by the sword*- The same word for "guilty" is found in Hos. 10:2, where as noted there, we also have the idea of God in court against His people. Finally, they are guilty. Despite their prayers and religious rituals, they had rebelled against Him, and so must "fall by the sword"- also judgment language. But "guilty" is the word used in :1; they had themselves made themselves guilty, and this final verdict was of their own choice. Sin is its own judgment, chosen by men and only confirmed by God.

'Bearing guilt' is also translated 'atone'. The only atonement for sin is death, to take the wages for sin which is death. So the only way to salvation is through grace, leading to a resurrection from that death. And through identification with someone else who has died that death and yet risen to life again, the Lord Jesus.

Falling by the sword and dashed infants is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:25). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us. And yet there is the message of resurrection for them despite all this death that is to come upon them.

Their infants will be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women will be ripped open- Israel had offered their children to Baal and were famed for it (see on :2). Some of the infant slaying rituals involved not only burning the child but also dashing it to pieces. The invaders who "ripped open" the women would themselves be judged for what they did (Am. 1:13 s.w.). But this was all part of the Divine 'tearing' of His people (s.w. Hos. 13:8). Yet even from that, on a communal level, they could be restored- if the remnant repented.

HOSEA CHAPTER 14

Hos 14:1 *Israel, return to Yahweh your God; for you have fallen because of your sin*- Hosea on God's behalf now makes his final appeal. They were to "return" in order to avoid the judgment to come. They didn't, and so from exile they were also to "return" both spiritually and physically to the land of promise to reestablish the kingdom. But most of them didn't want to do that either. They were to accept that their "fall" was due to their sin; whereas Ezekiel was clearly up against the attitude that the exiles thought their punishment was unfair, and they were unjustly suffering the effects of others' sins. Their "fall" was ultimately because of their pride (s.w. Hos. 5:5); this human weakness which is glorified or at best shrugged off by society was what prevented their repentance and brought about their fall.

We are now at the end of Hosea. All his appeals to Gomer, and God's to Israel, have not been responded to. So, she must be judged; but still His saving love is there for her and He still wants it to work. She had dry breasts and a miscarrying womb, an old woman whose sons of adultery had been slain, the old prostitute who has run out of highway. And still Hosea loved her, and still she refused. As with Israel. And so He looks ahead to the day when at resurrection and re-creation, He can love them freely (:5) and their hearts will be for Him. It could be at this time that Israel have already been taken captive to Assyria (:3), hence they are asked to literally 'come back' to Yahweh with words of repentance (:2). Israel have fallen / stumbled because of their sin, they are helpless on the ground unable to rise, apart from by grace. They are as it were "dead", and God's plan therefore involved their literal and spiritual resurrection. "The Lord your God" suggests God from His side has already restored them in His mind. Hosea beings with "I am not your God", I am not Yahweh to you. But now on His own initiative, Yahweh says that He is their God. He begins talking like this in Hos. 12:9; 13:4, leading up to the amazing climax here.

Hos 14:2 *Take words with you, and return to Yahweh. Tell him, Forgive all our sins, and accept that which is good: so we offer our lips like bulls*- Perhaps the intention was that although Hosea knew Israel would go into captivity and be unable to offer sacrifice there, he wanted them to learn there that they could offer their lips and hearts instead of bulls and animal sacrifice. "Accept that which is good" is AV "receive us graciously". They were to cast themselves upon His grace, as their father Jacob had done (Hos. 12). What God wanted was not the bulls of animals sacrifice, but broken and contrite hearts expressed in words of repentance. By being cut off from a temple and sacrificial system, their judgment actually encouraged them towards this. We too may find ourselves cut off from the externalities of church and religious life for whatever reason; that we might make this same intended journey. Again, as earlier in Hosea, we have God's fantasy that His people would say these words. Just as Hosea fantasized about Gomer's return and repentance.

"Take words with you" alludes to taking sacrifices to the sanctuary so that the people "do not appear before the Lord empty" (Ex. 23:15; Ex. 34:20); they were not to come to Him taking nothing with them. But all they could take was their words of repentance. They had broken the old covenant, they had no sacrifices to offer, they would be in captivity far from the temple or other ways of offering animal sacrifices. But the required sacrifice was repentance and declaration of loyalty to Yahweh.

Literally, "we will repay as young oxen our lips". The idea was that they would present the prayers of their lips as thank offerings. The word translated "repay" or "offer" is applied to the sacrifice offered in fulfilment of a vow (Dt. 23:22; Ps. 22:26; 50:14), and young oxen, were used for thank offerings (Ex. 24:5). Their statement of repentance was to be a thank offering. Because they had been forgiven without

repentance, they were to repent, just as the Lord ate with sinners in order to bring them to repentance. And these words in the LXX are applied to us all in Heb. 13:15 ["the sacrifice of our lips, giving thanks to His name"].

Hos 14:3 *Assyria can't save us. We won't ride on horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods!'*- They were to recognize that absolutely no human help could save them. They had asked Egypt for help before (2 Kings 17:3,4), and that assistance was likely imagined in terms of horses and chariots. But they were to totally reject any human strength. All their idols were likewise a trust in the works of their own hands. And here we see the relevance to us, we who do not have literal idols of wood and stone. Quite simply, any trust in our works, money, wealth or health is idolatry. The horses allude to Egypt. They were to recognise that neither Assyria nor Egypt could save. Is. 30:16 records their attitude: "No, but on horses will we flee... And on swift steeds will we ride".

For in You the fatherless finds mercy- See on 14:8 *From Me you will acquire fruit.* The prophecies of judgment and destruction consistently imply that there would be reformation and restoration arising out of those experiences. This was evidently not for those who were slain, but for the survivors and the orphans of the next generation. They would "find mercy", they would become the "Ruhamah" arising as it were as the resurrected form of Lo-Ruhamah, 'not finding mercy', the name of one of Gomer's adulterous sons who was to be slain by the invaders (Hos. 1:6; 2:4). Hosea had at one point disowned Gomer's sons whom she claimed were his, calling one "not my people". They the fatherless would "find mercy" in that Hosea would accept them, as God would accept Israel back. And so the prophecy links back to its beginning. A repentant Israel were intended to "find mercy" when they returned from captivity (Dt. 30:3; Is. 14:1; 49:10; 54:8; Jer. 30:18; 33:26). But most of them didn't want to return. This is the tragedy. And so the promise comes to be reapplied to those of our day who accept the new covenant in repentance, and "find mercy" both now and at judgment day (Is 60:10; 2 Tim. 1:18), and especially to repent Israel of the last days (Ez. 39:25; Rom. 11:31). Mercy being shown to those who had not found mercy (Hos. 2:23) is applied to Christian believers today (Rom. 11:30).

Hos 14:4 *I will heal their waywardness*- Israel are portrayed in Hosea as having an endless, insatiable psychological proclivity towards other gods, just as Gomer became a sex addict. The healing in view is therefore psychological; it is the gift of a holy spirit, a new psychology and worldview. But here we see God's love. Hosea tried all he could to make Gomer love him and be faithful- and failed. But despite divorcing Israel, the God who unlike Hosea can do all things, simply says that He will *make* them faithful. By His Holy Spirit working upon their spirit, as Jeremiah and Ezekiel later explain. Ps. 80:19 asks God to take this initiative: "Turn us again, Yahweh God of Armies. Cause Your face to shine, and we will be saved".

Healing is a major theme in Hosea. The other nations [cp. Gomer's lovers] could not heal Israel (Hos. 5:13), but Yahweh could, if they repented (Hos. 6:1 "Let us return / repent to Yahweh and He will heal us"). But He was hindered in that by their refusal to accept that healing (Hos. 7:1). The healing was in fact potentially done- they just had to accept it: "they didn't know that it was I who healed them" (Hos. 11:3), they refused to accept it. Finally God simply states in Hos. 14:4 "I will heal their waywardness ["backsliding", "disloyalty"], I will love them freely", and they would again be fruitful. For Him. Despite 'healing' being predicated upon repentance (e.g. Jer. 3:22 "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness",

Ps. 30:2 "I cried to You [in repentance] and You healed me", Is. 6:10 "Understand... convert... and be healed"). It's as if God scraps even that basic requirement and wants to force through His desire for them to have a heart for Him; just as Hosea fain would have done this to the heart of Gomer but lacked the power to do so. Just as so many unrequited lovers would do for the object of their love.

In Hosea 2, Yahweh and Hosea offer their women a remarriage under a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. The offer of a new covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah involves the gift of a new heart to God's people, His spirit, His mind, a heart solely for Him. Jer. 3:22 is clear: "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness". "I will restore... I will heal you... I will heal them and reveal unto them the abundance of peace [with God]" (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). The wonder of Jer. 30:12-15 is that the wounds which are "incurable" would be healed by God. He could do the psychologically impossible, through the gift of His spirit which would accompany the new covenant. This is available to us who have accepted the new covenant today. It's why and how believers are psychologically transformed.

This is the same idea as in Hos. 14:4. Their disloyalty would be healed, their unfaithful mind would be changed. We are helped to understand this by the Hosea-Gomer situation. He desperately wanted her to love him, to have a heart for him, and not constantly looking at other men and committing adultery. It was His hope that she would one day love him, and he would do anything to give her such a heart. Israel had a heart for the idols and not for Yahweh, just as Gomer is presented as a sex addict who is mentally enslaved to her addiction. But Yahweh earnestly wanted to heal their heart. This is Hosea's form of the offer of a new heart and spirit to Israel, which was part of the new covenant offered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That healing is offered to Israel, but they refuse. Until at the very end, in Hos. 14:4, God seems to as it were force through His plan with them. We who have willingly signed up to the new covenant have even more ample access to this spirit. If we want it- we will be given it. And we potentially have it.

I will love them freely- See on Hos. 9:15 *Love them no more.* The rent in God's heart between anger and love, judgment and mercy, His internal struggle (Hos. 11:8), comes down finally on the side of loving them freely, despite feeling at times that He could "love them no more" (Hos. 9:15). But the simple truth that "God is love" or "God loves Israel" was arrived at after the Divine struggles of heart and emotion which we cannot really enter into; although we see them reflected in Hosea's struggles of emotion over Gomer.

The free love of God means just that, love without even the condition of loyalty or repentance. He will be able to do so because His spirit has made them acceptable and loving and faithful to Him. Here we see the final resolution of the human problem, in all its moral, ethical and intellectual dimensions- of "How can man be just / right with God?", how can God "be" with us who are so weak and sinful. For all the clever explanations of Paul in Romans, we are left with the fear this is all a clever workaround. How can man be right with God. The answer is really in one word, "love". God forcing through the relationship, even through resurrection and imposed transformation, so that it works. How could Hosea get right with Gomer, how could Yahweh with Israel. Israel who had so sinned, we who have so sinned, can experience the "free" love of God because He will transform us. This is why we go on to read of the blessing of the Spirit. Yahweh will be to Israel a refreshing, enlivening dew (as He will be at the resurrection, "Your dead shall live; my dead body also shall arise.

Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth will cast forth her dead", Is. 26:19), leading to blossom. Resurrection has been in view in Hos. 13:14 "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol, I will redeem them from death! Death, where are your plagues? Sheol, where is your destruction?". The true Israel will be resurrected and changed; "we shall be changed... we shall be like Him". Oh how rich the promise. Resurrection and transformation by the Spirit was the only way to save Israel / Gomer, and ourselves. We won't get there it seems now. As Gomer had to die, Israel had to go into captivity and their sons fall by the sword in the land of the enemy, so we too must die; the wages of sin have to be death. But the answer is resurrection and transformation. We wonder at Paul's abandon of praise after reflecting that "And so all Israel shall be saved". The glory he speaks of is in their salvation by grace, not simply unity between Jew and Gentile. Possibly he entertains the view that indeed all historical Israel shall be raised, have unGodliness purged from Jacob until they become "Israel", and thus be eternally saved; even though that would on one hand contradict the clear teaching that salvation is only in Christ and there is no life outside of Him. But we are dealing here with a truly amazing grace beyond even Paul's ability to comprehend. And if so, Hosea will then have Gomer as he dreamt of her.

The 'free' love of God matches "the glorious liberty of God's dear children" which Paul speaks of. Intimacy on both sides. We too will love Him freely, without the fear of sin, the perception of the barrier that divides, and the cloud which so easily and quickly comes betwixt God and man. The word for "free" is usually used about the freewill offerings. This is our response even now to the "free" love of God. The same word occurs in Ps. 110:3, again with the ideas of dew, resurrection and future transformation: "Your people will offer themselves willingly [s.w. "free"] in the day of your power, in holy attire. Out of the womb of the morning, you have the dew of your youth".

We notice the seven "I will..." statements here, as if Yahweh, who had initially said "I will not be [Yahweh]" to His people, now "is" Yahweh again:
"*I will* bring my people back to me. *I will* love them freely; *I will no longer be angry* with them. *I will be* to the people of Israel like rain in a dry land.. *I will answer* their prayers ... Like an evergreen tree *I will shelter* them; *I will be* the source of all their blessings".

For My anger is turned away from him- The same words are used of how Moses turned away God's anger from Israel by his intercession and spirit of self-sacrifice (Ex. 32:12; Ps. 78:38). Israel's "preservation" by Moses has been alluded to earlier; see on Hos. 12:13. The mediator figure who ultimately does this is the Lord Jesus. God did not turn away His anger from Judah (2 Kings 23:26; Jer. 4:8) at that time; but He ultimately will, due to the work of the Lord Jesus. For man is only saved from wrath through Him, Paul teaches. So God is looking ahead to how things shall finally be, when His Son has atoned for Israel and His wrath is turned away, and He can love them freely. Hence Paul's implication that Israel shall be resurrected, ungodliness purged from Jacob so that Jacob becomes Israel. And so all Israel shall be saved. The natural sense is that "all Israel" means all Israel, and not 'Christ- believing Jews plus Gentile believers'. At the very least, we can conclude that all any of "Jacob" need to do is to say "yes" to the covenant and to take words of sorrow and repentance with them to God, and they shall be saved. All we have to do is say yes...

Hos 14:5 *I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like the lily, and send down his roots like Lebanon*- For Israel to be as a flourishing tree, it had to be planted.

The idea was that the people of God would return from captivity and be planted in the land of Israel permanently, where they would become a blessing to the nations around them (:7). It is at the time of the restoration, the new covenant and the Kingdom of God that Israel will be planted. "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked
up from their land which I have given them" (Am. 9:15); " I will bring them back to this land... I will plant them and not uproot them" (Jer. 24:6); "In the time to come Jacob shall take root and Israel shall bud and blossom and they shall fill the whole earth with fruit" (Is. 27:6). Clearly God's hope for reconcilliation with His people, as Hosea's for Gomer, was now not in this life. It is the resurrection [already spoken of in Hos. 13] and the Kingdom that is in view. And yet this was despite their impenitence, leading us to ponder whether Paul's understanding that "so all Israel shall be saved" could imply the resurrection and spiritual cleansing of historical Israel. Unless we fall back to the assumption that those who will be thus planted eternally in the earth and saved are those who heed the calls to repentance. But that doesn't exactly fit the context. Of course we stand here at the very frontier of human possibilities to understand.

"Like the lily" refers to the white lily, which is very common in Palestine, "which is unsurpassed in its fecundity, often producing fifty bulbs from a single root" (Pliny). The picture is of fruitfulness. Gomer was an old, barren woman, still loved by Hosea, despite having "dry breasts and a miscarrying womb". It might seem it was now too late for her and Hosea to have the family and relationship Hosea had hoped for. It may seem too late for God and Israel, for Him and us. But now we have the language of fertility, joy and blessing, brought about only by His Spirit. That Spirit must be received. But even then, we have the implication that God will almost force it upon His people. He so wants to make it work.

Hos 14:6 *His branches will spread, and his beauty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon*- The language of branches providing shade (:7) is that of the restored Kingdom of God, providing shade and blessing to the surrounding world; Ephraim would indeed have fruitful branches (Gen. 49:22). This could have come true after the return from exile (Ez. 17:8,23), but it didn't. The few who returned mixed with the nations, traded with them and in spirit became like them. They were not a blessing to them. And so the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the work of the Lord Jesus and His future Kingdom on earth (Mt. 13:32), through which the Kingdom of Israel shall be reestablished (Ez. 21:25-27).

The language of blossoming and fruitfulness in :6,7 are taken from marriage blessings common at the time. Still the Divine dream, as Hosea's for Gomer, was that despite the divorce, the judgments, the shame... still, somehow, the remarriage and reconcilliation would happen. Even if it required thousands of years of death followed by resurrection.

"Branches" is literally 'saplings', the idea being of a slender plant growing up from the root of the cut down tree. The same word is used of the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:2 "tender branch"). The hint is that through resurrection, and on account of Messiah, the condemned, dead Israel would rise again. These branches / saplings are of an olive tree. The judgment of Jer. 14:16 would be reversed through resurrection: "Yahweh called your name, A green olive tree, beautiful with goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken". They would be as originally intended. But the question of course is whether the actual unfaithful Israelites, like Gomer, would be resurrected and thus transformed; or whether this

comes true only through a new olive tree, the believers. The logical force of the argument here in Hosea is that those who were slain in judgment by Assyria and Babylon would arise, as if historical Israel were to be resurrected. That begs many questions, only resoluble by the acceptance of God's love and grace.

Hos 14:7 *Men will dwell in his shade. They will revive like the grain, and blossom like the vine. Their fragrance will be like the wine of Lebanon*- As noted on :6, this is the language of the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. The branches of natural Israel were broken off, and we have been grafted in (Rom. 11:21). Right now, we should be a shade to people from all nations through sharing the gospel of the Kingdom with them. The 'revival' could have happened in the time of Hosea (see on Hos. 6:2). But the Israelites wanted to sleep with the Gentiles, pay them for help, deceive them and fight with them, as Hosea has explained already- rather than be a shade to them, an attractive scent to them, and giving them a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. So much potential was wasted, as it is in human life to this day. It could have happened at the restoration (Jer. 31:5,12 use similar language), after Judah's 'death' in captivity. But most of them didn't want to return, and Malachi and Haggai explain that this fruitfulness didn't happen because they just didn't want the new covenant offered.

The language of fruitfulness here implies the restoration of the grain, wine and oil. God had laid waste their vines (Hos. 2:1). The judgments were all to be reversed. These were all blessings associated with faithfulness to the covenant (Dt. 7:13, 11:14; Jer. 31:12). The idea is that they have returned to covenant relationship, but under a new covenant, seeing they broke the old covenant. This is was all hinted at earlier- if Israel like Gomer were faithful: "The earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, and I will sow him for myself in the land" (Hos. 2:22,23). But here Hosea speaks as if these things will happen, regardless of the condition of repentance and loyalty to the covenant. God implies He is going to force it through. But I suggest what is implied is resurrection from the dead and transformation by the Spirit.

Hos 14:8 *Ephraim, what have I to do any more with idols?*- The idea may be that Ephraim will say this in repentance, and God responds. But we can also read it as God's address of Ephraim. As I have noted often, Israel were not so much building shrines to idols, but building altars to Yahweh and claiming that their idolatry there was in fact Yahweh worship. God for all time is marking that separation. No longer will His people serve their flesh under guise of serving Him.

I will answer, and will take care of him- Literally, I will show My face. God had turned His face away from Israel (Dt. 31:17), now He will look toward them in response to their exclusive, whole hearted commitment to Him.

I suggest that here we have a dialogue as God and Israel fall in love:
Ephraim: What have I to do with idols?
Yahweh: It is I who answer and look after you.
Ephraim: I am like an evergreen cypress.
Yahweh: from Me comes your fruit.

I am like a green fir tree- from Me you will acquire fruit- The dried up tree of Israel would become God's own tree, and would again produce fruit; even though green fir trees don't produce fruit but only seeds. But this one would give fruit, by a miracle. Instead of worshipping evergreen trees in the hope of fertility blessings, they would worship Yahweh alone, and receive fertility from Him. This is perhaps Hosea's fantasy that somehow, this worn out woman with dry breasts and a miscarrying womb

(Hos. 9:14) would somehow one day still bear him children of their own, and that in him “the fatherless [a reference to Gomer’s illegitimate children] finds mercy” (14:3). Those children had been slain, but would find mercy in that they would be resurrected. For how else could slain children "find mercy". This fantasy of Hosea’s, rooted in his amazing love for Gomer, love that was partly in pure and amazing obedience to God’s *command* that he love her (Hos. 3:1), is a reflection of God’s dream for Israel; His hope for Israel, which is "the hope of Israel". Such love and grace is in the background of that term. Hosea died with his dream unfulfilled. We are left with the question as to whether this similar loving intention of God for Israel will in fact be fulfilled, or whether it was what was potentially possible for Israel; or whether His fantasy for them will be fulfilled through a new Israel. If the latter, and we are that new Israel, then we can imagine what passionate joy the Father finds in our bumbling attempts to respond to Him and be His loyal and faithful wife. Whatever, the simple fact is that it all reflects an amazing grace, an ineffable love… and this God is our God, and Hosea who reflected all this is truly a pattern for ourselves in daily life.

Hos 14:9 *Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Who is prudent, that he may know them? For the ways of Yahweh are right, and the righteous walk in them; but the rebellious will stumble in them-*

The appeal to "know" Yahweh is yet again repeated. “She did not know that it was I who gave her grain, wine, and oil” (Hos. 2:8), she was destroyed for lack of knowledge of Yahweh, and yet always was the hope, the fantasy, of Hos. 2:20: “I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know Yahweh”. This was God's hope as it was Hosea's, that Gomer would finally know him in all the fullness of intimacy that he hoped for. But despite the intensity of Divine hope, of Hosea's hope, there had to be that freewill movement. Hence this final, forlorn appeal.

Walking in the ways of Yahweh is the language of keeping covenant (Dt. 8:6; 10:12; 11:22,28; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16; 31:29). Verse 1 has begun by saying that Israel have indeed stumbled, they are the rebellious, but by grace God will resurrect them literally and spiritually from that fallen position. God's amazing grace and willingness to save Israel 'anyway', however we understand that in its practical outworking, should inspire us to be loyal to the covenant. The wise will perceive that, rather than using grace as an excuse for sin and disloyalty to that covenant. Despite the hint at Israel's resurrection and transformation by the Spirit, either literally or at the proposed restoration which most of them refused, Hosea cannot conclude without some kind of notice about the conditionality of God's grace- even if those conditions may be waived. Even if there were to be unconditional universal salvation for "all Israel", then the conditionality of salvation must never be ignored. That is the abiding and concluding paradox we are left with by Hosea, by God, by His grace and love. It is the tension left between "I will love them no more" and "I will love them freely". To press further is to try to look beyond the veil. On the intellectual, exegetical level... we are now at a brick wall. Lead there by following the line of reasoning and language of Hosea. We cannot say more. Nor really think more. But somehow, "so all Israel shall be saved".

In the light of this, the true 'prudence' or wisdom was to repent; that was the true understanding. But Israel were not wise and so the exiled community didn't come to rebirth (see on Hos. 13:13). The very existence of such passionate love for us, love beyond reason, carries with it an inevitable warning as to our responsibilities. Faced as we are by a love like this, we simply can’t be passive to it. We shall either stumble, or walk in this love.

Zion's King shall reign victorious,
All the earth shall own His sway;
He will make His Kingdom glorious;
He will reign through endless day:
What though none on earth assist Him!
God requires not help from man,
What though all the world resist Him!
God will realise His plan.
Nations now from God estranged,
Then shall see a glorious light;
Night to day shall then be changed,
Saints shall triumph in the sight.
See the Papal idols falling!
Worshipped once, but now abhorr'd;
Men on Zion's King are calling;
Zion's King by all adored.
Then shall Israel, long dispersed,
Mourning seek the Lord their God ,
Look on Him whom once they pierced,
Own and kiss the chastening rod,
Then all Israel shall be saved,
War and tumult then shall cease,
While the greater Son of David
Rules a conquer'd world in peace.

3. Daughter of Zion, the power that hath saved thee,
Extolled with the harp and the timbrel shall be;
Shout: for the foe is destroyed that enslaved thee;
Th' oppressor is vanquished, and Zion is free. [Chorus]

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: JOEL

JOEL

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

JOEL CHAPTER 1

Joe 1:1 *The Word of Yahweh that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel*- There is no reference to this Joel in the historical books, no clue as to who Pethuel ["visions of God"] was, and no clear statement within Joel as to when exactly he lived and which invasion he was predicting. His references to Jerusalem and the temple suggest he was in Judah and predicting an invasion of Jerusalem. There is much internal evidence that Joel has in mind the Babylonian invasion, and he was living in Jerusalem and appealing desperately for repentance in order to avert it. This would mean that he was in Jerusalem whilst Jeremiah was imprisoned for uttering his similar prophecies; and that might explain the relative anonymity of Joel, and why Jeremiah doesn't specifically mention him.

But despite surface level similarities with some historical incidents, his prophecy doesn't fit the Babylonian invasion. We are left with an open question as to whether his call for prayer and repentance was heard, and whether Jerusalem fell or not. The descriptions of the "northern army" being turned away and destroyed (Joel 2:20) have some similarities with the Assyrian retreat in the time of Hezekiah, but the location of their destruction doesn't fit the historical record. There is much similarity between Joel's language and that used of Babylon's invasion. It could be that Joel lived just prior to the invasion and was urging a desperate repentance in order to change the outcome, in line with the appeals of Jeremiah. But these were unheeded, and so his prophecy applies to the final latter day invasion of the land; the potential salvation he predicted was not realized.

Commentators have offered various historical contexts for Joel, but they all seem to come unstuck on many verses in the prophecy. Harry Whittaker's attempt to prove that it all refers to the unsuccessful Assyrian invasion of Isaiah's time runs into difficulty with the repeated similarities between Joel's description of the invader, and the language of Amos and others about the Babylonian invasion. If indeed Judah repented, as Joel appeals for, then the invader would have been destroyed, the Spirit poured out and the Messianic kingdom established. And that didn't happen in Hezekiah's time; he himself turned away from faith straight afterwards. And yet indeed there are some points of contact with the Sennacherib / Hezekiah situation. We must also give due weight to Joel's insistence that the invasion was to be the unprecedented invasion of Judah, worse than anything before, and which would never be repeated (Joel 1:2,3 cp. Joel 2:2). This would point to the Babylonian rather than the Assyrian invasion. But ultimately the invasion in view is therefore that of the last days, before the Lord's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

But why the points of contact with the invasions of Assyria and Babylon? I suggest that Joel's prophecy could have come true at those points, if Judah had repented as he appealed for. But they didn't, and so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the last days. Likewise the passage about the pouring out of the Spirit is applied to the first century gifting of the Spirit (Joel 2:28 = Acts 2:17). But Israel did not repent then as they should have done, neither was the Messianic Kingdom established on earth then. It could have been; but Israel would not. Yet Joel's words shall come true in the last days. Although even then, whether Jerusalem falls is left by Joel an open question, depending upon Israel's repentance. Other prophecies clearly show that Jerusalem will fall, Judah will not repent as required; but they shall do so finally, and Joel's Kingdom prophecies shall come true.

Joe 1:2 *Hear this, you elders, and listen, all of you inhabitants of the land*- As so often in the prophets, the leadership and ordinary people are bracketed together and jointly appealed to. God's call was and is to individuals; they were not to follow their leaders, and leave spiritual decision making to their leaders. This itself was a radical and unusual approach within the understanding of society in Joel's time. We can certainly learn from this; God's word calls to us as individuals.

Has this ever happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?- The idea of this sentence couple with the reference to "generations" of the future in :3 is that the situation was unprecedented, both in the past and future- and just this language is used in Joel 2:2. This is the "time of trouble" for God's people which had never been and would never be repeated again; and that is unquestionably language of the very last days before the Lord's return (Dan. 12:1; Mt. 24:21). As noted on :1, Joel's prophecy could have potentially come true at various points in history, including his own time, perhaps just prior to the Assyrian or Babylonian invasion of Judah; but Judah did not repent as Joel appealed for, and so the prophecy has its main fulfilment in the last days.

Joe 1:3 *Tell your children about it, and have your children tell their children, and their children tell another generation*- See on :2. This may be a literary device meaning that the situation would not be repeated in future generations, rather than a literal appeal to pass on the details of the tragedy to future generations.

Joe 1:4 *What the swarming locust has left, the great locust has eaten. What the great locust has left, the grasshopper has eaten. What the grasshopper has left, the caterpillar has eaten*- The original words all refer to locusts but in various forms of their growth. Perhaps there was or will be a literal series of locust devastations of the land, designed to bring Jewry to repentance without the need for the bloodshed of an invasion; see on :7. But they will not be heeded. Am. 4:9 uses the same language in an apparently literal sense concerning the situation in the land before the Babylonian invasion. We note that God therefore worked by all means to try to bring His people to repentance without the Babylonian invasion. He works likewise with us, having to up the intensity to bring our stubborn hearts to repentance.

However it is clear from Joel 2:25 that the locusts represented "my great army which I sent among you". "Eaten" is the same word used for how the invading army would "consume" the land (Joel 2:3,5), and how the Babylonians would "consume" Judah (Am. 1:4; 2:5; Jer. 15:3). Whatever the possible potential historical application, locusts are used in Revelation as symbolic of the latter day invaders to come upon the land of promise; see on Rev. 9:3,7. And that is the primary application. The numerical values of the terms for the various locus forms have been interpreted as referring to the number of years the various empires dominated Jerusalem. These however are questionable; the Romans dominated the area beyond AD70, but I include the claims for your perusal:

Palmerworm, Hebrew *gazam*, numerical value 50- Babylon 588BC - 538BC
Locust, Hebrew *arbeh*, numerical value 208- Persia 538BC - 330BC
Cankerworm, Hebrew *yelek,* numerical value 140- Greece 330BC - 190BC
Caterpillar, Hebrew *hasil*, numerical value 108- Rome 38BC - AD70.

The attraction of the suggestion, however, is that we as latter day readers would therefore be intended to understand that after the four dominations of Jerusalem as outlined in Dan. 2 and Dan. 7, there was to be one last attempt in the last days. And that is the burden of Joel's material.

However there is no reason to think that the various kinds of locusts were consecutive, chronological invasions. Hebrew thought is not the linear thought of the Greeks and Western Europe. Jeremiah and Ezekiel described the Babylonian invasion as four-fold judgment (Jer. 15:3; Ez. 14:21), and this may be similar.

Joe 1:5 *Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine; for it is cut off from your mouth*- The impression is that Jewry was obsessed with self-pleasure and luxury, and the invasion was to catch them unawares. This is precisely the Biblical picture we get of latter day Israel. The Lord's return will be when some of His people are drunken (Mt. 24:49). Such a scenario is hard to conclusively apply to the state of affairs in Jerusalem on the eve of the historical Babylonian and Assyrian approach to Jerusalem. It more aptly fits our last days, although there were drunkards in Judah prior to the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 28:1,3). The 'weeping' commanded was weeping in repentance; this is the great theme of Joel, that repentance could avert the otherwise inevitable destruction, as Nineveh averted theirs. See on :11.

Joe 1:6 *For a nation has come up on my land, strong, and without number*- Joel

appears to be speaking at a time when the invasion had already begun, although he may be using the present tense to emphasize that what God threatened was as good as done. If the invasion had already begun, the drunkenness of :5 was due to a stubborn refusal to accept the reality of Divine judgment; and that is a human feature we see all around us and within our own psyche. The only other usage of "without number" about soldiers is about the Babylonian army, who are likened to locusts innumerable, just as here in Joel (Jer. 46:23).

His teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a lioness- Babylon and Assyria are both commonly likened to lions. Lam. 2:16 speaks of Jerusalem being devoured by the teeth of Babylon.

Joe 1:7 *He has laid My vine waste, and stripped My fig tree. He has stripped its bark*- Judah was God's vine and fig tree, but clearly Joel is speaking. This confusion of pronouns between God and His prophet is quite common in the prophets, reflecting how closely identified the prophets were with God. Their spirit was His Spirit; they shared His urgency, passions and feelings. And this was confirmed by the whole process of Divine inspiration. The past tenses may be an example of the 'prophetic perfect', God's word being so sure of fulfilment in the future that it is spoken as already fulfilled. Being "waste" or 'desolate' was the punishment threatened at the hands of the Babylonians (2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 29:8; 30:7; Jer. 4:7). Clearly Joel is alluding to the Babylonian invasion, but appealing for desperate repentance to avert it. But this was not forthcoming; and so his prophecy becomes descriptive of the latter day invasion of Israel which will be similar to the Babylonian invasion. The difference will be that it gives rise to Jewish repentance, the destruction of the invaders by the return of the Lord Jesus and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

And thrown it away- "Cast away", which is what God did to Judah after the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 52:3 s.w.). And yet the paradox of God's love is that He cast them away, but didn't cast away His people (Rom. 11:1). This paradox is developed in Hosea especially. God has real emotions, real anger and speaks words in anger, and yet grace and passion which seeks to always have the beloved back. And this God is our God.

Its branches are made white- Perhaps the idea is that the bark was stripped from the branches, leaving them white (as GNB). But the language of complete destruction of the trees is such that we are to conclude that they were destroyed, even though their branches had been made white. For this is the language of pruning, so that a better harvest might be received. The impression could be that God had tried pruning them, without effect, but in the end just allowed them all to be destroyed; see on :4.

Joe 1:8 *Mourn like a virgin dressed in sackcloth for the husband of her youth!*- This was the intensity Joel hoped they would have in repentance. The husband Israel married in her youth was God at Sinai (see on Hos. 8:1). As Hosea explains, she hardly remained a virgin, and lost her husband because she left Him for other gods. But here we have the situation explained in terms which provoke sympathy for the woman; it was as if God had died. Although God is immortal, He was so pained by

Israel's behaviour that He felt as if He had died. And that was how He could fully feel the death of His Son, whilst being immortal. Is. 54:6-8 uses a similar analogy, with God even taking blame which He need not have taken: "Israel, you are like a young wife, deserted by her husband and deeply distressed. But the LORD calls you back to him and says: "For one brief moment I left you; with deep love I will take you back. I turned away angry for only a moment, but I will show you my love forever." So says the LORD who saves you".

The meal offering and the drink offering are cut off from Yahweh's house; the priests, Yahweh's ministers, mourn- This could have been because they literally didn't have corn and wine to offer (:9). Or it could be that we have the frequently used 'prophetic perfect', whereby what is yet future is spoken of as having already happened. Judah are repeatedly condemned for mixing Yahweh worship with idol worship; their offerings were not pleasing to Yahweh (Is. 66:3; Jer. 6:20; 7:18-22). But the priests were so upset that they couldn't offer them. Their offerings were mere religion, even though they were done apparently sincerely and with true emotion. This is a solemn warning to us; emotion and enthusiasm about our religion is no guarantee of sincerity before God.

Joe 1:9 *The field is laid waste, the land mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the new wine has dried up and the oil wastes away*- Their 'mourning' was because they had lost their material blessings; Joel is urging them to instead mourn in repentance (:5,12). Oil, new wine and grain were the blessings for obedience; and these had been taken away.

Joe 1:10 *Be confounded, you farmers! Wail, you vineyard keepers; for the wheat and for the barley and the harvest of the field has perished*- AV "the field is wasted", which is a play on Hebrew words: *shadeh shadad*. The same word is used in Jeremiah of how even just before the Babylonian invasion, the land was "wasted" (Jer. 4:13,20). This seems a case of the prophetic perfect tense; God utters His word and it is certain of fulfilment, but in the gap between the utterance and the fulfilment, there is the possibility of repentance and the changing of that word. This is what happened with Nineveh, and we too stand in that gap. It gives critical urgency and intensity to our repentance and prayers. And so the invitation to "wail" is to wail in repentance.

Joe 1:11 *The vine has dried up, and the fig tree withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all of the trees of the field are withered away; for joy is withered away from the sons of men*- This is very similar to Jer. 12:4, about the situation just prior to the Babylonian invasion. Although "joy" was withered away from the people, they were getting drunk (:5). God intends His obedient people to live in "joy"; and when their disobedience precludes that, they instead turn to fleshly joy. The withered state of the land was directly reflective of the withered state of the people in the land. This parallel between land and people is common; the oft presented fecundity and prosperity of the natural creation in the Kingdom of God are all going to be reflections of the spiritual state of the inhabitants of the earth.

Joe 1:12 *Put on sackcloth and mourn, you priests! Wail, you ministers of the altar*- The Levites and priests were called to repentance just as much as land owners and

farm labourers (:11); continuing the theme of :2, that ordinary people cannot leave spirituality to their elders. All were to repent. By wearing sackcloth and admitting they had sinned, the priests could not wear their priestly clothing. This command was tantamount to asking them to seek forgiveness through the Mosaic rituals; instead they were to mourn in repentance and throw themselves directly upon God's mercy.

Come, lie all night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God, for the meal offering and the drink offering are withheld from your God's house- The offerings were "withheld" in the sense that they were debarred, not accepted. As noted on :8, the idea could also be that the wine and grain were simply unavailable due to the famine or locust swarms. The temple was going to be destroyed and the sacrifices made impossible to offer in captivity- because even when Judah could have offered them, they did not do so acceptably.

"Your God's house" recalls how the Lord spoke of the temple as "your house" and the feasts are described as 'feasts of the Jews'. They had hijacked God's religion, and turned His house and feasts into their own. And organized religion always runs the risk of doing this. Especially has "the Lord's table" been turned into "our table".

Joe 1:13 *Sanctify a fast*- Joel prophesies how latter day Israel will be exhorted to howl in their prayers, clothing themselves with sackcloth; exactly as Jeremiah had pleaded with Israel in the last moments before the first Babylonian onslaught: "Gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl" (Jer. 4:8). There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond in fervent prayer. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. The call to hold a fast and a solemn gathering could be a call to keep the day of atonement feast as it should have been kept; maybe it was even a call to keep such a feast outside of the law of Moses.

Call a solemn assembly- Judah had kept such solemn assemblies or feasts, but God was deeply irritated by them (s.w. Is. 1:13). Keeping external rituals without deep seated, desperate repentance is abhorrent to God. And all who are involved in attending religious meetings need to probe themselves deeply about this.

Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land- As noted on :2 and :12, the appeal was for all sectors of society to repent; for ordinary people to take full spiritual responsibility.

To the house of Yahweh your God, and cry to Yahweh- This was clearly spoken whilst the temple was still standing, and all Judah had the possibility of travelling up to Jerusalem. This would suggest that the Babylonian incursions were yet future. They are spoken of in the present tense because God's words are so certain of fulfilment that they are spoken of as if they have already happened. And yet there is the chance to change them by repentance, in the gap between the words and their fulfilment. But Joel is talking of the need for true repentance, rather than a mere crying out to God in pain and desperate request for help in need. That is a reaction common to all men. But crying out in true repentance is different, and that is Joel's burden.

Joe 1:14 *Alas for the day! For the day of Yahweh is at hand, and it will come as a destruction from the Almighty*- Joel has just appealed to Judah to keep the feast or day of atonement (:13) with true repentance. The feasts were each "the day of Yahweh", and the final judgment will likewise be the ultimate "day of Yahweh". We might conjecture that the Lord will return on a Jewish feast day, but that is perhaps mere literalism. The more essential idea is that by keeping the Lord's day or feast as asked, with deep repentance, then they would have a foretaste of the final day of the Lord. It's why the breaking of bread service, the Lord's feast of our times, is a preview of judgment day, an assurance of acceptance then if our souls are contrite before the cross now.

This verse is an exact repeat of Is. 13:6, which could support the idea that Joel was prophesying at the time of the Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah's time. But I would suggest that the overwhelming inter-textual evidence is that Joel has the Babylonian invasion in view, and by quoting Isaiah he is pointing out that as the repentance of a remnant in Jerusalem averted destruction by the Assyrians, so it would be true with the Babylonian threat. Isaiah of course had told Hezekiah that although the Assyrian threat had been averted, Babylon would destroy Jerusalem. But even this clear word of prophecy could be changed, so sensitive is God to genuine repentance. The word for "destruction" is used of what the Jews had done to themselves by their 'spoiling' of their own brethren (Ez. 45:9; Hos. 12:1). Divine judgment was therefore a bringing upon His people what they themselves had done. Sin is its own judgment.

Joe 1:15 *Isn't the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?*- Again we get the impression that there had been literal drought and locust swarms, leaving them without food and drink for the daily temple offerings. If indeed Joel was prophesying in the last days before Babylon took Jerusalem, then we can connect this with the chronic lack of food within the city recorded in Jer. 37:21; 38:9; 52:6. "The house of our God" contrasts with "the house of *your* God" in :13. In any appeal for others to repent, it's appropriate that we demonstrate our solidarity with them; and the prophets certainly did that. We think of Daniel fully identifying with Judah's sins in Dan. 9. The old covenant promised "joy" at time of harvest for those who remained in the covenant (Dt. 12:6,7,12; 16:11,14,15). The lack of joy and harvest therefore implies they had broken covenant with God.

Joe 1:16 *The seeds rot under their clods. The granaries are laid desolate. The barns are broken down, for the grain has withered*- The lack of harvest over a period of years (see Joel 2:25), to the point that barns had decayed through lack of use (s.w. Prov. 24:31), all pointed to the withdrawal of covenant blessings explained on :15. "Desolate" is the word used about the curses for disobedience (Lev. 26:22,31,32,34). The land was to lie desolate for 70 years (Lev. 26:34,35 cp. Jer. 25:11). Again we have the impression that Joel is speaking just prior to the Babylonian invasion and the start of the 70 years.

Joe 1:17 *How the animals groan! The herds of livestock are confused because they have no pasture. Yes, the flocks of sheep are made desolate*- The groaning of the animals because of lack of pasture was reflected in the crying of Joel for the same reason (:18). The idea is that as the famine made the animals groan to God, so should

the inhabitants of the land groan to God in repentance. But the word is often used of the groaning of the people of Jerusalem after the Babylonian invasion (Lam. 1:8,11,21). They groaned to God about their situation, but not the groan of repentance. All spiritual practices and attributes have a fake appearance of the real thing; and repentance is particularly an example.

Joe 1:18 *Yahweh, I cry to you because the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field*- Joel has been appealing for mass repentance and groaning to God in sorrow for their sins. He does so himself, perhaps hoping that the repentance of a minority would be acceptable to avert the destruction of Jerusalem, as it had been in the time of Hezekiah. The emphasis upon fire destroying the land is strange; the Babylonians burned Jerusalem with fire and some other towns afterwards, but there is no evidence they used a scorched earth policy upon Judah generally before the fall of Jerusalem. As noted on :1, Joel's prophecy could potentially have come true at the time of the Babylonian invasion, but it points ahead particularly to the last days. And it is likely that fire, perhaps as a result of nuclear warheads, will be used by the land's latter day invaders.

Joe 1:19 *Yes, the animals of the field pant to You, for the water brooks have dried up, and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness*- As noted above, "pant *to you*" suggests that the turning of the animals to God was to serve as a pattern for Judah's panting to God in repentance. The description of the water sources drying up is very much the language of the situation in Elijah's time; and again, the drought was intended to elicit repentance. The bush fires which broke out in the pasture lands were intended to provoke repentance, so that the fire of the Babylonians as they burnt Jerusalem and the temple would not have been necessary. God likewise works with us, seeking to elicit repentance from His hand in our lives, and then having to increase the intensity if we don't respond. This would then explain Joel 2:3 "A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns".

JOEL CHAPTER 2

Joe 2:1 *Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of Yahweh comes, for it is near at hand*- The trumpet summoned Israel to the day of atonement rituals, which have been alluded to in Joel 1. Yet the trumpet blasts also warned of approaching armies. As the enemy approached, there was to be a desperate keeping of the day of Atonement- whether or not it was the right time of year. Legal rituals became unimportant compared to the pressing need for repentance and forgiveness. The day or feast of Yahweh was to be for repentant Israel the day of Yahweh in the sense of judgment day. The whole ritual of the day of Atonement was an opportunity for Israel to have a preview of judgment day, and to be pronounced acceptable and cleansed, if they truly humbled their souls. This is "the day of Yahweh" here refers to both the feast of the day of atonement, and the judgment day of Yahweh. More literalistic minds could reason from this that the Lord's return may be at the day of atonement, or another feast / day of the Lord. But the essence is that Israel were to repent; the inhabitants of the land were to tremble in repentance, not simply from fear of judgment to come. The verdict could be changed- that was and is the greatest reality in spiritual life.

"The day of Yahweh is near" is the very phrase used about the Babylonian invasion (Ez. 30:3; Zeph. 1:7,14). It is also used in Joel 3:14, where the outcome of

that day is the judgment of the nations opposing God's people in a valley, and then the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom in the land of Israel. This didn't happen after Babylon took Jerusalem; so we can conclude that the scenario Joel had in mind for Babylon and Judah didn't work out. But the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days. This is perhaps why "Babylon" is not named; another nexus of powers will fulfil the terms of the prophecy as a perfect fit, and will come to their end at the valley mentioned in other prophecies, at the return of the Lord Jesus.

Joe 2:2 *A day of darkness and gloominess*- Literally, the light was being made into darkness. This is a reversal of creation, and speaks of judgment and as it were, de-creation. This verse is a repeat of Am. 5:20 and Zeph. 1:15, where the Babylonian invasion is in view. Am. 5:18,20 comment that this "day of Yahweh" was much sought after by Judah- but it would be a day of darkness and condemnation for them. Apparent enthusiasm for the second coming is not necessarily a sign of spirituality, nor acceptance at that day. Israel looked for light, but were given instead the gross darkness of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 13:16).

A day of clouds and thick darkness, like the dawn spreading on the mountains- The day of clouds and thick darkness speaks clearly of the Babylonian invasion and the beginning of the exile (Ez. 34:12; Zeph. 1:15). But "clouds and thick darkness" is very much the language of Yahweh's coming down in covenant with Israel at Sinai (Ex. 20:21; Dt. 4:11; 5:22). Now that covenant was being abrogated, for Judah had broken it. But in all God's judgments, there is the hope of final restoration. This day of thick darkness, presaging the arrival of a "great and strong" army of desolators, also seemed as the beginning of the dawn- an image used in Mal. 4:2 of the arising of Messiah and the restoration of the Kingdom of God in Israel. God's wrath and judgment is therefore unlike human wrath, where the focus of the moment is solely upon punishment and retribution. God is grace and hope itself, and He is also outside our limits of time. So in wrath He remembers mercy. The Babylonian judgment and exile was intended to result in the restoration and reestablishment of the Kingdom under a Messiah figure. Although even that didn't happen as potentially possible.

A great and strong people! There has never been the like, neither will there be any more after them, even to the years of many generations- The Babylonian army were made seemingly invincible by God; and as noted on Joel 1:2, this invasion would never be seen again nor had it been seen before. This is unquestionably language of the very last days before the Lord's return (Dan. 12:1; Mt. 24:21). As noted on Joel 1:1, Joel's prophecy could have potentially come true at various points in history, including his own time, perhaps just prior to the Babylonian invasion of Judah; but Judah did not repent as Joel appealed for, and so the prophecy has its main fulfilment in the last days.

Joe 2:3 *A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns*- The fire that came before the Babylonians may refer to the wildfires resultant from the extreme drought of previous years; because Judah refused to allow that fire to bring them to repentance, the Babylonian fire came. See on Joel 1:19. So the forest fires were replaced by the fires left burning by the Babylonians.

The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and after them- like a desolate wilderness- I suggested on Gen. 1 that the *eretz* in view there is the land promised to

Abraham, and that the land of Israel was effectively the garden of Eden. As sinful Adam was sent out of the garden to the east, so were God's people. These words of Joel support that approach. Eden was as it were destroyed and turned into a wilderness like the rest of the planet.

Yes, and no one has escaped them- The Assyrians and Babylonians boasted of a series of victories against other peoples before they came against Judah. God is saying that he knows this; and their apparent victory over Yahweh was only apparent and not in reality. For He had even predicted that they would boast in this way. The same word is used in :32, where we learn that there could have been some who "escaped" Babylon's invasion. So potentially, some could have "escaped"; and the word is used in Ez. 14:22 of how a remnant would survive the invasion. But that potential wasn't realized, at Joel's time. All these failed potentials were and are so distressing to God. But the offer of salvation shall finally come true in our last days. It is for us to witness to Israel ahead of time so that they have the knowledge of Christ required for repentance.

Joe 2:4 *Their appearance is as the appearance of horses, and as horsemen, so do they run*- Locusts appearing as horsemen is without doubt alluded to in Rev. 9, which as demonstrated there concerns the latter day invasion of the land. The scenario could have been fulfilled during the Babylonian period; Judah could have repented, Babylon destroyed and the Messianic Kingdom established. But they didn't repent, and so the prophecy was reapplied to our last days.

Joe 2:5 *Like the noise of chariots on the tops of the mountains do they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devours the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array*- The allusion may be to a locust swarm, with the rising sun glinting off their wings. We are given the picture of extreme military advantage and strength, and God's people left powerless to resist. Whilst Joel has limited application to the Babylonian invasion, this doesn't fit the text perfectly; see on :2. The main fulfilment will be in the latter day invasion, described in the locust prophecy of Rev. 9. Currently, Israel survives by keeping the technological, military advantage against their surrounding enemies. But this will not last. They will be left helpless before a vastly superior group of enemies. The enthusiasm for some Protestant groups about Israel's military might is misplaced and quite against the Biblical picture of the last days.

Joe 2:6 *At their presence the people are in anguish. All faces have grown pale*- "Presence" is Heb. 'face'. The Hebrew implies a face to face meeting between Jewry and her invaders; and her face becomes pale before them. The allusion may be to Jacob in his "time of trouble" meeting Esau face to face having wrestled face to face with the Angel whose face represented that of Esau (Gen. 32:30; 33:10). The unprecedented time of trouble of :2 is the time of Jacob's unprecedented trouble of the last days (Dan. 12:1), and Israel will likewise wrestle with God and man until they finally quit all human strength and repent. There is another Jacob allusion in :11.

Joe 2:7 *They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like warriors. They each march in his line, and they don't swerve off course*- Israel's enemies have been ever characterized by disunity. But there will come a brief moment of total unity as they all strive together for the one thing which unites them- the capture of Jerusalem. "The wall" of Jerusalem was Judah's perceived great military and technical advantage, just

as modern day Israel trust in such advantage against their enemies; but that shall be scaled.

Joe 2:8 *Neither does one jostle another; they march each one in his path, and they burst through the defences, and don't break ranks*- As explained on:7, the enemy will be focused upon the capture of Jerusalem and "Zion", the temple mount, in particular. They will overcome "the defences"; it is so emphasized that the apparent defensive technological advantage of the defenders will be overcome. This has clear appropriacy to latter day Israel.

Joe 2:9 *They rush on the city, they run on the wall, they climb up into the houses, they enter in at the windows like thieves*- This continues the picture of :7; Jerusalem's wall, the apparently invincible defensive technology of the Jews, will be totally breached. The houses and windows are those on the wall.

Joe 2:10 *The earth quakes before them, the skies tremble, the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining*- This is language specifically applied to the last days in Mt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12; 8:12. Earthquakes feature in several descriptions of the last days. Sun, moon and stars are specifically used as symbols of the leaders of Israel (Gen. 37:9). Whatever application there may have been to Babylon's actions, this was but a primary fulfilment.

Joe 2:11 *Yahweh thunders His voice before His army; for His forces are very great; for he is strong who obeys His command*- The prophets repeatedly emphasize the invading armies were God's armies; His people are not in the hands of radical evil, but rather all "armies" against them are totally under His control and command. See on Mt. 22:7 for another example. The same Hebrew phrase is used in Gen. 32:2 of Yahweh's camp or "forces"- both of Angels and Esau's soldiers (see on :6). Yahweh is Yahweh of hosts, both or Angelic and human armies whom those Angels control.

For the day of Yahweh is great and very awesome, and who can endure it?- The very words of Mal. 3:2 about the final day of Yahweh at the return of the Lord Jesus.

Joe 2:12 *Yet even now, says Yahweh, turn to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning*- The judgments had been spoken and are even recorded in the present tense as if they had already happened, so sure were they of fulfilment. But in the gap between the Divine statement and earthly fulfilment, there is the possibility of repentance- "even now". We too stand in that gap, and it should impart an intensity and urgency to our living and repenting. God's word is His word, and He doesn't say that if they repent, He will change His word. That is implied as a possibility, but it is not to be expected as some kind of contractual obligation from Him if we repent. Hence :14 "who knows if...".

Joe 2:13 *Tear your heart, and not your garments, and turn to Yahweh, your God*- A theme of Joel is that repentance can be on a merely surface level, and not the real thing. Joel 1 has described how Judah would cry out to their God- but they were urged to cry out in true repentance. The Babylonian judgment was to come upon Judah because when the Assyrian judgment was averted, Hezekiah had not repented from his heart; he tore his garments (same words in Is. 37:1), but not his heart. And they are being urged to learn that lesson. Hos. 13:8 describes the final Babylonian destruction as God rending or tearing the heart of Judah- again, the same words are used. They

refused to tear their hearts, and so their hearts were torn in the condemnation process. If we will not repent, then we shall be forced to repent all too late in condemnation. John the Baptist used the same logic in appealing for repentance; it was a choice of fire, or the fire of condemnation.

For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and relents from sending calamity- The very nature of God's Name, which is alluded to here, invites repentance. God had earlier repented Himself of the evil He planned to do to Israel (Ex. 32:12,14; 2 Sam. 24:16)- in both cases, because of the spirituality of a minority. Joel was hopeful that even if a minority responded to his appeal, the judgment could be averted. This is how God works; third parties are saved, or at least blessed with the aversion of judgment, for the sake of others' spirituality. I suggested on Joel 1:1 that Joel was contemporary with Jeremiah. Judah had not repented of their evil (Jer. 8:6) and so God would not. Jeremiah more than any other prophet repeats this theme of God being willing to repent or relent from His stated position of bringing evil upon a nation (Jer. 18:8,10; 26:3,13,18; 42:10). And Joel is making the same appeal. This feature of Yahweh, stating judgment to come but then repenting of it if there was repentance, was a unique feature unknown in any other god or religious system. Gods are typically presented in all religions as unchanging. The only unchanging feature of Yahweh is that the sons of Jacob are not consumed when they ought to be, because of His grace (Mal. 3:6). And this God is our God today.

The characteristics of God's Name are clearly alluding to His self declaration in Ex. 34:5,6: "Gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness″ is word for word what we read there. But "And relents from sending calamity" must therefore be the equivalent of what follows in Ex. 34:7: "Keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and disobedience and sin". God through Joel was now clarifying what that meant- it meant that His forgiveness was of such a deep reaching quality that even the consequences for sin could be forgiven. And we rightly gasp at such grace, such a God.

Joe 2:14 *Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meal offering and a drink offering to Yahweh, your God*- "Who knows? He may turn..." may not in fact be leaving it as an open question; for in :13 we have just read the assurance that He does do this. The sense may therefore be: "The one who experiences this, will experience a God who turns and relents, and goes even further- He will restore you grain and wine. But you are to use that blessing of grace by offering it to Yahweh, your God".

God's forgiveness and salvation can never be presumed upon; even if we are genuinely repentant. For the wages of sin has always been death (Rom. 6:23); we as sinners have no right to life. This is a theme stamped right across the Old Testament. Consider: "You have sinned a great sin. Now I will go up to Yahweh. Perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30). "Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts. It may be that Yahweh, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Am. 5:15). “Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious... Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him?” (Joel 2:13,14). "Let them turn each one from his evil way... Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" (Jonah 3:8,9). Possibly we could add Esther 4:14 to this list: "Who knows if you haven’t come to the kingdom for such a time as this?". This is why Daniel's friends can reason: "Our God whom we serve is

able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods" (Dan. 3:17,18). They believed in Yahweh's salvation, but were quite prepared not to receive it. They knew that His ability to dramatically save them at that moment was not at all certain of fulfilment for them. The same words "is able" and "save" are used by Darius in Dan. 6:21 when he again expresses a doubt as to whether God is able to save in this case: "Was the God whom you served so regularly able to deliver you from the lions?". Against all this we must balance the fact that those in Christ have been given the "right" to be God's children (Jn. 1:12). But the bold confidence we have in the Lord Jesus must somehow never fail to be nuanced by an awareness of our total unworthiness and inability to presume upon God's forgiveness.

Joe 2:15 *Blow the trumpet in Zion! Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly*- This repeats the call made in Joel 1, to hold a day of atonement style fast [the only 'day of Yahweh' where fasting was prescribed]. Whether or not it was the right time of year was immaterial- the fact Joel calls for it to be held could imply it was not. But our spiritual desperation drives us beyond all mere legalism. "Solemn assembly" is definitely the language of the feasts, especially the day of atonement; and the trumpet was blown at that time to proclaim the year of release. But now the trumpet was being sounded also as a warning that the Babylonian armies were approaching (see on :1).

Joe 2:16 *Gather the people. Sanctify the assembly. Assemble the elders. Gather the children, and those who nurse from the breasts. Let the bridegroom go forth from his room, and the bride out of her room*- Absolutely everyone was to be involved in this repentance; even children. For children can also sin. And no human situation was to be allowed to distract or excuse- if you had just given birth or were in the midst of your wedding, all the same, you needed to repent. And it is the experience of otherwise legitimate human experiences which often serves as an excuse for us not to repent, not to deeply engage with our sins. But the language is as ever hopeful; for Isaiah envisaged a repentant Judah as going forth as a bride from her room (Is. 49:18; 61:10; 62:5) into the Messianic kingdom. And this is Joel's vision. If they had repented, then the Messianic Kingdom could then have been established, as he goes on to describe. Male or female, elder or prole... all were guilty and needed to repent. For relationship with God is individual, and not predicated upon an eldership or priesthood.

Joe 2:17 *Let the priests, the ministers of Yahweh, weep between the porch and the altar*- The offerings weren't being offered because there was no grain or wine or animals left to offer, as Joel 1 has made clear. So the altar was to be approached with a different sacrifice- genuinely broken hearts in repentance, exactly as David had taught in Ps. 51:17.

And let them say, Spare Your people, Yahweh- God had used this very word in saying that He would *not* "spare" His impenitent, rebellious people (Jer. 13:14; 21:7). The clearly stated purpose of God was open to change by repentance.

And don't give Your heritage to reproach- Again, as noted above, God had stated that he would bring Judah "to reproach" (s.w. Jer. 23:40; 24:9; 29:18). But Joel knew God well and closely enough to understand that His stated purpose could be changed

by human repentance. If as suggested on Joel 1:1 Joel was contemporary with Jeremiah, this would explain his repeated references to Jeremiah.

That the pagan nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'- Joel was clearly inspired by the reasoning of Moses, whose single handed mediation led to the "evil" planned by God being 'repented of'.

Joe 2:18 *Then Yahweh was jealous for His land, and had pity on His people*- This section would be one of the clearest examples of the 'prophetic perfect' tense; that which was yet future being spoken of as if it had already happened. At the time of the Babylonian invasion, Yahweh ultimately did not have pity on His people (Jer. 13:14; Lam. 2:2,17,21; 3:43; Ez. 5:11; 7:4) in that the Babylonians showed no pity on the people (2 Chron. 36:17). The implication in Joel's context was that his appeal for repentance went unheeded. But ultimately, God would have pity, and would reestablish His Kingdom. For one day Judah would be repentant, and God's intended Kingdom purpose would come true.

Joe 2:19 *Yahweh answered His people, Behold, I will send you grain, new wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied with them; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations*- Grain, new wine and oil were all required for the temple rituals. Joel 1:12 had lamented that the grain and wine offerings couldn't be offered because there simply was none left to offer. So the idea is that blessings would be given, so that they could be given back to God. And that principle remains to this day in our lives.

Joe 2:20 *But I will remove the northern army far away from you*- The vast majority of the many Biblical references to the northern invader are to Babylon- not Assyria, let alone Russia. The Babylonian invasion which Joel sought to avert through his calls to repentance did actually happen. It was not 'removed' let alone destroyed. But the latter day invader will be. There are reports of those living in the Jerusalem area describing the locusts swarms which descended upon them as "the northern army"; but locusts typically enter Israel from the south and not the north.

And will drive it into a barren and desolate land, its front into the eastern sea, and its back into the western sea- The language of driving suggests the invader is a now cornered beast, with a head and back part. Daniel and Revelation have much to say of the latter day invader as a beast. The seas referred to are the Mediterranean and Dead Seas. This never happened historically, so again we conclude that Joel's prophecies concern the latter days. This presumably is the same location as the valley of decision of Joel 3:2,12,14. However, if the allusion continues to locusts, the idea may be that this huge swarm is driven into a deserted area and some are driven into the Dead Sea and others into the Mediterranean. But in this case, the language of "stench" is difficult to understand.

And its stench will come up, and its bad smell will rise- Continuing the image of the invaders being as a locust swarm, which is now over and lay dead and decaying. The same word is used of the "stench" of the Edomite nations who are judged in the last days (Is. 34:3). The smell of the destroyed nations led by Rosh is likewise noted in Ez. 39:11 AV. The latter day "northern" invader will comprise all these groups.

Surely He has done great things!- The reference is to God, as repeated in :21. This is again an example of the future being spoken of in the past, as God's word of gracious promise is ultimately so sure of fulfilment. This emphasis is given here in Joel because Judah did not repent, and the tendency would have been to wonder if therefore God's purpose had totally failed.

Joe 2:21 *Land, don't be afraid! Be glad and rejoice, for Yahweh has done great things!*- This confident exaltation is because Joel knows that even if his appeal for repentance is unheeded and Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, ultimately God's purpose of establishing His Kingdom would come true. And even when faced with the reality of sin and the spiritual weakness of God's people, and the inevitability of Divine judgment, those who are spiritual can see beyond that- to the wonderful reality of God's Kingdom that shall ultimately come.

Joe 2:22 *Don't be afraid, you animals of the field; for the pastures of the wilderness spring up, for the tree bears its fruit. The fig tree and the vine yield their strength*- The judgments described in Joel 1 are now specifically undone. The present tenses mean that what God had prophesied as happening ultimately was so sure of fulfilment, that it could be spoken of in the past or even present tenses. The future Kingdom is indeed "now but not yet". Joel could rejoice in the ultimate reality of the Kingdom, and encourage others to do so, even though on the eve of the Babylonian invasion of a Judah who had refused Joel's message that reality looked very distant.

Joe 2:23 *Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in Yahweh your God; for He gives you the former rains in just measure, and He causes the rain to come down for you, the former rains and the latter rains, as before*- As noted on :22, the immediate reality was bleak. Babylon was about to invade, and Judah had refused Joel's call to repentance; and so the potentially possible Messianic kingdom would not then come. But it would ultimately, so certainly that it could be spoken of in the present tense. And therefore Joel specifically addresses "you children of Zion", the faithful, repentant remnant within Jerusalem. For them, there could be joy in the ultimate hope. And for us too, when we recognize as Daniel had to that we shall maybe not see the Kingdom of God in our lifetime, and that God's people are not as they should be and we individually and collectively have missed the realization of so much that could have been and should have been... yet all the same, the hope of the Kingdom is so certain.

"The former rains" can be translated "the teacher or righteousness", perhaps a reference to the Elijah prophet who could have arisen to prepare the way for Messiah in Joel's time, had Judah repented. But this promise will be delayed until the last days, and Malachi 4 confirms that such a figure will indeed appear in the last days before the Lord's return. But former and latter rains may simply be read as meaning 'the blessings of the covenant as God intended'.

Joe 2:24 *The threshing floors will be full of wheat, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil*- The tenses change here to the future, perhaps to emphasize the previous usage of the prophetic perfect tense. The Kingdom of the future was as good as already there- even when Joel and the faithful remnant were at the low point of human experience. Their appeal for repentance had been unheeded for the most part, and God had chosen not to accept their personal repentance as enough to avert the destruction

of His people and temple. But still, the Kingdom shall come. We see this same hope and approach in Habakkuk particularly.

Joe 2:25 *I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the great locust, the grasshopper, and the caterpillar, My great army, which I sent among you*- See on 1 Kings 22:22. Finally Israel will realize that the armies of invaders were sent by God. "The years" may need to be read as 'what your lost in the years...', as GNB. This fits with the whole prophetic theme of restoration. The Kingdom of God on earth will be the restoration of the Kingdom of God as it was in Israel (Ez. 21:25-27).

Joe 2:26 *You will have plenty to eat and will be satisfied, and will praise the name of Yahweh your God who has dealt wondrously with you*- This clearly didn't happen at the Babylonian invasion; it potentially could have done, but Judah didn't repent and so it didn't. But finally they shall, after the latter day Babylonian invasion. "Dealt wondrously" is the same term used of God's actions in delivering Israel from Egypt (Ex. 3:20; Neh. 9:17), and in making His first covenant with Israel (Ex. 34:10). If God had delivered Judah from the Babylonian invasion, He would have "dealt wondrously" for His people (Jer. 21:2). In the last days, the deliverance from latter day Babylon will issue in a new covenant between God and His people.

And My people will never again be ashamed- This therefore refers to the final restoration of Israel, in the last days, at the Lord's return and the establishment of the Kingdom. Any previous fulfilment was at best an initial, primary fulfilment.

Joe 2:27 *You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am Yahweh your God, and there is no one else*- If the restoration had happened as God potentially enabled, then the temple of Ez. 40-48 would have been built, and God's presence found there; it would have been called "Yahweh is there" (Ez. 48:35). This didn't happen, and most of the Jews preferred to remain in exile. But it shall ultimately come true. As noted on :26, Judah are to enter a new covenant with God, and this will involve their recognition of His exclusive relationship with them and they with Him.

And My people will never again be ashamed- This therefore refers to the final restoration of Israel, in the last days, at the Lord's return and the establishment of the Kingdom. Any previous fulfilment was at best an initial, primary fulfilment.

Joe 2:28 *It will happen in the last days, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions*- Judah's entry into a new covenant (:26) will result in the gift of the Spirit to them. Jer. 31:33 says that the new covenant will mean God operating directly upon their hearts, giving them a heart to know Him and be obedient to Him. The spirit refers ultimately to the heart and mind, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of a new mind, a new pair of eyes, a new psychology. That this gift of the Spirit is part and parcel of the new covenant which even then was potentially possible for Judah is made explicit in Ez. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29. As Acts 2 makes clear, the receipt of the gift of the Spirit is the very reason to be baptized and enter the new covenant. We are thereby washed not only in water but with the regeneration of the Spirit (Tit. 3:5-8); born of water and the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). The essential gift of the Spirit is of moral and spiritual cleansing, but in the first century it was manifested

through the visible miracles. These were specific things for specific times, a visible manifestation of the internal gift which is such a major part of the Christian Gospel- which is the new covenant which Judah could have entered (Heb. 8:8-13). They could have entered it if they had repented and averted the Babylonian victory over Jerusalem; but they didn't. When a minority did repent in the first century, they entered the new covenant and received the Spirit. But the main fulfilment will be when the remnants of the Jewish people in Israel repent, whilst under the latter day tribulation. Then the Spirit will be poured out for their usage against their abusers, as we see hinted at in several passages in Revelation.

Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least the book of Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a linear chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfillment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then v. 12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples). These principles are all brought together in the way Peter interprets Joel 2. The comments in brackets reflect the interpretation which Peter offers later in his address. He gives each part of it a fulfillment not in chronological sequence with what has gone before: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [i.e. you are seeing a fulfillment of this prophecy before your eyes]: I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy [fulfilled by the apostles after Christ's ascension]... and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath [the miracles of the Lord Jesus during His ministry]... the sun shall be turned into darkness [the crucifixion], and the moon into blood [also referring to an unrecorded event at the crucifixion?], before that great and notable day of the Lord come [the second coming; or the resurrection?]: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved [fulfilled by the crowd accepting baptism on the day of Pentecost]" (Acts 2:16-21). Typical of the NT writers, Peter doesn't quote from the Masoretic [Hebrew] text, but from the Septuagint, and in Joel 2 there are significant differences. And yet Peter adds and changes things even from the LXX. The inspired writers don't quote exactly, and often mix interpretation with quotation.

"The last days" is a phrase doesn't have to necessarily refer to the last days before the Lord's second coming. It could equally refer to the last days of some other period- in the case of Peter's quotation of it in Acts 2, the Mosaic system. But the phrase is of course ambiguous- exactly because the Lord's second coming could have occurred then in the first century, but the various required preconditions were not met. The LXX also has as the Masoretic Text: "Afterward". "The last days" would appear to be Peter's inspired interpretation, choosing a minority reading of the Hebrew text [which the NEV follows].

"All flesh" shows that a prophecy apparently about "all" here has a specific fulfilment in a limited group. Other Biblical references to "all" must likewise be understood; from God's perspective, the believers are "all things" to Him.

Joe 2:29 *And also on the servants and on the handmaids I will pour out My Spirit in those days*- The servants / slaves and handmaids are emphasized. In order to see a fulfilment of this at that time of Pentecost, surely there were female believers who also began speaking in foreign languages- although that is not recorded. Often the NT quotes the OT selectively, omitting words and phrases which were not relevant to the fulfilment. The fact the "handmaids" and "daughters" (Acts 2:17) are mentioned would surely mean that there were women also given the gifts at this time. The fact this is not specifically recorded is yet another example of how the records are so abbreviated. That women aren't recorded as publically preaching at this time is no reason to think they did not. Likewise the fulfilment of the Joel prophecy meant that there were both old and young men preaching (Acts 2:17). The "all" who were "together in one place" (Acts 2:1) were those who received the gifts, all within the house; not just the apostles. However, Acts 2:7 records the impression that "all" who were speaking in foreign languages were from Galilee. The women / sisters in view were therefore presumably also from Galilee. Peter "and the eleven" stated that "these are not drunk" (Acts 2:15)- rather than 'We are not drunk'. The use of "these" suggests that there were others apart from 'the twelve' who were preaching with the Spirit gifts. It was a shameful thing for a Jewish man to talk publically to a woman, let alone for her to read the Torah, and for a woman to publically preach God's word would have been nothing short of scandalous. In this we have a challenge to our own sense of inadequacy in witness; women, Galileans, the illiterate and poorly educated... were those used by God to make history's greatest and most effective public witness to Christ.

Joe 2:30 *I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of smoke*- Blood, fire and smoke columns suggest Mosaic sacrifices, in which the blood had to be poured out and then the carcass burnt. God's judgments are described as Him having a sacrifice (Jer. 46:10), and in the Acts 2 quotation, the AD70 judgment of Jerusalem is surely in view. This is the language of Mt. 24:5-7 about the same event. But AD70 was but a preview of the last days, which is the burden of Joel's prophecy.

Thomson (*Land and the Book*, vol. 2, p. 311) suggests the allusion in this passage is to the whirlwind sandstorms, which are appropriate figures of Divine judgment: “We have two kinds of sirocco, one accompanied with vehement wind, which fills the air with dust and fine sand. I have often seen the whole heavens veiled in gloom with this sort of sandcloud, through which the sun, shorn of his beams, looked like a globe of dull smouldering fire. It may have been this phenomenon which suggested that strong prophetic figure of Joel, quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost. Wonders in the heaven and in the earth; blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. The pillars of smoke are probably those columns of sand and dust raised high in the air by local whirlwinds, which often accompany the sirocco. On the great desert of the Hauran I have seen a score of them marching with great rapidity over the plain, and they closely resemble ‹pillars of smoke”.

Joe 2:31 *The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes*- This would confirm the allusion to sandstorms noted on :30. Sun and moon represent the leaders of Israel (Gen. 37:9). In the primary application, Joel was speaking of the destruction of the royal family under

Zedekiah. This had to be removed before God's kingship in Messiah could be enthroned. But Judah's lack of repentance precluded the outcomes which were then possible, and so we can understand this to refer to the bloody destruction of the Israeli leadership in the last days.

Joe 2:32 *It will happen that whoever*- This clearly implies Gentiles. But that wasn't how the early Christians understood it when this was quoted in Acts 2. They chose to understand the Lord's universal preaching commission as meaning going out to preach to Jews of all nations, and they saw the response of Acts 2 as proof of this. And yet "all nations" is used about the Gentiles in all its other occurrences in Matthew (Mt. 4:15; 6:32; 10:5,18; 12:18,21; 20:19,25). Such intellectual failure had a moral basis- they subconsciously couldn't hack the idea of converting Gentiles into the Hope of Israel. They allowed themselves to assume they understood what the Lord meant, to assume they had their interpretation confirmed by the events of Acts 2… instead of baring themselves to the immense and personal import of the Lord's commission to take Him to literally all. We too can read Scripture and assume we understand it, and thereby skip over massive implications for us.

Will call on the name of Yahweh- This seems to prophesy of multitudes calling upon the name of the Lord in the 'last days'. The preliminary fulfillment of this in Acts 2:21 must surely be repeated in the ultimate 'last days'; and there, the name was called upon by calling upon themselves the name of the Lord Jesus in baptism and faith. And it may be that it is multitudes of Diaspora Jews who respond in the last days, as it was in Acts 2… The description of "the remnant" being saved out of Jerusalem and mount Zion, the temple mount, may mean that they go into the temple area in the last days to seek safety as the Jews did in AD70 and at the time of Hezekiah, and this is where they are at the moment of the Lord's intervention. Joel 2:32 could have had its primary fulfilment in the redemption of this remnant, and it therefore has an application to the salvation of the latter-day Jewish remnant out of Arab-occupied Jerusalem: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord (i.e. truly pray for deliverance in faith, perhaps through calling upon themselves the Lord's name through baptism into Christ) shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem (cp. 2 Kings 19:30,31 for the mention of those two terms) shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said (through Isaiah and his prophets), and in the remnant...". This passage is quoted in different contexts in Acts 2:21 and Rom. 10:13, but this does not preclude its application to the faithful remnant in Jerusalem in the last days. This New Testament usage is regarding how a convert should eagerly call upon himself the Lord's salvation / deliverance from sin in Christ. This should therefore be done with the same sense of urgency and desperate intensity as the persecuted remnant of the last days will do, like their counterparts within Jerusalem in Joel's time could have done.

The urgency we have in our witness isn't only joyful; there's an element of dead seriousness to it because of the very urgency of our task. Joel 2:32 predicted that when Jerusalem was surrounded by her enemies at Joel's time , with all in Judah who could do so having fled into the city for safety, "It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered [saved]: for in Mount Zion [the temple mount] and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance [RV "those that escape"]". These words are alluded to by Peter when he stood near the temple mount and urged people to be baptized into Christ, to call upon themselves the Lord's Name; and they are applied to all our witness by Paul (Rom. 10:13). Those refugees fleeing before the

Babylonian war machine are the people of this world whom we urge to accept deliverance and salvation through baptism into Christ.

Shall be saved- Initially, saved from the Babylonian invasion. But Peter guides us to understand these words as referring to eternal salvation in Christ.

For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape- Literally, "a remnant", although a different word to that at the end of this verse. The idea is that most of the Jews would be destroyed, but a remnant would escape and be saved by the appearance of salvation on Mount Zion. That could have happened if Judah had repented; the Babylonian army would have been destroyed, the remnant of Judah saved eternally, and the Messianic Kingdom established. But they didn't repent, and so these promises were reapplied to all who would accept God's salvation in Jesus. The same word was used in Joel 2:3, where we learn that there would be none that escaped Babylon's invasion. But potentially, some could have been; and the word is used in Ez. 14:22 of how a remnant would survive the invasion. But that potential wasn't realized, at Joel's time.

As Yahweh has said, and among the remnant, those whom Yahweh calls- This called remnant are different to those just mentioned, who were a remnant of natural Jews. The idea may be that if Judah had repented, the Babylonian invader would have been destroyed and a Messianic Kingdom established in Zion, and Yahweh would have called out a remnant from the Gentiles, perhaps a remnant from the invading armies, who could also have found salvation in the hope of Israel. This potential scenario didn't happen, but it shall do in the last days.

JOEL CHAPTER 3

Joe 3:1 *For behold, in those days, and in that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem*- Joel so far has spoken of the possibility of repentance to avert the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. Had that happened, he foresaw that a Messianic Kingdom could then have been established, with blessings for even the repentant remnant of the invaders (Joel 2:32). He speaks in the prophetic perfect or present tense in Joel 2, of the Kingdom promises being so certain of fulfilment that they can be spoken of as present reality. He realized that this might not happen in the short term, but the Kingdom promises were certain of fulfilment in the long term. As noted on Joel 2:2, the scenario he predicted was the one final invasion of Judah and the establishment of the Kingdom. This didn't happen in his time, and it seems in Joel 3 that he recognizes that, and instead now focuses on the fact that the Kingdom promises will come true and the invasion scenario will be reapplied to the last days. And he adds some more details concerning that latter day scenario, which otherwise would be impossible to snugly fit with what happened during the Babylonian invasion (especially Joel 3:3-10,19).

Joe 3:2 *I will gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat*- The "valley" in view is emphasized (:12,14), and is presumably located in the same area as the destruction of the invaders in Joel 2:20. This gathering of all

nations [usually used about all the nations of the *eretz* around Israel] into a valley for final judgment is quoted in Rev. 16:16 as applying specifically to the last days. But there we read of the valley of Megiddo, in northern Israel.

"Megiddo" and the descriptions of Sisera *gathering* his chariots and God *drawing* them into battle (Jud. 5:19) must link with the nations being *gathered* to Armageddon (Rev. 16:16). If this connection is valid, then "the kings of the earth (land - of Israel?) and of the whole world" which are gathered (Rev. 16:14) would primarily refer to the kings of the Islamic world within and around the earth / land promised to Abraham, Sisera of the latter days.

Rev. 16:14-16 and Rev. 19:19 appear to be based upon the ideas of the 'gathering together' of Israel's local enemies outlined in the commentary on Rev. 16:14, and also upon Zech. 12:3. "The kings of the earth" can be interpreted as in Zech. 12:3; ”of the whole world" may refer to the world in relation to Israel (as in Dan. 2), or possibly to the fact that all nations literally will be incited to attack Israel, kidded by the beast that some "final solution" to the Middle Eastern problem is necessary. 'Armageddon' meaning 'the valley of Megiddo', takes us back to Zech. 12:9,11: "I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem... in that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as... in the valley of Megiddon". The conclusion from this is that although a minority within Israel have repented before their victory in the valley of Jehoshaphat, according to the typology of Jehoshaphat's victory in 2 Chron. 20 and other passages, their full realization of the enormity of their sin of crucifying Jesus only comes home to them on seeing His complete rout of their enemies. Thus their returning to Jerusalem with joy (2 Chron. 20:27) will be preceded by, or mixed with, tears of pent-up emotional release. The similarity of the 'gather together' language has led us to associate the following:-

- The gathering together of Israel's neighbouring enemies against her at various times
- The gathering of the Arab nations into a valley near Jerusalem (2 Chron. 20:16, A.V. mg.) for destruction in Hezekiah's time
- Joel's prophecy of all nations being gathered into the "valley of Jehoshaphat" (Joel 3:2)
- The gathering together of the Arab nations into the 'valley of Megiddo' (Rev. 16:16) to fight Israel in the last days.

It could be objected that the valley of Megiddo is in the North of Israel whilst that of Jehoshaphat is in the South, near Jerusalem. However, the other similarities of language and context are so great as to suggest that they must refer to the same place. It may be that Megiddo having been the scene of many previous Arab battles in Israel's history, it is being used symbolically in Rev. 16:16 rather than as a literal geographical reference. Back in Rev. 16, the sixth vial has described how the nations will be gathered to their place of judgment in Armageddon. The seventh vial then records the destruction of Babylon, who receives "the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath" in the form of huge hailstones (Rev. 16:19,21). This equates the nations who are gathered to Armageddon with Babylon, which heads up the coalition elsewhere known as the beast. The cup of the wrath of God alludes to Zech. 12:2,3, where the peoples from the jihadist nations also are "gathered together" and have burdened themselves with Jerusalem are made to drink "a cup of trembling" by reason of doing so. The punishment with giant hailstones recalls how Israel's enemies were destroyed in the time of Joshua / Jesus (Josh. 20:11). This confirms our interpretation of 'Babylon' as having a Middle Eastern context.

But there is another possibility. The unclean spirits or teachings released from the beast and his publicity agents gather the nations together to Armageddon. "Armageddon" (Rev. 16:16) is from the Hebrew *har-magedon*. *Har* means 'mountain'. The assumption has been made that *magedon´*is the same as 'Megiddo'; but the problem is, Megiddo is a plain and there is no mountain there. Also, the word *magedon* would be spelt slightly differently if it were simply the place name Megiddo. The suggestion has been made and well argued that *magedon* is a form of the Hebrew *mo'ed*, and would literally mean "the mount of assembly / gathering"- the title of Jerusalem in Is. 14:13 [see Meredith Kline, 'Har Magedon', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39/2 (June 1996) pp. 207-222, available online. He explains the presence of the 'g' on the basis that the Hebrew consonant *ayin* is often represented by the Greek *gamma*]. Rev. 16 says that all nations are gathered to Armageddon, but elsewhere we read of all nations being gathered to Jerusalem. The two localities are surely identical, quite apart from the linguistic arguments. We can expect, therefore, far more focus specifically upon Jerusalem. For this is to be the centre to which all are gathered. This makes perfect sense if we see *magedon* as a Greek rendering of the Hebrew *mo'ed*- the nations are gathered to the mount of gathering. The king of Babylon / Assyria so wished to come to the "mount of assembly / gathering" (Is. 14:13), and it was that desire, and executing it, which was effectively his gathering to judgment. And so it will be with the Islamist obsession with Jerusalem- their gathering there will effectively be their gathering to judgment. Associating Armageddon with Jerusalem would more naturally fit with the upcoming description of "the great city", Jerusalem, being judged by an earthquake (:19).

And I will execute judgment on them there for My people and for My heritage Israel- AV "Plead with them". God's pleading against Gog is the language of Joel 3:2, again about the destruction of Israel's latter day Arab enemies. Although indeed God is entering into a court case with Israel's abusers, His judgments are always an appeal or pleading for reformation, often on the part of those who observe the judgments rather than those who perish in them. In wrath He remembers mercy, and ultimately only seeks to save. This is His passion, and is to this day.

Whom they have scattered among the nations. They have divided My land- The scattering among the nations was primarily done by the Babylonians (Esther 3:8; Jer. 50:17 s.w.) and Assyrians. It is hard to see how this will actually be done in the last days. But the latter day beast is the summary and composite of all the other, historical beasts; just as the image of Dan. 2 stands complete in the last days, for the various metals are all broke to pieces together. The previous behaviours of Israel's abusers will as it were be placed upon the latter day invaders, and they will be punished for them. Likewise, punishment for the persecution of all the prophets was visited upon the generation of first century Jewry (Lk. 11:50,51).

'Dividing the land' can be read as a metaphor for 'considering it is ours to inherit' (as Num. 26:53; Ez. 47:21 and often). Perhaps the idea is that they got rid of the Jewish inhabitants and then considered it was theirs to inherit- a position which exactly fits the theology of Israel's surrounding Islamist enemies.

Joe 3:3 *And have cast lots for My people, and have given a boy for a prostitute, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink*- This sounds very much like the selling of Jewish captives in the time of the Maccabees and after AD70 by the Romans. I

suggested on :2 that this doesn't have to be literally repeated in the latter day invasion, but rather the entity of the last days known as "the beast" is seen as a composite of all Israel's previous abusers and embodies all the previous abuses of God's people.

Joe 3:4 *Yes, and what are you to Me, Tyre, Sidon and all the regions of Philistia?-* These areas were confederate with Babylon. But they geographically refer to Lebanon and the Gaza strip- the very areas of hatred for Israel in the last days. They will have their judgment in the last day.

Will you repay Me? And if you repay Me, I will swiftly and speedily return your repayment on your own head- This could allude to the radical Islamist usage of the Koran to justify their conquest and abuse of Israel and Jewish people on the basis that they are 'repaying' Israel for their sins, on God's behalf. Islamic theology has a lot to say in justification of Muslims giving a recompense to the Jews- e.g. Quran 5.60: "Say (O Muhammad to the people of the Scripture): "Shall I inform you of something worse than that, regarding the recompense from Allah: those (Jews) who incurred the Curse of Allah and His Wrath, those of whom (some) He transformed into monkeys and swines, those who worshipped Taghut (false deities); such are worse in rank (on the Day of Resurrection in the Hellfire), and far more astray from the Right Path". Or 2.191-193: “And slay them wherever you come upon them, and expel them from where they expelled you [Palestine]; persecution is more grievous than slaying... such is the recompense of unbelievers... Fight them, till there is no persecution and the religion is Allah’s”.

Joe 3:5 *Because you have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried My finest treasures into your temples-* This exactly fits what the Babylonians did to the temple vessels. The motivation for the latter day invasion will be "to take a spoil" (Ez. 38:12).

Joe 3:6 *And have sold the children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem to the sons of the Greeks, that you may remove them far from their border-* This happened after the AD70 destruction of Jerusalem and to a limited extent during the invasions by "the king of the north" during the time of the Maccabees. But this will be the policy of the radical Islamists who will form the latter day Babylonian invader, following the teaching of the Quran that the Jews must be expelled from Palestine unless they accept Islam: “And slay them wherever you come upon them, and expel them from where they expelled you [Palestine]" (2.191-193).

Joe 3:7 *Behold, I will stir them up out of the place where you have sold them, and will return your repayment on your own head-* As noted on :4, the "repayment" or recompense is defined as expelling the Jews from Palestine. And this is exactly the belief of latter day radical Islamists; see on :4,6.

Joe 3:8 *And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hands of the children of Judah, and they will sell them to the men of Sheba, to a distant nation; for Yahweh has spoken it-* "Sheba" may simply be used here to denote the furthest part of the known world to Joel's hearers (Mt. 12:42; Jer. 6:20). It's hard to imagine that this will literally be done in the latter day application. The idea may simply be that what Israel's abusers did to them, shall be done back to them. This is a major theme of Revelation, where the seals speak of the latter day abuse of the land and people of

Israel, and then the vials speak in similar terms of what is then done back to the abusers at the Lord's return.

Joe 3:9 *Proclaim this among the nations: Sanctify war!*- Literally, "sanctify". The proclamation of holy war against Israel by her neighbours is exactly the situation we see today, with the Islamic Jihadists using the Koran as justification for a holy war against Israel, justifying thereby any amount of deception and cruelty. "The nations" in view are those around Israel; a fair case can be made for the view that Bible prophecy concerns the nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham. These nations are specifically defined as the "surrounding nations" in :11.

Stir up the mighty men- "Stir up" is used of how God stirs up the spirits or minds of men to act according to His plan (2 Chron. 21:16; 36:22; Is. 13:17; Ez. 23:22). God can act directly on the hearts of men; and this, more positively, is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The word is used of how the latter day invader will be stirred up by God from the borders of the *eretz* promised to Abraham (Jer. 25:32). His hand in history is leading Israel's enemies into a psychological position whereby they will fanatically desire to attack her. And clearly radical Islam is being used by Him in this 'stirring up'. See on :12. It could be that in this section we have some words addressed to Israel's invaders, and some to the weak remnant of Israel whom God will use against the invaders. They are to be stirred up and made strong, fighting a holy war ["sanctify war"] as they did against the inhabitants of the *eretz* under Joshua-Jesus.

Let all the warriors draw near. Let them come up- Coming near and coming up are terms associated with sacrifice; coming near to the altar to offer a sacrifice which comes up to God. These nations are bringing themselves in sacrifice. And they are propelled forwards in this by God's psychological action upon them through His Spirit.

Joe 3:10 *Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears*- This will be specifically reversed after the Lord is established as king in Zion (Mic. 4:3); as if there is a repentant remnant amongst the invaders who realize their error and wish to reverse it.

Let the weak say, 'I am strong!'- As Israel's enemies make themselves strong, so the weak shall become "strong"- *gibbor*. As suggested on :9, I take this as a reference to the repentant and feeble remnant of Israel becoming strong, rather than [as we could read it] of weak Gentile nations becoming strong in the last days. Thus there will be a standoff between the 'mighty men' of the Gentiles (Joel 3:9) and the 'mighty ones' of God, the Angelic hosts working through the feeble remnant on earth whom they will make into 'mighty ones'. Hence the many references in the prophets to the 'mighty men', the *gibborim* of the Gentiles, being slain in the last day. It will be the final showdown, screened world-wide, between the hosts of God and those of men- although we live it all out, we see it all, in our daily experience now.

Joe 3:11 *Hurry and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves together*- Again as noted on :9 we see the Divine encouragement of men in the path they wish to go; that is consistently His way with us. The gathering together will be because of a common theological and psychological obsession with Jerusalem. And this is where jihadist theology is increasingly focused.

Cause Your mighty ones to come down there, Yahweh- This may speak of God manifestation through Angels to destroy the latter day invader, the latter-day Sennacherib. The connection is with the "mighty ones" of :9, which could refer to the

mighty ones of the surrounding nations, as if this is the ultimate clash between Zion and Babylon, human might and Divine. Or it could be that the "mighty ones" of :9 are the revived remnant of Israel, now repentant. And they are the vehicle of God's manifestation or coming down.

Joe 3:12 *Let the nations arouse themselves*- This is the same word translated "stir up" in :9. God stirs them up psychologically against Israel, but they do this to themselves. This is how the Spirit works, positively and negatively; we are confirmed in the mental path we ourselves wish to take. Anything else would be manipulation; anything less would leave human beings too weak minded to propel themselves to their chosen ends.

And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat- See on :2. The invaders in the Jehoshaphat context were the surround nations of the *eretz*.

For there will I sit to judge all the surrounding nations- This may mean that God is as it were already enthroned in Zion when the nations come to Him. They come to destroy and capture Zion, but they are speeding to the judgment seat of Christ. Perhaps there is here the scenario of Ps. 2, where the Lord Jesus is enthroned in Zion when the invaders come; or even the Kingdom scenario of Ez. 38, with Israel dwelling without bars and gates when the invader comes, because the Lord is already enthroned in Zion.

Joe 3:13 *Put in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread*- This is God bidding the surrounding nations to put in the sickle; but in reaping Israel in judgment they are reaping themselves. They will destroy and judge themselves in their attempt to judge Israel. Those bidden "come" are the surrounding nations who themselves wish to "come" and destroy Israel, and who are confirmed in this desire to "come" (see on :9,12). But they are coming to tread the winepress of their own judgment. They will judge themselves, just as God's preferred method of destroying Israel's historical invaders was by setting them against each other. And this is not unimaginable in the context of Islamic jihadism.

For the winepress is full, the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great- The idea would be that their sin has come to the point where judgment must come. This concept is first enunciated in the context of the Amorites, the local inhabitants of the land, being judged once their iniquity was full (Gen. 15:16).

Joe 3:14 *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!*- "Multitudes" is Heb. *hamon*. Clearly there is a connection with "the destruction of Gog and all his multitude in the valley of Hamongog" (Ez. 39:11,15). I suggested on :12 that the aspect of things described here could be as in Ez. 38, when the Lord is enthroned in Zion and is attacked unsuccessfully, as in Ps. 2. What are we to do with all the prophecies of the latter day invasion when the details appear to clash with each other? Some have worked out detailed schemas and timelines whereby there are several invasions. But all those schemas seem to me to run into difficulties of harmonization somewhere. And they smack of literalism. My approach is to accept that prophecy is conditional, and may have various possible outcomes. Just as Joel could have had a fulfilment in his time, had Judah repented. This would mean that there are various possible outworkings; but they may not all come precisely true. The quicker Israel repent, the less of the judgment prophecies will need to be fulfilled. And God's grace and love may cut short the days, for the sake of His love for the chosen (Mt. 24:22).

For the day of Yahweh is near, in the valley of decision- "The day of Yahweh is near" is the very phrase used about the Babylonian invasion (Ez. 30:3; Zeph. 1:7,14). It is also used in Joel 2:1; the day of Yahweh is the same day envisaged throughout Joel. The outcome of that day is the judgment of the nations opposing God's people in a valley, and then the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom in the land of Israel. This didn't happen after Babylon took Jerusalem; so we can conclude that the scenario Joel had in mind for Babylon and Judah didn't work out. But the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days. This is perhaps why "Babylon" is not named; another nexus of powers will fulfil the terms of the prophecy as a perfect fit, and will come to their end at the valley mentioned in other prophecies, at the return of the Lord Jesus.

Joe 3:15 *The sun and the moon will be darkened, and the stars will withdraw their shining*- From Gen. 37:15 onwards, the heavenly bodies represent the leaders of Israel. This may be inserted at this point to remind us that although multitudes of Gentiles are to be judged (:14), the Israeli leadership also will as they are no better. Joel 2:10 has used the figure to describe the eclipse of Israel's leaders in the face of the invasion. But there may well be a literal element to all this, some kind of eclipse of the heavenly bodies. But that kind of literalism is not in accordance with the generally symbolic language being used in this section. "Darkened" is the same word as in the description of the darkened skies in 1 Kings 18:45 at the time of Israel's repentance due to Elijah's ministry. Another such repentance due to a latter day Elijah's work may therefore also be in view. For repentance is a major theme in Joel.

Joe 3:16 *Yahweh will roar from Zion, and thunder from Jerusalem*- Am. 1:2 says this will happen when Yahweh emerges to judge both Judah, Israel and her surrounding neighbours. And we have that idea here too- for in :14 we read of the judgment of the nations, and in :15 of the judgment of Israel. The idea of a thunderous roar likens Yahweh to a lion (as in Rev. 5:5, in the person of the Lord Jesus); but the invader is likened to a lion in Joel 1:6. This is a standoff between two lions; just as Yahweh's mighty ones face off against the mighty ones of the Gentiles (:9,11). This thunderous roar can be associated with the Lord's return being with a great shout (1 Thess. 4:16; Jn. 5:28,29), the 'calling' for the sword of judgment to fall upon the invaders (Ez. 38:21; Is. 11:4). This is the "roar" of Jer. 25:30, which Yahweh will utter as He treads the winepress, which is the context here too (:13). I suggested on Joel 1:1 that Joel was contemporary with Jeremiah and was giving Judah the same message as Jeremiah, so the many points of overlap with Jeremiah are to be expected.

The heavens and the earth will shake- As noted on :15, this would appear to refer specifically to Israel and particularly her leadership. Yahweh was to roar against them just as He would against their Gentile enemies; see Am. 1:2 and context. The apostate Jewish leadership in Jerusalem had 'roared' (s.w.) against the souls of ordinary people; and so this judgment was appropriate for them (Ez. 22:25; Zeph. 3:3). Hence the next clause goes on to say that God's true people, as opposed to the 'heavens' of the rulership, would be saved.

But Yahweh will be a refuge for His people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel- I suggested above and on :15 that the leadership of Israel stand condemned, especially for how they 'roared' against the ordinary people in their society and destroyed their spirituality. But a remnant amongst those ordinary people would find Yahweh as a refuge. The allusion is to how the faithful remnant had fled into Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time, and there been saved by Yahweh from the Assyrian

invasion. And perhaps something similar may happen in the last days (Is. 4:6 s.w.), when Yahweh will be a stronghold [s.w.] to "the poor... the needy" within Israel (Is. 25:4). Then, His people will literally find deliverance on His holy mountain (Obadiah 17).

Joe 3:17 *So you will know that I am Yahweh your God, dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain*- The "you" addressed is the faithful, poor remnant within Israel of the last days; see on :16. They may literally flee into Jerusalem for safety and there come to "know" by experience and in terms of relationship, that Yahweh is really there.

Then Jerusalem will be holy, and no strangers will pass through her any more- The implication is that Jerusalem in God's eyes was not "holy" at Joel's time, and yet He still refers to Zion as "My holy mountain", here and in Joel 2:1. We have here an example of how God calls His people by status what they are not yet in reality; but His purpose is to make us in reality what we are by status. Romans 1-8 is all about this; He counts us righteous, and so His Spirit works to make us righteous in practice.

Joe 3:18 *It will happen in that day, that the mountains will drop down sweet wine, the hills will flow with milk, all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters*- These are the blessings for obedience to the covenant. There will be a super abundance of such blessings. The brooks of Judah only flowed with water intermittently, according to the season. But the picture is of permanence; no longer will spirituality be occasional, with occasional blessing. Rather will obedience and deep covenant bonding with God be continual and permanent, with the associated blessings.

And a fountain will come forth from the house of Yahweh and will water the valley of Shittim- As with the darkening of the heavenly bodies, we can understand this literally as well as figuratively. Clearly these words are alluded to in Rev. 22:1, where a figurative river of water of life proceeds from the Lamb's throne, the restored throne of David in Jerusalem, and meets the chronic thirst of a dry world. "Shittim" is literally 'the acacias', trees known to grow in dry areas. Various attempts to literally locate the "valley of Shittim" would all require a major series of topographic changes if a literal stream of water were to flow there from the temple. But Zech. 14 suggests major earthquakes and topographical changes to the area around Jerusalem.

Joe 3:19 *Egypt will be a desolation, and Edom will be a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the children of Judah; because they have shed innocent blood in their land*- We wonder why Egypt and Edom are particularly selected for mention; the historical invader in view was Babylon, who was only assisted by mercenaries from Egypt and Edom in the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Why are not the main culprits, Babylon and Assyria, mentioned by name? Perhaps because God was particularly angry that people on the sidelines watching a fight jump in with all the bloodlust imaginable, and start even further kicking down the losing party. And that loser, historically, was God's people. The minor prophets are often billed, and rightly so, as "minor prophets with major messages". And that was never clearer than at this point.

We note likewise that the Jews murdered by them are called "innocent blood". But Joel and all the prophets emphasize that the entire society was guilty and the invasions were from God as deserved judgment. We need to connect this idea of "innocent blood" therefore with the final verse of the prophecy, where we learn that God has finally cleansed His people of their guilt (:21); and therefore, their murder

was seen in retrospect as the murder of innocent blood, such was and is the extent to which God totally justifies and cleanses His people.

Joe 3:20 *But Judah will be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation*- The contrast seems to be with Egypt and Edom being a perpetual desolation (:19) whereas Judah would be eternally inhabited. Yet we know from other prophecies that Egypt will have a definite part in God's eternal kingdom on earth (Is. 19:25). We may again be exposed here to the Divine grace which changes His stated judgment purpose against people. Egypt indeed was to be an eternal desolation, just as God at times had promised to eternally destroy and disinherit Israel; but their repentance and His grace means that this will not be the final outcome, just as Nineveh was to be destroyed in 40 days, but it wasn't.

Joe 3:21 *I will cleanse their blood that I have not so far cleansed: for Yahweh dwells in Zion*- See on :19. The prophecy concludes not simply with the promise of eternal physical blessing for Israel, but with the most essential and important reality- all their guilt will be cleansed. That forgiveness and cleansing will be required, because Yahweh Himself will dwell in Zion; the kingdom of Heaven comes down to earth, as Revelation concludes. And Ezekiel concludes likewise with the promise that Zion shall be the place where "Yahweh is there" (Ez. 48:35). God's final dwelling with man involves our total and eternal cleansing. "Cleansed" translates a Hebrew word which is equally translated "unpunished" (Jer. 46:28; 49:12). Israel were to indeed suffer for their sins, but that judgment and suffering was to bring about their cleansing. As ever, God's judgments have spiritual intent, and are not simple statements in anger of an offended Deity. Rather they are part of His path towards the salvation of His people which is at the core of His very being.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: AMOS

AMOS

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don’t fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the

wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

AMOS CHAPTER 1

Amos 1:1 *The words of Amos*- The prophets typically begin with something like "The word of the Lord…". But here we have "the words of *Amos*", which were God's words. This is a useful insight into the Divine-human cooperation which we now call "inspiration". They were the Lord's words, but through the words of Amos; just like Paul's letters to his friends were just that, and yet more than that, because they were inspired by God.

Who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa- A wilderness (2 Chron. 20:20). We have the impression that Amos was a very isolated individual who likely knew little about the national let alone international scene. And yet exactly such a person is chosen to be an international witness; for the threats of judgment upon the Gentile nations were presumably in order to give them the chance of repentance. This was a fact realized by Amos himself in Am. 7:14. We likewise are often chosen for service on the basis of our inadequacy rather than our secular, apparent qualifications.

Which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel- It seems Amos spoke mostly against the northern kingdom of Israel, perhaps stationing himself near the sanctuary at Bethel and condemning them. He was then expelled from Israel and took his message to Judah. Israel were prosperous in the days of Jeroboam II, hence the repeated criticisms of wealth. Amos, a poor herdmen, was the appropriate one to do this.

Two years before the earthquake- This earthquake is alluded to in Am. 8:8 and is stated as actually happening in Am. 9:5. The prophetic word is so certain of fulfilment that it can be spoken of in the present or even past tenses, even though the fulfilment is yet future. And yet as happened with Nineveh, in the gap between pronouncement and fulfilment, there is the possibility of repentance and a change to God's stated purpose (Jer. 18:7-9, and the example of Nineveh and Moses changing God's purpose of judgment about Israel).

Amo 1:2 *He said: Yahweh will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem*- As the subsequent context makes clear, this will happen when Yahweh emerges to judge both Judah, Israel and her surrounding neighbours. And we have that idea in Joel 3:16 too- for in Joel 3:14 we read of the judgment of the nations, and in Joel 3:15 of the judgment of Israel. The idea of a thunderous roar likens Yahweh to a lion (as in Rev. 5:5, in the person of the Lord Jesus); but the invader is likened to a lion in Joel 1:6 and often elsewhere. This is a standoff between two lions; just as Yahweh's mighty ones face off against the mighty ones of the Gentiles (Joel 3:9,11). This thunderous roar in its latter day aspect can be associated with the Lord's return being with a great shout (1 Thess. 4:16; Jn. 5:28,29), the 'calling' for the sword of judgment to fall upon the invaders (Ez. 38:21; Is. 11:4). This is the "roar" of Jer. 25:30, which Yahweh will utter as He treads the winepress, which is also the context in Joel 3:13. Joel may have been contemporary with Amos and was giving Judah the same message as him, so the many points of overlap with Amos are to be expected.

And the pastures of the shepherds will mourn, and the top of Carmel will wither- Am. 3:12 implies that Yahweh is the good shepherd to Israel, whereas they had many bad shepherds, as Ez. 34 also laments. The idea may be that the suffering of the people in their "pastures" was due to their bad shepherds, the spiritual leadership.

Amo 1:3 *Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Damascus, yes, for four*- There are six surrounding nations mentioned, and then Israel and Judah, who could be counted as one. Seven judgments connect with similar series of seven judgments in Revelation, which I would interpret as likewise referring to judgments on the nations around Israel and also including Israel. It could be argued that the gravity of the offending increases, coming to a climax in the sins of Israel and Judah. They would have heard Amos' prophecies and agree heartily that the Gentiles deserved punishment- but then the point is made that they have sinned even worse and will be punished along with the surrounding nations by the cataclysm of judgment which was and is to descend upon the *eretz* promised to Abraham. The seven nations to be judged connect with their sins of "three, yes for four", making seven- as if God notices and is sensitive to every sin,

and all these nations had now filled up their sin to completeness, seven times. And so judgment would fall (Gen. 15:16).

I will not turn away its punishment- As explained on Am. 1:1, there is the possibility of repentance and the averting of Divine judgment. But that turning away of judgment is now not going to be possible because of the complete filling up of transgression to seven times, three plus four. The same Hebrew is used of how God's people and the Gentiles refused to "turn away" from sin (Jer. 44:5); and so He did not turn away from their punishment (Jer. 30:24 s.w.).

Because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron- LXX "Because they sawed with iron saws the women with child of the Galaadites". The actions of one Gentile nation against another were noted by God. They had cruelly abused those they conquered; and God noticed that extreme abuse of power, the weak over the strong, and condemns them for it. God's sensitivity to sin is huge; and how much more does He watch us, His people, with our far greater responsibility.

Amo 1:4 *But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, and it will eat up the palaces of Ben Hadad*- God is sensitive to the opulence of Gentiles and their misuse of resources. Hazael means 'whom God looks on', perhaps the develop this point. How much more then is He to His people. Assyrian obelisks describe their destruction of Hazael's glory with fire.

Amo 1:5 *I will break the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven, and him who holds the sceptre from the house of Eden; and the people of Syria shall go into captivity to Kir, says Yahweh*- The way Gentiles trusted in their human strength and defensive military technology is noted by God. And these Gentiles were judged by other Gentiles, under God's hand. He took away their kingdom / rulership because of this. His sensitivity to His people trusting in their human defences is therefore so much the greater.

Amo 1:6 *Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Gaza, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment; because they carried away captive the whole community, to deliver them up to Edom*- LXX "Because they took prisoners the captivity of Solomon". Being too cruel, even between Gentiles, registers with God and He counts over-reaction and seeking of revenge to be sinful. Did Israel ever go into captivity in Edom because of Gaza? Perhaps not. In this case, the thought of doing so was judged by God so severely. We are judged according to our thoughts and plans, rather than all we actually are in physical terms. "The whole community" may mean that Gaza intended to get all the

Jews into captivity when they supported the Babylonian invasion, when God intended only a third of the community to go into captivity (Ez. 5:12). Punishing sinners more harshly than God intends is therefore presented as a serious sin. And this sort of thing often happens in church life; some sins are seen as deserving disproportionate punishment simply because they have offended deeply held human tradition.

Tyre is condemned for not honouring her covenant with Edom (Amos 1:9); Moab for being too harsh in judging Edom (Am. 2:1); Gaza likewise for being too cruel (Amos 1:6). Even amongst the Gentiles, God sees some as sinning more than others (Ez. 7:24). And even amongst God's people, some sins are "greater abomination" than others (Ez. 8:13). This doesn't mean that the 'smaller' ones don't count. But it reflects God's great sensitivity to human sin. The varying scale of sacrifices for various sins reflects this too. And of course our Lord Himself spoke of the man with "greater sin", and of other men who owed varying amounts to the Father. The penal structure of the law of Moses itself reflects differing degrees of sin.

Amo 1:7 *But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, and it will devour its palaces*- Destruction of the wall and palaces by Divinely sent fire was exactly the judgment to come upon Samaria and Jerusalem. The judgments upon the surrounding Gentile nations were intended as a warning to Israel; and we too encounter others in life suffering judgments for sins which we too commit in essence. And we are intended to learn from those encounters.

Amo 1:8 *I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him who holds the sceptre from Ashkelon; and I will turn My hand against Ekron; and the remnant of the Philistines will perish, says the Lord Yahweh*- All Bible prophecy comes to its ultimate moment in the situation of the last days, just prior to the Lord's return. Here in Amos 1 and 2 we read of judgments upon Israel's neighbours and upon them too. This is to happen in the last days, possibly in the same sequence. And so we note the focus upon Lebanon (:9), the Gaza strip (:7) and now upon the Philistines / Palestinians. That these very areas are today the centre of strong anti-Jewish sentiment and jihadist extremism must surely be highly significant. At no other time in history has the stage been set like this. But as noted on :7, Israel were and are intended to learn from the judgments on their neighbours, described as they are in identical terms to those used about judgments to come upon Israel- the sceptre removed, Yahweh's hand turned against, their remnant perishing.

Amo 1:9 *Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Tyre, yes, for four, I will not relent on its punishment; because they delivered up the whole community to Edom*- "The whole community" may mean that Tyre like Gaza intended to get all the Jews into captivity when they supported the Babylonian invasion, when God intended only a third

of the community to go into captivity (Ez. 5:12). Punishing sinners more harshly than God intends is therefore presented as a serious sin. And this sort of thing often happens in church life; some sins are seen as deserving disproportionate punishment simply because they have offended deeply held human tradition.

And didn't remember the brotherly covenant- This could refer to the effective covenant between Tyre and Israel first made in the times of David and Solomon (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:2-6; 9:11-14). Typically such covenants included a clause to the effect that it was binding upon their descendants. But it is typically human to shrug off the binding nature of an ancient covenant. But God takes covenant relationship seriously. And we learn from this that God's wrath is upon those who despise their brotherly covenant with their brethren.

Amo 1:10 *But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, and it will destroy its palaces*- As noted on :7, destruction of the wall and palaces by Divinely sent fire was exactly the judgment to come upon Samaria and Jerusalem. The judgments upon the surrounding Gentile nations were intended as a warning to Israel; and we too encounter others in life suffering judgments for sins which we too commit in essence. And we are intended to learn from those encounters. The wall of Tyre was perceived as an invincible human defence. But all such human strength will be progressively be revealed as useless before God's judgments.

Amo 1:11 *Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Edom, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment; because he pursued his brother with the sword*- Perhaps the focus is upon the word "pursued". Esau was indeed to live by the sword (Gen. 27:40), and to break the yoke of Jacob from off his neck. But to pursue Jacob with the sword over the generations was going beyond. Again we see God's particular wrath against those who punish sinners over severely; this is so against His own principles and way.

And cast off all pity- God understood that Esau / Edom's anger with Jacob was understandable and legitimate. But what was wrong was to cast off all sense of compassion when Jacob was now under judgment. To be heartless is for God an awful sin.

And his anger raged continually, and he kept his anger forever- God was willing to understand the gut reaction of anger [in Esau / Edom's case, over Jacob's deception]; but He does expect us to work through the stages of it, not to be caught up on the 'anger' stage of our reactions to loss and grief. This perhaps explains God's ready overlooking of Job's fist shaking against God. Again we see God condemning men not for being human and having human reactions, but for going too far in them. This is why

Moab in turn is condemned not for attacking Edom, but for being sadistic against him (Am. 2:1).

Amo 1:12 *But I will send a fire on Teman, and it will devour the palaces of Bozrah*- As noted on :10, this was to give Israel and Judah an example of the kinds of judgment to come upon them at the hands of the Babylonians and Assyrians.

Amo 1:13 *Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment; because they have ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead, that they may enlarge their border*- Ammon would only have achieved a very small territorial advantage by attacking Gilead. They used disproportionate behaviour; abusing pregnant women was not proportionate even to a campaign motivated simply by greed. A noted on :11, God shows here that although He recognizes human weakness, He does see a gradation in sin, and there are things which are bound to call forth His definite judgment even in this life.

Amo 1:14 *But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it will devour its palaces*- As noted on :10, this was to give Israel and Judah an example of the kinds of judgment to come upon them at the hands of the Babylonians and Assyrians.

With shouting in the day of battle, with a storm in the day of the whirlwind- "The whirlwind" was a common figure for the Babylonian and Assyrian judgment to come upon God's people. For sowing the wind, living in a vapid, empty way... they would reap the whirlwind (see on Hos. 8:7). But that same whirlwind of the Babylonian invasion was to shatter the Gentile nations too, and God's people were intended to learn from this (Is. 17:13).

Amo 1:15 *And their king will go into captivity, he and his princes together, says Yahweh*- This is precisely what happened to Judah; king and princes together went into captivity at the hands of Babylon. They were intended to have learnt the lesson from seeing the nations judged by Babylon; just as we are supposed to learn from the historical judgment of the nations, and the judgments of people who are brought into our lives for our observation and learning.

AMOS CHAPTER 2

Amos 2:1 *Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Moab, yes, for four*- We may well ask why God bothered warning Gentiles of their judgment. Surely the point was that they could repent- as Nineveh did- and the proposed judgment would then not come. This is how open God is. For "three... yes, for four", see on Am. 1:3.

I will not turn away its punishment- The implication is that God states coming purpose or judgment, but is willing to change it in some cases. Nineveh would be the classic example. This is what gives intensity to prayer and repentance- outcomes which God has previously predicted can be changed, such is His sensitivity to human words and behaviour.

Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime- We gasp at the intense knowledge of God, noting the details of how Gentiles treat each other. Edom has been the subject of God's own judgment in Amos 1; but He is saying that others do not have the right to abuse others, even if those others are the subjects of His wrath. When we see misfortune or judgment come upon our enemies or those who abused our own dear ones, we are tempted to shrug. But God isn't like that. His sensitivity to the human condition is too great. He had condemned Edom for abusing His people (Am. 1:11), but He condemns Moab for punishing Edom too cruelly. See on Am. 1:11. Moab had made a covenant with Edom, and to break it with such impunity provoked God's anger. Amos was obviously making the point that breaking covenant with God was therefore going to provoke His even greater wrath. Another reading for "the king of Edom" is "his son", in which case the reference would be to the king of Moab burning his son to Moloch (2 Kings 3:27).

Amos 2:2 *But I will send a fire on Moab, and it will destroy the palaces of Kerioth; and Moab will die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet*- This is similar language to that used about the judgments upon Israel and Judah [death with tumult = Hos. 10:14]. Destruction of the wall and palaces by Divinely sent fire was exactly the judgment to come upon Samaria and Jerusalem. The judgments upon the surrounding Gentile nations were intended as a warning to Israel; and we too encounter others in life suffering judgments for sins which we too commit in essence. And we are intended to learn from those encounters. The king of Moab had used fire to judge others (:1), and yet his anger and judgment of others with fire was now to be used against him and his people. We have here a classic example of a man being judged as he judged (Mt. 7:1).

Amos 2:3 *And I will cut off the judge from their midst, and will kill all their princes with him, says Yahweh*- Again, as noted above, this is similar language to that used about the judgments upon Israel and Judah. Their king is also called a judge, whom they would lose (Mic. 5:1); and as Ezekiel and Jeremiah state so often, the princes of Judah went into captivity. Jer. 52:10 uses this language to describe the killing of the princes of Judah. Truly, the judgments upon Israel's neighbours were intended as their warning.

Amos 2:4 *Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Judah, yes, for four*- For "three... yes, for four", see on Am. 1:3. Amos prophesied at the time of Uzziah (Am. 1:1) who was apparently a good king and held meetings where the Law was taught and obedience was encouraged. But the message is that beneath that religious veneer, Judah was seriously sinful. The same rubric ["For three... four"] is used about the Gentiles and also Israel and Judah. The point is that they were not radically different from the Gentiles.

I will not turn away its punishment- The great paradox is that God did turn away from the ultimate punishment of Judah (Hos. 11:9) despite their impenitence. Yet their sins were three plus four, seven- complete sin. This highlights God's extreme grace. As often seen in Hosea, God does change His mind about condemnation, even when He says He will not. This is the extent of His grace and passion for human salvation.

Because they have rejected Yahweh's law, and have not kept His statutes- The word translated "rejected" is also translated "despised" and 'cast away'. The allusion is to where these words are used in Lev. 26:43,44: "They have *despised* My judgments... yet for all that... I will not *cast them away*". They rejected / despised / cast away God, but He did not treat them as they treated Him. Despite this grace, judgment still had to come, as Amos explains. But that judgment is not the same as being 'cast away'.

And their lies have led them astray, after which their fathers walked- The reference is to idols. Any lie becomes an idol- that's a penetrating psychological observation being made here. Yet Uzziah supposedly cleansed Judah from idols. That was therefore the kind of surface level repentance which we are all so prone to. We might consider that following the understandings of our fathers, and be led astray by untruths received by tradition... is wrong, but not that terribly wrong. But this is chosen as a reason for Yahweh's wrath. He held them responsible for these things because He expects people to turn away from inherited untruths, not go with the flow, individuate from their fathers, and stand independently before Him. But that might just seem petty stuff to secular man; yet to God it is of critical importance.

Amos 2:5 *But I will send a fire on Judah, and it will eat up the palaces of Jerusalem*- The fortifications of Jerusalem built by Uzziah (Am. 1:1). As noted on Am. 1:10,14; 2:2, the judgment of the palaces of the surrounding nations by the Babylonians was recorded so that Judah might reflect and repent. The "palaces of Jerusalem" could refer to the fortifications which they had trusted in rather than in God (Jer. 17:27; Hos. 8:14); or they could refer to the large houses of the wealthy, which the Babylonians burned with fire (2 Kings 25:9). This would better fit the theme of social justice and condemnation of opulence which we find in Amos.

Amos 2:6 *Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Israel, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment*- Significantly, seven (3+4) specific sins are now mentioned here for Israel; but the number of individual sins listed for the other nations doesn't come to seven. I would suggest that seven is the number of completion, and the idea is that the sins of these nations had built up to a point where judgment had to come. The sins listed here seem nothing compared to the sins of the Gentile nations which have been enumerated previously. But the point is that sin is serious, and that things like opportunistic abuse of individuals is as huge in God's sight as the most extreme murder and perversions of idol worship.

Because they have sold the righteous for silver- Justice was perverted for the sake of bribes. Or the reference could be to selling debtors into slavery, forbidden by the law and also criticized in Am. 8:6. We note that "the righteous" can still get into debt to the point that all they have to give is their bodies. Poverty, whether from unwise decisions or acts of God, still befalls "the righteous". This is another major problem for the prosperity Gospel's claim that the righteous will always get wealthy.

And the needy for a pair of shoes- As noted above, this could refer to bribery, or to selling into slavery. But the point is, that is was done for very small gain, a pair of

shoes (LXX "sandals"). And we see this principle today; for very small gain, in whatever way, those in power will cause long term hardship for the weak.

Amos 2:7 *They trample on the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and deny justice to the oppressed*- The denial of justice would lead us to read :6 as referring to judging or accepting bribes in order to gain just a very small personal gain- a "pair of shoes" (:6). Not giving people justice is trampling on their heads. Only mourners have dust on their heads, so the idea may be that denying justice resulted in real pain, loss and mourning for the poor; but the feelings of others were despised as 'the strong' pursued their agenda, with no thought for the collateral damage of their actions or how others would feel emotionally. These principles are not merely relevant to judges or those in authority. We are all called upon to make decisions, to show justice- especially in our family and church communities. In some contexts we are all 'the strong' who must consider how we act toward 'the weak'. We are placed in these communities really for our testing. So often the denial of justice to another is for the sake of personal gain to us, in some way. And the gain is often petty. So often, believers judge one person one way and another differently, fellowshipping this brother but not that sister, even if they are morally and theologically identical; simply because they fear they might lose some kudos in the eyes of others. See on :13 and Am. 4:1.

And a man and his father use the same girl, to profane My holy name- The connection may be with their laying down on clothes beside the Baal altars (:8); for this was where men slept with the cult prostitutes. This is indeed in view here, but the context is about the abuse of the poor and injustice. As noted earlier on this verse, the strong were abusing the weak in that they cared nothing about the emotional or collateral damage down, just for the sake of very small gain- be it materially, or as in this case, the temporary 'pleasure' of such illicit sex. They didn't care for the girl's feelings or humiliation- that was the point. This point is being made along with the obvious criticism of Israel's idolatry. The abuse of the weak, the lack of justice which was part of using cult prostitutes, was every bit as bad as the idolatry itself.

Amos 2:8 *And they lay themselves down beside every altar on clothes taken in pledge*- As noted on :7, the condemnation of idolatry and sleeping with cult prostitutes has incorporated within it the injustice which was just as wrong. The clothes upon which they slept with the prostitutes were actually not theirs; they had taken them in pledge for debts overnight, which was specifically condemned in the law (Ex. 22:26; Dt. 24:12). It was lack of basic sensitivity to the needs of a poor person to keep their pledge overnight; for the person would have nothing warm to sleep in. And this was just as bad as sleeping with cult prostitutes.

And in the house of their God they drink the wine of the condemned- Paul alludes to this in 1 Cor. 11. The Christians of Corinth were drinking condemnation to themselves; and the cup we take is likewise either of blessing or condemnation. This is part of the condemnation of Israel, the ten tribe kingdom. They didn't worship at the temple, but rather at shrines. Their worship of Yahweh was performed as worship of the idols. Their sin was the worse, because they were justifying their idol worship as Yahweh worship. By so doing they were condemning themselves. But "the condemned" is literally 'the punished / fined'. The idea may be that they had demanded fines from the poor for insignificant violations, and were drinking the wine they had bought with this money. But they were drinking it as a drink offering to

Yahweh, albeit performed as idol worship. As noted in earlier verses, the grossness of their sin was because their idolatry incorporated the abuse of the poor and injustice.

Amo 2:9 *Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath*- They had worshipped the cults of the Amorites, and were to share their judgment. The Baal cult has been in view in :6-8. So far in this chapter I have alluded to the idea of the weak and the strong, and God's condemnation of those who were 'strong' for abusing the weak. This thought is made explicit here, where the pride, strength and human advantage of the Amorites is mentioned. The height and strength of the Amorites was what had caused a faithless Israel to want to return to Egypt (Num. 13:22,32,33). But now, Israel were acting like the Amorites, when they should have overthrown them in faith.

Amo 2:10 *Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorite*- All in :9-11 was specifically done by an Angel (cp. Zech. 1:1-8). Angels would then have been the mechanism through which God gave motivation to some young people to become prophets and Nazirites. God makes His Angels spirits, and it is the Spirit which does the same today. This is all cited as a reason for Israel's condemnation. They had been led out of the world, baptized in the Red Sea, led of the Spirit- and yet they rebelled against it.

Amo 2:11 *I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Isn't this true, you children of Israel? says Yahweh*- Apparently freewill decisions such as being a Nazirite are still influenced by God. For the Nazirites were "raised up" by God. Our freewill decisions for Him are confirmed by Him; such is the work of the holy Spirit on human hearts. This could refer to a specific raising up of Nazirites and prophets during the wilderness wanderings. God's willingness to work upon human hearts must not be despised. The fact He so worked with Israel but they refused is being cited as the ground of their condemnation. We note that it was "young men", "your sons", who were moved by God to offer themselves from the freewill devotions of being Nazirites or prophets. Youth is the time when temptation to use human strength and indulge pleasure is perhaps the most acute; and it is to youth that there is a special appeal by God, to give their best years to His service.

Amo 2:12 *But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'Don't prophesy!'*- Their sin was in that they disabled others from achieving the spiritual future for them which God had enabled. Out of all the things God could have condemned His people for, causing others to stumble was paramount to Him. We need to give this due weight in all our decisions and attitudes and responses to others. Amos was one of those forbidden to prophesy (Am. 7:12-14), so we can assume that he was a young man when he began his ministry (:11). He gave his best years to the Lord's service, in a thankless ministry of condemning the cult worship, materialism and injustice of his elders.

Amo 2:13 *See, I will crush you in your place, as a cart crushes that is full of grain*- As they had crushed beneath their feet the poor and the feelings of those they dealt with unjustly; see on :7 and Am. 4:1. Grain must be stamped upon; the idea is of a cart on the way to the threshing floor, full of judgment imagery. By stamping on the poor (:7), they were condemning themselves; they too would be crushed at the threshing floor, as the chaff and not the grain. The grain perhaps speaks of the poor whom they had stamped upon; through condemning them, and the poor correctly responding to the abuse, they had been the vehicle which brought about the salvation

of the poor in spiritual terms. And so it has been so often; the experience of abuse and condemnation by the strong leads to the weak's salvation, through their correct response to it.

But another reading is as AV: "I am pressed [crushed] under you"; as if God identified with the oppressed poor of :7. What we do to others we do to God. And so again, we find minor prophets with major messages: God can be crushed in that He identifies with the crushed. This is the extreme sin of all abusive, crushing behaviour towards others. We note that Amos as a young (:12) country man is full of rural allusions.

Amo 2:14 *Flight will flee from the swift; and the strong won't strengthen his force; neither shall the mighty deliver himself*- Again the analogy of the weak and the strong continues; the strong would be unable to flee from their condemnation at the hands of the invaders. They would have no place to run, although they would seek to do so; "flight" may stand for 'place of flight / to flee'. This is the awful picture of condemnation. Human might will then be revealed as weakness, and the weak saved. Only God's deliverance through His Son will save; human might will not enable self deliverance.

Amo 2:15 *Neither shall he stand who handles the bow; and he who is swift of foot won't escape; neither shall he who rides the horse deliver himself*- As noted on :14, self deliverance is impossible when faced with Divine judgment; the strong in this life who used that strength to abuse others shall not be saved. The fulfilment initially was in Israel fleeing before their enemies as predicted for disobedience, and it will be the same for all who meet God's wrath at the last day.

Amo 2:16 *And he who is courageous among the mighty will flee away naked in that day, says Yahweh*- Again and again, the theme continues- the human strong and mighty will not be saved by their strength. Nakedness is associated with condemnation; they will flee, but have nowhere to run to (:14). The primary fulfilment was clearly in the flight of Zedekiah and his mighty men, and being overtaken by the Babylonians on the Jericho road.

AMOS CHAPTER 3

Amos 3:1 *Hear this word that Yahweh has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family*- "The whole family" refers to Israel and Judah. There is *one* body- this is a very common theme in the New Testament. But it has strong Old Testament antecedents. There was one chosen nation, one land, one tabernacle, one altar, one covenant, one temple- unity was God's evident intention for His people even in Old Testament times. Israel were redeemed from Egypt as one family (Am. 3:1). The earliest anticipation of the one body was the fact that man and woman become one flesh / body in the marriage process (Gen. 2:17). If we are all members of the one body, this fact requires us to strive for unity with each other. We can't just sit back and think 'OK, so there's one body'; rather like a married couple can't just say they are one

because they are " one flesh" . They must work on it if they want to be truly one. And likewise with the one body of Christ.

Which I brought up out of the land of Egypt, saying- Amos spoke against the background of the calf cult, built and presented by Jeroboam with clear allusion back to the golden calf, whom an apostate Israel had liked to believe had brought them out of Egypt (Ex. 32:8 s.w.). The point is that Yahweh and not the calves brought Israel out of Egypt. To reconstrue Israel's national history wasn't possible; and yet that is what is done by all who turn away from faith. They reinterpret God's previous, clear involvement in their lives, shrugging it off as coincidence or tricks of the mind. Just as Israel reinterpreted God's 'bringing them forth' from Egypt as the work of the calves.

Amos 3:2 *You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all of your sins*- This is the theme of Hosea. God was in exclusive relationship with Israel, having entered a marriage covenant with them at Sinai (see on Hos. 8:1). As He was exclusively theirs, so they were to be for Him. "Chosen" is *yada*, 'to know', in the sense of relationship. And the sexual sense of a man knowing a woman is not completely out of view here. God's exclusive commitment to us His people of itself has to elicit our similar response. He is not one enthusiasm out of many, one god in a pantheon; He is to our only God. And this is the huge force of the first commandment, that for us, in our hearts, there is to be only one God.

Amos 3:3 *Do two walk together, unless they have agreed where to meet?*- The AV rendering "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?" has been misused by exclusivists to demand total agreement between fellow believers. But this is not the context here; neither is it required that there be total agreement before two can walk together. Both Old and New Testaments are full of examples of where believers had differing interpretations, and yet walked together toward the same Kingdom. And unity is not the same as uniformity. What is important here is that there must be an agreed meeting point before the journey can begin. And God and Israel had indeed met together at Sinai and there entered covenant relationship (Am. 3:1). They were being reminded therefore of their ongoing commitment to the covenant, and the need to continue to walk together with God. The idea is picked up in Am. 4:12, where Israel are told to "prepare to meet your God". This was no mere grim pronouncement of doom to come, but a desperately urgent appeal for repentance, for preparation and willingness to meet their God in renewed covenant relationship, as they had done at Sinai.

Amos 3:4 *Will a lion roar in the thicket, when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?*- The lion represents Israel's Babylonian and Assyrian enemies. They were roaring (see on :7). Israel were already caught; but there was a desperately brief window of repentance. Amos was appealing with urgency and

intensity; Israel were already in the mouth of the lion (:12). But they refused to perceive their true position before God and the urgency of the need for repentance.

Amos 3:5 *Can a bird fall in a trap on the earth, where no snare is set for him? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when there is nothing to catch?*- The original is difficult; the idea may be that a snare definitely works, and an animal or bird cannot trigger it without being caught in the jaws of the trap. Amos is addressing the deep psychological mentality that assumes that in fact we can sin and get away with it; somehow, we reason, in my case it will be different.

Amos 3:6 *Does the trumpet alarm sound in a city without the people being afraid?*- The trumpet was being sounded by Amos; the invaders were at the gates, indeed in :12 we read that Israel were already being consumed. Amos struggled to express the intensity and urgency of their position, just as we do in our appeals to men and women.

Does evil happen to a city and Yahweh hasn't done it?- This could be translated to the effect that if evil happens God will judge it. God *will* judge sin. This will be the terror of His latter day judgments. I would paraphrase Am. 3:6,7 like this: 'If there's evil in a city, God will do something, i.e. He will punish it. But He *now* does nothing, but He reveals His future judgments to His servants the prophets'. In the context, Amos has been forth-telling judgments to come on various cities (Am. 3:9,12,14,15). The text however may be read as it stands; as Is. 45:5-7 makes clear, evil in the sense of calamity comes from God. All is of Him, and there is no room therefore for the classical idea of a cosmic Satan figure responsible for all our calamities and negative experiences.

Amos 3:7 *Surely the Lord Yahweh will do nothing, unless He first reveals His secret to His servants the prophets*- This is not simply stating the obvious; the implied idea is that God reveals His intended behaviour to the prophets, who are intimate with God and know His 'secrets'; and they then reveal them to men. But the implication is that in the gap between the statement and the fulfilment, there can be repentance. And this was what Amos was appealing for.

Amos 3:8 *The lion has roared- who will not fear? The Lord Yahweh has spoken- who can but speak it forth?*- Amos sees himself as the prophet (:7) who is the roaring lion. But the lion is a clear symbol of Israel's enemies, Babylon and Assyria (:4). Through the prophetic word of judgment, Israel had the opportunity to repent. The word of judgment was therefore the roar of the approaching lion. The Hebrew for "Speak it forth" can mean to pray or appeal; the idea is that although God's word of judgment is certain, in the gap between the statement and the fulfilment, there can be repentance; and God may then change His stated purpose, as He did with Nineveh.

Hebrew poetry rhymes according to the ideas presented rather than the assonance of the words. However, this doesn't mean that in a couplet, the first part is directly equal to the second part. Subtle differences are set up in order to make a point. Am. 3:8 is an example of this. "The lion has roared: who shall not fear? God has spoken: who can but speak forth [AV 'prophesy', but not only in the sense of predicting future events]?". If a lion roars, so a man naturally fears as a result of it. God speaks, and just as naturally we can do nothing but speak it forth. Hence Am. 3:9 goes on to exhort the hearers to publish God's purpose to the Gentile nations around them. The lion roars, and man fears; and we are set up to expect: God speaks, and man should fear. But there is an intended dashing of this expectation. God has spoken, just as the lion may roar; but we are not to *fear* but rather to *speak it forth* to others. We come down, therefore, to something very basic, something in the foundation of our faith: that the Bible is the inspired word of God. But if we believe that, if we hear that voice of Yahweh, we will inevitably, axiomatically, speak it forth to others.

Amos 3:9 *Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see what unrest is in her, and what oppression is among them*- Samaria was built on a hill, but that hill was surrounded by higher hills. God is judging Israel (see on :13), and He invites the Egyptians and Philistines to come and take their place seated on the vantage points around the city of Samaria, to view His just judgment of the Israel whom their influence had corrupted. They aren't listed in the list of nations condemned in chapters 1 and 2; we can assume that the invitation was in order that they might learn from God's judgment of Israel and repent. This is consistently the purpose of His judgments. Just as He had expected Israel and Judah to learn from the judgments upon the "palaces" of their neighbours in Am. 1 and 2, so here God desires those who lived in the palaces of Ashdod and Egypt to learn from the judgment of the "palaces" of Samaria. God's desire to save comes through so strongly, even during His judgment of sinners.

Amos 3:10 *Indeed they don't know how to do right, says Yahweh, who hoard plunder and loot in their palaces*- We noted on Am. 1 and 2 that the "palaces" of the surrounding nations were destroyed by Divine judgment. Israel were intended to learn from this. The wealth they had gotten from abusing their brethren is described as "plunder and loot" because as they had plundered their brethren, so their wealth was to become "plunder and loot" for their invaders (:11). When sin is persisted in, sinners lose any taste for righteousness; they become incapable of knowing how to do right. Only the direct working of God's Spirit on the human heart can change this. A new psychology is required.

Amos 3:11 *Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: An adversary will overrun the land; and he will pull down your strongholds, and your fortresses will be plundered*- Just as they had obtained their wealth and expensive gadgets by plundering their brethren (:11). The overrunning of the land clearly refers to the coming up of the Assyrians throughout the land. All human defences would be destroyed and shown to be just that- the pathetic hopes of the flesh, which before God were nothing at all. And again, the essence of this filters down to us in our age, with our tendency to trust technology, health science, bank balances, hoped for inheritances... rather than in the God who promises to supply our daily bread. See on :14.

Amos 3:12 *Thus says Yahweh: As the shepherd rescues out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be rescued who sit in Samaria*- As explained on :4 and :8, Israel was already consumed, but they could avert this by intense repentance. Amos was a herdman (Am. 1:1), and he may be alluding to the way the sheep were branded on their legs and ear. The brave shepherd wished to extricate these parts from the lion's mouth to demonstrate simply that "this was mine". In this we see God's hope for the tiny remnant; that they would be His, saved out of the mouth of the invaders, proven to be His. And yet the remnant didn't repent and were not spiritually strong nor obedience at the time of the restoration. God is here presented as the shepherd, and yet Amos was a shepherd (Am. 1:1). We observe again the closeness between God and His prophets.

On the corner of a couch, and on the silken cushions of a bed- The idea was that the couch in the corner was the most desirable place. They who now lived in luxury at the expense of the poor were in fact in the mouth of the lion. Part of the prophetic mission was to persuade Israel of the seriousness of their position. And God's word does likewise with us. Why spend our time and passions for that which shall fade away? If we are to spend eternity being spiritually minded and doing God's work, then should we not be seeking to do this now? If we get even a glimpse of the extent of eternity, are we not to use this brief life to the maximum for the things of the Kingdom?

Amos 3:13 *Listen, and testify against the house of Jacob, says the Lord Yahweh, the God of Armies*- This continues the sense that God has entered into judgment with Israel, and the Philistines and Egyptians were seated in the gallery as observers; see on :9. The invitation may be to Amos personally, or to the gathered Philistines and Egyptians.

Amos 3:14 *For in the day that I visit the transgressions of Israel on him, I will also visit the altars of Bethel*- This repeats the prediction of the man of God against that altar in 1

Kings 13:1-4. Amos was making the same prophesy; perhaps he literally stood near Bethel or the altar and repeated the message.

And the horns of the altar will be cut off, and fall to the ground- The horns were considered the place of certain refuge (1 Kings 2:28). The repeated point is that what we consider to be our human strength and defence will surely be revealed as nothing before God's judgment; see on :11.

Amos 3:15 *I will strike the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory will perish, and the great houses will have an end, says Yahweh*- We noted on Am. 1 and 2 that the judgments of the "palaces" or grand houses of the surrounding nations were intended as warnings to the wealthy Israelites; for their similar houses would be destroyed unless they repented. But they didn't learn the lesson from others' judgments, and so the record of the invasions records that the great houses of Jerusalem and Samaria were indeed pulled down. "Houses of ivory" refer to houses in which ivory was stored or where the decorations were of ivory. Ahab had such a house (1 Kings 22:39). Instead of repudiating his apostate lifestyle, the Israelites had eagerly followed it.

AMOS CHAPTER 4

Amos 4:1 *Listen to this word you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who tell their husbands, Bring us drinks!*- Having made clear that judgment was about to burst in Am. 3, Amos now desperately appeals for repentance. I noted on Am. 2:7,13 that economic abuse of the poor and the weak by the 'strong' is described as crushing them. But here we read that it was the obese women of Bashan who did this. The idea is that they demanded of their husbands a lifestyle that meant their husbands abused the poor. God sees all things, and every human motivation. And so they were all condemned for their part in the abuse. These obese women were "on the mountain of Samaria"; perhaps referring to the cult shrine there, just as the mountain of Zion referred to the temple. The drinks they demanded would have been wine offerings, drunk supposedly to Yahweh through their worship of the calves. Their sin was the worse because it was tied up with religious and pseudo spiritual justification.

Oppressing and crushing the poor and needy uses the same Hebrew words as found in Dt. 24:14 about not oppressing poor and needy people, including Gentiles living amongst them. And this was what Israel and Judah had done (Ez. 22:29). It was appropriate therefore that it was Gentiles who would "oppress", "crush" and spoil Israel

(Dt. 28:29,33 s.w.). The motivation for not oppressing the poor was to be a continual awareness and reflection upon the fact that they had been the poor, needy and oppressed in Egypt, but had been saved from that by God's grace, just as Messiah would save the poor and needy and destroy the oppressor (Dt. 24:18; Ps 72:4). This is why Amos seeks to remind Israel of their spiritual beginnings and often alludes to the great salvation from Egypt (Am. 3:1). We too need to ever be aware of our salvation by grace alone, from our spiritual poverty. To oppress another will not come at all naturally if we are ever aware of our personal experience of grace. God is particularly sensitive to how we treat the poor or the weak in whatever sense. What we do to them, we do to Him; for he who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker (Prov. 14:31). The "oppression" of Israel by the Assyrians was therefore just and appropriate (Jer. 50:33); and yet Is. 52:4 says that the Assyrians "oppressed them without cause". I take this therefore as the in-loveness of God, imputing righteousness and innocence to His disobedient people.

Amos 4:2 *The Lord Yahweh*- "Lord" is *adon*, the same word used for "husband" in :1. Instead of being partners in abuse with their husbands, they ought to have had Yahweh as their lord.

Has sworn by His holiness that, behold, the days shall come on you that they will take you away with hooks, and the last of you with fish hooks- Clearly a reference to the captivities at the hands of Babylon and Assyria, where hooks were placed in the bodies of the captives. This was the judgment upon Egypt, to be captured by hooks (Ez. 29:4). They had acted as Egypt had towards them (see on :7) and so were to be punished as Egypt- all because they had oppressed the poor. Abuse of the weak by the strong, in whatever sense, makes us as the world, as Egypt; and such abuse is not limited simply to financial abuse. For we are all the strong in some contexts. But the original is difficult and the LXX offers: "And fiery destroyers shall cast those with you into boiling caldrons", which would explain why the same Hebrew word for "hooks" is used of the pot or cauldron which Jerusalem would become (Ez. 11:3; 24:3,6).

Amos 4:3 *You will go out at the breaks in the wall, each one straight before her; and you will cast yourselves into Harmon, says Yahweh*- The "her" reminds us that the subject of these words are the obese women of :1, who had grown fat as a result of abusing the poor. This attempted escape through the breaches in the wall is exactly what happened when Zedekiah and the royal family sought to escape the Babylonian siege, and we can assume that something similar happened when the Assyrians surrounded Samaria. They were to go out "straight before", as if they were fattened calves being led out of their pens to slaughter. As explained on :1, they had fattened themselves for the slaughter by abusing others. The allusion to calves is appropriate because they had worshipped the calves of Jeroboam rather than Yahweh; they became like that they worshipped, and were judged appropriately. We become like what we worship, and the desire to worship

something is coded within our natures. It's a case of choosing to exclusively worship the Lord and being totally devoted to Him rather than anything else.

The LXX has: "And ye shall be brought forth naked in the presence of each other; and ye shall be cast forth on the mountain Romman". This could refer to a mountain in Assyria; where in scenes reminiscent of the holocaust, the Israelite women would be cast down naked. But (NEV) "you will cast yourselves"- they had done this to themselves.

Amos 4:4 *Go to Bethel, and sin; to Gilgal, and sin more*- This could equally be read as meaning that this is what they had done. But we can also read it, as NEV, as God encouraging them in their sin. This is how He works; a holy spirit from Him encouraging us in righteousness, and an "evil spirit from the Lord" encouraging sinners in the downward spiral they delight in. This is why we can never take a break from our spiritual path; we are being propelled in constant motion, in the direction we choose.

Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days- We see here how the Israelites were mixing Yahweh worship with their paganism at the calf shrines of Bethel and Gilgal. For it was to Yahweh that morning and evening sacrifices were to be made; and the three yearly tithe is that referred to as due to Yahweh in Dt. 14:28; 26:12. This is the biting challenge of Amos and the situation he describes; we can mix Yahweh worship with our idolatry and consider that because we have a semblance of devotion to Him, then all shall be well with us. This is the danger of organized religion. The organized side of it is perhaps a necessary evil; but it can so easily take away from the true spirituality which is so essential to acceptable worship and relationship with God.

Amos 4:5 *Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings and brag about them: for this pleases you, you children of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh*- As noted on :4, Israel were using elements of Yahweh worship in their devotions to the idols at Bethel and Gilgal. Yet they offered thank offerings with leaven, representing their malice and wickedness (1 Cor. 5:8). They even liked to claim that they offered voluntary offerings to Yahweh, over and above those required. And it 'pleased' Israel to do this, they liked doing it. It is no bad exercise to set ourselves the task of working out how we might do so today. Buying and boasting about luxury goods and homes, which we claim are part of our care for the needy when they are really for our own indulgence; proclaiming strict adherence to Divine principles as a means of shunning those we have a gut dislike of… and so we could continue the list.

Amos 4:6 *I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in every town; yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh*- God had already tried to bring Israel to repentance. The threatened invasion was but the last of a series of attempts to

bring them back to God. He had given them famine to try to make them "return", implying they had already as it were gone away from Him into Gentile lands from which they would have to "return" (s.w.) to God. Their exile and captivity was therefore but a reflection of their own distancing of themselves from God. We noted on :1 that the wealthy women were obese; and yet this was achieved during a time of want and famine in the land. Their abuse of the poor for their own luxury at such a time was therefore the more obnoxious.

Amos 4:7 *I also have withheld the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; and I caused it to rain on one city, and caused it not to rain on another city. One place was rained on, and the piece where it didn't rain withered*- This selective rain was to recall how the Egyptians suffered some of the plagues but the Israelites didn't. As noted on :1, God was seeking to remind Israel of their salvation from Egypt (see on Am. 3:1). They had been saved by grace, but by oppressing their brethren as the Egyptians had oppressed them, they were no better than the Egyptians. They had therefore reversed the exodus; they were now the Egyptians, because in their hearts they had returned there. The allusions to the Egyptian plagues continue in :9,10.

Amos 4:8 *So two or three cities staggered to one city to drink water, and were not satisfied: yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh*- The drought was intended to make the people go to God; but instead they went to try to get water from elsewhere. We wonder which city had water whereas the others didn't; possibly it was a Gentile city, or a city where there were members of the righteous remnant. "Staggered" or 'wander' is the word used about Israel's wandering away from God (Jer. 14:10) and into captivity (Am. 9:9; Lam. 4:15). The drought therefore gave them a foretaste of what condemnation and judgment would be like; but they stubbornly refused to perceive it. We also see such foretastes of judgment; in Scripture, in our lives and those of others. And it is for us to respond.

Amos 4:9 *I struck you with blight and mildew*- Literally, "blasting" (as AV). Again the allusion is to Egypt, whose corn was likewise blasted (Gen. 41:6).

Many times in your gardens and your vineyards- "Many times" reflects the multiple efforts of God with Israel. He so many times nudged them to perceive the similarities with Egypt.

And your fig trees and your olive trees have the swarming locust devoured: yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh- See on :7. Locusts were one of the plagues on Egypt; but the fig and the olive, the very symbols of Israel, were now being treated like

the Egyptians. They were supposed to perceive these multiple prods and nudges, to join the dots and see the picture. But like so many today, they refused.

Amos 4:10 *I sent plagues among you like I did upon Egypt. I have slain your young men with the sword, and have carried away your horses; and I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh*- See on :7. The "camps" were again to recall Egypt; "horses" typically came from Egypt, and were the symbol of human strength, which the law of Moses forbad the kings of Israel to use; see on:11. Already there had been incursions into the land, and young men and horses killed or carried away. By all means God had tried to prod and nudge Israel to repentance without an all out invasion and devastation of the land. The various seals of judgment upon the land and people of Israel in the last days, as detailed in Revelation, are intended to have the same effect; and will be augmented by our witness to Israel and Jewish people. For all these multiple nudges and opportunities to repent, Israel refused.

Amos 4:11 *I have overthrown some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a burning stick plucked out of the fire; yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh*- As noted on :10, there were incursions of the land before the main invasion in order to try to bring them to repentance. Hence "some of you". They were as Sodom, as Isaiah 1 makes clear; but were treated like Lot who was saved out of the burning by grace alone. This was undeserved grace. And yet still they didn't learn; they were saved from rightful judgment, but still they wouldn't perceive God's grace and repent. The historical situation is that of 2 Kings 13, where in the time of Amos, "The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben Hadad the son of Hazael, continually. Jehoahaz begged Yahweh, and Yahweh listened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, how that the king of Syria oppressed them. Yahweh gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians; and the children of Israel lived in their tents as before. Nevertheless they didn't depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, with which he made Israel to sin, but walked therein. There remained the Asherah also in Samaria. For the king of Syria didn't leave to Jehoahaz of the people any more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria destroyed them, and made them like the dust in threshing" (2 Kings 13:3-7). We note here the destruction of their horses, which is mentioned here in Am. 4:10.

Amos 4:12 *Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel; and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel*- Amos speaks of Israel's final judgment as a day of their meeting their God, and he urges them to prepare to meet Him. This was no grim

fatalism, as if an angry final statement. The language is shot through with allusion to how both Israel and Moses were told to prepare to meet Yahweh at Sinai (Ex. 19:11,15; 34:2). But that meeting involved a declaration of God's Name, the foremost characteristic of which was that God is a God *full* of mercy and love for His people. Their preparation to meet God was therefore a call to repentance and moral preparation, so that the threatened judgments could be averted. It was because judgment had been pronounced and would surely happen, that Amos urges Israel to repent; because in the gap between pronouncement and actualization, there was the possibility of repentance which would as it were change God's mind, as happened with Nineveh. This is the eternal intensity of the moments we now live in. The idea of meeting God is a development of the idea in Am. 3:3 (see note there), where Israel are told that two (God and themselves) can walk together once they have an agreed meeting place; and God and Israel had "met" in covenant at Sinai. So the command to prepare to again meet God, just as they had 'prepared' themselves to meet Him at Sinai by sanctification rituals, was no mere grim pronouncement of doom to come, but a desperately urgent appeal for repentance, for preparation and willingness to meet their God in renewed covenant relationship, as they had done at Sinai.

Amos 4:13 *For, behold, He who forms the mountains, and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought; who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the high places of the earth: Yahweh, the God of Armies, is His name*- The armies of Babylonians and Assyrians were God's armies. The very mountains around Samaria alluded to in Am. 3:9 had been created by God. The God of endless physical ability has the same boundless abilities when it comes to matters of the spirit or "wind"; He who created all things knows the thought of man. And this was where repentance needed to occur. He could invert His creative work, making light into darkness; and He would destroy the "high places" of the land through the forthcoming invasion. The invaders typically destroyed the shrines of those whom they conquered; hence the God of those armies would as it were tread on their high places, just as they had trampled upon the poor (see on :1).

AMOS CHAPTER 5

Amos 5:1 *Listen to this word which I take up for a lamentation over you, O house of Israel*- "Lamentation" is literally a funeral lament. It was as if they were already dead, and now God and Amos were as it were lamenting at the funeral; although the lamentation was yet future (:16). But although the prophetic word of destruction was so certain, yet there was still space to repent. In this was the desperate urgency of the

appeal Amos is making. Israel were being asked to "listen" to their own funeral lamentation. We too can try to fast forward in time and reflect what could legitimately be said about us.

Amos 5:2 *The virgin of Israel has fallen; she shall rise no more. She is cast down on her land; there is no one to raise her up*- But the idea of the restoration was that God would raise up Israel. So terms like "no more" and "never again" are relative to that generation, at that time; see another example in 2 Kings 24:7. This is quite normal language usage within Semitic thought, but it can cause difficulties of understanding and interpretation for more literalistic Western readers. All the same, that generation would fall and die, their bodies cast out in the open (Ez. 29:5; 32:4); and they were being asked to imagine the scene of their death and the funeral lament over them- and repent to avert that judgment. The present and past tenses are used to bring home how certain are God's words of fulfilment.

Amos 5:3 *For thus says the Lord Yahweh: The city that went forth a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went forth one hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel*- As with the destruction of Jerusalem, there was always a remnant left. Samaria was to be left with just 10% of its former population; a major destruction. And it was with this tiny remnant that God hoped to work. They were perhaps the tenth, the tithe, which were intended for God's work. The idea of only a tenth surviving is repeated in Am. 6:10.

Amos 5:4 *For thus says Yahweh to the house of Israel: Seek Me, and you will live*- We are frequently reminded in the prophets that the spiritual way of life is one which *is seeking* God. We are to seek His face (Ps. 24:6; 27:8)- which it is impossible to behold (Ex. 33:20). Actually finding God in the ultimate sense is therefore unattainable in this life; but our whole mortal life must be lived in this spirit of *seeking* ultimate perfection. Seeking God is often defined in the prophets as forsaking our sins and desiring to be righteous (Amos 5:5,8,14,15). None of us are completely successful in our seeking of God in terms of quitting every sin and becoming perfect, and therefore it follows that none of is *completely* forsakes all our sinfulness. And yet righteousness is imputed to those who seek it, who love God's ways but like Paul in Rom. 7, allow themselves to be all too constrained by their human location. In Hebrew thought, to seek is to worship. God is worshipped by our seeking of Him. And thus the Kingdom blessing is for those who hunger and thirst to be righteous, even though they are not of themselves righteous (Mt. 5:6).

Amos 5:5 *But don't seek Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and don't pass to Beersheba*- Which required passing right across Judah. Judah too had her idol shrines in addition to Yahweh's temple.

For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing- There is a word play here, as if to say "For Gilgal shall taste the gall of exile"- "Ha-Gilgal galoh yigleh". And likewise "Bethel", the house of God, "shall become an idolatry / idol house". No mention is made of Beersheba's judgment, perhaps because there appeared more hope for Judah's repentance.

Amos 5:6 *Seek Yahweh, and you will live*- "Seeking" God is explained on :4.

Lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, and there be no one to quench it in Bethel- Tiglath-Pileser first took into captivity all Gilead and Galilee, the majority of the territory of the ten tribes (2 Kings 10:32,33); but didn't touch the territory of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph. That earlier invasion had been a warning; the outpouring of wrath upon Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, could yet be averted. The fire had started, but it could still be quenched by repentance. But despite the message being so clear, they refused to repent; just as we can see the writing on the wall and refuse to note it. This blindness is a sad feature of human nature.

Amos 5:7 *You who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth*- This is the thought of Am. 6:7 "But you have turned justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness". Israel's judgment was to be cast down to the earth (Is. 28:2; Dan. 8:12), and wormwood was to be their condemnation (Jer. 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:15). It was serving other gods which would lead to the bitterness of wormwood (s.w. Dt. 29:18). But they are condemned here not for idolatry, but for injustice, abusing the weak so that they left them with a bitter taste in their mouth, just as we feel when we have been misused or ripped off. This was the essential sin, and it was the egoism and selfishness behind that abuse which led further to idolatry. By making others feel this bitterness, by refusing to show justice / righteousness [the two ideas are closely connected in Hebrew], the abusers were securing their own condemnation when they would taste as it were the bitterness of wormwood.

Amos 5:8 *Seek Him who made the Pleiades and Orion*- This is emphasized because Israel are rebuked for worshipping the star of Remphan in :26 (cp. Acts 7:43). God had made not just one star but the "seven stars" (NEV "Pleiades"), all of them, and the entire constellation of stars seen in "Orion".

He who turns the shadow of death into the morning, and makes the day dark with night; who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, Yahweh is His name- According to God's Name / essential character, He would reverse the creation process. Darkness would become night, and the waters of the sea, representing the armies of the invaders, would be poured out by Him upon the surface of the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham, just as they were at the flood. The same imagery is used in Revelation, where judgments are poured out as if from bowls / vials upon the same geographical area.

Amos 5:9 *He who brings sudden destruction on the strong, so that destruction comes on the fortress*- The citadel of Samaria, their human strength and defence, would be destroyed. It would be sudden, in that they had previously trusted in their various alliances. This is the nature of divine judgment- to reveal all human strength as hopelessly weak, and it is for the faithful to perceive that before judgment comes. We live in an age when such human strength has been perfected and honed as never before, with insurance against every eventuality. "The strong" refer to the group within Israel who were abusing the weak. The lesson for us is not simply regarding financial exploitation of the poor. We can all be strong in some contexts. You may be standing in line at a check out, and the person in front of you doesn't speak the local language. You suddenly become the strong, and they the weak; it is not for you to be impatient and irritated with the weak. You may be an accepted member of a family or community; and an outsider comes within the circle. You are the strong, and they the weak.

Amos 5:10 *They hate him who reproves in the gate*- Perhaps a reference to Amos who stood in the gate of Samaria or Bethel delivering his warnings. I discuss on Ps. 15:2 how there was a well attested practice of priests standing at the temple gates and assessing the worthiness of worshippers by posing questions to those seeking entrance.

And they detest him who speaks blamelessly- Insofar as Amos spoke God's words. This detesting of Amos led to him being banned from Israel, as he records in Am. 7.

Amos 5:11 *Forasmuch therefore as you trample on the poor, and take taxes of wheat from him- therefore you who have built houses of cut stone will not dwell in them. You who have planted pleasant vineyards shall not drink their wine*- The taxes demanded had to be paid in kind, in agricultural produce, because the poor had nothing else to give; see on Am. 7:1. And Am. 4:6-9 has explained that this was at a time of famine. The strong took away what little food the poor had, just in order to continue their own opulent living. We live in a world where there is every opportunity to do this, and on a global scale. In time of famine, everyone had to go down a step on the ladder. But the motivation for taxing the hungry and therefore taking their little food from them was

because it was unthinkable that the strong should take a step down on the ladder. And this again is a principle which cuts to the core of our society. When it comes to actually stepping down a peg and going without some aspects of our current lifestyle, all within us rebels against it. We may be generous, but only if our current level of living is not undercut. And if circumstances require us to downsize or downgrade in whatever way, it is human nature to do literally anything, at any cost to the weak, in order to save us from doing so.

Amos 5:12 *For I know how many are your offences, and how great are your sins*- Israel like us were tempted to think that the apparent silence of God meant that He had as it were not noticed their sins. But God is deeply sensitive, and every offence was noted and felt, and the magnitude of it. But His sensitivity never turns off. What was apparently just an on paper series of offences are described here as "your mighty sins". What we may shrug off as just surface level failure are "mighty sins" to God.

You who afflict the just- We note it was the righteous who were abused, in this case. The poor are not always "the just", for poverty is no guarantee of spirituality of itself. So it was the righteous remnant who were being abused, and God was particularly sensitive to that.

Who take a bribe, and who turn aside the needy in the courts- Is. 29:21 uses the same phrase but adds that they turned aside the needy for "a thing of nothing". The bribes they received were very small, just as Judas betrayed the Lord for a mere 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave, that couldn't even buy more than a small parcel of muddy, useless land. Amos has made this complaint elsewhere, that even for a pair of sandals, cheap shoes, the cause of the righteous was perverted (Am. 2:6; 8:6). The allusion may be to Num. 35:31, where bribes are forbidden to cover murder. By hating their brothers and abusing them, they had effectively murdered them. And the Lord confirmed in His teaching that hatred is as murder in God's book.

Amos 5:13 *Therefore a prudent person keeps silent in such a time, for it is an evil time*- The reference may be to the righteous keeping silent in respect of the rightness of Divine judgments (Lev. 10:3; Ps. 39:9). The "evil time" was to come because they had themselves sought "evil" (:14). Constantly we see that the judgments which came were essentially that which they themselves sought. See on Am. 6:10.

Amos 5:14 *Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so Yahweh, the God of Armies, will be with you, as you say*- They claimed that Yahweh was with them, when He was not (Mic. 3:11). Hence they claimed to desire the day of Yahweh, when in fact it would be their condemnation (:18). The promises of the Kingdom, the comfort of God's

love, are often appropriated by passive believers in times of crisis. But these promises, and the active presence of God, are to be experienced in daily life now. And this requires a seeking of good, rather than of evil. The unjust profiteers and materialists would likely have objected to the charge of actively seeking evil; but this is how God sees anything other than seeking good.

Amos 5:15 *Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts. It may be that Yahweh, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph*- The prophets called upon men to “hate evil and love good”, to have some passion about our positions. As noted on :6, only the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh was left intact after the earlier Assyrian invasion. And if they repented, and loved good rather than evil and were just, then they could experience the grace of God's plan to save a remnant. The essence of spirituality is not achieving perfection, but loving good, loving the things of the Spirit; and therefore all who love the Lord's appearing, with all that requires, shall be saved (see on 2 Tim. 4:8).

God's forgiveness and salvation can never be presumed upon; even if we are genuinely repentant. For the wages of sin has always been death (Rom. 6:23); we as sinners have no right to life. This is a theme stamped right across the Old Testament. Consider: "You have sinned a great sin. Now I will go up to Yahweh. Perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30). "Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts. It may be that Yahweh, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Am. 5:15). “Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious… Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him?” (Joel 2:13,14). "Let them turn each one from his evil way… Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" (Jonah 3:8,9). Possibly we could add Esther 4:14 to this list: "Who knows if you haven’t come to the kingdom for such a time as this?". This is why Daniel's friends can reason: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods" (Dan. 3:17,18). They believed in Yahweh's salvation, but were quite prepared not to receive it. They knew that His ability to dramatically save them at that moment was not at all certain of fulfilment for them. The same words "is able" and "save" are used by Darius in Dan. 6:21 when he again expresses a doubt as to whether God is able to save in this case: "Was the God whom you served so regularly able to deliver you from the lions?". Against all this we must balance the fact that those in Christ have been given the "right" to be God's children (Jn. 1:12). But the bold confidence we have in the Lord Jesus must somehow never fail to be nuanced by an awareness of our total unworthiness and inability to presume upon God's forgiveness.

Amos 5:16 *Therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Armies, the Lord: Wailing will be in all the boulevards; and they will say in all the streets, 'Alas! Alas!', and they will call the farmer to mourning, and those who are skilful in lamentation to wailing*- As noted on :1, it was as if the lamentation was already in progress, so certain was it that Israel would perish in the judgment to come. But that future reality could still be changed by repentance, such was and is God's sensitivity to human repentance. "The farmer" seems to be used in order to give the impression that there would be mourning from city streets to country areas.

Amos 5:17 *In all vineyards there will be wailing; for I will pass through the midst of you, says Yahweh*- See on :1,16. The passing through the midst in judgment is the language of God's judgment of Egypt on Passover night (Ex. 12:12). Israel had returned to Egypt in spirit and were judged accordingly, as Egypt. The wailing or funeral mourning was in the vineyards because they were symbolic of the wealthy life (:11). But those vineyards had already been smitten by the drought (Am. 4:9). They ought to have learnt the lesson, that the wealthy life and symbols of opulence were already of no meaning. But they continued in their hope that their vineyards would again flourish. We too are at times given premonitions about the meaninglessness of wealth and opulence. And if we don't take the lesson, that wealth will be removed totally at the last day.

Amos 5:18 *Woe to you who desire the day of Yahweh! Why do you long for the day of Yahweh? It will be darkness for you, and not light*- This and Mal. 3:1,2 warn that just desiring the coming of the Lord isn't enough; for what end will it be, if we don't *truly* love His appearing? Yet Amos goes on to say that Israel "put far away" the reality of the day of the Lord, in their minds (Am. 6:3). And yet they desired it. We can study prophecy, but not really love His appearing in seriously preparing ourselves for that day. Indeed, we can subconsciously put it far from us. When we grasp for a fleeting moment how *very near* is the second coming for us; can we dwell upon it, retain that intensity? Or would we rather put it "far away"? This is surely why the Lord brings the list of signs of His coming to a close with some chilling parables concerning the need for personal watchfulness. It's as if He could foresee generations of believers straining to interpret His words carefully, correctly matching them with trends in the world… and yet missing the essential point: that we must watch and prepare ourselves for His coming, whenever it may be for us. Having given so many indicators of His soon appearing, the Lord then says that His coming will be unexpected by the believers (Mt. 24:36,44). He wasn't saying 'Well, you'll never properly interpret what I've just said'. He meant rather: 'OK you'll know, more or less, when my return is imminent; but all the same, *in reality* it will be terribly unexpected for most of you unless you prepare yourselves. You need to make personal changes, and be watchful of yourselves; otherwise all the correct

prophetic interpretation in the world is meaningless'. Those described in Rom. 1:32 know the judgment of God; they know it will come. But they have a mind "void of [an awareness of] judgment" (Rom. 1:28 AVmg.). We can know, know it all. But live with a mind and heart void of it. Tit. 1:16 AVmg. uses the same word to describe those who "profess that they know God" but are "void of judgment". We can know Him, but have no real personal sense of judgment to come. These are sobering thoughts.

Amos 5:19 *As if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him-* The allusion may be to the idea that the lion may spare its prostrate prey, but the bear will not do so. This idea may be incorrect, but God uses it here; if they had repented to God prostrate before the invaders, then the judgment could have been averted. But they did not, and so they faced the merciless destruction of a bear.

Or he went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a snake bit him- They may flee for refuge into their houses, so often criticized by Amos, but find no safety there either. Again, human wealth and strength is to be no refuge. The point is so repeated by Amos because we are so slow to accept it. See on Am. 6:9.

Amos 5:20 *Won't the day of Yahweh be darkness for you, and not light? Even very dark, and no brightness in it?-* They were perhaps grabbing hold of the promises in Joel about the day of Yahweh being of bright light, a new dawn for Israel. But it would not be so for them. It's rather like an uncommitted nominally Christian person grabbing hold of words of comfort about the future Kingdom of God coming on earth; the question is, will that day be of judgment or salvation for us? The question here, rather than a simple statement, is to desperately appeal for them to imagine what judgment day would be like, and change the outcome by their repentance.

Amos 5:21 *I hate, I despise your feasts, and I can't tolerate your solemn assemblies-* The feasts and related gatherings are repeatedly described as feats of Yahweh, assemblies of Yahweh. But Israel had hijacked God's religion and made His table, His feasts, their own- hence "*your* feasts". The New Testament likewise describes the feats as "feasts of the Jews" and Yahweh's temple as the temple of the Jews. By making the Lord's table effectively ours, we are doing the same; taking over His house as our own, with all the house rules of our denominationalism. The same language is used of God's anger at the sacrifices and feasts held in the Jerusalem temple in Judah (Is. 1:10-15). Again we see that the shrines and rituals of the calves in the ten tribe kingdom were imitations of the Jerusalem temple.

Amos 5:22 *Yes, though you offer Me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat animals-* They had failed

to appreciate what the New Testament makes apparent- that the blood of sacrifices, the performance of religious ritual of itself, was not a ground for acceptability. Rather was a contrite, repentant heart required, and the cleansing was from God's response to that rather than for the sake of the blood itself. And as noted on :21, we see that they in the ten tribe kingdom were carefully imitating the Mosaic rituals of the Jerusalem temple. But they were doing so in worship of their calves.

Amos 5:23 *Take away from Me the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps*- The same language is used of how God was angry with the songs and harp music of the Jerusalem temple (Is. 1:14; 24:8; Ez. 26:13). The calf shrines of the ten tribes were imitations of the Jerusalem temple worship. They were therefore the more irritating to God.

Amos 5:24 *But let justice roll on like rivers, and righteousness like a mighty stream*- In Hebrew, the word for justice is that for judgment. So we have here a double meaning; God was to send judgment upon Israel like mighty rivers, and such rivers are Biblical imagery for invading armies, Assyria especially (Is. 8:6). And yet this could be averted, if the country became awash with the justice which Amos so frequently appeals for.

"Mighty stream" suggests "Ethanim", the seventh month, just before the early rains, was called Ethanim, the month of the perennial streams. Perhaps the idea is that the final Assyrian judgment was to come in this month.

Amos 5:25 *Did you really bring to Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel?*- The historical record says that they did, so the idea is that although they did, God didn't accept them because they were also offering to other gods. This is a biting, incisive challenge to all of us who perform religious rituals, such as collective meetings, prayer, breaking of bread etc. We can do all these things, but not do them as God accepts. Such things are all a natural and correct part of communal life together, but they are also part of organized religion, and human nature tends to seek justification through ritual and religion rather than heartbroken faith in the God who saves by grace.

Amos 5:26 *You also carried the tent of your king and the shrine of your images, the star of your god, which you made for yourselves*- Right at their birth by the Red Sea, the Almighty records that "the people feared Yahweh, and believed Yahweh, and His servant Moses" (Ex. 14:23). No mention is made of the Egyptian idols they were still cuddling (we don't directly learn about them until Ez. 20). Nor do we learn that this "belief" of theirs lasted a mere three days; nor of the fact that they rejected Moses, and in their

hearts turned back to Egypt. "There was no strange god" with Israel on their journey (Dt. 32:12); but there were (Am. 5:26). The reconciliation is that God counted as Israel as devoted solely to Him. The references are to Moloch [the planet Mars] and Chiun [Saturn]. Hence the emphasis that in fact God had created all the planets (:8).

Amos 5:27 *Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, says Yahweh, whose name is the God of Armies*- Quoted in the New Testament as "beyond Babylon", which is more relevant to Judah's captivity than that of the ten tribes to Assyria. We see here how the New Testament 'quotes' the Old Testament often with paraphrase. The idea is that the judgments upon Israel were in essence to come upon Judah; and Amos had a ministry to both Israel and Judah.

AMOS CHAPTER 6

Amos 6:1 *Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who are secure on the mountain of Samaria*- As noted throughout Am. 5, the ten tribe kingdom of Israel had set up shrines to the golden calves, and a centre of worship in Samaria, which consciously imitated the Jerusalem temple which was in Judah. Judah were also apostate, and the abominations performed in the Jerusalem temple were in essence as those found at the calf shrines in Israel. This explains why Zion, the temple mount, is here paralleled with the central hill in Samaria where the idol shrine was located. Amos preached to both Israel and Judah, often with the same material; so we can better appreciate why he uses this parallel. The LXX suggests that the ten tribes were despising Zion, the mount of the Jerusalem temple, and considered that God had replaced it with the idol shrine in Samaria: "Woe to them that set at nought Sion, and that trust in the mountain of Samaria".

They felt "at ease" and "secure" because they kidded themselves that the coming day of Yahweh would be for their salvation (see on Am. 5:18). The latter day equivalent is in those amongst God's people who say "peace and safety" when sudden destruction is about to come (1 Thess. 5:3). "Secure" or 'trusting' is the word used in warning Israel that the high walls and fortifications in which they would 'trust' would be brought down (Dt. 28:52 s.w.). The word is often used by the prophets in their appeal for God's people to "trust" in Him and not human strength (Is. 12:2; 26:3,4 etc.) and not trusting in idols (Is. 42:17; 47:10; Hab. 2:18 etc.). Their trust in their idols was however understood by them as trust in Yahweh. They had mixed the flesh and the spirit to such an extent.

The notable men of the chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come!- The idea is as GNB, reading "nations" as an intensive plural: "You great leaders of this great nation Israel, you to whom the people go for help!".

Amos 6:2 *Go to Calneh, and see; and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these kingdoms? Or is their border greater than your border?*- "These kingdoms" would refer to Israel and Judah, or perhaps as in :1, to the "great nation Israel" (:1 GNB). The GNB therefore offers: "Go and look at the city of Calneh. Then go on to the great city of Hamath and on down to the Philistine city of Gath. Were they any better than the kingdoms of Judah

and Israel? Was their territory larger than yours?". This is therefore a repeat of the appeal in Am. 1 and Am. 2, to reflect upon the destiny of Gentile nations around Israel, and to realize that unless they stopped acting like the Gentiles, then they would be judged as Gentiles. "Calneh" had just been conquered by the Assyrians (Is. 10:9). Hamath had been conquered briefly by Jeroboam II in the time of Amos (2 Kings 14:25), but Assyria had just captured it (2 Kings 18:34). Gath had also been conquered by Uzziah king of Judah in the time of Amos (2 Chron. 26:6), but would also be conquered. The kings of Israel and Judah had not conquered Calneh and Hamath because they were "better than these kingdoms". Secular success is no certain sign that we are right with God; and here again we see the great error of the prosperity gospel.

Amos 6:3 *Those who put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near*- See on Am. 5:18 *Why do you long for the day of Yahweh?.* They desired the coming of the day of Yahweh; but God's word through Amos penetrates their deepest psychology. For deep in their hearts, they knew they had sinned and would be judged, but they were putting that reality far away. By doing so they were hastening the coming of judgment, as if that day was somehow flexible within God's purpose. More positively, we can hasten the Lord's coming. The final date is unknown because it will factor in both the 'hastening of judgment' factor due to human sin, and the 'hastening of salvation' due to the prayers of the righteous.

Amos 6:4 *Who lie on beds of ivory, and stretch themselves on their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall*- This decadence was all the worse because a famine preceded the final invasion; and as noted on Am. 4:6, the wealthy only retained their extravagant standard of living by forcing the weak and poor to pay them taxes in the form of food. We note that they both worshipped calves and ate them. They became like that which they worshipped, and that message is taught time and again in the prophets. It has strong relevance to us today. Likewise 'stretching' is the word used for 'pouring out' as if in the libations of sacrifice. They justified their decadence as service to God. And we have that same basic human tendency today.

Amos 6:5 *Who strum on the strings of a harp; who invent for themselves instruments of music, like David did*- I suggested on :4 and :6 that this decadence had overtones of religious worship. They claimed to admire the spirituality of David and to be continuing his style of worship. When really they were just enjoying a decadent meal accompanied by music. This mixture of flesh and spirit is really our acutest temptation. They drunk wine and anointed their faces with oil- the language of rejoicing in God's blessings, assuming they were righteous, and that the wealth they had wrongly gained was in fact Divine blessing. Many a corrupt Pentecostal pastor must have done the same in our days. They looked back to the heritage of their spiritual ancestors (David), and on a surface level appeared to follow them. They chanted the temple songs at their shrines in Samaria and Gilgal, and yet there was no grief within them for the affliction of God's people (:6).

Amos 6:6 *Who drink wine in bowls*- This is the language of the drink offerings being poured out in bowls (Zech. 14:20). As noted on :4 and :5, their decadence was performed with the appearance of religious worship to it.

And anoint themselves with the best oils; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph- This could refer to this historical Joseph, whose affliction was caused by his own brothers, and they ignored it (Gen. 42:21). The suffering, spiritual, innocent Joseph then becomes representative of the righteous remnant who were being abused. Or the reference could be to how the areas of Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, were to be afflicted, unless they repented; but those addressed were not grieved for that. They didn't repent because of the suffering they saw their brethren passing through.

Amos 6:7 *Therefore they will now go into captivity with the first who go captive*- The idea is that those who had gone into captivity first, during the early Assyrian incursions, were intended as a warning to them. But they had not taken that warning, and so they too would go into captivity as those who had "first" or earlier gone into captivity.

And the feasting and lounging will end- "Lounging" is Heb. *mizrach*, a word play with *mizraq*, "bowls", in :6. "Will end" is the same word used in Am. 5:23, when God asks for their songs of worship to Him to be taken away or ended. Their feasting with bowls if wine was therefore performed as a feast to Yahweh. He ended it through the invasion, seeing they refused to stop. This is how obnoxious is self-gratification performed in the name of serving God.

Amos 6:8 *The Lord Yahweh has sworn by Himself, says Yahweh, the God of Armies, that I hate the pride of Jacob*- For all the issues which the prophets could have condemned people for, pride was high on their list. Jeremiah wept in secret, his eyes running with tears, "for your pride" (Jer. 13:15-17). Isaiah gets passionate about the way that Assyria thought that "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom" (Is. 10:13). Because Ephraim trusted in his wealth, the most awful words of judgment are pronounced upon him (Hos. 12:8; 10:13,14). We shrug when we see pride and trust in wealth. Rich or poor, we all tend to trust in money. Thinking that that's life… under the sun. But the prophets went ballistic about this. We've developed established patterns of indifference to this kind of thing. But the prophet's consciences were keenly sensitive to these patterns, and they openly challenged them. They weren't just empty moralizers, bleating on about the state of the nation; their words are an assault of the mind and conscience.

And detest his fortresses. Therefore I will deliver up the city with all that is in it- As noted often, the fortresses were the human strength which Israel trusted in, rather than in God; see on :1. God hated, even detested, all such trust in human defences. We need to take that lesson. For we have so many temptations to trust in human strength. And it is bank balances, reserves, health plans etc. which God detests if they are used to replace trust in Him.

Amos 6:9 *It will happen, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die*- We note again the reference of Amos to fortified houses, which the wealthy thought would be their defence against invaders. Such a large house must be in view, if ten men remained within it. Even if these houses were such a defence, God would send a snake on their walls inside to kill them (Am. 5:19). We really need to hear all this repetition- all human strength and defence is not so at all.

Amos 6:10 *When a man's relative carries his body out of the house to burn it, he will ask him who is in the innermost parts of the house: 'Is there yet any with you?'. And if he says, 'No', then he will say, 'Hush! Indeed we must not mention the name of*

Yahweh'- The idea may be as in Am. 5:13. The righteous keep silent in respect of the rightness of Divine judgments (Lev. 10:3; Ps. 39:9), even if they fall upon their own relatives. And again, even the innermost, most fortified parts of their homes would not preserve them. The innermost parts, the very core, of our various human defence mechanisms will likewise be revealed as nothing before God's judgment. It was the duty of the closest relatives to bury the dead; and AV "uncle" may imply that only an uncle was left in this family to bury the younger men. This relative was therefore the only one of the ten (:9) who survived in the house and family. This is mentioned also in Am. 5:3; Samaria was to be left with just 10% of its former population; a major destruction. And it was with this tiny remnant that God hoped to work. They were perhaps the tenth, the tithe, which were intended for God's work. To mention that Name of Yahweh was part of covenant relationship, but that was to be interrupted for the remnant who survived. They had called upon Yahweh as part of their idol worship; and now that was to be no longer possible. They would realize that they had in reality not called upon His Name at all.

Amos 6:11 *For behold, Yahweh says it, and the great house will be smashed to pieces, and the little house into bits*- Repeatedly Amos drives home the idea that their houses will not save them. Their fortified homes and hidden recesses within them were what they so trusted in, rather than turning to God. We too tend to have those hidden recesses of our own device.

Amos 6:12 *Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plough there with oxen?*- The answer is obviously "no". But this was how utterly foolish they were being in being unjust and causing bitterness to those they abused. It ought to have been obvious. But that which is spiritually obvious is not perceived because of the way that sin distorts our vision. But the Hebrew is difficult. The GNB offers: "You brag about capturing the town of Lodebar. You boast, "We were strong enough to take Karnaim". The military victories earlier in the time of Amos, under Jeroboam II and Uzziah (2 Kings 14:25-28), were to be now revealed as meaningless; such secular success was no reflection of spirituality. And they would realize that all too late.

But you have turned justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness- See on Am. 5:7. Justice and righteousness are God's intentions for His people; but just as a horse can't run on rocky crags, so they had inverted the entire sense of spirituality.

Amos 6:13 *You who rejoice in a thing of nothing, who say, 'Haven't we taken for ourselves horns by our own strength?'*- The horns of the Jerusalem altar were thought to be the ultimate source of safety (1 Kings 1:50; 2:28). It seems that the ten tribes had replicated this by adding horns to their calf statues, which were "a thing of nothing". They had created their own strength, rather than realizing their weakness and trusting in God's strength. They were aware that a righteous Ephraim would push her enemies as with the horns of a unicorn (Dt. 33:17), and as noted on :1, they were "at ease" with God, assuming they were righteous, appropriating the blessings of the righteous to themselves. Only condemnation would make them realize how wrong they were.

Amos 6:14 *For, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, says Yahweh, the God of Armies; and they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of the Arabah*- From the north to the south. The same terms of definition are used to describe the territory which Jeroboam II had recently recovered (2 Kings

14:25). All that secular success was no sign at all of God's blessing. All this so easily translates into our modern terms. We need not assume that nice homes and possessions are God's blessing and His approval of our spirituality. Not at all. It can be that we merely blessed ourselves with those things. Those armies sent to take these things away were effectively God's armies, totally under His control.

AMOS CHAPTER 7

Amos 7:1 *Thus the Lord Yahweh showed me: and behold, He formed locusts in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and behold, it was the latter growth after the king's harvest*- GNB "Just after the king's share of the hay had been cut and the grass was starting to grow again". Am. 4:6-9 has explained that this was at a time of famine. The strong took away what little food the poor had, just in order to continue their own opulent living, as explained on Am. 5:11. The king was chief in this offence. The punishment was therefore that locusts would eat up the harvest of the wealthy. However "the shooting up" may refer to the temporary revival of prosperity under Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25) after it had as it were been mown down by the incursions of Hazael and Benhadad (2 Kings 13:3,22).

It could be argued that the timing of the judgment reflects God's grace- the first harvest had already happened, the King taking the best of the hay. Note how Uzziah, the King in Amos' time, Am. 1:1, "loved husbandry", 2 Chron. 26:10; like us, he was tested at his weakest point. The grasshoppers [Heb. locusts] were prepared to destroy the secondary harvest which was not so crucial to survival. It could be that the locusts ate the grass but hadn't moved on to the crops. God's grace is seen in the midst of His judgments; He could have judged Israel far more severely, by destroying the primary harvest. The creation of a locust plague by God naturally alludes to the plague of locusts upon *Egypt* - which was ended by Moses' mediation for Egypt just as Amos now interceded for Israel; see on :3. This is one of many examples of where God's apostate people are treated as and spoken of in the language of Egypt / the world; the ultimate punishment for the rejected will be to be sent back into the world, the Egypt which they had preferred in their day of opportunity, and share their destiny. Hence Paul writes of being "condemned with the world". See on :4.

Note that God consciously "forms" locusts… He sends His rain on the earth, there's a consciousness about every movement in the natural creation, a conscious expenditure of His energy and Spirit.

The LXX of Amos 7:1 is interesting: "Behold, a swarm of locusts coming from the east; and, behold, one caterpillar, king Gog". Yet Amos intercedes: "Repent, O Lord, for this. And this shall not be, says the Lord". This would suggest that the Gog invasion was conditional and was forestalled by the intercession of Amos; thus not only Ezekiel 40-48 would be conditional prophecy, but Ezekiel 38 and 39 also.

Amos 7:2 *It happened that when they made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, Lord Yahweh, forgive, I beseech You! How could Jacob stand? For he is so small*- The only other time we read of Jacob being "small" is when the same Hebrew word is used about Jacob being the "younger" son (Gen. 27:15,42). God delights to work through the weak, the younger sons, the spiritually weak, the sinners... and Amos appeals to God's grace, to continue working through the weak Israel. For how else shall Jacob "arise"- and the same Hebrew words are used of the historical Jacob 'arising' and being saved by God's grace from a just destruction for his sins (Gen. 31:17; 35:1). We can use these ideas to comfort those who feel they have fallen so far into sin that God has stopped working with them. His style is quite the opposite- to use such desperate situations to bring men and women to be His truest servants.

The historical fulfilment of this may be in that the incursions of Hazael and Benhadad into Israel could have destroyed them; but it was the prayer of Amos which saved those "locusts" from totally destroying the kingdom. There was still some space for repentance; hence the intensity of Amos' appeal. And in the time allotted, Jeroboam II did restore much land to Israel (see on :1), but still there was no repentance.

The idea of prophets was well known in the world around ancient Israel. The idea of a prophet was that a person was caught up in some kind of ecstasy, transported into some 'other' world, and leaving behind their humanity. The true prophets were different. Their inspiration was about being attuned to the mind of God, they remained very much in the flesh and in the world, and the subjects of their prophecy related to very real, human things- injustice, a guy building an extension on his house without paying the labourers. Not flashing lights and ethereal coasting through space. The pagan prophets (e.g. the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:26-29) worked themselves into a frenzy in order to reach a state of depersonalization and loss of consciousness, in the hope that then they would be filled with Divine consciousness. True prophets like Amos were absolutely different; the inspiration process required them to be fully in touch with their own consciousness and personality, and it was exactly through their humanity that the personality of God came through in the inspired words they spake and wrote. Amos perceived the Lord's word, and then 'butted in' as it were, in full consciousness: "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech Thee! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" (Am. 7:2). This is the very opposite of the pagan prophets losing touch with their human senses and reasoning.

The relatively small amount of human repentance needed to make the Angel repent is shown here in Amos 7. Amos sees visions of the impending judgements on Israel. After each he prays for Jacob to be forgiven; and the answer comes: Yahweh repented for this. It shall not be, says the Lord". He repented for the sake of one intense prayer! Notice too Amos asking "Who shall stand for Jacob?". Michael the Angel stands for Israel in the

court of Heaven (as the Angel 'God of Jacob'; Dan. 12:1), and thus it appears Amos is pointing out that if Israel is condemned and punished they will have no Angel with them- and so the Angel / God changes His mind.

Although the prophets were on God's side as it were, sharing His spirit, speaking His words, they were also men, and they were largely Jews, members of the nation upon whom He was announcing His wrath. At times, they reason with God. Amos delivered God's judgment against his people, and then pleaded with God about them, and He changed His mind. Other examples in Is. 6:11; Jer. 4:14; Ps. 74:10. This was how well the prophets knew God; and yet again, it shows that they weren't merely impersonally reproducing a message from God. They were involved in it and highly sensitive to it.

Amos 7:3 *Yahweh relented concerning this. It shall not be, says Yahweh*- There really were intended Divine judgments upon Israel at this time which didn't happen thanks to a subsistence farmer praying to God to change His mind... Note the huge implications of the two words "for this" [NEV "concerning this"]. For those few words of Amos, Almighty God changed His mind. What's amazing is that Amos had opened his prophecy by relaying the statement that God would *not* repent of His judgment of Israel. God is not the stone faced, unchanging Allah of Islam, nor the emotionless deity of the Greeks. He changes, just as He did over Nineveh. The only thing that is unchanging in Him is grace, whereby the sons of Jacob are not ultimately consumed when they ought to have been (Mal. 3:6 cp. Jer. 10:25).

Amos 7:4 *Thus the Lord Yahweh showed me and behold, the Lord Yahweh called for judgment by fire; and it dried up the great deep, and would have devoured the land*- "Called" raises the question 'to whom?'. Maybe to the Angels in the court of Heaven? "Contend by fire" (AV) suggests a reference to Elijah calling God to contend by fire against an apostate Israel.

Israel are likened to the sea, being burnt up by the heat of God's wrath. But the sea is usually a symbol of the Gentile world- as in the notes on 7:1, apostate Israel are being likened to the Gentiles. God at that time would've burnt up all Israel- had not Amos interceded. This is exactly what happened with Moses. The idea of "part" of God's land and people being burnt up by judgment is common in Revelation- the implication of the allusions back here to Amos could be that *all* God's land / people aren't destroyed in the last days because of intercession by third parties- ourselves?

Destruction by fire is more radical and total than a locust swarm. As explained on :2, the locust swarm was stopped from totally destroying the kingdom by Amos' intercession. But still Israel didn't repent, and so destruction by fire was promised. But Amos again interceded and even this was delayed- explaining how all the more desperately intense was Amos' appeal for repentance.

Amos 7:5 *Then I said, Lord Yahweh, cease, I beg You! How could Jacob stand? For he is small*- God is open to changing His stated plan due to the mediation of others. It would even appear that Amos believed God could forgive the sins of others because of *his* prayers rather than their repentance. For Amos doesn't merely ask God not to execute His judgments, but to actually forgive Israel. There's an obvious similarity with the intercession of Moses; the only other person to pray "Forgive, I beseech You" is Moses- the same Hebrew words are found on his lips twice (Ex. 34:9; Num. 14:19). Moses' amazing example had been meditated upon by Amos as he did his agricultural work- and he rose up to the same level. He prayed the same prayer. We too should be motivated in our prayer lives by Biblical examples, even using the same words. So many Biblical prayers use the words of previous Scripture. God leads us to see the similarities between our situations and those of Biblical figures- e.g. by giving Amos a vision of judgment upon Israel in terms of a locust plague, which was intended to lead Amos to see Israel as Egypt and himself as Moses in making intercession to end the plague. Amos gets into the spirit of Moses by asking God to "cease", using the same word used to describe how the plagues "ceased" as a result of Moses' intercession (Ex. 9:29,33,34). Amos the humble herdsman rose up to the spirit of Moses, the figure set within Judaism as it were in stained glass as unapproachable and beyond imitation, to be revered but not copied. And we can rise up in the same way.

Amos 7:6 *Yahweh relented concerning this. This also shall not be, says the Lord Yahweh*- Amos pronounced what the Lord had shown him: that the land would be destroyed by grasshoppers, and then by fire. But each time he begged Yahweh to relent. And “the Lord repented for this: It shall not be, saith the Lord” (AV). Israel’s salvation was to some degree dependent on the love and prayer of Amos. God may have prepared great things potentially, which are only ‘released’ by our prayer for them. James reasons that because we have seen “the end intended by the Lord” (James 5:11 NKJ) we ought therefore to do the maximum of *our* ability in prayer for others, and as Job praying for his friends, we can really influence the outcomes for third parties (see on Mk. 2:5).

Amos 7:7 *Thus he showed me: Behold, the Lord stood beside a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand*- Measuring was an idiom for preparation for judgment, and like all prophecy, this will have its ultimate application in the last days (see on Rev. 11:2). The idea may be that God had built the wall perpendicular, but Israel had built further upon it, and now He would assess precisely how far they had strayed. Every sin and failure led to others, just as building a wall with slight errors to begin with leads to the wall becoming more grossly out of shape as the building proceeds. This is the problem with considering that there are small sins, some 'out of line' stuff in our lives that we shall just let be.

Amos 7:8 *Yahweh said to me, Amos, what do you see? I said, A plumb line. Then the*

Lord said, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel. I will not again change My mind about punishing them- God is aware that He has changed His mind... elsewhere He warns that *this* time, His threatened punishment of Israel will not be as another echo in the mountains (Ez. 7:7). But... He *still* doesn't destroy them fully. Hos. 11:8 describes His unbearable tension: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together" (Hos. 11:8). This is the God whose word is ultimately firm still being open to changing it- such is the extent of His love for Israel; and us.

Amos 7:9 *The high places of Isaac will be desolate, the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword*- We never read of Isaac having any idolatrous "high places", but all the patriarchs were amazingly weak at times and so it doesn't surprise us. The point could be that the secret sins of God's people, e.g. those of Isaac which by grace aren't recorded in the Biblical record, will be revealed in the time of judgment. Hence the reference in 7:16 to "the house of Isaac". But Isaac had a vision from God at Beersheba and likely built an altar there (Gen. 26:23,24). The apostacy of God's people was in continually seeking to justify their idolatry by daubing it with references to true Yahweh worship; and Beersheba was one of the idol shrines (Am. 5:5).

Amos 7:10 *Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words*- This was his commentary upon Amos preaching the word of :9, that the house of Jeroboam was to be destroyed. It would seem that Amos announced this word at Bethel, not Samaria. Perhaps he stationed himself there at the idol shrine and warned the people daily. As always happens, the words of the faithful are twisted; Amaziah implied that Amos was taking into his own hands to fulfil the prophecy against Jeroboam, and was plotting to murder him. "Conspired" is literally "banded", as if Amos had built up a group of followers; perhaps indeed a minority did repent. And indeed the word of God could not be abided by Israel when it finally came to fulfilment; the same words are used in Joel 2:11.

Amos 7:11 *For Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land'*- The implication is that Amos kept on saying this; and that although he was appealing for repentance, he recognized that the captivity was going to happen. To keep on giving an unpopular message is difficult; it's one thing to whisper something once, but to keep warning is bound to make us unpopular. Amos is really an example to us.

Amos 7:12 *Amaziah also said to Amos, You prophet, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there*- "Eat bread" may be an idiom to imply that he would be sponsored there, implying that Amos was just saying what his financial supporters wanted him to say. This would explain why his response is that he is not a professional prophet as they understood a prophet, i.e. a man just saying things for the sake of those who employed him (as in Ez. 13:19); but rather was he just a humble herdsman and fig gatherer (:14).

Amos 7:13 *But don't prophesy again any more at Bethel; for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house!*- This is typical of how money controls spirituality in apostate religion. Jeroboam had funded the sanctuary, it was his [and not Yahweh's]; therefore Amos shouldn't be condemning the king in the king's sanctuary. The record is making the point that Bethel, the house of God, was no longer the house of God but the king's house. Israel had hijacked God's house, just as the Lord's table has so often been hijacked by those who act as if it is their table, and decide who may or may not enter the Lord's house / family. Telling the prophets not to prophesy was the sin of God's people in Am. 2:12. Reading or hearing God's word but not letting it bite us is just the same.

Amos 7:14 *Then Amos answered Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore figs*- This was Amos' answer to the implication he was a career prophet just saying what those who paid him wanted to hear (:12). He was not even the son of a prophet, probably referring to the "sons of the prophets" who had attended the schools of the prophets (2 Kings 4:1,2). Amos was for whatever reason not within the mainstream and not apparently associated with the schools of the prophets. He was as he says, just a humble labourer. This is evidence enough that one can teach God's word without any pedigree or theological education. Indeed it seems God prefers to work through outsiders such as Amos. He was poor- a herdsman who also gathered sycamore fruit, which was plentiful in Israel but inferior to figs.

When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice". Amos, in the same way, was told not to keep on prophesying; but he replies: "I am no prophet...the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy" (Am. 1:14,15 RV). It's almost contradictory: 'I'm not a prophet... I am a prophet'. He was truly selfless, like, John, just a voice for God. Samuel also spoke of himself at a distance from himself when he told Israel: "The Lord sent Jerubbaal... and Samuel... and delivered you" (1 Sam. 12:11).

Amos stresses that speaking forth God's word wasn't at all what he wished to do or was cut out for. Likewise Paul says that because preaching God's word was against his natural inclination, therefore a calling to preach the Gospel had indeed been given to

him (1 Cor. 9:17). Paul was sent to the Gentiles and not the Jews as he might naturally have preferred; the disciples were unlearned and ignorant men called to preach to the Jewish intelligentsia; women weren't accepted as legal witnesses and yet the Lord asks women to be the first witnesses of His resurrection; always in the preaching of His word does God use those who humanly aren't qualified to do so. He doesn't use slick presentation, but rather human weakness in order to convert others. Amos doubtless alludes to himself in Am. 3:8 where he says that a prophet cannot but speak out God's word- and this is alluded to by the apostles when they say they cannot but speak out what they have seen and heard of Christ.

Amos doesn't actually answer the serious false allegation against him personally, but gets on with speaking forth God's word. This is rather like Peter, who when forbidden to preach just continues to do so. Paul also was forbidden by the Jews to teach the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2:16). Both Paul and Peter must have recalled Amos going through the same. Situations repeat within the lives of God's children who are contemporary with each other, and also between our situations and those of Bible characters. This is the basis in practice for the unity of the Spirit. We are given real life examples of others who have walked this path before.

Amos 7:15 *And Yahweh took me from following the flock, and Yahweh said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel'*- The context is responding to the idea that he was only saying what men had paid him to say (see on :12). Amos seems to purposefully use the language used about David who was likewise taken from the flock to do God's work (2 Sam. 7:8; Ps. 78:70,71). David and Moses were seen as untouchable founding fathers of the Israelite culture and religion; for a humble labourer to act like Moses in mediating for Israel (as in :1-5), and now to see himself as David, was significant spiritual ambition. We too can rise up to these patterns rather than just admire them. The low status of Amos is therefore emphasized; he was a "herdman" (Am. 1:1), a *noqeed* because he shepherded *naaqaad*, a stunted and ugly breed, leading to the proverb "viler than a *naaqaad*". Likewise he gathered not figs, but sycamore fruit, the cheapest, commonest and least tasty fruit (:14).

Amos 7:16 *Now therefore listen to the word of Yahweh: 'You say, Don't prophesy against Israel, and don't preach against the house of Isaac'*- To forbid the teaching of God's word led to the serious condemnation of :17. And church politics today often lead to a similar forbidding of preachers, especially those considered to be outsiders like Amos. The same situation is criticized in Mic. 2:6, where the command to stop others preaching was because those who forbad it didn't want to "take shame". We can claim belief in an inspired Bible and yet refuse to be shamed by what we read, and effectively we are thereby shutting down God's word. This shows that 'belief in an inspired Bible' can never

remain a mere theological tenet; it demands so much of us, and one can so easily deny it in practice despite giving lipservice to the theory.

The Israelites considered themselves the house / family of Isaac because they had transformed his shrine to Yahweh at Beersheba into an idol shrine, through which they claimed to worship Yahweh; see on :9. They thought their much proclaimed connection with Isaac somehow justified their sin, just as multi generational Christian believers can assume that their pedigree justifies their apostacy.

Amos 7:17 *Therefore thus says Yahweh: 'Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword*- Imagine the nervous tone of voice in which Amos likely said those words, just as we imagine Joseph and Daniel summoning the courage to speak forth God's word. We likely know that feeling. To call a man's wife a prostitute was serious indeed. Presumably she would become such in order to placate the invaders, or because she simply needed to somehow get food in the desperate situation which was to come.

And your land shall be divided by line- Such division is characteristic of how God judges people (Lam. 4:16; Ez. 5:1 s.w.). Those who divide themselves within God's kingdom or people are thereby living out their own condemnation.

And you yourself shall die in a land that is unclean, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land'- The Israelites considered Gentile lands "unclean", and yet they had made their own land unclean by their sins (Is. 24:5; Jer. 2:7). It was therefore appropriate that they be taken away to die in an unclean Gentile land. Clearly it was the hypocrisy of Israel in considering other lands "unclean" which was so obnoxious to God. And the people of God must ever struggle with the temptation to be no better in essence than those they claim to be separate from.

AMOS CHAPTER 8

Amos 8:1 *Thus the Lord Yahweh showed me: Behold, a basket of summer fruit*- "Summer" translates a Hebrew word very similar to that used for "end" in :2. These final visions in Amos may be in response to him being exiled from Israel as recorded in Am. 7. Israel had stated finally that they didn't want God's word, and so Amos now gives visions of the end, and yet concludes with the gracious hope of restoration.

Amos 8:2 *He said, Amos, what do you see? I said, A basket of summer fruit*- The

apparently obvious question was to help Amos be clear in his own mind. We too at times have to be asked 'What is this?', because verbalizing the reply is helpful for our own understanding. The 'end fruit' (see on :1) was the fruit of Israel's behaviour. All our days and years are spent cultivating, and the fruit shall surely come. For Israel, the fruit they bore meant "the end" for them.

Then Yahweh said to me, The end has come on My people Israel. I will not again change My mind about them any more- Amos had successfully persuaded God to change His mind, but God says He will do so no more. And yet even then, there were changes in His plans, influenced always by His passionate desire to save at least some. The Divine statement here is proof enough that God *does* change His mind, as we see clearly in His altering of purpose regarding Israel's destruction (Num. 14:34) and that of Nineveh. He is only unchanging in His essential grace, in that the sons of Jacob are not consumed when they ought to be (Mal. 3:6).

Amos 8:3 *The songs of the temple will be wailings in that day, says the Lord Yahweh*- These visions seem particularly addressed to the ten tribes (:14), but most of Amos' words also have relevance to Judah; for he prophesied to both kingdoms (Am. 1:1). I have noted earlier that the idol shrines of the ten tribe kingdom were conscious imitations of the worship at the Jerusalem temple; so "the songs of the temple" could refer to the musical worship at the shrine in Samaria. A historical fulfilment would have been in how the songs of Zion, the temple mount, became laments in Judah's captivity (Ps. 137:3,4 s.w.). But the immediate context seems to concern wailing for the dead bodies in the temple / sanctuary.

The dead bodies will be many. In every place they will throw them out in silence- This "silence" is that spoken of in Am. 6:10 (see note there). The bodies would be thrown out and not buried. Perhaps the reference is to what happened when the literal sanctuary at Bethel collapsed during the Assyrian invasion and destroyed those who had taken refuge there; see on Am. 9:2.

Amos 8:4 *Hear this, you who desire to swallow up the needy*- The awful judgments of :3 were due to the abuse of the poor. We might have thought that the idolatry was the main reason, yet the sin which apparently angered God even more than that was the abuse of poor brethren. As they had swallowed up or devoured the needy (s.w. Am. 2:7), so they would be swallowed up by the invaders (s.w. Is. 42:14; Ez. 36:3). To care for "the needy" was a major theme of the Mosaic law (s.w. Ex. 23:6; Dt. 15:4,7,9,11 etc.). We have noted earlier in Amos that the poor were swallowed up for tiny amounts, such was the avarice of the wealthy.

And cause the poor of the land to fail- "Fail" is the same word as "sabbath" in the next verse. These "poor" were the ones left in the land by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:12; Jer. 39:10; 40:7) and it seems the Assyrians did likewise. There was no economic advantage in taking the dirt poor away into captivity. It was they who therefore remained in the land whilst she 'kept her sabbaths' (2 Chron. 36:21). The word play is making the point that it was the abused who were the ones who would also 'sabbath' in the land. It was this abused minority with whom God hoped to work and bring about a restored Kingdom.

Amos 8:5 *Saying, 'Oh when will the new moon be gone, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath end, that we may market wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel large, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit*- We marvel that whilst God's people were involved in such major idolatry and abuse, they would bother to religiously keep the sabbath. But they did, and this is exactly the warning to the religious man and woman- that external observance of spiritual rites and even obedience to Divine commandments is no reflection of spirituality. It was the kind of apparently petty, hidden sin which clearly weighed heavier with God than the more evident sin of idolatry. For tweaking balances would have resulted in only relatively petty gain for the trader, otherwise it would have been noticeable and lacking in credibility. Likewise Paul begins his critique of the Corinthians by speaking of their divisiveness, and only later addresses their drunkenness at the breaking of bread, use of prostitutes, denial of the resurrection etc. Hosea lamented the use of the same "balances of deceit", and saw how this was all part of an attempt to even deceive God (Hos. 11:12; 12:7 s.w.). Micah likewise (Mic. 6:11). This secret tweaking of balances was noticed by God and it was a consistent issue He had with Israel; it was "an abomination unto Yahweh" (Prov. 20:23), using the very word typically used for idol worship.

Amos 8:6 *That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the sweepings along with the wheat?'*- As noted on :5, the deceit and abuse practiced was for very petty gain on each transaction. This is where greed leads. The poor were sold into slavery for "a pair of shoes", or sandals. "Pay me what you owe me" was the attitude (Mt. 18:28), and for petty amounts, the debtor was forced into slavery. And the Lord quotes this attitude as pertinent to us today if we do not forgive our brother from the heart. The chaff or left over grain of the wheat should have been left for the poor of the land; we recall Ruth gleaning such corn. But Israel swept it up and sold it to the poor. And remember that such attitudes are being cited as reason for "the end" finally coming upon Israel (:1,2).

Amos 8:7 *Yahweh has sworn by the pride of Jacob*- This could mean that the judgment was coming because of Jacob / Israel's pride; or that He swore as the One whom Jacob /

Israel were proud of. I have noted throughout Amos that the people were kidding themselves that they were Yahweh's people and He would preserve them in the coming day of Yahweh; perhaps it was exactly because of this that He was so insistent that He would never forget or pass by judgment of their sins.

Surely I will never forget any of their works- There is within us all the tendency to assume that the passage of time works a kind of atonement for our sins; we forget them, or the reality of them fades, and we can assume that this is so likewise with God. But He doesn't deal with sin like that. He doesn't suffer from memory loss or the diminishing of felt reality simply due to the passage of time. Israel forgot God's works, as the Psalmist laments, but God didn't forget theirs. This is why it's so critical to repent of our sins immediately, before the passing of time leaves us feeling that elapsed time has dealt with them, as if God operates some kind of statute of limitations. But He doesn't. We need to throw ourselves upon God's grace for past sins, and repent immediately when we sin. It is likewise important to realize that because God doesn't forget sin, in terms of memory, then we must the more urgently throw ourselves upon His grace and believe we are saved due to our status in Christ.

Amos 8:8 *Won't the land tremble for this, and everyone mourn who dwells in it?*- This is the earthquake mentioned in Am. 1:1 and Am. 9:5 (see notes there). The things in view are the apparently lesser, secret sins of the previous verses. We would expect an earthquake in response to idolatry, but an earthquake for tweaking balances and demanding what is legitimately owed to us (:6)... ? In secular terms, it seems a disproportionate response. But this is the major message in the minor prophets; that it is exactly those sins which are so major to God. And they are the very sins we are likely to commit.

Yes, it will rise up wholly like the River; and it will be stirred up and sink again, like the River of Egypt- The allusion is to how the Nile rises and falls, spreading debris on its flood plain. Because they had trusted in Egypt, they would rise and fall like Egypt. And in physical terms this would refer to the literal rising and falling of the land as a result of the prophesied earthquake.

Amos 8:9 *It will happen in that day, says the Lord Yahweh, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the day time*- Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because "I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day", i.e. a funeral. The darkness at the cross was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son*. The cross was the judgment of the Jewish world.

But the extinguishing of the noon day sun speaks of individuals and a society being cut off at the apparent zenith of their glory. The destruction of Israel was to be relatively sudden; they were to be cut down in the midst of the revived prosperity which had been brought about by Jeroboam II. There is every indication in Amos that their judgment would be unexpected by them. And so shall it be in the last day.

Amos 8:10 *I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will make you wear sackcloth on all your bodies, and baldness on every head. I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day*- The way Israel kept the Mosaic feasts and sung David's temple songs in their idol shrines, mixing idolatry with the trappings of Yahweh worship, was so upsetting to God. The mourning in view is very bitter and intense, and looks forward to the mourning of the rejected in the last day. Then, too late, the rejected Jews will mourn for the crucified, only Son of God. They will then mourn for Him in repentance (Mt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7), but too late. They will see Him when resurrected to judgment and hail Him (Mt. 23:39; 26:64) but not be accepted by Him. See on Mt. 16:28.

Amos 8:11 *Behold, the days come, says the Lord Yahweh, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Yahweh*- Amos had been exiled from Israel because they didn't want to hear Yahweh's word from him (Am. 7:12). But they would desperately want to hear it later, just as Zedekiah earnestly sought to hear the word from Yahweh but too late. A literal famine had already been sent in the land, and this was to provide Israel with warning that just as they had gone around the land seeking for food and water in the time of Ahab's famine, so they would spiritually. If we don't accept God's word now, and love it, then we shall desire to do so in the time of condemnation, but all too late. Now is the time to hear and apply ourselves to His word.

Amos 8:12 *They will wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they will run back and forth to seek the word of Yahweh, and will not find it*- This desperate seeking of God's word is commentary upon the way that Amos had been forbidden to speak God's word in the ten tribe kingdom (Am. 7:12). The day would come, as for all who reject God's word, when they would desperately seek that which they had no time for or rejected. "Sea to sea" may refer to the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean, for the reference here is specifically to the ten tribe kingdom. North to east may refer to the location of their shrines. To seek and not find spirituality and salvation is going to be why the rejected bang their teeth as a result of their condemnation. It's the foolish girls earnestly seeking to fill their lamps with oil, but all too late.

Amos 8:13 *In that day the beautiful virgins and the young men will faint for thirst*- The thirst is defined in :11 as a thirst for God's word. Now, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled (Mt. 5:6). The process of condemnation will not be met with indifference by those condemned; they will seek desperately to be righteous and to be accepted, but it will be too late. Life is the time to seek and serve the Lord. This is particularly directed by Amos at young men and women; the intellectual and physical energy of youth is intended to be directed to God's word. And if it is not, then it may be too late at the last day.

Amos 8:14 *Those who swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, 'As your god, Dan, lives'*- The golden calf is described as Israel's sin (Dt. 9:21). "The sin of Samaria" / the ten tribe kingdom therefore refers to the golden calf at Bethel, rather than to the sin *in* Samaria. Yahweh is the only living God; that truth is repeated so often in Scripture. To claim that any idol is alive is to reject the one and only living God.

And, 'As the way of Beersheba lives;' they will fall, and never rise up again- "The way" can be an idiom to mean a system of worship, just as Christianity was at times called "the way", i.e. the only, one and true way. Beersheba was in Judah, but it is repeatedly mentioned as being the place of sin for the ten tribes; and the references to Isaac in Amos (see on Am. 7:9,16) are because he had built an altar there, which had been taken over as an idol shrine. The particular sin at Beersheba for the ten tribes was perhaps in that they considered they could just hop over the border and sin secretly. The whole mentality of hopping off for secret sin was and is so abhorrent to God. I noted on Hos. 4:15 that Judah were condemned for having this same mentality.

AMOS CHAPTER 9

Amos 9:1 *I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and He said, Strike the tops of the pillars, that the thresholds may shake; and break them in pieces on the head of all of them; and I will kill the last of them with the sword*- The altar at Bethel had been the subject of other prophecies of destruction (1 Kings 13:2-4). I have suggested on Am. 7:12 that Amos may have stood near the altar, or the entrance to it in Bethel, and condemned it and its worshippers. It could be that now Amos is literally commanded to smash it. But the command seems to be associated with the total destruction unto death of the people who worshipped there, and may therefore be the Divine command to the Assyrian invaders, presided over by the Lord standing beside the altar. "The altar"

is put for the sanctuary around it, which would collapse upon the heads of the worshippers. It recalls the destruction of the pagan Philistine temple by Samson in his death. Perhaps the Assyrian soldiers literally fulfilled this; the Israelites believed that the horns of that altar would provide salvation for them (see on Am. 3:14; 6:13). They would have fled for refuge there in the final Assyrian onslaught; only to be crushed beneath the falling masonry as the sanctuary was brought down upon them. Their wrong beliefs therefore led them to literal destruction.

There shall not one of them flee away, and there shall not one of them escape- But even here, God did remember mercy. A remnant did escape. As noted often on Hosea, God speaks in anger, quite legitimately, but His saving grace comes to dominate still. However, the reference may specifically be to the sanctuary built around the altar, which was to collapse upon the worshippers beneath it and kill them all.

Amos 9:2 *Though they dig into Sheol, there My hand will take them; and though they climb up to the sky, I will bring them down from there*- This alludes to Ps. 139 which has already stated this and was likely one of the temple songs they sung. They knew the words and perhaps sung them, but overlooked their personal relevance. I suggested on :1 that the Israelites fled into the Bethel sanctuary for safety and deliverance from the final Assyrian onslaught, and those who did perished there beneath the falling masonry, perhaps triggered by the earthquake of :5 and Am. 8:8. It would seem that they dug bunkers there for safety; but it was but digging their own graves, digging into *sheol*. Perhaps they literally sung the temple songs as they cowered there; but their bodies were extricated and thrown out of the collapsed masonry in silence (Am. 8:3).

Amos 9:3 *Though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out from there*- As some would seek to hide in the sanctuary at Bethel, others in the northern Kingdom would flee to the top of Carmel. This was a known Baal shrine (1 Kings 18:19,20). God searched and found them there at the hands of the Assyrian soldiers, and as explained on :5, through the earthquake that shook the land at the time of the final Assyrian invasion.

And though they be hidden from My sight in the bottom of the sea- The allusions to Ps. 139 make it clear that we can never be hidden from God's sight. But here we have an example of the Bible speaking from the perspective of men. This was how Israel would feel; that like Jonah, they could somehow flee from Yahweh's presence and be outside responsibility to Him. But it is impossible to flee His presence.

There I will command the serpent, and it will bite them- The idea is similar to that of Am. 5:19 (see note there). Whatever their place of escape and human strength, God saw it and controlled small animals which could destroy them. "The serpent" could refer to some aspect of the Assyrian or Babylonian invaders (s.w. Is. 14:29; Jer. 8:17; 46:22).

Amos 9:4 *Though they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it will kill them*- It's unclear the extent to which this happened. Large numbers of the ten tribe kingdom and of Judah were not killed in captivity, but instead prospered. As often noted in Hosea, God speaks at times in great and legitimate anger, as He did to Moses regarding His intended total destruction of Israel; and yet He relents and does not do according to the fierceness of His anger. This is all of His grace.

The parallel is with hiding on Carmel in the caves on the west side of the mountain (:3)- but still being discovered and judged. The idea may be that even going into Gentile lands didn't mean that they were outside of God's presence- a lesson Jonah had to learn. But again, in this judgment there is hope; for the comfort was that even in captivity, the presence of God could be with them, despite their lack of any temple and the opportunity to keep much of the old covenant. The cherubim moved from the Jerusalem temple to Babylon in Ezekiel's visions, in visual representation of this truth.

I will set My eyes on them for evil, and not for good- This could imply that right up until the captivity, all through the idolatry and wickedness of the generations before it, God as it were focused His eyes upon doing them good. He really wanted to save them and to give them good in every way; this is the great blessing of being in covenant relationship with Him. He really wishes us good and is determined to achieve this; but He will not force us to accept it. His eyes may refer to the activity of the Angels.

Amos 9:5 *For the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, is He who touches the land and it melts, and all who dwell in it will mourn*- This earthquake is alluded to in Am. 8:8 and is stated as being two years in the future in Am. 1:1. Here it is spoken of as actually happening. The prophetic word is so certain of fulfilment that it can be spoken of in the present or even past tenses, even though the fulfilment is yet future. And yet as happened with Nineveh, in the gap between pronouncement and fulfilment, there is the possibility of repentance and a change to God's stated purpose (Jer. 18:7-9, and the example of Nineveh and Moses changing God's purpose of judgment about Israel). However it could be that the earthquake mentioned in Am. 1:1 was but a premonition of the final earthquake which would happen at the time of the Assyrian invasion; they were being given thereby a foretaste of judgment to come, in the hope they repented. I suggested on :2 that the idolaters ran into the Bethel sanctuary for refuge, and it was destroyed by an earthquake

as the Assyrians approached, killing the worshippers beneath the falling masonry. But that same earthquake affected the entire country; those who tried to hide in bunkers or mountains like Carmel (:3) were also destroyed or revealed by the same earthquake.

And it will rise up wholly like the River, and will sink again, like the River of Egypt- The allusion is to how the Nile rises and falls, spreading debris on its flood plain. Because they had trusted in Egypt, they would rise and fall like Egypt. And in physical terms this would refer to the literal rising and falling of the land as a result of the prophesied earthquake.

Amos 9:6 *It is He who builds His chambers in the heavens, and has founded His vault on the earth; He who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth; Yahweh is His name*- God is in total, active control of nature. He hasn't wound it up on clockwork and left it ticking. He is involved intensely and consciously; see on Mt. 6:26. He can equally therefore bring about cataclysm. The literal earthquake described in :2 and :5 would involve flooding, and the flooding of the earth / land */ eretz* of Israel also spoke of how the invading armies are likened to rivers and gushing waters, called for by God and therefore irresistible. We have just noted how the Israelites thought they could hide in caves and bunkers on and beneath mount Carmel (:3); God's vaults and chambers are infinitely larger than any human defence. The man who thinks his cattle or cash will be his defence is made to learn that the cattle on a thousand hills are His. All though these verses we see that all human defence against God's judgment will be declared pathetically irrelevant. And we are to learn that now, and submit to His judgments, and be on His side wholeheartedly.

Amos 9:7 *Are you not like the children of the Ethiopians to Me, you children of Israel?, says Yahweh. Haven't I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?*- Other nations had been brought by God from one country to another. The reference to the Ethiopians would be in allusion to the idea that the Assyrian ruling dynasty came from Ethiopia. The idea was that the Israelites should not assume that because they had historically been brought from Egypt to Israel through the Red Sea [cp. baptism, 1 Cor. 10:1], therefore they were definitely of God and He was always on their side. He has moved pagan nations around His chessboard as well. The fact God has moved mightily with us in the past, not least through the waters of baptism / the Red Sea, is no guarantee that where we stand now is therefore spiritually pleasing to Him.

Amos 9:8 *See, the eyes of the Lord Yahweh are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the surface of the earth; except that I will not utterly destroy the house of*

Jacob, says Yahweh- God's eyes / Angels were now focused for evil upon them, see on :4. They would be destroyed from the *eretz* or land of Israel, but not utterly destroyed; in that a remnant were intended to repent and be restored. This was God's intention for the ten tribe kingdom as much as for Judah; for the context here largely refers to the ten tribes. But they never returned, nor was there any recorded stirring of repentance amongst them. So much potential was wasted.

Amos 9:9 *For, see, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all the nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet not the least kernel will fall to the earth*- Israel's moving to and from amongst the nations is to be likened to corn being "sifted in a sieve", and the context is in explaining how the repentance and restoration of a remnant was to be brought about; see on :8. The potential plan was that they would be moved around amongst the nations of the Assyrian empire in line with Assyrian policy for captives; they would be preserved and thereby brought to repentance. But this didn't happen, at least not on any notable scale. The prophecy may have been rescheduled for fulfilment in the last days and over a far longer period. For Israelites have indeed been sifted amongst the nations for centuries now. It follows that the longer they move amongst the nations, the more the corn will be prepared for final ingathering. The longer they suffer, the nearer they are to repentance. Reflect too that "yet shall not the least grain fall to the earth". The least kernel that will not fall to the earth would mean that this remnant would be preserved. Does this imply that there has always been a faithful remnant amongst Israel, throughout all their wanderings amongst the nations? Remember that the context here is largely concerning the ten tribes.

Amos 9:10 *All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, those who say, 'Evil won't overtake us nor meet us'*- They had been warned to prepare for this meeting with God in judgment, i.e. to repent (Am. 4:12). And as explained on Am. 3:3, the idea of meeting with God implied the entry of a new covenant with Him. But they were assured that in no way would they have any meeting with God in judgment; their self assurance and self righteousness led them to preclude any real possibility of condemnation by God. We need to be careful here. For we too can assume that the regular rhythm of our religion will somehow tide us through into eternity. But condemnation at the last day is a real possibility. We should be confident that by grace, if the Lord returns right now, I shall be saved and not condemned. That is the good news of the Gospel, and anything less than such confidence robs the 'gospel' of its good news. But we may throw it all away tomorrow or later in our lives, as so many have done. There is therefore always the longer term possibility of condemnation; that sense of the future we might miss, the weight of our own weakness and how it could indeed lead us to miss the path in future... must ever remain with us, and result in an appropriate humility and casting of ourselves upon God's grace and spiritual preservation.

Amos 9:11 *After this*- After the repentance of the remnant spoken of in :8-10. Israel didn't repent in Assyria. And so the planned restoration didn't happen. But God's prophetic word will still come true; the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied. One of those reapplications was in the repentance of a remnant of Israelites after the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection in the first century AD, and in Acts 15 James quotes the LXX version of :11,12 in this regard. But he does so within a practical context- of arguing that Gentiles too should be baptized into Jesus and allowed full part in the church and people of God.

I will return- It was exiled Israel who were to return to the land. But God so identifies Himself with the downtrodden remnant that He speaks of Himself returning. The cherubim of glory had departed from Jerusalem and reappeared in Babylon, according to Ezekiel's visions; and Ez. 48 concludes with the comment that if the temple were rebuilt as commanded in Ez. 40-48, then again "Yahweh will be there" in Zion. But most of the exiles, especially from the ten tribes, didn't want to return; and so God's desire to live with people was to be reapplied to the Gentiles, as James makes clear by his quotation of this passage.

And I will rebuild- The word can mean to resurrect; the reapplication of this prophecy to the formation of a new house or family of God was to be through the resurrection of David's great descendant, Messiah Jesus.

The tent of David- Not the "house" of David. The allusion is to how David kept the ark of God in a tent and not in a house.

That has fallen down- This chapter began with a prophecy of the destruction of the sanctuary at Bethel built over the altar and golden calf, which would collapse and crush the apostate Israelite worshippers beneath it. This collapse and falling down was typical of what had happened to God's presence amongst His people.

I will rebuild- The same word used of establishing a covenant (Gen. 6:18; 9:9,11). There is hint here of a new, restored covenant between God and His people. This "new covenant" for the returned exiles spoken of in Jeremiah and Ezekiel is the same new covenant which we enter today through baptism into Jesus. This rebuilding was all of grace, for God in His wrath had just sworn that they would never again "arise" or 'rebuild' (Am. 8:14 s.w.). But here in Am. 9:11 the word is twice used of how God would resurrect / rebuild / make arise His people.

Its ruins- This is the word used of how Israel had "forsaken Your covenant, thrown down your altars" (1 Kings 19:10,14). What was in ruins was God's covenant relationship with Israel, epitomized by the Jerusalem temple and the sanctuary at Bethel, the house of

God (see on :1) being physically ruined (Lam. 2:2,17; Ez. 16:39; 36:36 s.w.). Under the new covenant, the God who had once ruined / overthrown them would build them again in a new covenant relationship (Jer. 31:28,40; Ez. 36:36 s.w.).

And I will restore it as in the days of old- The covenant relationship could be rebuilt, and could have happened at Israel's return from exile, had they rebuilt the temple according to the laws in Ez. 40-48. But they didn't, and so James explains that this prophecy has been reapplied to the building of a new house of God's people, which includes Gentiles, in line with the prophetic hope that the restoration from exile would also bring blessing upon the Gentiles, who would identify themselves with the returning exiles and become God's people. That didn't happen at the time, and as Ezra and Nehemiah record, the returned exiles intermarried with Gentiles rather than being the light of the Gentile world. And so in Acts 15:15-17 James quotes this as meaning that because the house / people of David have been rebuilt, therefore it is now acceptable to help the Gentiles "seek after the Lord" Jesus. James perceived that firstly the Gospel must go to the house of David, the Jews, and once they had responded, then it would go to the Gentiles. Perhaps the Lord had the same principle in mind when He bad His preachers to not [then] preach to Gentiles but instead [at that stage] concentrate on preaching to the house of Israel (Mt. 10:5). Yet the primary fulfillment of Amos 9 is clearly in the last days- then, after Israel have been sifted in the sieve of persecution amongst the Gentiles in the latter day holocaust, the tabernacle of David will again be 'rebuilt', the Gentiles will turn to the Lord, and then the Kingdom situation of :13-15 will come about. Surely what we are being told is that there must be a repeat of what happened in the first century. What happened then, in the repentance of a minority in Israel, the spread of the Gospel to the world and then the Lord's 'coming' in AD70... this must all be repeated on a far greater scale. Thus some in Israel must repent in the last days, after the pattern of the 1st century. This will bring about the great latter day gathering in of the Gentiles at the establishment of the Kingdom, when the whole Gentile world will seek to come up to Zion (Is. 2:3; 19:23; 11:10; 51:4,5; 60:3,11; 66:20; Zech. 8:21).

Amos 9:12 *That the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord*- As explained on :11, the initial possibility was that the returned exiles would have brought with them the Gentiles, who would come with them to "seek the Lord". But they didn't return, for the most part; and mixed with the Gentiles rather than encouraging them to "seek the Lord", as Ezra and Nehemiah describe. And so the prophecy was reapplied, and partially fulfilled in Gentiles seeking the Lord Jesus and being baptized into the new covenant. "The remnant" of natural Israel was to mix with all the Gentiles who called the Name on themselves by baptism into it. And so from this, James concludes that Gentiles should be baptized and accepted on an equal footing with ethnic Jews in the newly rebuilt house of David / kingdom of God, under the new covenant.

And all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who makes these things known from of old- Acts 15:17 uses these words to encourage us to preach to the Gentiles "upon whom my name is [Amos says 'has already been'] called". The Name is called upon us by baptism; yet in prospect, in potential, the Name has already been called upon the whole world. But it is for us to go and convert them. This explains why Paul is spoken of as having been a convert before he actually was. James' usage of this passage is an example of how the New Testament quotes several passages evidently prophetic of the future Kingdom as having their fulfillment in the preaching of the Gospel today. Am. 9:11,12 had its fulfillment in the work of preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-18; 26:16-18).

Amos 9:13 *See, the days come, says Yahweh, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the one treading grapes him who sows seed*- The idea is that the harvests would take so long to reap, that it would already be sowing time whilst the harvest was still ongoing. This idea is alluded to in Jn. 4. The experience of preaching is in itself a foretaste of the future world-wide Kingdom. The harvest is both at the end of the age, according to the parables of Mt. 13, but also is ongoing right now (Jn. 4:36) as we gather in the harvest of converts. The Lord in Jn. 4:35,36 took this figure far further, by saying that the harvest is such that the interval between sowing and harvesting is in some sense collapsed for those who engage in preaching. The reaper was already collecting his wages; the harvest was already there, even though it was four months away (Jn. 4:35). This clearly alludes to the promises that in the Messianic Kingdom there would also be no interval between sowing and harvest, so abundant would be the harvest (Lev. 26:5; Am. 9:13). And hence, we are impelled to spread the foretaste of the Kingdom world-wide by our witness right now.

And sweet wine will drip from the mountains, and flow from the hills- Vines were grown on terraces, and the grapes were seen as dripping wine directly from themselves.

Amos 9:14 *I will bring My people Israel back from captivity, and they will rebuild the ruined cities, and inhabit them; and they will plant vineyards, and drink wine from them. They shall also make gardens, and eat their fruit*- Tragically, Israel and Judah didn't want to return from the lands of their captivity; many remained there, and those of Judah who did return were motivated by the hope of personal benefit, as Haggai and Malachi make clear, and soon descended into self-righteousness. So much Divine potential was wasted; the temple complex of Ez. 40-48 was a commandment to be obeyed, but the returned exiles didn't obey it. As Haggai and Malachi record, they were smitten with drought and famine, rather than eating the fruit of their gardens. The Divine plan was therefore rescheduled and reapplied, as explained on :11. Our lives too waste so much potential; it must be so tragic for God, although He must therefore be the more pleased with we weak ones who at least say "Yes" to His plans rather than ignore them.

Amos 9:15 *I will plant them in their land, and they will no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them*- As explained on :11,12, this entire prophecy could have come true at the restoration; but it didn't, and so was reapplied to the coming of the Gentiles to believe in the Lord Jesus under the new covenant. It is questionable therefore whether these verses are to be read as requiring a literal returning of Jews to "their land". It certainly can't apply to the return of Jewish people to Israel in the 20th century, because the descriptions of the latter day tribulation require Israel's plucking up and brief latter day exile, when passages like Dt. 28:68 shall have to be fulfilled.

Says Yahweh your God- It is grace itself for Yahweh to still call Himself their God, when the context is of an Israel who had refused His word and multiple opportunities to repent. Always God remembers His longer term plan, which is of salvation.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: OBADIAH

OBADIAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don’t fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending

forth of God’s word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

OBADIAH CHAPTER 1

Obadiah:1 *The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Lord Yahweh says about Edom*- Edom, which is Esau Jacob's brother (Gen. 36:8), often joined in the attacks of others upon Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah's prophecy against Edom seems to quote Obadiah's (Jer. 47:9-22). I say Jeremiah quotes Obadiah because Jeremiah is full of quotations of earlier prophecies against nations: against the Philistines (Jer. 47:1-7 = Is. 14:28-32), the Moabites (Jer. 48 = Is. 15:1-9; 16:1-14), the Ammonites (Jer. 49:1-6 = Am. 1:13-15), Babylon (Jer. 50,51 = Is. 13:1-14:23) and against Damascus (Jer. 49:23-27 = Am. 1:13-15). The style of Jeremiah's prophecy against Edom is different to those passages where Jeremiah is giving his unique material. Israel and Judah are both in view in :10. The references to Jerusalem being taken do not have to refer to the Babylonian invasion, as Jerusalem was plundered several times before that; by the Egyptians (1 Kings 14:25,26; 2 Chron. 12:2), by the Arabians and Philistines in the time of Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:16,17); by Joash of Israel (2 Kings 14:13,14; 2 Chron. 25:23,24); by the Babylonians at the time of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chron. 36:6,7). Joel 2:32 quotes Obad. 17 ("as Yahweh has said"). So we can conclude that Obadiah was prophesying well before the final Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem and Judah. I suggest that Obadiah's prophecy was originally given at the time of Jehoram, when the Edomites rebelled against Judah (2 Kings 8:22; 2 Chron. 21:10). They joined in with the Arabians and Philistines in sacking Jerusalem, and the Philistines gave the captives of Judah to the Edomites to abuse (Am. 1:6,9).

When the Egyptians sacked Jerusalem (1 Kings 14:25,26; 2 Chron. 12:2), the Edomites joined in (Joel 3:19). They likewise assisted the Babylonians (Ps. 137:7); and they would have been included within the general term "Arabians" who assisted the Philistines in destroying Jerusalem in the time of Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:16,17), and Am. 1:6,9 speak of the Philistines and Edomites together abusing the captives of Judah.

We may wonder why the main perpetrators (Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, the Philistines) are not singled out for such condemnation; why do we have in Obadiah an entire prophecy against a minor player? In my early days of school teaching, I had to break up a fight

between two boys behind the bicycle sheds. A ring of boys stood observing, but one boy was in the ring with the other two, full of blood lust, jumping up and down and inciting one of the fighters to grievously hurt the other, shouting abuse at that other fighter. My anger was particularly against that boy rather than the protagonists. And this then would be one of the major lessons from a minor prophet; that God likewise views the ancillaries to conflict as worthy of even more condemnation than the protagonists. And we need to think that through in the context of our own lives.

Further, Edom or Esau was singled out for such special condemnation because he was Jacob's brother (:10). This was not the case for the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines etc. Jacob and Esau were admittedly somewhat separated, and Jacob hadn't been the best brother to Esau. But they were still brothers, and God expected much better of Esau / Edom than He did of the others. And here too we find a penetrating challenge. Our brethren whom we may view askance, from whom we may be separated by the way life has gone for us, are still our brothers. And we are judged very sensitively according to our attitudes toward them, especially in the time of their distress, however justified we may feel that distress to be.

We have heard news from Yahweh- It was the duty of prophets to share with others the "news" revealed to them from Yahweh. The "we" could refer to a school of the prophets centred around Obadiah. Or the "we" could refer to the Angels.

And an ambassador is sent among the nations- The Hebrew for "ambassador" is also translated "messenger", which is also what the Hebrew for "angel" means. So perhaps an Angel is in view, sent amongst the nations to stir them up to a battle which would result in the destruction of Edom.

Saying, Arise, and let's rise up against her in battle- The judgment of Edom was to result in the restoration of Israel's Kingdom. This could have happened at various points in the history of Judah and Israel, but it didn't, because Israel didn't repent and the restoration was not conducted spiritually. The ultimate fulfilment of this prophecy, as of all prophecy, will be in the last days.

Obadiah:2 *Behold, I have made you small among the nations. You are greatly despised*- The past tense here must be compared with the present tense of :3 used about Edom's pride at that time. It is therefore a prophetic perfect- God's word, both of judgment and salvation blessing, is so certain of fulfilment that it can be spoken as having already happened. The parallel in Jer. 49:15 uses the future tense: "I *will* make you small among the nations". This is why there are passages which speak of the believer's salvation as if

it has already occurred, whereas at this point in human time we are still mortal. It was Israel / Jacob who were made small among the nations; Jacob was the "younger", s.w. 'smaller', son compared to Esau (Gen. 27:15,42). Esau / Edom was to receive the judgment of Jacob. This is a major theme of the Apocalypse, that Israel's enemies suffer as she suffers; the seals of judgment upon Israel are in essence repeated in the vials of judgment upon the surrounding nations.

Obadiah:3 *The pride of your heart has deceived you*- It was their apparently awesome human strength which deceived Esau / Edom, according to the parallel in Jer. 49:16. And in Obad. 7 it is the other nations in the confederacy against Israel who deceive Edom. They praised Edom's strength, and Edom's heart was thereby lifted up in pride. The problem with human strength is that it deceives; we thereby play God and become proud.

You who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high- Pride is consistently given as the reason for the judgment of nations. God is so sensitive to it, and so should we be. The allusion is to how the houses in Petra were carved out of caves in the rock. Edom is recorded as having expelled the Horites from the area where the Edomites settled, and 'Horite' is literally 'a cave dweller'. The consistent message of the prophets is that human strength will not save ultimately, and is in fact an abomination to the God who loves humble trust in Him above all things.

Who says in his heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'- The answer to that was "God" (:4).

Obadiah:4 *Though you mount on high as the eagle*- The parallel Jer. 49:22 says that an eagle greater than them shall take them away from their mountain fortress.

And though your nest is set among the stars, I will bring you down from there, says Yahweh- This is similar language to the condemnation of Babylon in Is. 14, whose heart likewise was exalted to the stars. Edom thought that their physical height and unapproachable fortress in Petra (see on :3) guaranteed their safety. Just as a woman may think her bank balance or a man may consider his pedigree to be an invincible advantage in life. We need to come down from those heights in this life, rather than be brought down from them in the condemnation process. The bringing down of human pride and strength is a major theme of the latter day judgment of the nations around Israel; the word is used multiple times in the prophets (s.w. Ez. 32:30 Hag. 2:22; Zech. 10:11; 11:2 and often) as well as Israel herself (Jer. 13:18 and often). We either come down now, or then. And even the most modestly stationed person in life has some aspect to their lives which is their height of human strength.

Obadiah:5 *If thieves came to you, if robbers by night*- The Lord's second coming will indeed be as a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), both to the world and to the unprepared amongst God's people. Again we see that the final moment of all Bible prophecy is at the Lord's return in the last day, the climax of prophecy.

Oh, what disaster awaits you!- This seems to be Obadiah's interjection, so fully does he personally believe the message he is preaching. Such interjections are common in the prophets. We too should feel the reality of the message of the Kingdom we preach; these things are really so, and shall absolutely come true.

Wouldn't they only steal until they had enough? If grape pickers came to you, wouldn't they leave some gleaning grapes?- The implication of the argument is that a certain degree of theft or grape picking would have been acceptable with God. He recognized that Esau / Edom had a legitimate issue with Jacob, even though of course he should ideally have simply forgiven him. But God perceived that they had gone far beyond that. This is not to say that some degree of vengeance and sin is somehow OK with God, but beyond that invisible line, it is not. But on the other hand, God is used to judging human sin, and He does so with understanding, as the only true judge, taking into account all background factors which led to the sinful behaviour.

Obadiah:6 *How are the men of Esau searched out! How are his hidden things searched through!*- As noted on :2, the past tense is used of events yet future. The picture is of the attackers searching through the hidden things of Edom in search of booty, stripping the bodies of the slain men of Esau. As all the things and men of Jacob were searched (Gen. 31:35 s.w.), and as latter day Jacob must be likewise searched (Zeph. 1:12 s.w.), so Esau must experience what Jacob went through. Perhaps this is why "Esau" is used here rather than "Edom". Despite the strong language of total condemnation, perhaps the idea is that Esau / Edom will come to understand the experiences of his brother Jacob, and eternally reconcile in the Kingdom age. The "hidden things" may refer to the secret sins of Esau (as Jacob's hidden sins are to be searched out, s.w. Hos. 13:12). And those hidden sins were his hatred of his brother. This is the central pivot of the prophecy- that Esau / Edom had hated his brother (:10).

Obadiah:7 *All the men of your alliance have brought you on your way, even to the border*- The idea is as in GNB "Your allies have deceived you; they have driven you from your country". It is hard to discern a major historical fulfilment of this; Edom is to be part of a wider alliance against Jacob / Israel, which then turns upon her and destroys her by deceit. But we can see it coming true in the last days, where so many Bible prophecies suggest that Israel's invaders will destroy themselves, the ten horns will hate the whore.

The "alliance" is that of the ten nations around Israel who make a covenant or alliance to destroy her (Ps. 83:5 s.w.). That sounds exactly like the Palestinian Covenant and other such documents which are the founding principles of the jihadist enemies of Israel in our days.

The men who were at peace with you have deceived you, and prevailed against you. Friends who eat your bread lay a snare under you. There is no understanding in him- Eating bread together was a religious act, and "peace" is the characteristic appeal of Islam, a word which can mean both 'submission' and is also related to *salam*, peace; by peace the latter day entity of abuse shall destroy many (Dan. 8:25; 1 Thess. 5:3).

Obadiah:8 *Won't I in that day, says Yahweh, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mountain of Esau?*- The one time apparent friends of Esau have no understanding (:7) and neither does Esau. Understanding here is presented as the antithesis to pride and human strength. The true understanding is the humility that knows that human strength is nothing and indeed is an abomination to God. As Judah were destroyed (:12 s.w.) so was Edom to be. The destruction of understanding and human wisdom (see the parallel in Jer. 49:7) happens in "that day". In a moment, men will realize that their entire worldview, what seemed to them wise and sensible and logical, has come crashing down. They were wrong, and it will be too late to learn wisdom. Now is the time to do so.

Obadiah:9 *Your mighty men, Teman, will be dismayed, to the end that everyone may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter*- The reference may be to the mountain in the sense of the nation, but probably specifically to Petra, their mountain fortress which they considered so invincible (see on :3). The "mighty men" may not simply be warriors; the parallel Jer. 49:22 implies that the heart of those might men will suddenly become like that of a woman hit by labour pains. As noted on :8, the entire worldview and value system of the world will in a sudden moment come crashing down. They will be left only with utter dismay and desperation. "Dismay" is a word often used in the prophets of the result of Divine judgment; the idea is of mental shock and desperation. "Slaughter" is the same word as "violence" in :10- *hamas*, a word often used by jihadism in teaching violence against Israel. What they do and have done to Jacob shall be done to them. We noted on :1 that Edom were never the main aggressors but the ancillaries; yet they are singled out for such judgment because they did this against their brother. The Arabs are Israel's brothers; and this is felt and noted by God and factored in to His final judgment of Arab jihadism against Israel.

Obadiah:10 *For the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever*- This verse in terms of structure stands at the centre of the prophecy. This is the fundamental lesson; that Esau hated his brother, even though his brother had sinned against him and God recognized his legitimate feelings of anger (see on :5). And such hatred of our brother leads to eternal condemnation. Eternal "shame" is the language of rejection at the final judgment. "Violence" translates *hamas*, the name of a terror organization currently fighting against Israel; and the use of *hamas* against Jews is one of the dogmas of jihadism. We can see how the latter day fulfilment of these words is already upon us. The *eretz* / land promised to Abraham is to be filled with this *hamas* before the Lord's judgments come as the flood did to destroy all such violent people (s.w. Gen. 6:11,13). The word is also used of the *hamas* done by Hagar against the seed of Abraham (Gen. 16:5).

Obadiah:11 *In the day that you stood on the other side*- As noted on :1, it was Esau's refusal to help Jacob during his time of trouble, both historically and particularly in the last days, which leads to this severe judgment. And so we have another major message from a minor prophet; doing nothing, looking on, is indeed seen as passive aggression by God and judged accordingly. Standing and doing nothing during the various desolations of Jerusalem listed on :1 made Edom "as one of them".

In the day that strangers carried away his substance- This is the same word used in :13 of how Edom carried away Jacob's substance. It could be that the allusions are to the various times when Jerusalem was invaded (see on :1); sometimes Edom just did nothing to help, other times they joined in. Or the idea could be that by passively doing nothing they were indeed "like one of them". This is the serious weight of sins of omission, doing nothing when another is in need. You did not make the homeless person be on the street; but by not responding, you are responsible for their plight. The historical reference would have been to Edom supporting the Philistines when they ransacked Jerusalem and took captives (Am. 1:6,9).

And foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots for Jerusalem, even you were like one of them- The writer of Psalm 137, sitting angry and frustrated by a Babylonian riverside, with his guitar hanging on a willow branch, being jeered ("tormented" Ps. 137:3 RVmg.) by the victorious Babylonian soldiers who had led him away captive... he felt *so* angry with them. Especially when they tried to make him sing one of the temple songs ("sing us one of the songs of Zion"). And, as a bitter man does, his mind went from one hurt to another. He remembered how when Babylon had invaded, the Edomites hadn't helped their Hebrew brethren (Obadiah 11,12). They had egged on the Babylonian soldiers in ripping down the temple, shouting [in a chorus?] "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation"; see my comment on :1 about the boy who eggs on another boy in a school

yard fight. And so in anger and bitterness this Jew prays with tears, as he remembered Zion, “O daughter of Babylon… happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock” (:8,9 RV). God read those angry words as a prayer, and in some sense they will have their fulfilment, in the judgment not only of Babylon but of Edom in the last days. For these words are picked up in Rev. 18:8,21 and applied to what will finally happen to Babylon. Her spiritual children such as Edom will be dashed against the rock of Christ, the stone of Daniel 2:44, at His return. He will dash in pieces the Babylon-led people that oppose Him.

Obadiah:12 *But don’t look down on your brother in the day of his disaster*- The time of Jacob's trouble has particular reference to the last days (Dan. 12:1*;* Jer. 30:7). Edom are being urged not to act as they have done historically. And the challenge comes to us to not despise sinners when they are undergoing judgment for their sins, lest we be treated like them. Only by recognizing our own sinfulness will we be saved from doing this.

And don’t rejoice over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction- Rejoicing over the downfall of anyone is sin; for we all deserve to fall and to take the consequence of our sin as they are doing. The fact Esau mocked Jacob as he skulked off to Padan Aram is picked up in Obadiah 12 as a ground for Esau's condemnation; and yet, humanly, Jacob was at that time by far the bigger and more responsible sinner. A bit of mocking from Esau was, from a human standpoint, a mild response. But he is here condemned for such an attitude. The future tense of this verse suggests that in the last days Edom / Esau is to be tempted to again treat Jacob / Israel in the same way as they did during previous invasions of Judah. To break with history and culture is indeed hard, even when that history is wrong and abusive. But this is an appeal for repentance on Edom's part.

Don’t speak proudly in the day of distress- This has particular reference to the latter day time of Jacob's trouble (s.w. "distress"; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1).

Obadiah:13 *Don’t enter into the gate of My people in the day of their calamity*- Again, this has particular reference to the latter day time of Jacob's trouble (s.w. "distress"; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1). The AV renders these verses as rebuke of Esau for having done these things. The ambiguity in the tenses reflects God's awareness that latter day Esau will be tempted to act toward Jacob as they have done historically. And the appeal is to break with the pattern of past behaviour and instead live by grace, motivated by an awareness of our own sin and desert of judgment. Entering into the gate of a person was an idiom used of intercourse, and in this context, of rape. This was what Edom were judged as having done, even though they were the lesser players in the drama, and simply jumping onside with the far larger powers who had invaded Judah. But this is how God saw it.

Don't look down on their affliction in the day of their calamity- For all the major acts of abuse listed here, looking down in pride upon a suffering sinner was especially noteworthy to God. This is just as bad as rape and theft.

Neither seize their wealth on the day of their calamity- Again, "the day" has particular reference to the latter day time of Jacob's trouble (s.w. "distress"; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1). I noted on :11 that standing doing nothing positive to assist may be counted here as if Edom did in fact seize Judah's wealth. But it may also be a simple, plain statement as to what they did.

Obadiah:14 *Don't stand in the crossroads to cut off those of his who escape*- This presumably refers to a particular point on the route southwards to Egypt which ran through Edomite territory. The Jewish refugees were "cut off" by Edom; in line with the second half of the verse, this need not refer to murdering them, but to blocking their route, just as had happened when Israel came up out of Egypt to Canaan. By doing so they were effectively cutting them off in death, because the attackers would therefore catch up with them and slay them. Again and again we see that the collateral damage of apparently lesser actions is weighed carefully by God. And this is the huge takeaway lesson for our lives.

Don't deliver up those of his who remain in the day of distress- It could be that some Jews fled to Edom for safety, throwing themselves upon their brother- but Edom delivered them up to their attackers.

Obadiah:15 *For the day of Yahweh is nearly upon all the nations!*- The proximity of judgment day ought to stand for every generation as a reason for repentance. The preceding verses have been an appeal for Esau to act out of character with his historical pattern; and that is the essence of every human repentance. Edom was to be punished along with "all the nations", a term often used about all the nations around Israel. This never clearly happened historically, but looks ahead therefore to the latter day situation. The Nabatean conquest of Petra from the Edomites doesn't fit Edom perishing along with "all nations".

As you have done, it will be done to you. Your deeds will return upon your own head- I have noted several times already on Obadiah that Esau was to be taught Jacob's experiences; not simply for the sake of a 'measure for measure' punishment, but in order that they would perceive the meaning of what they had done, and repent.

Obadiah:16 *For as you have drunk on My holy mountain*- Drinking is often used in a religious sense. They had blasphemed the temple mount; but the cup of wine they

drunk there was effectively a drinking of condemnation to themselves.

So will all the nations drink continually. Yes, they will drink, swallow down, and will be as though they had not been- The cup of Divine judgment would cause their eternal death. This is the ultimate condemnation, rather than eternal, conscious torture. Again we note that Edom is to be destroyed at the same time as "all the nations" around Israel. This must have specific reference to the last days, as such a scenario hasn't happened historically. And God's word will always essentially and ultimately come true.

Obadiah:17 *But in Mount Zion, there will be those who escape, and it will be holy*- This appears to have specific reference to the last days. In the very place where Israel's God is mocked and blasphemed by the conquerors of Zion (:16), there will also be a remnant who escape (Joel 2:32; Is. 59:20). That remnant may refer to a remnant of Edom as well as Israel (Is. 4:2); the referent is purposefully ambiguous, because it is God's plan to save individuals from Edom as well as Israel. Although the temple mount will have been desecrated (:16), it will suddenly be made holy (Joel 3:17). The reference is surely to the literal return of the Lord Jesus to Zion, to save the repentant remnant and judge their abusers.

The house of Jacob will possess their inheritances- "Jerusalem" is literally "possession of peace". The plural "inheritances" may refer to their one great inheritance, as an intensive plural- i.e. Jerusalem and Mount Zion. This area is already a major issue in Jewish-Arab relations, and possessing it is the goal of jihadism.

Obadiah:18 *The house of Jacob will be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame*- As required by the new covenant and the prophecy of the sticks becoming one in Zechariah, the two houses of Israel, Judah and Israel, will unite as one (Jer. 3:18). Entry of the new covenant will make them one who are part of it, as it does now. For disunity between believers is a denial of covenant relationship.

And the house of Esau for stubble- As will all the opposing nations be burnt as stubble at the return of the Lord Jesus (Mal. 4:1).

They will burn among them and consume them. There will not be anyone remaining to the house of Esau. Truly Yahweh has spoken- The judgment upon Edom which we have in Obadiah raises questions regarding Isaac's blessing of Jacob and Esau; for Gen. 27:40 promises that ultimately, Esau would break off the yoke of Jacob and also come to blessing. But this isn't really what the prophecy of Obadiah sounds like. Perhaps Jacob's words were only true of Esau personally and not his seed. Or maybe we are to conclude

that Isaac's blessings were nothing more than his ramblings, and were not the Abrahamic blessing. And so all the angst of Jacob and Esau about getting that human blessing was totally misplaced; Isaac's words and blessing had no ultimate power in the long term. And that is true of all the secular blessings we might seek, when the Abrahamic blessing ought to be all we are interested in.

Obadiah:19 *Those of the South will possess the mountain of Esau, and those of the lowland, the Philistines. They will possess the field of Ephraim, and the field of Samaria. Benjamin will possess Gilead*- The "possessions" of :17 within the *eretz* will be finally and eternally possessed by the latter day repentant remnant of Israel. As they were sold into those areas to be abused by the historical Edomites and Philistine / Palestinians (Am. 1:6,9), so they will again; but they will rise up at the Lord's return and possess those areas.

Obadiah:20 *The captives of this army of the children of Israel, who are among the Canaanites, will possess even to Zarephath; and the captives of Jerusalem, who are in Sepharad, will possess the cities of the Negev*- The historical reference is to how when the Philistines [Canaan-dwellers] sacked Jerusalem, they sold the captives of Jerusalem to the Edomites to abuse (Am. 1:6,9). There could have been a restoration and Messianic kingdom even then; but Judah didn't repent, and so the possibility was reapplied and rescheduled to the last days. The captive remnant of Israeli Jews, under abuse by latter day Edom and the Philistines / Palestinians, will repent and possess the *eretz* as God originally intended. Jerome says the name Sepharad in Assyrian means a boundary- i:e., 'the Jews scattered in all boundaries and regions'.

Obadiah:21 *Saviours will come up on Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will be Yahweh's*- As the latter day Edomites and others desecrate the temple mount, perhaps by briefly building a physical structure there (:16), the Lord Jesus will return, Yah's salvation, Yehoshua. He and those in Him, the repentant Jewish remnant who now identify with and in Him (:17), will appear there and judge Esau. And the kingdom of Yahweh will be eternally established upon earth, the scene of Is. 24:23.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: JONAH

JONAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

JONAH CHAPTER 1

Jonah 1:1 *Now the word of Yahweh came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying*- "Jonah" means 'dove', and we recall the dove going out from the ark, not finding rest, returning, and then going out again to find rest away from her original sanctuary in the ark, after judgment had been poured out upon the *eretz* or land promised to Abraham (Gen. 8:8,9). This speaks of Jonah's two journeys to Nineveh; the first unfruitful, and the second fruitful. And again, water is a strong feature of the narrative, as it was in that of the flood. The dove like Jonah was saved from the water by grace.

"Amittai" means 'truth' or possibly even suggests 'the truth of Yahweh'. The final truth of the prophetic word is grace and not judgment, which is what Jonah was brought to learn. The narrative addresses the elitism which had crept into Israel, especially at the time of the restoration from Babylon. Although the book describes an

event before then, at a time before Nineveh was overthrown, it was perhaps published, as it were, at that time. Jonah represents Israel, saved by grace in the fish, cast back up upon the land / *eretz* in order to witness to the Gentiles of God's grace.

"Now..." definitely suggests a continuation of a narrative; "now it happened..." would be a fair translation. Nearly every usage of the term elsewhere implies a continuation of a previous narrative. Was Jonah ever mentioned before in the Bible? Yes, in 2 Kings 14:25,26: "[Jeroboam II] restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of Yahweh, the God of Israel, which He spoke by His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was of Gath Hepher. For Yahweh saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter; for there was none shut up nor left at large, neither was there any helper for Israel". We learn here that Jonah lived at a time when Israel was oppressed by Gentiles, and yet Yahweh had promised restoration. We understand why he found the idea of preaching grace to Gentiles so difficult.

Jonah 1:2 *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city*- Quoting Gen. 10:12 about Nineveh. The archeological excavations have found an area of about 25 square kilometers all surrounded by a mighty wall. It took three days to go into the city (Jon. 3:3).

And preach against it- The idea is, to its face. Face to face contact is always the most effective way of witnessing, although we live in a world of social media and communication which tempts us to avoid doing this.

For their wickedness has come up before Me- There is no specific call to repentance. But Jonah ought to have deduced that he was not called to merely inform them that they were wicked and that God had noticed. Rather the idea was that because God had noticed and was therefore going to respond in judgment, they ought to do something- repent. The language is that used about how the wickedness of Sodom and the world before the flood came up before God (Gen. 6:5; 18:21). Jonah passed through water, which he describes as a flood (Jon. 2:3). He is presented therefore as having carried and experienced their judgment. He experienced 'death' by a flood, just as Noah's world did; and this was the experience which in essence was going to come upon Nineveh, seeing their wickedness had come before God as that of Noah's world had done. This depends the sense in which Jonah was a type of the Lord Jesus; He represented us, tasting death for every man, dying the death of the cross, the death of the criminal, the sinner. And yet after three days and nights, was resurrected from it. Again we see that we appeal to people through commonality of experience.

Jonah 1:3 *But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish*- The idea is, a place far from the *eretz* promised to Abraham, beyond its borders. But if a boat of those times could sail on a single voyage from Joppa to Tarshish, we can be sure that "Tarshish" has no reference to Britain. And there is no evidence that Palestine traded with Britain at that time or even knew it existed. Wherever it was, it was accessible by one voyage from Joppa. If it refers to the ancient city of Tartessus in Spain, then this was in precisely the opposite direction of Nineveh. In Jon. 4:2 Jonah states that he fled because he suspected that Yahweh would relent of His purpose to destroy Nineveh. He therefore represents the unspoken xenophobia which developed within Hebrew thinking after the restoration, a hypocritical dislike of Gentiles and assumption that ethnic Israel were the only people of God. We too can preach without any actual desire for the repentance of our audience, the exercise can often be a stroking of our own egos, in the name of 'witness', rather than a desire that some will actually respond. Churches

and individuals must really enquire whether they actually want success in their preaching, because the implications of so many attitudes are that they don't.

Resistance to the Divine call is very common- we think of Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah etc. We need to ask what is our calling, and how resistant are we to it.

From the presence of Yahweh- Jonah knew the theory from the well known Psalm 139:7: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, and whither shall I flee from thy presence?". But we can know Bible texts well, and yet act in a completely opposite way; see on :9. Perhaps he still laboured under the idea that God's presence was only in the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and he thought that by leaving that he could thereby flee from relationship with God. The *place* where Yahweh was revealed was understood as the face or presence of God (Gen. 4:4; 32:30). Or possibly the allusion is to how God's prophetic servants stood before His face / presence, and he thought that by leaving the *eretz* he could resign from relationship with God and the call to prophetic service. But we cannot resign from God and our standing before Him. Judah had indeed been cast out from the presence of Yahweh (2 Kings 24:20; Jer. 23:39; 52:3), but Jonah was to learn that even when 'dead' in the seas of the Gentiles, he was not out of that presence ultimately. And this was the lesson for all Israel and Judah in their dispersion.

The text appears to poke fun at Jonah- a Hebrew man fleeing from the presence of Yahweh, when he knows that presence cannot be fled from. And yet it is Jonah who wrote the book- continually pointing out what a fool he had been, how he just didn't get it, and thereby appealing to us his readers to learn from his mistake. We end up disliking Jonah, but that's because Jonah himself sets us up to do so.

To stand in the presence of someone is often used in the sense of acting as one's official minister (Gen. 41:46; Deut. 1:38; 10:8; 1 Sam. 16:21f.; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:15; 2 Kings 3:14, etc.) To flee from His presence was therefore "to refuse to serve Him in this office" (Theodore Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 222). But there is no way we can resign from our calling to be witnesses. We are now with the Lord, and we cannot just resign from His purpose and calling. Jonah intended to flee to Tarshish, the very end of the known world; going the very opposite direction to Nineveh. And we too need to be impressed by the reality of the fact that we can never resign from the Father and Son; we are in their grip. We cannot just 'pass' on the piercing issues of commitment day by day.

He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going down to Tarshish; so he paid its fare, and went down into it, in order to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh- We notice the triple emphasis upon his 'going down', away from God. The term is used again in :5. See on Jon. 2:6. The fare was usually paid in full when the passenger had arrived at the destination; but Jonah comes over as eager to board the ship, and confident that his plan will mean that he arrives at his destination.

Jonah 1:4 *But Yahweh sent out a great wind on the sea and there was a mighty storm on the sea, so that the ship was likely to break up*- God created a great wind, perhaps through an Angel being sent out (Ps. 104:4) with which He brought Jonah and his fellows to their knees. God later creates another great wind with which to teach Jonah something else (Jonah 4:8). Jonah ought to have perceived the same hand of the same God at work with him. Divine work and control of creation is quite a theme in Jonah- the wind, the great fish, the vine / gourd, the tiny maggot which ate it, and prepares the way for the conclusion at the end of the book, that God cares for animals too (Jon. 4:11). The extent and scope of Divine involvement in our world was something Jonah as well as Israel in captivity needed to learn. He was not only involved with the

Israelite people on the territory of their land, but with all men worldwide, and even with vegetation and animals great and small. Jonah surely knew all this from the Psalms, but as noted on :3 he acted contrary to the basic Bible verses he knew and sung. This is our problem too; the implications of just one verse of the Bible or a Bible-based hymn can turn our worldview right around, if we let them. Jonah was so focussed on truth for its own sake, being the son of Amittai, 'Truth of Yah'. He was concerned with the future restoration of Israel and the judgment of sinners, but didn't perceive God's hand and huge activity right now.

Jonah 1:5 *Then the sailors were afraid, and every man cried to his god*- The implication was that Jonah was amongst Gentiles (see on :9), the very people he despised as unworthy of his witness. But through the whole incident of the storm, he was made to realize that he was to witness to Gentiles, indeed he had to. And this failure, like ours, prepared him for his greater witness to Gentile Nineveh.

They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten the ship- Circumstances repeat within the experience of God's servants; repeating examples of Biblical characters, and also those of God's children known and contemporary to us. It is the same Divine hand at work. Paul during his shipwreck experienced something similar, Acts 27:18,19 being very similar to the LXX here in Jonah; and again, it was a suffering *en route* to make a witness to the Gentiles. Paul would have been encouraged to go forward, insofar as he perceived the similarities with Jonah. We need to keep asking ourselves what Bible character has trodden our path before us, that through the comfort of the scriptures we might have hope, even if we cannot attach exact meaning to event in this life.

But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship- We noticed the triple emphasis upon his 'going down' in :3, away from God. And now he goes even deeper down, and he will go even deeper, taken to the depths of the ocean by the fish. He ought to have come to repentance there, but it appears he didn't; and so Jonah had to go into the great fish and be up hard against its rib cage, a grander form of the sides of the ship. At least later, he would have perceived the similarities. Our tribulations often repeat, that we might learn the lessons we ought to have previously learnt from similar but less extreme situations. Remember this is Jonah writing his memoirs, his autobiography. He perceives how he went lower and lower... and then, even in his defiance, was used to make one of the greatest witnesses of all times.

And he was laying down, deeply asleep- Surely he wasn't asleep, but was giving that impression. Here we have one of many examples of where the Bible records things from the viewpoint of how they appeared to men, even if that appearance was incorrect. The language of demons is another example. We think of the Lord Jesus likewise asleep during a storm; and see how Jonah was being set up as a type of Messiah.

Jonah 1:6 *So the captain came to him and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call on your God! Maybe your God will look to us so that we won't perish*- Jonah was the only one who didn't apparently pray to his God, even though he is presented as the only one on board who had a relationship with the true God. He would have reflected that despite this, he had not used that relationship as he might have done, in order to save both himself and Gentiles. The Gentiles were more zealous for their gods than Jonah was. The captain himself made the effort to come

down to Jonah to ask him to pray. Perhaps Jonah thought that Yahweh was only approachable from within the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and stubbornly refused to entertain the possibility that God could be prayed to from anywhere. This was a lesson which the captives in Babylon and Assyria had to learn, and so the book of Jonah addresses that question. Or maybe Jonah had given up with a God of so much grace. We note that "Your God" is *ha Elohim*, as if to imply that the captain was driven to the suspicion that there was only one true God, *the* God; and it was the God of Israel, the God of this rebellious Hebrew passenger. As with Jonah, God worked with those pagans to elicit from them a true recognition of Himself.

"Arise and call..." is exactly what Jonah had been told by Yahweh in :2- to arise and preach / call out to Nineveh. He is hearing the same words of Yahweh again, but through the larynx of a Gentile. He is being severely nudged, but he chooses suicide at sea [as he imagined it] rather than obedience. And still, by grace, God saves him even from that. We note that Jonah was also disobedient to the captain's call to "arise and call..." just as he was to that of Yahweh. There is no statement of penitence here when we would expect it, especially as Jonah thinks he os to be thrown to his death. He was lost in his own depression and preferred suicide to obedience and repentance. He is the same in chapter 4. He presents himself as the one who didn't repent but was still saved by grace; whereas the Ninevites repented and were saved. He leaves us to conclude that God was even more gracious to him and Israel than He was to the Assyrians.

Jonah time and again presents as a man who wanted to walk away from what he didn't like, to avoid responsibility to God and man [just as modern man]- but God doesn't abandon him in that, but works powerfully to almost make him obedient. Without making man a puppet, God by grace does 'push' at just the right force to encourage obedience without forcing it.

We note how the Gentile captain rather parallels the king of Nineveh. They both 'arise', and both ponder whether Yahweh might be gracious to them. Both the captain and the King acted "so that we not perish" (1:6; 3:9) and both came 'to fear Yahweh'. Jonah was intended to learn from the conversion of the sailors, and this should have led him to hope for the conversion of the Ninevites. But his memoirs are stating that he failed, time and again, on every level. Yet still God used him to affect the most succesful preaching of any man apart from the Lord Jesus- just a sentence from him, unenthusiastically muttered, led to the conversion of a whole city with 120,000 children in it, i.e. likely 1 million total population.

Jonah 1:7 *They all said to each other, Come, let's cast lots, that we may know who is responsible for this evil that is on us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah*- Jonah had the opportunity to repent in front of them all; but he doesn't. So the lot fell upon Jonah to elicit repentance from him. We too could avoid so many problems, for ourselves and others, if we repented earlier, rather than circumstance arising which forces us to public repentance.

Jonah 1:8 *Then they asked him, Tell us, please, for whose cause this evil is on us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? Of what people are you?*- This was to elicit from Jonah a statement of his own biography, which was used by God to elicit true repentance. It is no bad thing for us all to mentally prepare such a biography, that we might realize who we are before God.

Jonah 1:9 *He said to them, I am a Hebrew, and I fear Yahweh the God of heaven-*

"Hebrew" was a term always used either by or to foreigners. Again we are given the impression that he was on a Gentile ship; see on :5. The implication could be that he feared Yahweh's judgment. For in :10 we read that Jonah told them that he was fleeing from Yahweh's call. So he could hardly claim that he was truly fearing Yahweh when he had been so disobedient to Him. We note that he answers their questions apart from the question about his occupation. He was a prophet, but he didn't want to be a prophet, and even at his most desperate moment, he denies it. He had been called by God to know His Truth and share it, but like so many, he resisted it, desperately. But still God worked with him to help him come out with his faith. And Jonah's memoirs in this book are his testament to that grace. God wants us, and He will not give up with us just because we think we can avoid or resign from our responsibilities. Jonah presents as the very opposite of how good prophets behave- they grieve for the impenitent, rejoice when their message is received, lament that nobody hears them. Whereas Jonah utters a brief sentence about judgment- and 120,000 people believe it and repent immediately. The book of Jonah is Jonah's marvel at God's grace and patience with him. He was perhaps the most succesful preacher after the Lord Jesus- he uttered a message of just one sentence, warning of judgment to come- and 120,000 people repented and were saved. He realized the wonder of this, and is making the point that he was the last person who ought to have had this honour, he was the world's worst prophet, the most mixed up of people. His book is marvelling at how God uses such people in His gracious hands.

Who has made the sea and the dry land- The Gentiles thought there were separate gods of the sea and of the dry land. Jonah in his extremity is brought to realize and teach that Yahweh is the only true God, God of both sea and dry land. But he had fled from the presence of Yahweh, thinking that Yahweh was only really active and present in the land of Israel. Now he was being driven to realize that God was also the God of the sea, symbolic as it clearly is in scripture of the Gentile nations. Jonah came to this realization quite naturally; we marvel at the way God taught him so much so quickly, or rather, brought Jonah to realize the truth in reality of that which he theoretically knew. See on :3.

Jonah 1:10 *Then were the men extremely afraid and said to him, What is this that you have done?*- This can be read not as a question, but an exclamation: "What ever have you done!". They realized the extreme sinfulness of what Jonah had done, more than he did. The wind and waves all around them were clearly sent from God, and were witness enough to the seriousness of the sin of denying others salvation. We must ask whether implicitly or explicitly we have done the same. For it is a serious matter. Who can be baptized or fellowshipped is a question we must ask ourselves; and it's no good assuming that we are innocent of our part in barring others from these things just because we are mere members of a church or group who does this.

"What have you done?" is the question to Eve (Gen. 3:13). And like Adam and Eve, Jonah doesn't respond as intended with a frank expression of penitence; and yet is still ultimately saved by grace.

For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of Yahweh, because he had told them- He may have done so whilst explaining to them why he feared God's judgment upon him (:9). Or perhaps he had earlier jokingly but in truth told them that he was a prophet of Yahweh who was running away from Him, seeing Jonah considered that He only operated in the land of Israel. And now they were all being taught how wrong that was. We note that Jonah is never once repentant. Yet God saves him and keeps hold of him by sovereign grace. And the book concludes with

God saying that He saved Nineveh because He felt sorry for all the kids and the cattle- not actually because He repented in line with their repentance. Sovereign grace is the theme all through.

Jonah 1:11 *Then they said to him, What shall we do to you, that the sea may be calm to us? For the sea grew more and more stormy*- They realized that their salvation depended upon Jonah; note the contrast between "you" and "us". This was to set Jonah up to appreciate that he and his mission really could be used by God to save Gentiles. It was clear that destruction was imminent and not a moment could be wasted, or else that destruction was going to take away the lives of the sailors unless Jonah was proactive. This was to prepare Jonah for his work with Nineveh; in a sense, their salvation depended upon him being proactive. But again, Jonah presents himself as a man who failed to learn his lessons- and who was therefore saved, and used by God, by absolute sovereign grace.

Jonah 1:12 *He said to them, Take me up*- The Hebrew means 'to lift up' in the sense of exaltation; the very idea used by the Lord to describe His exaltation and 'lifting up' on the cross. The language of Jonah suffering in the fish and drowning in "great waters" is full of allusions to Messianic Psalms which point forward to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus- and His saving out of it in resurrection.

The sailors knew Jonah was a religious man and that he knew the requirements of his God. They knew the storm was upon them for his sake as a punishment from his God, and so they ask what they can do to him to appease his God. Jonah felt that he had to die; he could have thrown himself into the sea. But he says they must do so, presumably because he wants them to have guilt over it. His desire to bring judgment and not grace upon Gentiles is clear.

And throw me into the sea. Then the sea will be calm for you; for I know that because of me this great storm is on you- Jonah reasoned that Yahweh sought to kill him in judgment, and he didn't see the point in the Gentiles perishing along with him. This was a natural conclusion on his part; he was being brought to the position where he did in fact care whether Gentiles perished or not. God's patient efforts to educate Jonah were amazing; and He tries likewise with us, working through our failures to teach the lessons. Jonah recognizes that his judgment is just; being drowned in the sea of nations but miraculously preserved by grace makes Jonah a representative of sinful Israel, who would finally accept the justice of their punishments (Lev. 26:41,43). And yet at the same time, Jonah is clearly typical of the Lord Jesus, who died so that a great company of Gentiles might be saved (Jn. 11:50). The Lord's death was if He was drowning in the stormy sea (Ps. 69:1,2). His three days in the grave was clearly represented by Jonah's time inside the fish. The Lord represented sinful Israel, and yet at the same time, His death brought both them and the Gentiles to salvation. Jonah opens up to us the real import of the Lord's representative sacrifice, dying as the representative of God's sinful people, and yet thereby their saviour.

Jonah 1:13 *Nevertheless the men rowed hard to get them back to the land*- Literally, they 'broke through', i.e. the waves. Jonah would have later reflected on their humanity, not wishing for one Hebrew to perish. This is in stark contrast to his indifference as to the perishing of multiple thousands of Gentiles, and the book of Jonah concludes by recording Jonah being rebuked for this. And who wrote the book of Jonah? Presumably, Jonah himself, under Divine inspiration. The way he concludes it is therefore his own recognition of how his inhumanity and indifference was worse

than that of the Gentiles whom he had so despised. The book is really his own confession of utter guilt, having come to repentance and marvel at God's grace by the time he wrote it.

Jonah presents the Gentile sailors as more righteous and nicer than he was- a self centered man trying to sleep at the bottom of the ship rather than helping the sailors. The verbs used to describe the sailors are scream, feared, threw. The three verbs used for Jonah are went down, lay down, fell asleep. He really didn't care for the humanity around him, only about himself. He paints a picture of his studied and extreme indifference to people. We note that those sailors had thrown the cargo into the sea, but they had more morality than to be willing to throw Jonah into the sea. And the conversion of the sailors sets us up for the conversion of Nineveh, with Jonah sitting beneath the gourd self centered and angry whilst the Ninevites frantically repent. But it is Jonah who is presenting himself like this. At the end of the book, he doesn't make specific his appeal to 'not be like him'. This is the whole effect of his style; that we are left to conclude that. And by portraying himself as he did, Jonah makes an even more powerful appeal to us than he would've done had he stated that in so many words.

But they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them- The men deeply believed Jonah's story, and were driven by his suggestion to pray to Yahweh (:14). "Tempestuous" implies a whirlwind, of the type associated with the cherubim in Ezekiel's visions. Jonah and the sailors were really witnessing a theophany, so powerful that they could only be saved from it by accepting Yahweh as God and [in Jonah's case] repenting.

Jonah 1:14 *Therefore they cried to Yahweh and said, We beg you Yahweh, we beg you, don't let us die for the sake of this man's life, and don't lay on us innocent blood; for you, Yahweh, have done as it pleased You*- As Jonah heard these Gentiles praying to Yahweh rather than their own gods, he must have realized that his failure had led them to Yahweh; and that Gentiles were quite capable of turning away from their gods to whom they had fruitlessly been praying just a short time before. "They cried out to Yahweh" is a phrase elsewhere used about *Israel* in their desperation crying out to Yahweh, especially during the time of the Judges. These Gentiles are presented as Israel ought to be. Their request "don't lay on us innocent blood" is the language of Israel asking God not to be held guilty for untraced murder (Dt. 21:8,9). I don't think they knew God's law, but their words are recorded and framed as if they were Israelites.

When Jonah heard the men of Nineveh praying that they 'might not perish', he should've thought back to how the men in the boat to Tarshish prayed the very same words. The men in the ship prayed earnestly that they 'might not perish', both in the storm and for the sake of Jonah's life (1:6,14). The men of Nineveh prayed to God that they too 'might not perish' (Jon. 3:9)- the record uses the same Hebrew word in both cases. Jonah should've learnt his lesson; the men in the ship didn't perish because of his self-sacrifice- and the implication could be that they turned to Israel's God as a result of the whole dreadful experience. And Jonah's self-sacrifical preaching, just as painful for him as voluntarily suggesting he be thrown to his death, was eliciting in Jonah the same response from those he was preaching to. But he couldn't maintain the intensity of the self-sacrificial life of witness; he gave up and got angry that they were responding, and, it seems, stopped preaching once he had entered into the city and the response had started. Take another lesson from this; we would likely have been inspired to continue preaching by such a good response. But

for Jonah, the response was what discouraged him. What is encouraging for one in the work of witness is a great discouragement for another.

Jonah 1:15 *So they took up Jonah, and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased its raging*- This continues the similarity with the Lord asleep in the storm and then the storm suddenly ending (Lk. 8:24), confirming Jonah as a type of the Lord Jesus, even in his rebellion. The sea "stood still" (Heb.), recalling the miracle at the Red Sea. The Gentile sailors were bidden realize that they too could participate in such a great deliverance, through identity with the people of God.

Jonah 1:16 *Then the men feared Yahweh exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows*- They sacrificed an animal whilst onboard, and made vows which would have been fulfilled when they got to land. Those vows were surely to accept Yahweh as their God. Perhaps as Jonah hit the waters and the storm ceased, the last thing he heard in the sudden silence was their vowing to make Yahweh their God. And this was why from within the fish he also made vows and promised that he would keep them and also offer sacrifice when back on dry land (Jon. 2:9). The heroes of the story so far are the sailors, who vow to Yahweh and sacrifice to Him as best they could on the ship; and Jonah is not at all the hero. Jonah in the boat is a clear type of the Lord Jesus asleep in the boat in Mk. 4:36-41. We have a man with others in a boat, a great storm arises and waves threaten to sink the boat, Jonah / Jesus sleeps through the storm, but is awakened by fearful sailors; the storm stops immediately, leading to ‘fearing a great fear’. I suggest that the Lord Jesus intentionally appeared asleep in the boat during the storm, in order to prompt the disciples to see themselves as the sailors in Jonah's ship- and like them, come to faith and commitment. But it seems that prompt was not perceived by the disciples, and they 'feared' but not 'fearing Yahweh' as the sailors with Jonath did. We too are given such prompts, situations which recall Biblical narratives, and we may or may not perceive them. It is also the case that the Lord was setting Himself up as an antitype of Jonah, but in the sense that He was the opposite to Jonah. His sea voyage was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles in the area of the Gerasenes; and Legion's repentance matches that of the Ninevites.

Jonah 1:17 *Yahweh prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah*- As noted on :4, this continues the theme of God being actively at work not just with Israelites outside the land of Israel, not just with Gentiles, but also with animals, the natural creation and vegetation like the vine / gourd.

And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights- The Lord quoted this as being typical of His time in the grave (see on Mt. 12:40). So it seems Jonah died. We marvel at the extent of God's hand. Jonah thought he could avoid God's hand on him by committing suicide. He does it, dies, gets swallowed by a specially created fish, and then resurrects inside the fish. God's grace to him was sovereign. And he still wants to commit suicide again, in chapter 4; the fact he stays alive to write his memoirs shows God again saved him from it. He becomes a parade example of grace. Likewise we have noted that Jonah's being asleep in the boat and then the storm ceasing was also typical of the Lord. But Jonah made no active effort in these matters; the events happened to him. Just as he brought Gentiles to believe in Yahweh and worked to save them (:12) without making any conscious effort. All this was to show him God's grace; he was saved and used by grace, and this was intended

to prepare him for the next stage of his life, which was the journey to Nineveh in order to offer them God's grace based upon his own experience of that grace. We can also see phases in our own lives, for which we are educated by experience through our previous failures.

As Jonah was three days in the fish and then came up out of it to preach to the Gentiles, so the Lord would be three days in the grave and then would rise- as a sign to the Jews. But how was His resurrection a sign to them, seeing they never saw His risen body? Yet the Lord's reasoning demands that His resurrection be a sign to them, just as tangible as the re-appearance of the drowned Jonah. But, the Jews never saw Him after the resurrection...? The resolution must be that in the preaching of the risen Jesus by those in Him, it was as if the Jews saw Him, risen and standing as a sign before them, every bit as real as the Jonah who emerged from the fish after three days.

Matthew's Gospel, which refers to this as a type of the Lord's time in the grave, doesn't seem to teach a literal 72 hours for Jesus in the grave. But a 'day' can mean 'part of a day'- as in 1 Kings 20:29; Esther 4:16-5:1. The term is surely used to highlight the connection with Jonah's experience.

JONAH CHAPTER 2

Jonah 2:1 *Then Jonah prayed to Yahweh his God out of the great fish's belly*- Did Jonah die? It could be argued that he was cast into the sea, drowned, and his body went to the bottom of the sea. But there, he was swallowed by the "great fish", and revived within the fish's belly. And from there he prayed to God, reflecting upon his death experience. This would then heighten the connection with the Lord's death and resurrection. To pray to God on reviving inside the fish was surely natural and inevitable for any man. But as noted on Jon. 1, Jonah was led almost involuntarily to realize the error of his previous positions. He could pray to God from outside the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham, and far from the temple or any organized religious apparatus.

Jonah 2:2 *He said, I called because of my affliction to Yahweh and He answered me*- "Affliction" translates the same word used of Israel's afflictions for disobedience (Dt. 31:17; Neh. 9:27; Is. 37:3) and the time of Jacob's trouble (Gen. 35:3); Jonah was the representative of sinful Israel, bearing their punishment at the same time as he represented the sinless Lord Jesus in His time of dying. In this sense, the Lord Jesus was afflicted in all their affliction / condemnation for sin (Is. 63:9 s.w.). Here we have profound insight into the representative nature of the Lord's death; He died sinless, and yet intensely identified with the sinful people of God and their condemnation. Jonah's prayer in Jon. 2 is shot through with allusions to various Psalms; here to Ps. 120:1. God's word was in his heart, but only through Divine teaching and affliction due to his own sinfulness... could he come to know it as true for him personally. And this is a path we too pass through.

Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. You heard my voice- Here we learn clearly that *sheol* refers not to a place of fire and torment for the wicked, but to a covered place, the grave. And as noted on :1, it would support the idea that Jonah did actually die by drowning, and the belly of the fish became his tomb. The Hebrew words for "cried" and "heard" differ by only one rather similar letter; a subtle difference. Our cry in prayer and God's hearing are intimately connected. He is not truly not far from every one of us.

"Cried" is the word used of Nineveh's crying to God and the sailors crying to God (Jonah 1:14; 3:8). Gentiles cried and were heard; Jonah cried and was heard. He ought therefore to have been willing to accept that Nineveh, like the sailors, could cry to God and be heard by grace. But he presents himself as the man who refused to learn his lessons. Until he writes up his memoirs in this fascinating little book, and on that basis pastored over a million people, many of whom will be accepted by the Lord Jesus at the last day.

Jonah 2:3 *For You threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas*- Jonah perceived God's hand in what others did to him, and that is an abiding lesson to take with us in life's path. He alludes to Ps. 88:6. The same word is used of God casting His people out of their land (Dt. 29:28), out of His presence (2 Kings 24:20; Jer. 52:3)- just as Jonah felt he had been (see on :4). Banished from God's presence and far from the temple (:4). All God's true Israel are to see themselves in Jonah; especially those who had been cast out by God from His land and presence into the seas of the Gentiles.

I suggested that Jonah's request to be cast into the sea was suicidal, and not in response to any Divine command. He even got the sailors to throw him in so that yet more Gentiles would have blood on their hands. Yet he now marvels that it was God who threw him in to the waters- God by grace alone worked through his suicide rather than abandonning him to the consequences of his sin. We need to write our own autobiographies in our own minds, and perceive God's grace at every step. And only we can do this. This is self examination.

The water was all around me. All Your waves and Your breakers passed over me- This confirms the suggestion made on :1, that Jonah was not instantly swallowed by the fish. The pictures in children's Bibles are nearly all wrong: of a grinning whale waiting eagerly to catch the body thrown by the sailors from the boat. Jonah was surrounded by waves and went down "into the heart of the seas". The Psalms allusions are to Ps. 42:7; 69:1,2,14,15, and Ps. 69 is clearly a foretaste of the Lord's feelings on the cross. He felt there as condemned sinners like Jonah felt in the time of their condemnation. He never sinned, and was personally unworthy of condemnation. But that doesn't mean that He doesn't know how sinners feel now, as they are condemned in real time for their sins by the court of Heaven; nor how the condemned will feel at the last day. Judges pass down sentences which they have never experienced; but the Lord has experienced the feelings of condemned men, whilst being morally innocent. In this we see His complete identity with sinful man.

The AV has "floods". Jonah experienced death by flooding; as noted on Jon. 1:2, he thereby bore the condemnation due to Nineveh (Jon. 1:2 cp. Gen. 6:5), and could therefore give Nineveh a real hope of repentance and salvation thanks to his experience. Floods are a symbol of Divine judgment; Jonah had experienced this, and by grace been saved from it because he cried to Yahweh. He presents himself as so ungracious in denying Nineveh the opportunity to cry out to Yahweh and be saved from their condemnation. He still failed to perceive that his salvation by grace was to lead him to wish others to avail themselves of that same grace. Xenophobia and spiritual elitism are thus shown in their full power. Despite experiencing amazing grace, we can still wish to deny it to others, and to be riled when others do avail themselves of the same grace we experienced.

Jonah 2:4 *I said*- The language and ideas are similar to those of Hezekiah (Is. 38:11), who felt he was condemned to death. Jonah in the fish is now recalling his last conscious thoughts before his lungs filled with water for the last time (see on :1). So

his later thoughts in this chapter are the wonder of a man saved from condemnation by utter grace.

'I have been banished from Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple'- This is absolutely the language of God's exiled people, recalling the statement in Solomon's prayer that wherever they were scattered for their sins, they could always look again towards the temple and pray (1 Kings 8:38). Jonah was clearly representative of Israel. He had chosen to go out of God's presence (Jon. 1:3), and so he was being confirmed in that desire. He was being made to realize how terrible it was to in fact resign from God and His presence. His personal sin, however, must not be overlooked; for it was that which called forth all this judgment. It was not the sin of idolatry nor lukewarm response to Yahweh, but rather that of intolerance, pride and avoiding the call to witness. All of which things we at times have been guilty of and are continually tested with.

Jonah 2:5 *The waters surrounded me, even to the soul*- Alluding to Ps. 40:12; 69:1, both of which Psalms are quoted in the New Testament about the Lord's death. See on :3.

The deep was around me- The word used for sin and its judgment compassing around the condemned (Ps. 18:4; 40:12; 116:3).

The weeds were wrapped around my head- Confirming the suggestion in :1 that Jonah drowned and his body sunk to the bottom of the ocean. Perhaps he found himself inside the fish with seaweed wrapped around his body, as if they were his grave clothes and the burial napkin around his head. But "wrapped" is literally 'to bind around' and is the word usually used for healing and restoration- which was to come about through death and resurrection. Perhaps Jonah praying to God with seaweed wrapped around him looked ahead to the Ninevites calling out to God wrapped in sackcloth- again, highlighting how Jonah was so wrong to not accept their sincerity and the very real possibility of God hearing them in their sackcloth, when his prayer had been heard wrapped in seaweed. We may reach a peak of praise and gratitude- but not retain it, as we slip back into mere religion and our natural wiring of exclusivism.

Jonah 2:6 *I went down*- The same word used of his going down to Joppa, down into the ship, and further down into the very hold of the ship (see on Jon. 1:3,5). He was brought down as low as could be, to be exalted in due time. This is indeed the path we shall all pass through; it's a race to the bottom.

Ps. 55:23 speaks of the wicked, those who had 'broken the covenant' which Jonah was so proud to be part of, being 'brought down' into "the pit" or "destruction"; and these very same two Hebrew words occur together in Jonah 2:6. They also occur together in Ez. 28:8, speaking of how the Gentile king of Tyre was to be 'brought down' to "the pit". This would have been the sort of prophecy which nationalistic Jonah would have loved to hear; but now he recognized that he was essentially like a wicked Gentile, and had shared their condemnation- but been graciously saved from it. The preaching of Jonah is surely our example. His refusal to allow the king of Nineveh to repent is therefore presented by him as all the more disgusting; for he had suffered the condemnation of a Gentile king, but been saved from it by grace. It is not enough to simply experience grace; we must allow that experience to humble us and lead us to want others to share in it.

Jonah is alluding to the language of Ps. 139, about how we cannot flee God's presence even if we go to the uttermost depths of the ocean. Later in Jon. 4:2 he

shows his awareness of God's basic graciousness, and he quotes Ex. 32. Jonah knew God was like this but didn't want Him to be like it. Just as he also knew Ps. 139:6 says that you can't flee from Yahweh's presence- but still he did. This is why the Hebrew language uses the idea of "knowing" in the sense of actually experientially knowing through relationship. We live in a world where knowledge for the sake of it is sought after and dealt with as never before. Wisdom is really all about translating our knowledge into practice, and so many waste their lives amassing the knowledge without translating it into practice.

To the bottoms of the mountains; the earth barred me in forever: yet have You brought up my life from the pit, Yahweh my God- This clearly states that Jonah died and was only then swallowed by the fish; see on :1. And he went to the very bottom of the ocean, into the deepest ravine on the seabed, and had the impression of the permanence of death, barred in forever, alluding to Job 17:16. This was how low down he had to be brought, such was his pride, and such was the significance of the work Yahweh wished to do with him; see on Jon. 1:3. "From the pit" is AV "from corruption", deepening the similarities with the Lord's resurrection (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27,31). Ps. 71:20 is also in view, where the Psalmist is brought out of "affliction" (s.w. :2), out of the pit to new life.

"You brought *up*" alludes to how Jonah has presented himself as going *down* to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the bottom of the ship, down into the sea, down to the depths of the ocean. All this going *down* was of his own device. But God by grace saved him rather than allowing the consequences of sin to work out, as a kind of 'fair dinkum' result of his own choices. This is grace. He had repeatedly been told to "arise", to 'go up', but he had refused; to arise and go to Nineveh, to arise and pray to his God, and to arise again and go to Nineveh. As the king of Nineveh arose to repent, Jonah sat down and sulked (Jonah 3:6; 4:5). But despite all this stubborn refusal, God brought Jonah *up.* This is sovereign grace. The exact opposite of 'God helps those who help themselves', the ultimate slap in the face to the Protestant Work Ethic. That ethic claims that God doesn't save from consequences; and yet He does, even in David's life this is apparent and he therefore often prays for it. If we are not saved from consequence of sin, we would all die eternally. But we are saved from consequences of sin, and that is one huge lesson of Jonah. Anything other than that would not be grace.

Jonah 2:7 *When my soul ebbed away within me*- Jonah recalled the feelings of death (Ps. 42:6; 73:26; 142:3). The language is suggestive of how a person in the final minutes of palliative care ebbs back and forth until they cease breathing and the heart stops. It is the word used of the ebbing away of Judah's life in the Babylonian invasion (Lam. 2:12,19); again we see Jonah presented as representative of God's people under condemnation. The way he describes those feelings make him a parade example of resurrection. Jonah's life "ebbed away" inside the fish- and a very similar word is used about his experience as he sat under the gourd (Jonah 4:8 "he fainted"). In the fish, Jonah prayed that God would save his life, and was heard. But when he was made to feel the same again, he instead prayed God to take away his life. Perhaps this shows that even when we respond well to circumstances, those same circumstances may repeat in order to test us as to whether we will continue to make that right response. Jonah continually presents himself as simply 'not getting it'.

I remembered Yahweh. My prayer came in to You, into Your holy temple- David also felt that his prayers came into God's holy temple even before that temple was built (Ps. 11:4; 18:6). Jonah was brought to realize that the true temple presence of

God was in Heaven and not in a stone building in Jerusalem. It is only desperation which leads us to these kinds of perceptions; that God is so real, that He is outside of organized religion. Israel too were afflicted as Jonah but the prayer of the faithful came into God (Ps. 102:1 s.w. Jon. 2:2 "affliction").

Jonah had been shown that the prayers of the Gentile sailors were heard. His own prayer had been heard. Despite it being uttered from within a fish's belly, where he was esconced for his rebellion and sins. This was all to prepare him for the absolute possibility that if the Ninevites prayed to God, He would likely hear them. And given his own experience of prayer answered by grace, he ought to wish them well in such endeavour. His later anger that they prayed and were heard... is therefore the height of ingratitude and refusal to 'get it'. And he is presenting himself, therefore, as the most unlikely and undeserving person on earth to be used to convert 120,000 children and therefore probably anything from 600,000 to 1 million adults.

Jonah 2:8 *Those who regard lying vanities forsake their own mercy*- This is a profound truth; true grace ["mercy" is *hesed*] and salvation is only found in Yahweh the God of Israel. To forsake Him is to forsake our own access to mercy and grace. Jonah was surely reflecting upon how the sailors had begged their idols and gods for salvation, and not found it. Only Yahweh had provided such saving grace, both to them and to Jonah. This reflection was surely to motivate Jonah to now go and try to persuade the Ninevites of Yahweh's grace. Jonah is constantly quoting from the Psalms, and here he may have in mind Ps. 31:6: "I have hated them that regard lying vanities". But now Jonah doesn't hate the idolaters personally, but rather perceives the tragedy of the fact that they are rejecting their own access to Yahweh's grace. Yahweh is all about mercy, or grace; again, Ps. 59:17 "the God of my mercy" is in mind. But we preclude His grace if we trust in the lying vanities of this world. Grace is therefore the unique characteristic of Yahweh, of true Christianity- no other religious system incorporates this.

Jonah 2:9 *But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving, I will pay that which I have vowed*- Jonah is repeating the words of the sailors (Jon. 1:16), whom he has just been thinking about in :8. But he is also repeating the words of Ps. 3:8; 116:17,18. He comes to realize that those Gentile sailors had in their desperation come to the spirit of Yahweh's inspired words, and to the very songs which were at the core of the Jewish religion. He came to realize that he could not from that location within a fish offer a sacrifice, and so all he could do was offer the sacrifice of praise. He was being taught that beyond ritual and organized religion, there is the real relationship with God in the Spirit. That praise is the essential sacrifice is recognized throughout the Bible (Ps. 54:6; Heb. 13:15); it was the essence of the new covenant (Jer. 33:11), which Jonah was [like Israel in captivity] being prodded towards.

Presumably his vow was to be obedient to his commission of preaching to Nineveh. And yet despite the intensity of his sincerity whilst within the fish, we find that when it comes to it, he doesn't perform the vow at all well in that he loses the spirit of grace. We too, one moment, can be awed by our experience of grace and desire to give our very souls in order to share that grace with others; but then the old pride, bitterness and prejudices so easily return. When we are brought down, we have to stay down. That is the art of spiritual life.

There are a number of Old Testament examples of preaching the word after becoming aware of the depth of one's own sins. Consider Jonah preaching the second

time, with the marks in his body after three days in the whale, admitting his rebellion against Yahweh, pleading with them to respond to His word. Reflect how when his head was wrapped around with seaweed, at the bottom of the sea at the absolute end of mortal life, he made a vow to God, which he then fulfilled, presumably in going back to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 2:9). His response to having confessed his sins and daring to believe in God's forgiveness, turning again towards His temple even from underwater, was to resolve to preach to others if he was spared his life. And this he did, although as with so many of us, the pureness of his initial evangelical zeal soon flaked. Or consider Manasseh, 2 Chron. 33:16; Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 19:3 cp. 18:31; 19:2; Josiah, 2 Chron. 34:29,32; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 3:29; 4:2...

Salvation belongs to Yahweh- 'Jesus' in Hebrew is Yahoshua, the salvation of Yah. Jonah was brought to understand the essence of salvation in Jesus. Jonah is telling us, albeit obliquely, that he had come to grasp salvation by absolute grace in his own case- and now will seek to deny that to Nineveh.

Jonah 2:10 *Yahweh spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah on the dry land*- Again we see God in harmony with nature and in personal communion with it. He created the vine for shelter, the tiny worm which ate it, the great fish, and the storm. And uses absolutely all things to reveal His grace. To be vomited out is the language used of Israel being vomited out of their land (Lev. 18:25,28; 20:22). Even in the moment of his salvation, Jonah was identified with sinful Israel in their condemnation, and was thereby the pattern for their salvation, and a clear prediction of the Lord's saving experiences.

Everything in the book of Jonah is obedient to God, even the animal creation [the fish, the vine, the worm, the east wind in Jon. 4:6-8]. The only character disobedient is Jonah. And I suggest he is intentionally presenting himself like this, to again heighten his own incredible lack of qualification to do God's work. God spoke to the fish twice and it was obedient, and twice to Jonah and he was both times disobedient.

The 'resurrected' Jonah was a type of the Lord- and he was a 'sign' to the Ninevites presumably in that he still bore in his body the marks of a man who had been three days within a fish. It could be that the fish beached itself, and vomited Jonah out of its stomach in its death throes (this is how beached whales meet their end). In this case, the fish would have drawn the attention of the local population, as would have the man with bleached hair and strange skin who walked away from it. Death, the dying fish, gave birth to life. And surely Paul had this in mind when he wrote of how in the Lord's death and resurrection, "death is swallowed up in victory". We too as witnesses of Christ will have something about us that is unintentionally striking in the eyes of those with whom we mix. There was no human chance that Jonah would be listened to when he came to preach judgment against Nineveh. Some guy standing on the edge of town, saying 'You're all gonna be destroyed'. People would have laughed, ignored him, or told him to shut up. But there was something about him that was gripping and arresting. He was living proof that the judgment of God is real, and that His mercy is just as real. Presumably Jonah must have said far more than "Nineveh is going to be destroyed".

It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all

this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that "the judge stands before the door". What is our response to Jonah / Jesus?

JONAH CHAPTER 3

Jonah 3:1 *The word of Yahweh came to Jonah the second time saying*- God's patience is amazing. Jonah failed the first time and was given a second chance, but his failure was used to prepare him. Jonah has several parallels to Elijah, who likewise struggled with spiritual elitism and judgmentalism. He too was sent a second time with his commission to Israel (1 Kings 19:4). Jonah quotes Elijah's words in Jon. 4:3. Perhaps the apostles likewise received a second commission to preach to the Gentiles after resisting that given to them just before the Lord's ascension.

The boat was not far from land- for the sailors tried to row the boat to land. Jonah would have come ashore somewhere on the coasts of Israel. We are left to imagine him walking away up the beach from the dying fish, naked, disfigured by the acids of the fish's belly, determined to pay his vows of sharing God's grace with others, getting some clothes, gathering some money, and making his way on camel to Nineveh. In this he is our pattern. In the parable of the two sons, the Lord divides us into two groups- those who respond to a calling to 'go' by saying they will, but don't go; and those who refuse to go but afterwards go. This is clearly an allusion to Jonah. But Jonah is thus made typical of each and every one of us.

Jonah 3:2 *Arise, go to Nineveh*- Earlier, Jonah had been told the same; but he 'arose' and got a ship to Tarshish (Jon. 1:2,3). He had been bidden by the captain to "arise" and relate with his God (Jon. 1:6). Circumstances repeat in our lives in order to help us do correctly what we were asked to do by God the first time. See on :6.

That great city, and preach to it the message that I give you- The size of the city is mentioned because Jonah was intended to see the tragedy of so many people being lost. And the book of Jonah concludes with this same point (Jon. 4:11). The tragedy of lost humanity ought to impress itself deeply upon us, as we see the lights of a city beneath us from an airplane, or as we see crowds streaming past us on a street. We wonder whether "the message" given was indeed simply limited to what is recorded in :4: "In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!". Perhaps there was also a call to repentance, which Jonah didn't mention because he wanted to see Nineveh destroyed.

Jonah 3:3 *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of Yahweh*- This time he was obedient, when previously he had been told to arise and go to Nineveh, and had arisen and went to Tarshish (Jon. 1:2,3).

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey across- The Old Testament reflects that God has a heart for all humanity- not just Israel. Nineveh was a great city *to God*, and it grieved Him that it might have to be destroyed (Jonah 3:3)- He even was sensitive to the plight of the animals there. This is how the book concludes- that God saves Nineveh because of His native pity for humanity, concerned about the kids and the cattle, and not simply because they had repented.

Nineveh was big to God- in the sense that man is so significant to Him, even very sinful man. The sensitive heart of God becomes all the more sensitive to us, His chosen people. The archeological excavations have found an area of about 100 square kilometers all surrounded by a mighty wall. It was indeed a great city, comprised of three or four smaller towns (Jon. 1:2). It was large enough to contain 120,000 young children (Jon. 4:11), suggesting a city of over half a million, with a high population density.

We enquire of the connection between Jonah's being three days in the fish, and Nineveh being a city of three days journey. The idea was surely that his three days humiliation in the fish was to result in his three days of witness. But we learn from :4 that he seems to have only witnessed for one day. He presents all the way through as the disobedient prophet- whom God used by grace. His message is really 'Don't be like me- but God is so very gracious'.

Jonah 3:4 *Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey*- The record seems to stress his reluctance and disobedience. He only started preaching after he had walked for one day within the city, when it took three days to walk across the city; despite the high population density discovered by archaeologists and required by the larg*e* figure given for children (see on Jon. 4:11).

And he cried out and said- He initially refused to "cry" the message of repentance to Nineveh; he wanted to be an incognito prophet. But an incognito prophet is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron. So the Lord brought about a situation in which he desperately "cried" to God; and then told him to go and "cry" to Nineveh. The very same Hebrew words are used about his crying to God and his crying / proclamation to Nineveh (Jonah 1:2; 2:2; 3:2,4). Jonah was forced by circumstance to share his relationship with God with the world around him which he despised. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this. The family at Bethany may have been an example of this. The Jews had commanded "that if any man knew where he was, he should shew it" (Jn. 11:57). And "Jesus *therefore*… came to Bethany" (Jn. 12:1 RV). He purposefully attracted attention to His connection with the Bethany home. And so it was that "much people of the Jews learned that he was there"(Jn. 12:9), and the context makes it clear that this was a source of witness to them (Jn. 12:10,11). The Lord sought to expose their secret discipleship, to take the bucket off their candle. And He will do likewise with us. Jonah is of course the great example.

In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!- I suggested on :2 that Jonah may have purposefully omitted any call to repentance. He wanted the city to be destroyed. "Overthrown" recalls the triple emphasis using the same word that Sodom was "overthrown" (Gen. 19:21,25,29). But Abraham had interceded that it might not be, and we are left to conclude from the record in Gen. 18 that if Abraham had had more spiritual vision, he could have asked God to spare the city for even the sake of one. And God would have heard. But Jonah is exactly the opposite; he didn't intercede for the city, and instead wished its overthrow. "Overthrown", to throw over, can be understood as a hint at repentance. So it could be that this word choice of itself hints at a call to repentance in order to avoid being overthrown.

Historians note the "forty lean years" of Nineveh, a period of natural disasters, famines and revolts. It could be that Jonah's message was at the end of that- as if to say that in 40 days, those 40 lean years would come to their climax in destruction. It was as if they 40 days to repent, a day for a year.

It took Jonah three days to walk through Nineveh (3:3). On the first day in the city, he told them that in 40 days God would destroy them; it follows that by the time he was in the middle of the city he was telling them that they had 37 days left. So too the Jews had between 37 and 40 years notice of the destruction of Jerusalem.

This very brief statement is in fact all Jonah is recorded as saying to Nineveh. But their king and 120,000 people heard it, and repented and were saved. It is the most amazing response to preaching. But that fact is juxtaposed against the fact that Jonah, in his memoirs, is reflecting that he was the most cranky and unpleasant of prophets. He is not recorded as prefacing his message with a "Thus says Yahweh". The hundreds of prophetic messages recorded in the Bible all include something like that. But Jonah doesn't bother. It's as if he doesn't want to give any possible reason for the message to be believed.

The language of overturning recalls Sodom, another sinful city which was in fact overturned (Gen. 19:25; Dt. 29:22). Both cities sinned greatly and this came up before Yahweh (Jonah 1:2; Gen. 18:21). But the similarities are in order to highlight the contrast between Abraham interceding for Sodom, eager for their salvation; and Jonah eagerly wanting their destruction.

We note the LXX has "three days" instead of 40 days. As Jonah was praying in the fish for 3 days, so Nineveh prayed for three days. But Jonah was angry that their prayers for grace were heard. He totally didn't learn that if he had been shown grace, he must show grace to others.

Jonah 3:5 *The people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even to their least*- It is often commented that Nineveh was ultimately destroyed, and therefore their repentance was insincere. Perhaps so, but God was very sensitive to any repentance and respected it, even if the intensity of repentance was not continued. However, the Lord states clearly that there will be men of Nineveh who arise in judgment at the last day and are accepted into God's Kingdom, along with the Queen of Sheba, whereas the Jews of the Lord's day will be rejected (Mt. 12:41). What knowledge did the Ninevites and the queen of Sheba have? The queen of Sheba had the knowledge of Yahweh's moral requirements as taught in Solomon's Proverbs. It's unclear how much correct theology she was taught; and if correct theology is so critically important, we would expect to hear of Solomon teaching it to her, before reading that she shall arise at the last day and be saved. We don't read of her going back to her country clutching scrolls of the law of Moses. Maybe she was illiterate. But we read of her awed at the moral appeal of Yahweh worship. Likewise the men of Nineveh heard only a brief message from Jonah- that Yahweh was going to destroy them. We would expect to read of Jonah eagerly expounding true theology to them and giving them scrolls of the writings of Moses and the prophets; but we don't, and we get the impression he had no interest in sharing Israelite theology with Gentiles anyway. But those men, many of them illiterate and with no access to the written word of Yahweh, shall arise in salvation at the last day. It was the moral appeal of Yahweh and their sense of His claim upon them which made them responsible to His judgment and thereby capable of salvation seeing they accepted that claim. This sets the level of knowledge required for responsibility to judgment, and for salvation, far lower than where many have set it.

Jonah 3:6 *The news reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne*- We noted on :2 that the word "arise" runs like a theme throughout the book of Jonah. Jonah had been told to "arise" in response to God's word and had not done so (Jon. 1:2,3). The king of Nineveh arose in response to that same Divine word. The idea is to

present the Gentiles as more responsive to God's word than even His own prophet, let alone His own people. And the book of Jonah was presumably written by Jonah; in his spiritual maturity, he reflects upon all this, and perceives, and narrates, the paucity of his own response.

Took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes- Sackcloth and ashes are Biblically associated with repentance. We wonder why the king did this. Why listen to some wandering Jewish preacher guy who just rocked up with a message of doom, which we can infer he didn't preach very enthusiastically and with no specific call to repentance? The same question arises as to why John the Baptist, who "did no miracle", could get large numbers of Jews to repent. I suggest it was the personality and experience of the preacher which gave credibility to the message. It has been claimed there was an eclipse of the sun around this time, but that passes, and so it was the personality of Jonah, carefully developed by God, which led to Nineveh's repentance. And so it is today; technique and carrots will not elicit real, lasting repentance. So much depends upon personal contact with a preacher who is a credible example; and Jonah, perhaps with bleached skin from his time inside the whale, was proof enough of the reality of Divine judgment as well as Divine grace.

Jonah 3:7 *He made a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor animal, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water*- The sensitivity of God towards animals which the book of Jonah stresses was reflected in that of the king. The king took seriously the threat of total destruction; he realized that God had in view to destroy the entire city with all that was in it (see on Jon. 4:11). And he therefore wished absolutely everyone and everything within the city, even animals, to reflect repentance. "Proclamation" is the same word translated "cry" in Jon. 1:5, where the Gentile sailors 'cried' to their gods and then ended up crying to Yahweh. The Gentile sailors and the Gentile Ninevites are clearly presented in parallel; Jonah ought to have learnt from the final repentance of the sailors that the Ninevites would likewise respond. His desire for them *not* to respond is therefore all the more obnoxious. The Hebrew for "decree" is literally 'taste'; it is the same word used for how nobody was to "taste" anything. The idea is that the king perceived or tasted the reality of judgment, and he ordered his people to have the same taste or perception. It could be that the city was saved because of the personal repentance of the king, and his preaching of that.

Jonah 3:8 *But let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and animal, and let them cry mightily to God. Yes, let them turn each one from his evil way*- There is a sense of mutuality and rapport built up between the preacher and the hearer in all successful preaching. Jonah “cried” to Nineveh (Jonah 1:2; 3:2,4) and they “cried” to God in response to his ‘crying’ to them- the same Hebrew words are used (Jonah 3:5,8). As Jonah cried to God from the belly of the fish, so the Ninevites were inspired- presumably by what he related to them of his own life- to cry mightily to God for undeserved deliverance.

The language here is exactly that of Jeremiah in appealing for Judah to turn from their evil ways and cry to God in repentance in order to avert the planned destruction by Babylon (Jer. 25:5; 36:3,7). Again, Gentile repentance is being held up in contrast to Jewish disobedience. This is quite a theme in Jonah. One function of the book of Jonah is to appeal for God's people to repent, to take an example from the Ninevites.

And this is how the Lord uses the book, in appealing for the Israel of His day to repent and avert the planned destruction of AD70. Perhaps Jonah was prophesying after some judgments upon Israel or Judah which the Assyrians were aware of; they perceived the similarities between themselves and God's judged people, and repented. This would have been in line with God's intentions regarding judging His people; that the Gentiles would see it and fear Him because of it. See on :9.

And from the violence that is in his hands- Violence was what Nineveh was ultimately destroyed for (Nah. 2:11,12; 3:1). It was a characteristic of Assyria, as the prophets often mention. They were asked to repent of their lead personal characteristic which they were proud of. To repent of that which has become our own very self definition is so hard; but this is the radical call of God's word.

Jonah 3:9 *Who knows*- God may change His intended judgments; He frames or plans judgment, but may change from that plan (Jer. 18:11). But we can in no way presume upon this, it is only of His grace; the same phrase is used in this context in 2 Sam. 12:22; Joel 2:14.

Whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger- God does change. It is as simple as that. He is only unchanging in that His grace to the sons of Jacob remains a permanent feature of His character (Mal. 3:6). A God this open and this sensitive to even change His own stated, published intentions was the God known to Moses, who got Him to change His plan of destroying Israel as a nation. But this is the God unknown to all legalistic religion.

So that we might not perish?- This is the word used of Israel's perishing under Divine judgment for their sins (Dt. 4:26 and often). I suggested on :8 that Nineveh may have learnt from the perishing of Israel and therefore repented. It is the same word used of the perishing of the Gentile sailors which was averted because of their repentance and turning to Yahweh (Jon. 1:6,14). Perhaps some of the sailors were Assyrians and had sent word back to Nineveh. The vine likewise perished (Jon. 4:10 s.w.), and the point was that God made to perish that which He had long laboured for, and that perishing was for Jonah's sake. And He did not want to make Nineveh perish because of Jonah's nationalism and elitism.

God's forgiveness and salvation can never be presumed upon; even if we are genuinely repentant. For the wages of sin has always been death (Rom. 6:23); we as sinners have no right to life. This is a theme stamped right across the Old Testament. Consider: "You have sinned a great sin. Now I will go up to Yahweh. Perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30). "Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts. It may be that Yahweh, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Am. 5:15). “Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious... Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him?” (Joel 2:13,14). "Let them turn each one from his evil way... Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" (Jonah 3:8,9). Possibly we could add Esther 4:14 to this list: "Who knows if you haven’t come to the kingdom for such a time as this?". This is why Daniel's friends can reason: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods" (Dan. 3:17,18). They believed in Yahweh's salvation, but were quite prepared not to receive it. They knew that His ability to dramatically save them at that moment was not at all certain of fulfilment for them. The same words "is able" and "save" are used by Darius in Dan. 6:21 when he again expresses a doubt as to whether God is able to save in this case: "Was the God whom you served so regularly able to deliver you

from the lions?". Against all this we must balance the fact that those in Christ have been given the "right" to be God's children (Jn. 1:12). But the bold confidence we have in the Lord Jesus must somehow never fail to be nuanced by an awareness of our total unworthiness and inability to presume upon God's forgiveness.

Jonah 3:10 *God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which He said He would do to them, and He didn't do it*- Their turning led to God's turning. This is how sensitive He is to human repentance, even if He knows that as in the case of some at Nineveh, it will not last long. God does change. Jeremiah is clear that if a nation repents, then outcomes will change (Jer. 18:7-10). Or even without repentance, God's repentances / changes of heart were kindled together (Hos. 11:8). Just as Hosea, madly in love with Gomer, struggled to separate from and judge her as he might and maybe should have done. God repented that He made man upon earth (Gen. 6:6), and had made Saul king (1 Sam. 15:11,35). He changed His plans to destroy Israel (Ex. 32:6) because of intercession (as in Abraham for Sodom or Am. 7:3,6). The openness of God to dialogue is seen in His agreement to extend Hezekiah's life (Is. 38:1-5). God only does not change in that His grace to the sons of Jacob never changes. God therefore presents as heartbroken when human response fails- "Surely they will reverence My Son". He hoped His sons would turn out fine men and they did not. He looked for good fruit in His vineyard, but there was bad fruit. I suggest He enters into our experience by as it were limiting His omniscience, as He clearly limits His omnipotence, so that Israel "limited the Holy One of Israel". The idea that God is outside time and space is true only so far; He wishes to enter relationship with us. And so He accomodates Himself to us. If He exercises His ability to totally know future outcomes, then His emotional response to our choices rather loses its validity. The whole range of language expressing Divine hurt and surprise and hope is militated against if He foreknows everything. This is what gives relationship with God the ultimate zing, or real time intimacy. And the nature and future of that relationship is in our hands, not His- for He will remain faithful and engaged. Repentance and prayer change things; we can influence the future. We balk at how mere man can do this. But this is the huge significance to what it means to be human, made in God's image and partners, co-workers with Him. It also gives another window into the huge stakes there were in Gethsemane and on the cross.

God's 'change' over Nineveh shows for all time that Bible prophecy can be conditional, even when the conditions [in this case, repentance] aren't mentioned. Is. 46:10 and a few other such passages may appear to contradict that, but the context is of God's desire to save His people: "declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure". And that pleasure is defined in the same section, and throughout Isaiah, as the salvation of His people. That desire to save is the context of Malachi's "I am Yahweh and change not". Likewise Jer. 29:11: "For I know the thoughts [Heb. intentions] that I think towards you, says Yahweh, thoughts [intentions] of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future". But despite that, the wicked amongst Israel were as the troubled sea and had no peace; their dogged exercise of their freewill thwarted the intentions of a God who only wanted to save, whose will is that none perish (2 Pet. 3:9)- even though many do.

How was it that one unknown man could turn up in a huge city and make all of them believe that judgment was really coming, and they really must repent? Why ever listen to this one man? He must surely have told them the story of his own disobedience, experience of judgment, and gracious salvation. There was something

about him that proved to that city that this had really happened; that there was and is a God of judgment above. Perhaps the “sign” of the prophet Jonah was in that 3 days in the fish had bleached his hair, made him thin, making him look arrestingly different. Whatever it was, his antitypical experience of fellowship with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus was enough to arrest a whole city in its tracks. Again, the more real, the more credible.

Mt. 12:41 says that "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation", Israel of the first century. We must read in an ellipsis, ‘[the people of] this generation’. For individuals and not entire generations will be judged. 'Standing up' is possibly an allusion to the resurrection of the responsible at the last day, but more likely the figure is of a judge arising in judgment to state the verdict; which in this case, is condemnation. The Lord in Mt. 12:27 had spoken of how the children of the Jews would judge those Jews in the last day. The Lord clearly seems to envisage the judgment process as having a public dimension to it. The fact one person was spiritually responsive, given a similar or harder set of circumstances than what another has had who did not respond, will therefore as it were be the judgment of the person who didn’t respond. It clearly won’t be merely an awards ceremony nor a yes / no decision, but rather will context and precedent from others be taken into account. ‘If *they* responded and *you* did not, given similar circumstances, then *they* will condemn *you*’- that seems to be the Lord’s reasoning. If Ninevite men will be saved, it seems logical to assume that they must have been pastored beyond their initial immediate repentance. So one tends to believe the legends that attest that a repentant Jonah remained in Nineveh and pastored the converts until his death.

He says that the Ninevites repented "At the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, one greater than Jonah is here!". This effectively is a noun, referring to "the preaching" as in the message of Jonah, and yet also Jonah was himself the preaching or the message. And that was why he was so credible as a preacher. What he preached was judgment to come, and the Ninevites repented on hearing it. The Lord was teaching not only judgment to come, but was making specific the call to repentance implicit within that message, and urging people to accept God's grace. Hence those who heard Him were even more guilty before the Ninevites. Jonah's preaching occurred *after* he had been three days within the whale; after the Lord had been three days in the earth, He too would preach mightily, through the ministry of those 'in Him' who were effectively His representatives and appealed on His behalf. But He reasons as if that appeal was already being made- as if in essence He had already passed through the cross and resurrection. This is not the only time He reasons in this way; in proclaiming Himself Lord, the serpent lifted up on the pole, the One who had already "overcome the world", He reasoned as if the successful outcome of His death had already occurred. Such was His faith that He would come forth triumphant.

Their repentance according to Mt. 12:41 was so sincere that it lasted a lifetime; for at the last day, they shall arise in judgment over the Jews of the first century and condemn them. Some of the Ninevites will be in God's Kingdom and accepted at the day of judgment.

JONAH CHAPTER 4

Jonah 4:1 *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry*- Jonah wanted to see Nineveh's destruction. The 'grace' side of God, His desire for human repentance and salvation, just wasn't reflected in Jonah. He focused on God's anger with sin and

sinners, and overlooked the rest. The book of Jonah was written by Jonah to state his repentance of legalism, elitism, racism and lack of grace. It's a profound warning that conservatism is not right of itself, and can lead to serious moral failure. It's simply not the case that conservatism is likely, as a rule of thumb, to be closer to God than liberalism. That has been the deeply wrong assumption of so many people. The Lord warned that conservatism is part of our human nature, and His teaching is radically progressive and anti-conservative (see on Lk. 5:39). It was God's right to be angry with sin and Nineveh; it was not for Jonah to be angry just because they had repented. The Lord perceived this feature of human nature when He commented that His goodness leads some to have an evil eye, a bitter outlook because He has saved (see on Mt. 20:15). Jonah had invested so much of himself in the message of judgment that he preached; when he realized God was changing from that path, he felt the whole narrative of his own life had been upset. God can change; this is clearly taught throughout the Bible. His passion for human salvation makes Him open ended in many ways. But for some, that is too much. Divine history has to be foretold in advance according to their particular interpretation of it. And when things don't work out for them, because either their understanding was faulty or God worked differently because of factoring in human repentance or potential to repent, they lose their faith or drift away from God. Jonah speaks to them.

"Displeased" is the word typically used of God's displeasure with sin. But Jonah presents himself as totally out of step with God. He was "displeased" at repentance from sin. And he will go on in :2 to even justify himself, by saying that 'This is exactly what I said would happen!'. He makes himself the prophet. Probably one of the greatest tests of human spirituality is how we respond to others' blessing or repentance. Jonah presents himself as being so deeply unspiritual by being bitter when God shows mercy and men repent and receive His blessing. We note all the personal pronouns in :2,3: "wasn't this what *I* said when *I* was still in *my own* country? Therefore *I* hurried to flee away to Tarshish, for *I* knew that You are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and You relent of doing harm.

Therefore now Yahweh, take, *I* beg You, *my life* from *me*; for *it is better for me* to die than to live". He presents as an extreme narcissist.

Nineveh repented; thousands repented, and there must have been a party of joy in Heaven! But on earth, God's preacher, Jonah- didn't share Heaven's joy. He was angry. He didn't walk in step with the spirit. He didn't reflect Heaven's joy on earth. The Lord said: "Is your eye evil [i.e. are you clouded by a mean spirited feeling], because I am good?". We are all prone to this; to respond to God's grace by being evil-eyed, by our worldview, our "eye", becoming narrower and clouded because of the extravagance of His grace. By these comments I do not in any way underestimate the sadness and urgency of resolving divisions in the body of Christ; but we must remember that all true Christians who are in the one body preach, by that token, the same true Gospel. Their baptisms are valid- so, we can rejoice. For who, after all, is Paul or Apollos, or Steve Z or Steve A, or Andy A or Andy Z, or any of us, but ministers. The essence is Christ.

We recall that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but wishes all men to repent (Ez. 18:23). Clearly Jonah is totally out of step with God's essential will.

Jonah 4:2 *He prayed to Yahweh and said, Please, Yahweh, wasn't this what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore I hurried to flee away to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in*

loving kindness, and You relent of doing harm- See on Joel 2:14. This remonstration with God isn't recorded from God's standpoint in the record of Jon. 1. But the book of Jonah is Jonah's confession of sin and repentance. So he now records what he said. And he does so in exactly the terms in which God revealed His character and Name to Moses in Ex. 32. Jonah knew God was like this but didn't want Him to be like it. Just as he also knew Ps. 139:6 says that you can't flee from Yahweh's presence- but still he did. Jonah is effectively saying that he can't stand who God really is. He wanted, like so many religious people, to focus on a few aspects of God [in this case, God's anger with sin and judgment of it] and build the narrative of his understanding of God upon them; without wanting to see the far wider picture of who God is. In Jonah's case, his willful ignoring of God's gracious side was tantamount to not knowing the God whom he knew only in theory; for the gracious side of God dominates. And Jonah's amazing salvation from death, even his experience of resurrection, ought to have been enough to help him see that side. But here we see how hard it is to understand grace and believe it. Even death and resurrection, salvation by utter grace, wasn't enough to persuade Jonah of it. Others are likewise dragged through hell and high water, as Jonah was literally, and still don't get it. Judgmentalism and elitism dies a hard death, and many never get there. For to accept God's grace means an admission that they were wrong.

Jonah didn't share Heaven's joy. He was angry. He didn't walk in step with the spirit. It is apparent from the lesson of the gourd, and God's final approval of Nineveh's repentance, that His motive in asking Jonah to preach judgment to come upon Nineveh was because God wanted their repentance. Jonah's initial response had been to refuse to preach, because He feared God's grace might incorporate them too. We need to probe the motives for our reticence in not preaching as we might. It's too easy to excuse it as our personal shyness. Can there not be a sense in us too that we actually don't want our potential audiences to share in God's grace, even though we may not express this to ourselves directly? And another lesson arises for our preaching. It was God's intention, surely, that an upfront confrontation of Nineveh with their sins and the reality of God's coming judgment *if proclaimed with love in the heart and a sense of our own unworthiness* would bring about their conversion. We must ask whether we have perceived this in our approach to preaching.

Many struggle with the question of why God allows bad things to happen to good people. But it appears Jonah's struggle was with why God allows good things to happen to bad people. The result of not accepting God's ways leads to the anger, depression and effective loss of faith which we see in Jonah. It's perhaps more common to see this arising from struggling with why evil happens to the good. But both struggles arise from a lack of humility. These "Why?" questions are inbuilt, purposefully, into the structure of our lives. The very fact we don't have answers is to humble us- and if we refuse to be humbled, we will lose our faith as so many have.

Jonah 4:3 *Therefore now Yahweh, take, I beg You, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live*- This is a quotation of Elijah's words in 1 Kings 19:4. As noted on Jon. 3:1, there are similarities between Jonah and Elijah; who likewise struggled with spiritual elitism and judgmentalism. His whole life was centered around his sense that he was right and others wrong; and that judgment would come upon the 'others'. To have the whole narrative of his life and psychology wrecked by God's grace... was too much for him. He saw no point in being alive, despite the fact that he of all people had been preserved alive and resurrected. We too were raised with the

Lord Jesus in baptism; our lives are worth it, they are for the Lord's sake and the sake of His grace, rather than to prove ourselves always right and others wrong. Jonah would rather die than have his view of God proved wrong by God Himself. For him, it was only important that he was right. He didn't want to see any other dimension; and so many get involved in small time Protestant religion, with all the arguments about what is the true interpretation of this or that, because they simply want to be right. And they see no other dimension. He was devoted to his understanding of God, rather than to God as He actually is. And so many have had to make this hard journey. Jonah's conversion is the pattern for so many who considered themselves orthodox Christians- orthodox to whatever set of understandings of God they had received and liked to believe. God turned from His anger with Nineveh in the same way as He had turned from the fierceness of His anger and "repented of the evil" planned with Israel at the time of the golden calf incident (Ex. 32:12,14). Jonah knew this. But he didn't want God to be as kind to Gentiles as He had been to himself and Israel. Those who so object to the salvation of others will accept God has been gracious to them personally- but they don't want to see that that amazing grace can be applied to others in other ways, ways different to which it was shown to themselves. Yet the same amazing grace in its essence is part of God's saving character, it is what 'Jesus', Yah's salvation, is all about. The parallels with the golden calf incident continue, in that Moses was willing to give his life for Israel's salvation, whereas Jonah wanted to give his life in suicide because his own narrative about God had run out of highway. Jonah's words "Isn't this what I told You?" echo those of Israel in Ex. 14:12: "Isn't this the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians?'". Jonah's double attempt at suicide contrasts with the sailors and the king of Nineveh, who earnestly sought not to die.

Jonah had earlier experienced his prophecy of Israel's restoration coming true even though they did not repent. But he failed to see that his, and Israel's, experience of grace could be shared by others. For "Jeroboam did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh: he didn't depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin. He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of Yahweh, the God of Israel, which He spoke by His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was of Gath Hepher. For Yahweh saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter; for there was none shut up nor left at large, neither was there any helper for Israel. Yahweh didn't say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under the sky; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash" (2 Kings 14:24-27).

Jonah 4:4 *Yahweh said, Is it right for you to be angry?*- Perhaps the emphasis is on the word "you". Jonah was a sinner. God alone had the right to be angry with the sins of Nineveh, and by being angry that others could be saved, Jonah was playing God. And not even playing God very well, for he was ignoring the gracious side of God which is so fundamental to Him. All who struggle with anger issues need to read Jonah this way; are *you* right to be angry? Even if anger is justified, it is not always for *you* to express that anger. Anger, Divine wrath, is in the end His and not ours. For He is the judge; we are the sinners, saved by grace like Jonah and responding to that grace by showing it to others.

Jonah 4:5 *Then Jonah went out of the city*- Jonah was hoping the city would be destroyed, and so rather than remain there begging them to repent for 40 days, he simply uttered the doom and left. Perhaps he was aware of prophecies that the

Assyrians would destroy Judah and God's people go into captivity there. And perhaps that was why he wanted to see Nineveh destroyed. But by thinking that way, he was accepting that God's prophetic word could change according to human action, in this case, his not persuading Nineveh to repent. And yet again, in a beautiful way, he was brought to realize that if God's intentions can indeed change, then he should allow Nineveh the chance of repentance to change the otherwise inevitable prophetic outcome.

I suggest Jonah left the city because he hoped against hope it would still be judged and destroyed. And like Lot leaving Sodom to the east, he wanted to be away from the destruction and saved by his isolation.

And sat on the east side of the city, and there made himself a shelter- This is the same word used of the booths made by Israel at the time of the feast of tabernacles. Perhaps it was that time of year, and Jonah legalistically tried to keep the feast. But he was keeping it in Gentile territory. And so his legalism was used by God to teach him that relationship with Him was perfectly possible outside *eretz* Israel. But the word for "shelter" is also used in Isaiah as a double symbol- of Israel in their condemnation (Is. 1:8) and of God's final giving of shelter to all nations upon Zion (Is. 4:6). And by being condemnatory of Gentiles, Jonah was living out the symbolism of a condemned Judah. For if we condemn, we shall be condemned (Mt. 7:1). So God seeks to convert Jonah to see the better symbolism, and live that out. He creates for Jonah a better shelter, to give him shade from the heat, and this is described in the very language of Is. 4:6: "There will be a pavilion for a shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a refuge and for a shelter from storm and from rain". God is ever seeking to convert legalists and hyper conservatives like Jonah, when their judgmentalism and total lack of love would make many of us just give up with them. We note the Lord's similar efforts towards the scribes and Pharisees, which actually paid off in that after His ascension, many of them were baptized.

And sat under it in the shade- As noted above, the shade of the booth was clearly alluding to Is. 4:6, the salvation given by Yahweh in Zion. Jonah experienced it not in Zion but in a Gentile land. But that didn't make him recalculate his position. He himself enjoyed the shade of God's grace, but was unwilling to see Gentiles share it. His story would have been a powerful message to the early Jewish Christians who initially struggled with accepting Gentiles into the hope of Israel.

Until he might see what would become of the city- Jonah left the city because he believed and hoped that it would be destroyed. He is presented as being diametrically opposed to the will of God. Indeed, seeing Jonah wrote the book of Jonah, he presents himself this way, because the book is his confession. Let us note that in this case it was religious conservatism which led to his being so totally out of step with God, just as it was the libertinism of the Corinthian believers which led them to the same final position.

Jonah 4:6 *Yahweh God prepared*- "Prepared" is a major theme in Jonah. God prepared a huge fish (Jon. 1:17), the vine, a tiny worm (:7) and an east wind (:8). The impression is clearly given that God was at work in things and ways great and small in order to bring about the repentance of both Jonah and the Ninevites. I suggest "the vine" was a special creation by God, just as the big fish was. But if it were the castor-bean vine, then we can reflect that this was a tree of brittle wood that had a short

lifespan and was disregarded by man for any useful purpose. That was how Jonah viewed Nineveh- but God saw something in Nineveh that was not useless and He would not disregard them. We reflect that a burnt, brittle vine, useless for any human use, is used by God to represent Ithe city of Jerusalem in Ez. 15:1-8. And the point there is that what was useless to man, namely Jerusalem judged and destroyed, God would still use and show interest in. And He was being as gracious to the city of Nineveh.

A vine, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. So Jonah was very glad because of the vine- We would likely have turned away in disgust from someone as self-righteous and unloving as Jonah. But God saw the man's discomfort and showed him grace. The vine or gourd was a special creation, although perhaps an exaggerated form of a quick growing shrub known in the area, as the big fish likewise was a special creation but an exaggerated form of a whale or shark. The impression given is that God magnifies the natural in such a way as to demonstrate His power and preference to use the natural and well known.

Jonah 4:7 *But God prepared a worm at dawn the next day, and it chewed on the vine so that it withered*- Jonah was being taught that God can give grace and take it away in a moment if we don't appreciate it. From mighty fish to tiny worms, God is at work. For "prepared" see on :6.

This incident was to make Jonah understand how God valued Nineveh. God had made each of the Ninevites to “grow” (4:10,11), just as He had made the gourd grow (4:6). Jonah was so grateful for the gourd; he valued it. And this was to show him God’s value of Nineveh. Yet Jonah was angry with the worm, who had made the gourd perish. The perishing of Nineveh (Jon. 3:9) and the perishing of the gourd (4:10) are clearly parallel. He was being led to realize who he really was- a worm, who unthinkingly had sought to fell and cause to perish a wonderful and beautiful part of God’s creation. Jonah’s anger that Nineveh had been preserved is set against his anger that the gourd had perished. He was being shown that he was not in step with God’s thinking / Spirit here. If Nineveh had perished, God would have been angry and sad and depressed, just as Jonah felt on the perishing of the gourd. This was the whole purpose of the gourd incident, and it is the purpose of many incidents in our lives- to show us how God feels. Jonah was angry that Nineveh had been preserved, when instead he should have been angry if it had perished. His anger, his feelings, were not in step with God’s. And the gourd incident beautifully brought this out to him.

Jonah 4:8 *It happened that when the sun arose, God prepared*- For "prepared" see on :6.

A hot east wind- A sign of Divine judgment, as this was what was sent upon the Egyptians. Jonah was sitting on the east of the city and so it came directly upon him.

And the sun beat on Jonah’s head- Being smitten by the sun was to be understood as Divine judgment, and preservation from this is a sign of being God's people (the same Hebrew phrase is used in Ps. 121:6; Is. 49:10 "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun strike them: for He who has mercy on them will lead them"). Jonah had set himself up in his booth to observe the hoped for judgment upon Nineveh. But in fact they were to be spared judgment, and instead, judgment was aimed at Jonah, even though God in His grace had been willing to spare Jonah from it

through creating the vine. The whole narrative of Jonah's thinking and self-understanding was being overturned. Sinful Gentiles had repented and were being saved; and instead Divine judgment was headed for him for his self-righteous elitism.

So that he fainted- Jonah "fainted" as a result of the gourd perishing, just as he "fainted" [s.w.] when he refused to preach to Nineveh initially (Jon. 2:7). Circumstances so often repeat in the lives of God's people, and this is in order to seek to teach us something. It seems that Jonah only preached on the outskirts of Nineveh and then gave up; for it was only word of his message that reached the King (Jon. 3:3,4). Jonah couldn't maintain the intensity; he wilted as the gourd did. He couldn't maintain a sense of God's grace, of His tremendous desire to save, and his motivation waned. And so, circumstances repeated. His half hearted preaching was tantamount to his refusal to preach; and he fainted as a result of each of these things.

And requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live- See on Jon. 1:4. These are the very words of the self-righteous Elijah, who wished to die because he considered himself to be the only faithful believer in Israel, ignoring the at least 7000 whom God stated were faithful. Elijah said this after the contest on Carmel, after which Ahab apparently repented. Perhaps it was Ahab's repentance which made Elijah wish to die; he wished judgment upon Ahab. And Jonah didn't learn the lesson. I argued on Jon. 2 that Jonah had already died and been resurrected by grace. He really ought to have learnt grace; but instead he just wants to die again. He considered the new life he had been given to be worthless, unless he could in that life see judgment upon sinners. We too can be saved from so great a death, preserved by grace, and yet still not let that grace become the narrative of our lives, but instead return to legalism, anger and self-righteous condemnation of others. The story of Jonah is indeed an incisive challenge to us in our age, where anger and condemnation of others is so much part of daily experience.

We note the clear similarities with Elijah, who sat under a juniper tree and asked to die in the same terms (1 Kings 19:4). He was another man who ran out of highway in his narrative about God, considering himself the only faithful one and despising others. And he too wanted to die rather than hear that Ahab had even apparently repented, and that Israel had slain the prophets of Baal. Again Jonah presents himself negatively- as acting like self righteous Elijah in weakness. For what Elijah said then, he was rejected from his prophetic ministry. And Jonah seems to be making the point thereby, that he was also utterly unworthy of being a prophet / preacher. Even though he had brought about the conversion of up to 1 million people. Jonah had been dramatically saved from death in the fish, so his desire to die is all the more ungrateful.

Jonah 4:9 *God said to Jonah, Is it right for you to be angry about the vine? He said, I am right to be angry, even to death*- As noted on :8, Jonah ought to have learnt from his own salvation by grace that all bitterness and wrath was to have no part in his life from then on. But he didn't. Again we must put the emphasis upon "you"- is it right for *you* to be angry, when wrath and judgment belongs to God alone? Jonah was angry that God had taken away the vine, just as he was angry that Nineveh wasn't being judged. Yet the gift of the vine to shelter him in his anger was purely by God's grace. He was angry that grace had been withdrawn from him, just as he was angry that judgment had been withdrawn from Nineveh. He assumed that *he* had a right to God's grace, whereas Nineveh didn't. He was being powerfully tested in these things, just as we are. "Is it right...?" translates a Hebrew word which really carries the idea

of 'Are you doing / creating good?'. Anger of Jonah's kind is uncreative. No good will come of it. Whilst anger is part of our human makeup, it needs to be controlled. The expression of God's anger is always ultimately creative, His judgments bring others to know Him, His Name is glorified... whereas the anger displayed by Jonah was not going to do or create anything good or right. It was purely selfish, and he admits that he is angry unto death- so angry, that he wanted to die, and throw away the gift of saved life which He had earlier been given when resurrected out of the fish.

The plant saved Jonah's life. Even though he had said he wanted to die rather than live. So why was he so upset that the plant, which preserved his life, had died? God is proving whether his suicidal wish was what he really wanted. Any sense that "My life is not worth living" is likewise probed by God.

Jonah 4:10 *Yahweh said, You have been concerned for the vine, for which you have not laboured, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night*- If Jonah didn't want God's grace withdrawn from him nor the vine, then he had to understand that God also didn't want to withdraw His grace from Nineveh. And God had far more invested in Nineveh than Jonah had in the vine. He had laboured for Nineveh and its people; proof enough that this world isn't just wound up by God and left ticking on a clockwork mechanism. Everything, especially human life, is a result of His outgoing giving out of His power and energy. God had made the people of Nineveh grow... this is how close God is to Gentiles. And let us not think that people are unimportant to God, or not noticed by Him if they don't know the Gospel. He expends conscious effort for all growth, especially human growth. People matter to Him, even if we cannot fathom why many die without never hearing the Gospel; perhaps He foreknew they would not accept it, and so not calling them to hear it was an act of grace. For those who hear it and reject it shall be raised to condemnation. Whatever the reason, we must accept that God is love, and reveals Himself here as having made each animal and human to grow; to destroy them with mass destruction was clearly not what He wanted to do. Instead, He had "pity" (AV), or "was concerned" for Nineveh even more than Jonah was for the vine (:11). And so we should be for all people; John Thomas was quite wrong to claim that we should "not care a rush" for those who differ from us in their religious understandings.

God saved Nineveh because He pitied them, as Jonah pitied the shade tree. God wishes to show that He didn't just save Nineveh because they repented. If left at that, we would go away thinking God only saves the totally penitent. But from Adam and Eve onwards, through Jonah, we see this isn't the full story. He wishes to show that He also saved Nineveh because He pitied the kids and cattle. Pity was the reason He saved Israel from destruction in Egypt send in the wilderness: "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Is. 63:10). His eye pitied them that He didn't destroy them in the desert (Ez. 20:17). Jer. 15:5 seems to imply God pitied Jerusalem because nobody else would: "For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem?". "No eye pitied you... you were cast out bleeding into the open field" (Ez. 16:5). Just for that reason. He restored Zion not because Judah in exile repented, but because He pitied them. The Lord's teaching "Be merciful as your Father is merciful" could as well be translated "Be pitiful, as your Father is pitiful to you". God saved Judah from exile because of pity: "But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went" (Ez. 36:21).

The book ends with the comment that there were many animals there, who could not repent- to simply show that God feels pity for any suffering, and not just human suffering. The message is of the immense dimension of His pity. Jonah's pity for the plant is therefore God's attempt to lead him to share His kind of pity. We are to infer that Jonah got it, and returned to Nineveh and pastored the converts succesfully, seeing they will be in the resurrection, the Lord says.

Multiple times, God said He would not pity His people. Just as He said He would destroy Nineveh. But He did. Because such relenting on punishment is what it means to be pitiful. In the last days too, God will intervene and send His Son because He "will be jealous for His land and pity His people" (Joel 2:18). Pity is to be part of us too. Edom were condemned because although they had the right to judge Jacob, they cast off all pity (Am. 1:11). The Lord forgives the hopelessly indebted servants because of His pity, and we stand condemned if we do not show pity "as I had pity on you" (Mt. 18:33). David says he did not kill Saul when God gave him the chance to, because "My eye spared / pitied you" (1 Sam. 24:10). God gave him the chance to judge Saul. But he pitied him, and didn't. It was pity which was behind the gift of Jesus: "when the kindness (pity) of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, He saved us" (Tit. 3:4). And we can appeal to God's amazing pity. Nehemiah ends his life with the appeal:"Spare / pity me according to the greatness of Your mercy" (Neh. 13:22). Pity is pity. It is a form of grace . But it is pure. It is not based on past nor future merit. It is pity for man in his plight at this moment. And God doesn't want us to get the wrong message from Nineveh's repentance and His change. There is this other dimension, of pure pity.

God labours hard for the growth of every plant in a Gentile land, even if it flourishes only for a day. Jonah was willfully blind to the extent of God's operations because there was too much grace in it. He had earlier tried to think that God worked only in Israel and he could somehow dodge God. And man cannot dodge God. Jonah presents as totally self centered rather than rejoicing in amazing grace. God had laboured for Nineveh in preparing her potentially for conversion, perhaps through the experience of Nineveh's "40 lean years" noted by historians. He works for the conversion of so many; to not preach to them, or despise them as not our type, is as it were to seek to nullify all that labour. Every person we witness to has had that Divine labour in their lives preparing them for our witness. By working so hard to avoid making the witness, Jonah was working against the God who had worked so hard to bring Nineveh to repentance. We are to be "workers together with God" in witness, not workers against Him. Like God with Nineveh and the 120,000 children, we are to perceive the potential in people, and witness to them seeking to appeal to that latent potential within them.

The vine 'perished' as Nineveh were going to perish and as the Gentile sailors had almost perished (see on Jon. 3:9). The point was that God made to perish that which He had long laboured for, and that perishing was for Jonah's sake. And He did not want to make Nineveh perish because of Jonah's nationalism and elitism.

Can one person on a speck of a planet in a speck of a solar system in a mediocre clump of a galaxy really make a difference to the creator of that universe? Just one of the billions who have lived on this planet since Adam? As David looked to the heavens, he felt what surely we all have: "What is man, that You are mindful of him…?". Almighty God created a bush to give Jonah shade from the sun; and created a tiny worm to take it away, to teach Jonah something. We *matter* to God. Our lives and experiences and the things in our lives are important to Him, down to the micro

level [a worm, in Jonah's case]. And we should reflect this in the way we treat others- *all* men. God reminded Jonah that He had laboured and 'made to grow' the people of Nineveh, just as He had consciously expended energy on the growth of the gourd. People should matter to us; their lives, their feelings, their eternal destiny. I am not preaching some kind of humanism. Rather, appealing for us to reflect the same senseless, illogical, caring and saving spirit of our Lord and our Creator.

Jonah 4:11 *Shouldn't I be concerned for Nineveh, that great city*- The greatness of the city was the basis for His feeling of compassion, His desire that they would not perish [although they were worthy of it] and come to repentance. This enables us to read Jon. 1:2 in a somewhat different light: "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against". When God described Nineveh as a "great city", the very fact of its size elicited a desire to spare it. And of course we meet the same phrase in Revelation (Rev. 18:21), where a condemned Babylon is described as a "great city". This was not God gleefully preparing to destroy a huge city. He surely had Nineveh in mind when He inspired those words. This was, and will be, a God whose very heart is touched by the tragedy of sinners having to be punished, and who is open to a change of purpose if they will repent. Thus the latter day appeal to "Come out of her!", whether we understand 'Babylon' as false religion, the Moslem world, the world of sinners or whoever, is rooted in God's spirit of passionate love towards Nineveh. As Jonah "cried" against Nineveh, so God 'cries' against Babylon (Rev. 18:2). We who make that appeal in these last days should be reflecting here on earth the mind of God in Heaven; not merely pronouncing doom and gloom against 'Babylon', but warning them of God's stated intentions towards them *with a heart that bleeds for them and seeks their repentance.* The heart of God Almighty responded in harmony to the hearts of the Ninevites- brought out by the repeated word play in Jonah 3:8-10, whereby the 'turning' of Nineveh in repentance is reflected in how God 'turns' and repents of what He had said He would do to them.

We note that God says nothing about Nineveh's repentance. He doesn't say "They repented, so I did". That's what we expect Him to say, but He doesn't. He leaves Jonah with a picture of His absolute and sovereign grace towards Nineveh- because that was the quality of grace which He had shown to Jonah. God seems to give Jonah the reason for His change of mind as 'I'm concerned about the cattle and the kids, 120,000 of them. So, I re-thought'. Sovereign grace was the reason God gave Jonah for the re-thinking over Nineveh's destruction. And Jonah gets it- that he too had been saved by sovereign grace, not by repentance. For there is never a word of repentance from Jonah in the whole book. But God still worked to save him. Only when we appreciate this argument do we understand the otherwise strange ending to the book- "and much cattle". The point is that pity is a strong component of God's character. He simply pities people, despite their lack of or low quality of repentance, as He did Jonah, Adam and Eve, humanity... As Jonah shows, it's not that repentance is not a factor. It is, big time. But God wants to demonstrate that His basic, essential deep pity is a major issue too, quite apart from repentance. For as a parent pities their children, so God pities us.

In which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who can't discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?- As noted on :10, all life on this earth is a result of God's conscious, active involvement and labour. And this includes animal life; and so the tragedy of destroying the city would involve the loss of the animal life too. What was in God's mind therefore was a cataclysm the size of that which hit Sodom; it would have been on a huge scale, if 120,000 children and all the animals would have been destroyed. Keil and Delitsczh

quote ancient sources which claim that a child was considered to only be able to certainly differentiate between right and left at seven years old. 120,000 under seven would mean a population of over half a million, with high population density. The total desolation of the Nineveh area was clearly in His mind; and therefore His sensitivity to human repentance is the more evident, in that He changed that plan.

"Who cannot discern..." may be God telling Jonah: 'You didn't get it, did you. Time and again, you didn't discern. But I saved you. So why should I not save these people who also don't discern?'. He also is perhaps saying that He saw the potential in those 120,000 young children who didn't currently know right from wrong. And the fact Jonah returned to Nineveh and spent the rest of his life pastoring them... means that he 'got it' in the end. And so again we understand how this book is his memoirs, explaining how he had come to spend his life pastoring the people of Nineveh.

The story ends with Jonah sitting in the outback with no shade, exposed to heat stroke, without water and about to die. But he lived to write his story. So we are left to conclude that he repented and God saved him from death. And lived to write his memoirs to God's absolute grace. The final word, "and much cattle", sounds at first blush like a truncated, bodged ending- until we 'get it'. That God is so gracious, that He cared even for all the cattle who would be destroyed in some fire and brimstone destruction of Nineveh. Jonah concludes by presenting God as caring and gracious towards His creation, to the uttermost. And this thereby contrasts with his own ungraciousness.

The book ends with God saying that He pitied Nineveh, just as Jonah had pitied the vine. But... there was an extra element in God's pity: "And much cattle". He was showing how His grace and vision of grace is so much broader than man's, especially Jonah's.

In all true spiritual endeavour and genuine spiritual progress, there seems almost inevitably to be a process of two steps backward and three forward. Consider the pattern of Jonah's life:

- Encounters the presence of God
- Flees from his preaching responsibility; faints
- Saved by God's grace
- Repents and obeys the call to preach
- Loses his intensity
- God shows Jonah how He feels about Nineveh
- Jonah faints
- Repents and obeys the call to preach by writing up his poem and writing the book of Jonah.

Within the course of a few hours, we can go through the essence of this process, learning again the lesson of Jonah and the gourd. We are encountering the presence and call of God to minister every hour; for the need of the world around us is the call.

Jonah and Nahum

Nahum also prophesied against Nineveh. When we read his words, it would appear that there was no chance for Nineveh. And yet presumably there was always a chance for them, just as there was at Jonah's time some years previously. But it seems to me that the essential message of Nahum was that of Jonah. They could have repented, even then. Not surprisingly, we find many allusions by Nahum back to Jonah:

Nahum	Jonah [re. Nineveh]
God is slow to anger (1:3)	4:2 [same Hebrew words]- and therefore He saved Nineveh.
"Who can abide in the fierceness of His anger?" (1:6)	God turns away from "the fierceness of His anger" [s.w.] against Nineveh (3:9)- Nineveh had survived God's fierce anger by repenting, and so they could even in Nahum's time. The Hebrew word translated "abide" in Nah. 1:6 is that used in Jonah to describe how the King of Assyria "arose" (3:6) in repentance. The answer to the question: "Who can abide / arise in the [presence of] the fierceness of His anger?" is: 'The King of Assyria if he repents'.
The wickedness of Nineveh "came up" before God's face (2:1)	The same words are used about Nineveh (1:2).
God was "against" Nineveh (2:13)	Same word in 1:2
Judged for "wickedness" (3:19)	Same word in 1:2; 3:8

It becomes apparent that the Ninevites of Nahum's day are being directed back to the repentance of their city at the time of Jonah; but clearly they are also being invited to share in Jonah's personal repentance.

Nahum	Jonah [re. Jonah]
God has His way in the storm (1:3)	Jonah's experience in the storm
God rebukes the sea (1:4)	As God stilled the storm which Jonah was in
Who can stand before God? (1:5)	Jonah had to be 'stood up' [s.w.] from his hiding in the

	ship when fleeing from God's presence (1:15)
The Lord is a stronghold "in the day of trouble" (1:7) to those who trust Him.	Jonah cried to God in his "affliction" [s.w. "trouble"] (2:2)
An "overrunning flood" will overtake Nineveh (1:8)	"The floods…passed over [s.w. "overrunning"] Jonah (2:2); but Jonah repented and was saved. Note how the connections between Nah. 1:7,8 and Jonah 2:2 are in close proximity- surely an allusion is intended here.
Affliction (1:9)	Affliction [s.w.] (2:2)

From this it becomes apparent that Jonah is seen by God as in essentially the same position as the Ninevites. This was why his appeal to them was so strong. For he had been in just their position, in essence, yet had repented. The fact Nahum makes all these allusions to Jonah's personal repentance indicates that they well knew the story of Jonah; and his repentance had inspired that of the audience he preached to. In these we see a very real pattern for ourselves; it is our identity with our audience, as repentant sinners ourselves, which will elicit their response.

Nahum's message was not only a warning of judgment to come upon Nineveh. It was an appeal to Israel, that unless they repented, they would likewise perish. The appeal to Judah to "perform thy vows" (Nah. 1:15) is couched in the very same words as Jonah used in Jonah 2:9: "I will pay [s.w. perform] that which I have vowed". Judah were being asked to be like Jonah, and not despise Nineveh, but rather appeal to her to repent.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: MICAH

MICAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

MICAH CHAPTER 1

Micah Chapter 1

Micah 1:1 *The word of Yahweh that came to Micah the Morashtite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem*- We note that although Micah was based in Judah, his work was also in appealing to Samaria, the ten tribes, as well as the two tribe kingdom of Judah whose capital was Jerusalem. Micah's words were perhaps addressed specifically to the leadership and priests in the cities of Samaria and Jerusalem, although all the people were also addressed (:2).

Micah 1:2 *Hear, you peoples, all of you*- As noted on :1, Micah was appealing to both Israel and Judah. Hence "all" the earth / *eretz* / land was addressed. Perhaps there was a tendency for Judah to assume that all words of Divine condemnation were for others rather than themselves; and we all have that tendency. Several of the prophets appeal to both Israel and Judah; potentially, if both nations had repented, they could have reunited as one nation under God and the dominion of God's Kingdom established over them both.

Listen, O earth, and all that is therein- The Hebrew terms for "hear", usually meaning 'be obedient', and "listen", meaning literally to hear or pay attention, are

often used together in the Hebrew Bible. The idea is that if we really hear, we will be obedient to what we hear. And this is our problem; the language of the Bible can drift over us, without us paying attention. And so the two terms are used together- to really hear God's word is to be obedient to it.

And let the Lord Yahweh be witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple- The imagery of the court room continues in :3. God is both the witness, and the judge. Just as the Lord Jesus is later presented as both the judge and also the advocate, on our side and successfully pleading our case, hopeless as it is. There is no essential contradiction; the imagery here gives us an insight into the thinking of God Himself. "From" is not a reflection of the original; the idea is that God in His heavenly temple, of which the Jerusalem temple was but a reflection, had entered into judgment with His people and was giving evidence.

Micah 1:3 *For behold, Yahweh comes forth out of His place, and will come down and tread on the high places of the earth-* God would come forth from the Heavenly temple and trample the "high places" where His people worshipped idols (:5). This probably has primary reference to the Angel going forth from the temple to slay the Assyrians in Hezekiah's time. See on Ps. 78:60. Micah's appeal for repentance was heard at Hezekiah's time (Jer. 26:18,19), and so God came forth in judgment upon the enemies of His people rather than upon Judah, as would otherwise have happened as Micah here foresees. This is an example of where God's stated purposes can be changed by human repentance. And yet the prophetic word comes true, but in a different form and time. Yahweh in His Angel did come out of His temple; but to judge Assyria and not Judah as originally intended.

There are a whole set of allusions to Saul and Jonathan's death in Micah 1 and 2, where they are connected with a spiritually collapsed Israel:

Micah 1 and 2	Saul and Jonathan
High places (1:3)	Slain at the site of *their* high places (2 Sam. 1:19,25). These high places are consistently associated with idolatry and at best semi-spirituality.
"A wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls" (1:8) for apostate Israel	David's lament over Jonathan and Saul
"They covet fields, and take them away... they oppress a man" (Mic. 2:2)	Saul was guilty of this.
"Lament with a lamentation of lamentations" for the pathos of it all (Mic. 2:4 AVmg.)	David's lament over Jonathan and Saul
"Your shame naked" (1:11)	Stripped naked by the Philistines, with Saul's body paraded naked on the wall of Bethshan.

"It is come unto Judah; he is come unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem" (1:9)	The Philistines took the Israelite cities at this time (1 Sam. 31:7), presumably including Jerusalem, which David had to recapture.
"Declare ye it not at Gath" (1:10) - regarding Israel's judgment for sin	This is a direct quote from 2 Sam.1:20.
"The glory of Israel hides in the cave of Adullam" (1:15 NEB)	Saul
"She is grievously sick of her wounds" (1:9 AVmg.)	How Saul and Jonathan died (1 Sam. 31:1,2 AVmg.).

David's lament over Saul and Jonathan was that of God and Micah over Israel. There is therefore the possible hint that Jonathan's personal spirituality was not what it might have been at this time. The grief of Micah for Israel was that of David for Jonathan: "I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls" (Mic. 1:8). The extent of David's grief is another indication of his love for Jonathan; and this is a prophecy of Christ's love for us. The spirit of Christ was in Micah.

Micah 1:4 *The mountains melt under him*- The language of Ps. 97:5,7 about the judgment upon idolaters.

And the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire- The language of condemnation of the wicked (Ps. 68:2). We note that on the cross, the Lord's heart was also like melted wax (Ps. 22:14). Although He never personally sinned, through the crucifixion process He endured the condemnation of sinners; those He condemns will therefore be given a judgment which He has Himself experienced although innocent. No human judge can do this. His judgment will therefore be ultimately just. And yet we also see how even sin doesn't put us in a position which He cannot appreciate.

Like waters that are poured down a steep place- Waters and rivers often represent Gentile powers. They would gush into the land in judgment, poured out by God, rather like the bowls of judgment are poured out upon *eretz* Israel in Revelation.

Micah 1:5 *All this is because of the disobedience of Jacob, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the disobedience of Jacob? Isn't it Samaria?*- There are many hints in the Genesis record that the historical Jacob and his family were all too involved with idols as well as Yahweh. Gen. 31:36 uses the precise Hebrew words as here: "Jacob answered Laban, What is my trespass [s.w. "disobedience"]? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued after me?". The context is that Jacob's wife Rachel had stolen her father's idols, and Jacob was in denial of this. The disobedience of Jacob and the sins of the Jacob family, "Israel", was not only idolatry, but specifically the denial that they practiced it. Soon afterwards, Jacob urged the family of Israel to repentance and they buried their idols beneath a tree. And this was the ongoing sin of Israel at Micah's time- idolatry, and the denial of it. The disobedience of Jacob was at the idol shrine of Samaria, where the ten tribes worshipped their idols in the name of Yahweh, claiming that their ancestor Jacob had done the same; Hosea comments often about this. See on Hos. 7:1; 8:5,6; 10:5,7; 13:16.

And what are the high places of Judah? Aren't they Jerusalem?- Just as the ten tribes worshipped their idols in the name of Yahweh worship, so the Jerusalem temple was used. Ezekiel was shown men worshipping idols right within the temple. And this is our tendency; not to totally deny Yahweh and fall into atheism, but to worship our idols in the name of serving God. Our passion for a career, nice house, car and vacations becomes justified as Yahweh worship when it is just the same idolatry which the people around us shamelessly practice.

Micah 1:6 *Therefore I will make Samaria like a rubble heap of the field, like places for planting vineyards; and I will pour down its stones into the valley, and I will uncover its foundations*- It was normal for victorious invaders to destroy the religious symbols of those they vanquished, and this was to happen to Samaria. And yet in wrath God always remembers mercy; the desolate site would become a place where vineyards could be planted. This is the very picture of God's restored Kingdom upon earth (Is. 65:21; Am. 9:14). God's anger is unlike human anger. It is to clear the ground for His restorative work, albeit with another generation and even nation.

Micah 1:7 *All her idols will be beaten to pieces, and all her temple gifts will be burned with fire, and all her images will be destroyed; for as the hire of a prostitute has she obtained them, and to the hire of a prostitute shall they return*- The condemnation of Jerusalem and her temple cult is more extreme than that of Samaria. Those who prided themselves that they were worshipping Yahweh correctly, in the temple rather than at Jeroboam's idolatrous calf shrines, were actually worse than those they felt superior to. And this is the danger of legalism to this day. As noted on :6, it was usual for victorious invaders to destroy the religious symbols of those they vanquished, and this was to happen to Jerusalem. It was only the reformation led by Isaiah's school of the prophets, which surely included Micah, aided by Hezekiah, which stopped this prophecy coming true at that time. The idols were "temple gifts"; they were justified as having been devoted to Yahweh. See on :5. Micah uses the same language as Hosea, in seeing Jerusalem as a prostitute who was paid for her services with idols which she treasured.

Micah 1:8 *For this I will lament and wail; I will go stripped and naked*- This was the judgment of prostitutes, and Micah has just likened Jerusalem to a prostitute in :7. He doesn't merely condemn, but feels himself into the shoes of those whose behaviour is so abhorrent. No wonder therefore that his appeal was successful in Hezekiah's time (Jer. 26:18,19).

I will howl like the jackals, and moan like the daughters of owls- The Hebrew specifically refers to female jackals and female owls. The females only howl like this when their very own young are taken from them. This was how Micah felt as he predicted the destruction of God's people; for in :16 he will speak of how *they* would lose their beloved offspring. It would be a very personal loss to Micah. Their diminishing was his diminishing, and in this he powerfully reflected the feelings of God. These terrible judgments were not therefore uttered in anger, and unlike Jonah, they were uttered with every appeal for the hearers to repent and to thereby change the otherwise inevitable.

Micah 1:9 *For her wounds are incurable; and it has come even to Judah*- The incurable wound was healed by their repentance (Jer. 26:18,19). This is the paradox of grace. God is really willing to change His stated purpose, as He did regarding Israel at the time of Moses, and for Nineveh- because He so respects the repentance of even a remnant, and their intercession.

It reaches to the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem- As noted on :8 and :10, Micah's personal identity with his target audience is impressive, and the root of his success. Hence he speaks of "my people". We see here too the unity of spirit between God and His prophet, His man on earth. These words about "my people" could be God speaking, or Micah. Micah was one in spirit with God in his feelings about God's people. The process of inspiration would have worked through this.

Micah 1:10 *Don't tell it in Gath*- See on :3. Micah mourned for God's people as righteous David did for sinful Saul, whom he so loved despite all the wickedness that man did to him.

Don't weep at all. At Beth Ophrah I have rolled myself in the dust- Rolling naked (:7) in the dust… this was the extent of Micah's passion for the repentance of his audience. The success of his appeal (Jer. 26:18,19) was because of his personal appeal and identity with his target audience. And this is the lesson for every preacher. "Beth Ophrah" is literally 'house of dust', this was what that idol shrine would become; and Micah rolls himself in the dust in order to show his extreme identity with those facing such impending judgment. He didn't shrug and not care for those who refused to listen; his heart bled for them because of his urgent and desperate sense of identity with them. This shines through all of Micah's appeals. The prophets believed their message, to the point that it overcame them with grief that men wouldn't heed them. Is this how we feel at the rejection of our message? Is our testimony to Jesus really in the spirit of these prophets…? Can we identify with Micah when he lamented and wailed, going stripped and naked, because of the import of what he was prophesying, and human rejection of it? Depending which translation we choose, it appears that Micah now lists 10 towns around Jerusalem which are to be judged. This may be in order to suggest that Judah is effectively no better than the ten tribe kingdom and will suffer their judgment.

Micah 1:11 *Pass on, inhabitant of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame*- As noted on :7 and :8, the judgment for a prostitute. "Shaphir" means 'beautiful woman', another connection with prostitution. They would flee the invaders, or be taken captive by them, in naked shame. Yet Micah also went naked and shamed because he so identified with them (:8). The towns of Judah listed here were presumably centers of idolatry. If we follow the LXX here, the identity of the next towns is no longer an issue: "The inhabitant of Sennaar, fairly inhabiting her cities, came not forth to mourn for the house next to her: she shall receive of you the stroke of grief". This would be in contrast to how Micah did mourn for those next to him.

The inhabitant of Zaanan won't come out- "Zaanan" could be a form of "Zion". They would not be able to flee to Beth Ezel, possibly Azal near Jerusalem (Zech. 14:5). Zion would be surrounded by her enemies and there would be no place to escape to, as all the surrounding villages would have been captured. There is a similar idea in :12, where another village near Jerusalem is mentioned.

When you hear the wailing of Beth Ezel, you will know there is no protection there- Beth Ezel is "house of joining", perhaps a reference to the brothels associated with idol worship.

Micah 1:12 *For the inhabitant of Maroth waits anxiously hoping for good*- The villages around Jerusalem were to be overrun by the Assyrians as they closed in on Jerusalem. The problem was that the Jews had been worshipping idols in the name of Yahweh worship (see on :5), and they thought that therefore Yahweh would protect them; they 'anxiously hoped', s.w. "pray" in Zech. 8:22; but the response was to be "evil" rather than the "good" they asked for. Both "good" and "evil" come from Him, not Satan.

But evil has come down from Yahweh to the gate of Jerusalem- Clear evidence that evil in the sense of disaster comes from God and not from any supernatural being called Satan. Micah felt that the "evil" was already at the gate of Jerusalem, about to enter. The picture is of the enemies at the gates of Jerusalem, surrounding the city. This is what happened when Sennacherib invaded, but Micah's appeal was heard, a remnant repented, led by Isaiah and his school of the prophets, which included Micah, whose prophecies have much in common with Isaiah (Mic. 4 = Is. 2). And so the situation was averted, although the towns around Jerusalem did indeed fall to the Assyrians at that time.

Micah 1:13 *Harness the chariot to the swift steed, inhabitant of Lachish*- The idea could be that Lachish should prepare to flee. But the rest of the verse speaks as if there was particular sin found there. I suggest therefore that the idea is that the Assyrians had a camp at Lachish from which they would begin their assault on Jerusalem, and this is exactly what is stated in Is. 36:2. Yet that invasion was sent by God, at His command; see on :4.

She was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion; for the transgressions of Israel were found in you- As explained on :5, the transgression of Israel / Jacob was idolatry and refusing to accept their sin. The daughter of Zion refers specifically to the temple mount, which had become a place of idol worship in the name of Yahweh (:5). Some of the idols they worshipped came from the Assyrians who were now going to attack and destroy them. "The beginning of sin" can mean "the great sin".

Micah 1:14 *Therefore you will give a parting gift to Moresheth Gath*- Micah was from Moresheth (:1), he perhaps calls it "Gath" to suggest it was Philistine in spirit. Again, he is stressing that the judgment he is announcing affects him personally, "my people" (:9), and even his own home village. This continues the theme of Micah's complete identification with the audience he was preaching to.

The houses of Achzib will be a deceitful thing to the kings of Israel- There is a word play here, as "deceitful" is the same word as "Achzib". The word is used of the false prophets in Mic. 2:11, so perhaps these houses were the centers of the false prophets who had assured the people that they were serving Yahweh through their idolatry and He would therefore protect them from the invaders; see on :12.

Micah 1:15 *I will yet hand you over to your enemy, inhabitant of Mareshah*- Again the emphasis is upon the fact that God would do this, He would pour out the waters of the invaders upon His own people.

The leader who is the glory of Israel will come to hide in the Adullam cave- As noted on :3, Micah was lamenting for his people as David did for Saul. They gloried in their king just as Israel initially did in Saul, but he would come to hide himself in the Adullam cave just as Saul did. But again there is hope implied; for at that cave,

David gave Saul the opportunity for repentance. And this is always the hint throughout Micah, and it seems some took it. The leader whom Israel glorified was presumably a king of Judah before Hezekiah; but the judgment of Jerusalem didn't then come, because Micah's message was responded to. The book of Micah has three discernible sections, possibly corresponding to the prophecies he uttered in the reign of the three kings mention in :1. These words may have therefore had Jotham or Ahaz in view.

Micah 1:16 *Shave your heads, and cut off your hair for the children of your delight. Enlarge your baldness like the vulture; for they have gone into captivity from you!*- I noted on :8 that Micah wept as if *he* had lost his children. He was totally identified with those who were so sinful, who were under certain judgment, but whom he hoped to save by bringing them to repentance. In no way did he practice guilt by association and mental separation from those who were under judgment. Instead, on God's behalf, he identified with them in order to try to win them to repentance. And this was supremely what God did through the work and death of His Son, who was "son of man" as much as any man was. A woman did not shave her head in grief for lost children; this was the punishment of a prostitute, and this is the theme of this section. Israel had prostituted themselves to other gods (:7). Judah was to cut off her hair in shame and grief (Is. 3:24; Jer. 7:29), and yet they would do so themselves.

MICAH CHAPTER 2

Micah Chapter 2

Micah 2:1 *Woe to those who devise iniquity*- The same phrase used in Ps. 36:4 of Saul who has been set up as the prototype of a condemned Israel at Micah's time (see on Mic. 1:3). It is the same phrase used of the Jerusalem leadership who brought idols into the temple (Ez. 11:2). This was ongoing in Micah's time (Mic. 1:5), but judgment didn't come for it because Micah's appeal succeeded, thanks to his passionate identity with the people he was appealing to, and to the effects of the school of the prophets to which he belonged.

And work evil on their beds!- "Evil" was to come upon Jerusalem (Mic. 1:12), but the people had themselves worked or created that evil.

When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand- We have here one of many Biblical examples of where thought gives direct rise to action. The state of our mind, our spirit, is therefore critically important. They 'did' ["practiced"] evil; and that phrase is the consistent refrain of the record of the kings, that they "did evil in the sight of Yahweh". But that doing of evil was conscious, and the result of their thoughts as they lay at night upon their beds.

Micah 2:2 *They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away: and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage*- As noted on :1, the thought

gives rise to the action. They coveted fields in their hearts, and then in the morning, they actually seized them. We think of Ahab's coveting Naboth's vineyard. The perpetrators of these things were the ruling classes. Land inheritances were from God, and the Mosaic law defended inheritances, seeing the land was God's and He had divided it as He wished. To simply grab property from another was therefore to as it were steal from God. To "oppress" others by legalistic games to their own advantage would lead to the Assyrians 'oppressing' them; the same word is used about this in Is. 52:4. If Judah stopped oppressing their brethren, they would not be oppressed by their enemies (Jer. 7:6; 21:12; 50:33). Not oppressing our brethren is a major theme of the law and the prophets. And it has wide application to our lives today. The collateral damage caused is brought out here- by seizing the house of a man, the oppressor was hurting the man's house in the sense of his family. The collateral damage of unpleasant behaviour against individuals is often ignored or discounted. But God notices.

Micah 2:3 *Therefore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am planning against these people a disaster-* This is the same word for "evil"; the evil of the oppressors (:1) would lead to the evil of the invasions (Mic. 1:12). God plans judgment, and states it as if it will surely happen, as He did with Nineveh in Jonah's time. But in the gap between statement and fulfilment, there is the opportunity for repentance, and God is so sensitive to that, that He will change His stated word of judgment. The evil planned need not happen if there is repentance (the same words are used in Jer. 18:11).

From which you will not remove your necks, neither will you walk proudly; for it is an evil time- The idea is that the invaders would impose a yoke upon God's people, implying captivity and bondage. And yet they could remove their necks from it eventually, for it was God's purpose that the captives would return. But the generation that first experienced it would not. The intention was to bring down their proud necks; pride as always was the essential problem.

Micah 2:4 *In that day they will take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, saying, 'We are utterly ruined! My people's possession is divided up. Indeed he takes it from me and assigns our fields to traitors!'-* Again we see that the judgments to come were really of their own device. They had taken others' possessions, and so now the fields they had stolen (:2) would be taken by the invaders. Who would take up the parable "against you"? They themselves. They were to lament themselves, and recognize that their fields had been taken away and given to the immoral. Micah ahead of time had lamented (Mic. 1:8). He felt himself into the condemnation of his people, although he himself was innocent. Just as the Lord did to supremacy on the cross. It was this identity and empathy with the objects of the wrath he was pronouncing

which made Micah so effective, and it is the reason why the cross of the human Christ must be central to our appeal to men; for He there is what elicits response.

Micah 2:5 *Therefore you will have no one who divides the land by lot in the assembly of Yahweh*- It was at these land courts that the poor were deceived out of their property and inheritances, as criticized in :2. And yet it was done in the name of Yahweh; those illegal courts were presented as being an "assembly of Yahweh" just as idol worship was claimed as Yahweh worship. Or it could be that we are to associate :5 with :6; and this verse is the threat of the Jewish leaders to Micah, that they would arrange that he would lose his inheritance.

Micah 2:6 *Don't preach!, they preach, Don't preach about these things. Disgrace won't overtake us*- As noted on Mic. 1:5, Judah worshipped other gods in the name of Yahweh worship, and the false prophets of both Israel and Judah assured them that therefore Yahweh would protect them from the Assyrians; they expected good to come from Him in the time of their need (see on Mic. 1:12). The word for "preach" is literally 'to drip', which was the metaphor for prophecy in Dt. 32:2. They 'preached' or 'dripped' that Micah was not to 'drip' or preach. They were claiming Divine inspiration in forbidding Micah to preach. Amos had the same. Anyone who feels the need to stop another preaching is really revealing their own agenda. These false prophets claimed to have had Divine revelation that Micah should stop teaching, and that they had a message that the people would not be overtaken by disgrace as Micah claimed. Truly false teachers say what people want to hear. Isaiah, contemporary with Micah, had prophesied that they would indeed suffer "disgrace" (s.w. Is. 30:3; 45:16). Micah taught the same. In Semitic worldviews, shame was worse than death. It was again their pride which led them to reject intuitively any message that they would be humbled, and it is the same root cause for human rejection of the Christian message.

Micah 2:7 *Shall it be said, O house of Jacob: Is the Spirit of Yahweh restrained?*- Micah spoke by the Spirit of Yahweh, and to tell him not to speak those words (:6) was therefore an attempt to restrain the Spirit. They could not restrain God's Spirit by simply stating that the inspired word of God was not inspired. People make the same mistake today.

Are these His doings? Don't My words do good to him who walks blamelessly?- The power of God's word is such that those who are spiritual, who 'walk blamelessly', are strengthened further by them. His words "do good"; perhaps the false prophets were saying that Micah's prophetic word were 'not good' for the people, just as was claimed against Jeremiah.

Micah 2:8 *But lately My people have risen up as an enemy*- God's people became His enemy in that they were on the side of God's enemies; and He would be an enemy to their enemies (Ex. 23:22 s.w.). Perhaps this was reflected in Micah's personal experience, just as God's painful relationship with Israel was reflected in that of Hosea with his faithless wife Gomer. For Micah will use the same word for "enemy" in speaking of how his own close family members, perhaps even his own wife, had become his "enemy" (Mic. 7:6,8,10). We will note on :11 that the problem was not simply with the minority who were the leaders; but the entire people were polluting the land by eagerly listening to false prophets.

You strip the robe and clothing from those who pass by- As noted on Hos. 7:1, the priests were even robbing those who passed along the roads.

Confidently assuming that they aren't in danger- As noted on :6, the false prophets claimed that Yahweh would protect His people from the Assyrians because they were worshipping Him when they worshipped the idols. The ten tribe kingdom did the same with their calf worship.

Micah 2:9 *You drive the women of My people out from their pleasant houses; from their young children you take away My blessing forever*- This continues the complaint in :2, that houses and the Divine blessing of land inheritance were being taken away from people by wealth-hungry leaders.

Micah 2:10 *Arise, and depart! For this is not your resting place, because of your uncleanness that destroys, even with a grievous destruction*- There has been a strong theme in this chapter of inheritances being given by God but then taken away by corrupt men. This seems to continue here; the land would spew out those who corrupted it (Lev. 18:28; 20:22). The people are being asked to recognize this, and themselves depart. It could not be their permanent resting place because they were destroying it by their own uncleanness. They would be dealt with just as the Canaanites had been.

Micah 2:11 *If a man walking in a spirit of falsehood lies: I will prophesy to you of wine and of strong drink; he would be the prophet of this people*- The false prophets spoke under the influence of alcohol / spirit drink, and yet claimed to be inspired by God's Spirit. The same contrast between the two types of spirit is made by Paul in Eph. 5:18; perhaps he got the idea from here. And yet the people loved to listen to them and accepted them as Divine prophets. The judgment therefore shifts from the religious leaders to the people, who gave them power and eagerly accepted the false prophets.

God would surely not have destroyed the whole land and people for the sake of a few individuals who were falsely claiming to be prophets; the problem was that people had itching ears, and the nature of how they were and what they wanted inspired the false prophets to teach them what they wanted to hear. See on Mic. 3:5.

Micah 2:12 *I will surely assemble, Jacob, all of you; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as a flock in the midst of their pasture; they will swarm with people*- As so often, the prophecies of condemnation lead immediately onwards to those of God's restorative purpose. His judgments were not threatened nor executed in the kind of anger which men have. Rather did God always use those judgments towards His further purpose of salvation for a repentant remnant. and it sees He envisaged that remnant including both Israel and Judah. Their repentance would lead them to realize that all the personal barriers between them were as nothing; reconcilliation with God empowers reconcilliation between those reconciled with Him. The experience of repentance and forgiveness involves the humility which is required for reconcilliation between persons. This is why the prophets (Ezekiel and Zechariah particularly) often present the restoration to God as the time of unity between the remnants of Judah and Israel.

Micah 2:13 *He who opens the breach goes up before them. They break through and pass the gate, and go out. And their king passes on before them, with Yahweh at their head*- This sounds like the final desperate exit from Jerusalem by Zedekiah many years later. But this could have happened soon after the prophecy was first given. It didn't, because Micah's appeal met some response. God's plan was therefore changed, but His word still came finally true, just as it did in Jonah's prophecy of Nineveh's destruction. It was averted by repentance, but the prophetic word was reinterpreted and rescheduled in fulfilment. But even in that shameful exile, Yahweh would as it were be leading the exiles, at their head.

But the Hebrew can be translated quite comfortably in a way which would rather speak of the return of the exiles, again with Yahweh at their head; and this would fit the context of :12. The same lesson is taught here as in the cherubim visions of Ezekiel; Yahweh in all His glory went with the exiles out of Jerusalem into captivity, and would return with their children to a restored Zion. It was not that God turned away in disgust from His sinful people. He worked with them to both punish and restore, and this is an abiding feature of His work with His people.

MICAH CHAPTER 3

Micah Chapter 3

Micah 3:1 *I said, Please listen*- Often the prophets break off from predicting coming condemnation to *plead personally* with their hearers to repent [this explains some of the strange shifts of pronouns in the prophets]. Chapter 2 is a message of judgment from God against Israel. And now Micah pleads personally with them.

You heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel: Isn't it for you to know justice?- "Heads" translates the same word used in the preceding verse, Mic. 2:13, where we noted that Yahweh was the head of His people, both in exile and restoration. The leadership were supposed to be working on God's behalf, leading the people with Him and for Him. They didn't "know" justice in the sense of actively engaging with it; "know" means effectively to have relationship with. By not knowing justice they hated it (:9).

Micah 3:2 *You who hate the good, and love the evil; who tear off their skin, and their flesh from off their bone*s- This is the language of wolves tearing their prey. The shepherds of Israel were in fact wolves.

Micah 3:3 *Who also eat the flesh of My people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones, and chop them in pieces for the pot, and as flesh within the cauldron*- It is a lion who breaks the bones of its prey. The leaders of Israel had acted as the Assyrian lions would do to God's people.

Micah 3:4 *Then they will cry to Yahweh, but He will not answer them. Yes, He will hide His face from them at that time, because they made their deeds evil*- "Evil" is the term used so often of the evil to be brought upon God's people by their invaders. But the people had themselves done "evil" to themselves. Their judgment was appropriate to their sin.

Micah 3:5 *Thus says Yahweh concerning the prophets who lead My people astray; for those who proclaim, Peace! to those who feed them*- "Peace" often refers to peace with God. The priests of the calf shrines of Israel and of the idol shrines within the Jerusalem temple (Mic. 1:5) assured the people that they enjoyed peace with God, and would not suffer from the Assyrians. This is the same kind of fake "peace and safety" cry of the last days (1 Thess. 5:3). They said this to those who paid them, who fed them. They were career religionists. As noted on Mic. 2:11, it was for this reason that the common people were as guilty as their spiritual leaders; for they wanted to hear the message which their leaders taught them, and even paid for it. It's simply not the case that God would punish

the mass of innocent people for the sins of their religious leaders. The masses get the leadership they essentially want, in that the leaders know they must say what the masses want. That principle has been historically true, regardless of whether democracy was practiced or not. And so at this point in Israel's history, the leaders spoke what they knew the masses wanted to hear. And so the masses, although they were abused by their leadership, still stood responsible before God. See on :7.

And whoever doesn't provide for their mouths, they prepare war against him- The singular "him" may refer specifically to Micah. Those who didn't pay the false prophets to teach what they wanted to hear, had war prepared or sanctified against them. This is the language of jihad, of holy war- but waged by the false prophets upon the faithful minority. They religiously justified persecuting those who didn't support them, appealing to a very quasi spirituality. See on Mic. 4:3.

Micah 3:6 *Therefore night is over you, with no vision, and it is dark to you, that you may not divine; and the sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will be black over them*- The prophets in view are the false prophets of :5. It is the same idea as Ez. 13:23: "Therefore you shall no more see false visions, nor practise fortune telling. I will deliver My people out of your hand". This verse is not saying that from then on, there would be no more prophets inspired by Yahweh. For there were prophets after Micah, and he himself goes on to insist that he is inspired (:8). The *false* prophets would have no further vision because the night of destruction would come upon them, rather than the light of God's Kingdom which they claimed was about to dawn due to the people's supposed faithfulness to the idol shrines, which they claimed were a form of devotion to Yahweh. This was the very message of Am. 5:18,20- the false prophets proclaimed the coming of a glorious day of Yahweh, but that day would be night and not light to them. The inversion of light to darkness suggests a de-creation, an undoing of creation, which is the very way that God envisages the destruction of His people and land.

Micah 3:7 *The seers shall be disappointed, and the diviners confounded. Yes, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer from God*- In their last moments, they would realize that there was no answer from God. God going silent is the ultimate sign of condemnation, as experienced by Saul. "Confounded" is the word Isaiah uses of how Judah would be "confounded" when their idols were destroyed and revealed as impotent (Is. 1:29). "Disappointed and confounded" is the Hebrew phrase used about the ordinary people of Judah in Jer. 15:9. As noted on :5, the masses were also not innocent, for it was their desires which led to the leaders teaching as they did.

Micah 3:8 *But as for me, I am full of power by the Spirit of Yahweh, and of judgment, and of might, to declare to Jacob his disobedience, and to Israel his sin*- Micah insists that he is inspired by God's Spirit, whereas the false prophets were not. The references to Jacob and Israel may refer to Judah and the ten tribes. Both had sinned, and Judah were not to assume that they were more righteous. Micah personally was to be the declaration to Israel; see on Mic. 6:8.

The reality of God's anger, His hurt, His jealousy, means that God isn't indifferent to sin. And neither should we be, increasingly surrounded by it as we are, with sin presented to us as the norm of human existence. We may feel or express disapproval at sin; but God's reaction is something which language can't convey. It results in the broken heart of God. This is the message of the prophets: that we must end our indifference, quite literally, for God's sake. Sadly, many readers of the prophets seem to feel that these men are merely droning on, one prophet, one chapter, seems so much like the next. Yet read sensitively, and in a good translation, the words of the prophets expose us to a relentless shattering of indifference. Their words are onslaughts against cherished assumptions, patterns of living, challenging our endless evasions of issues, calling faith and behaviour to account. They are the very voice of God passionately imploring us to turn more fully to Him. Their task was "to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin"; just as Isaiah did, who probably led the school of prophets which Micah belonged to (Mic. 3:8 = Is. 58:1).

Micah 3:9 *Please listen to this, you heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, who hate justice, and pervert all right judgment*- They didn't "know" justice in the sense of actively engaging with it; "know" means effectively to have relationship with (:1). By not knowing justice they hated it. They of course would have denied this; but God sees the implication of our actions and states them for what they really are. The words for "justice" and "right judgment" are typically associated with the characteristics of God Himself (Dt. 32:4). The leaders are called the 'leaders' of His people (:1) just as God is described with the same term in Mic. 2:13. They were to manifest God, to reflect His characteristics to others.

Micah 3:10 *They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity*- The great houses of Jerusalem were built on the basis of the fraud and theft they had committed, as detailed in :11 and also mentioned in Jer. 22:13; Ez. 22:27; and the records of Jerusalem's desolation stress the destruction of the great houses. Instead of building up Zion, they were in effect reducing her to rubble (:12).

Micah 3:11 *Her leaders judge for bribes*- Micah's contemporary Isaiah had also bemoaned this (Is. 1:23); it was a flagrant disobedience to the Law (Ex. 23:8; Dt. 16:19).

And her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money- As explained on :5, the fact the people paid for their teaching meant that the teachers taught what those paying them wanted to hear. And so the guilt of the nation was shared by the entire society; it wasn't just the false teachers and priests who were responsible, but those who paid them to tell them what they wanted to here. The "fortune" they prophesied was that a wonderful Messianic kingdom would come soon, rather than destruction. Hence as explained on :6, the day of Yahweh which was coming would be night and not light for them, as in Am. 5:18,20.

Yet they lean on Yahweh and say, Isn't Yahweh in the midst of us? No disaster will come on us- The context of :12 suggests this is specifically concerning the false teachers of Judah. They assumed Yahweh was in their midst, and therefore they were invincible, because they had the Jerusalem temple and didn't worship in the calf shrines of the ten tribes. They felt that having the temple in their territory and using it was their automatic justification (Is. 48:2; Jer. 7:4,8-11). And the departure of the cherubim in Ez. 1 would suggest that the shekinah glory was still seen in the temple until the captivity. And yet they had built idol shrines within the Jerusalem temple (Mic. 1:5; Ez. 8). This is the problem with organized religion and religious symbols; simply being involved with them can lead to the false assumption that therefore Yahweh is with us, in our midst, and we must be on the right path.

"Lean" is a word often used by Micah's contemporary prophet Isaiah. Judah leaned or trusted upon their enemies rather than Yahweh (Is. 10:20), upon Egypt (Is. 31:1), upon their own deceit (Is. 30:12). And yet they also claimed to trust in Yahweh. This is not contradictory, but rather absolutely true to life; that effectively we can trust in human strength, whilst genuinely claiming to trust Yahweh. Rabshakeh mocks Judah for this, saying that they trusted or leaned upon Egypt, and yet also upon their God Yahweh (Is. 36:6; 37:10). Trust in Yahweh can only be total; anything less than total trust is not trust.

Yahweh was only "in the midst" of His people in the restored, Messianic Kingdom (s.w. Joel 2:27; Zeph. 3:15,17). But they assumed they had Him with them, when in fact their uncleanness precluded His real presence in their midst.

Micah 3:12 *Therefore Zion for your sake will be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem will become heaps of rubble, and the mountain of the temple like the high places of a forest*- We can wrongly get the impression that the prophets droned on and were never really responded to. But Micah was different. These prophecies of his did elicit repentance. These words could have come true in his time, when the Assyrians invaded Judah; but they didn't, because there was sufficient repentance of a minority (Jer. 26:18,19), to the point that Jeremiah cites this as an appeal for the Judah of his day to repent. These words came only partially true in the Babylonian context. The Babylonian invasion left part of the temple still standing and even functional, although mount Zion

was desolate (Lam. 5:18), but the foundations weren't plowed, although there were heaps of rubble (Neh. 2:17; 4:2). The only time Zion's foundations were plowed was by the Romans in AD70. And so we see how prophecy is conditional, just as in 40 days, Nineveh would have been destroyed. But the Ninevites repented, and it didn't happen. But the prophetic word does come finally true, even if it is reapplied and rescheduled. And so these words of Micah did come true in AD70.

MICAH CHAPTER 4

Micah Chapter 4

Micah 4:1 *But in the latter days, it will happen that the mountain of Yahweh's temple will be established on the top of the mountains, and it will be exalted above the hills; and nations will stream to it*- Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and these words are largely repeated in Is. 2:2-4. Micah also prophesied before Isaiah (Mic. 1:1), so it could be that Isaiah is quoting Micah. The "But..." suggests that after mount Zion is plowed as a field (Mic. 3:12), at some future point, it will be revived into the restored mount and temple of the Messianic kingdom which could have come about at the restoration. This didn't happen, and so we look to the latter day desolation of Zion, perhaps with the total destruction of the area to pave the way for an "abomination of desolation" to be built there, followed by the Lord's return to immediately replace that with the mountain of His house, exalted above all other kingdoms, great ["mountains"] and small ["hills"]; or we may prefer to interpret the mountains as the seven mountains upon which latter day Babylon sits, perhaps seven surrounding nations or power blocs, or seven kings (Rev. 17:9-11). But the theme of social justice is never absent from Micah. He has spoken of how the "houses" of the wealthy in Zion were those "taken away" from others (Mic. 2:2), and "taken away" is the same word here translated "exalted". All that petty grabbing of houses will be totally subsumed within the huge and eternal reality of the exaltation of *Yahweh's* house. The nations will stream or flow unto God's house / kingdom, whereas previously they streamed together to Babylon (s.w. Jer. 51:44). The word is used in Jer. 31:12 of how those who accept the new covenant will flow to Zion in order to receive Yahweh's goodness as well as literal food. So we can assume that these people who flow to Zion are those converted to the Lord Jesus at His return. This is confirmed in :2.

Micah 4:2 *Many nations will go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion will go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem*- This connects with the previous theme of Mic. 3, that Judah had despised Yahweh's law and acted unjustly directly contrary to it. But such would be their

restoration, that from the disgraced Zion would go out Yahweh's law to all nations. The Divine vision was that when Judah returned from exile, the Gentile nations of their dispersion would come with them, just as many Egyptians came up with Israel out of Egypt. But this didn't happen at the restoration, and instead the Jews were heavily influenced by the Gentiles' religions and intermarried with them rather than being a light to them. And most of God's people didn't even return to Zion but chose to remain in their dispersion. As noted on Mic. 3:12, Divine prophecy can be reapplied and reinterpreted, but often only in essence rather than to the letter. And so we can see these words as having an ultimate fulfilment, but we would be unwise to insist upon a strictly literal exact fulfilment for them.

The ultimate fulfilment, as explained on :1, will be when repentant people flow to Zion to accept the new covenant. And this will involve learning God's ways, as expressed in the word and law which comes from Zion. That law doesn't have to be the law of Moses; it will be the law of the new covenant. The "law" , *torah*, is a form of the verb just used, "to teach"; the idea is simply 'His teaching', and not specifically the Pentateuch or Decalogue.

Micah 4:3 *And He will judge between many peoples*- Ps. 72:4 uses this phrase to predict that Messiah would judge the *poor* and *needy* of the peoples. Again, Micah has social justice in view, seeing he has been condemning Israel's judges for failing in this; the idea is that they ought to have lived the kingdom life right now, as we should. But they didn't. Joel 3:2 uses the phrase concerning how the Lord will judge the peoples for how they have treated His people Israel. And again, it is the abuse of the weak and downtrodden which will be the eternal issue.

And will decide concerning strong nations afar off- "Decide" is literally 'rebuke', and Micah's contemporary prophet Isaiah explains that the rebuke of the returned Lord Jesus will concern how they treat the poor and downtrodden (Is. 11:3,4); and that passage also says that He will rebuke not from what He sees before His eyes. As Micah puts it, He will be able to do this "afar off". We get the impression that at the Lord's return, the nations will not be forced into spirituality; they will still have their conflicts and tendencies to sin and abuse, and the Lord's word will address these issues. There will therefore be a process of time from His return to the final spiritual subjugation of the planet. Whether that period will be a literal 1000 years is a question I discuss in the commentary on Rev. 20, but a process of time is certainly implied. For it is not God's way to force anyone to accept His ways.

They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks- This will be a conscious reversal of the aggressive spirit of militarism into which the nations

around Israel will have sunk in the immediate lead up to the Lord's return (Joel 3:10). The destruction of all military hardware is spoken of again in Hos. 2:18; Zech. 9:10.

Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more- The "war" of the context in Mic. 3:5 is aggression against others who don't agree with us and who stand up to unGodly behaviour. "Learn" is literally to goad, perhaps alluding to the destruction of all prodding spears; there will be no more provocation of conflict on whatever level.

Micah 4:4 *But they will sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and no one will make them afraid: for the mouth of Yahweh of Armies has spoken*- Sitting under ones own vine and fig tree is a picture of not being afraid, which is the context of :3; and the idiom is used like this in 1 Kings 4:25, meaning 'to dwell safely'. In the later day program, this may be the time of Ez. 38:11 (see note there) when Israel are re-established as God's Kingdom at the Lord's return, and then experience an unsuccessful invasion led by Gog. Zech. 3:10 says that the restored people of God will invite Gentiles to sit with them under their vine and fig tree; so the picture is not merely of peace and safety, but of peace with God in covenant with Him. We may legitimately interpret the vine and fig tree of God's people as Messiah, the true vine (Jn. 15).

Micah made this prophecy at a time when Assyria were offering their subject peoples to live under their own vine and fig tree (2 Kings 18:31,32), and likely Rabshakeh was alluding to Micah's words, claiming that the real Kingdom experience was available there and then, if only they accepted Assyrian domination. And so the promises of the Kingdom are replicated in the false claims of materialism today, and perhaps will be specifically claimed by the latter day antiChrist, a fake Christ offering a fake Kingdom of God.

Micah 4:5 *Indeed all the nations may walk in the name of their gods; but we will walk in the name of Yahweh our God for ever and ever*- See on Is. 19:18. The idea may be that there will no coercion of the nations in the Messianic Kingdom; but rather the example of God's people walking in the Name of their God will convert the nations. And this principle is seen today; no true convert is one by coercion or high powered argument, but rather by the example of God's people. As noted on :4, the idea is that the restored people of God will invite others to come sit with them under their vine and fig tree (Zech. 3:10). But that will be by invitation and freewill response, and not coercion.

Micah 4:6 *In that day, says Yahweh, I will assemble that which is lame, and I will gather that which is driven away*- This is all very much the language of limping Jacob being

gathered home after his exile in Padan Aram. But in him we must see all of us. The results of sin and trusting in human strength will still be evident, but Jacob will still be regathered. In the primary context, those "driven away" would refer to those who went into captivity in Babylon and Assyria now returning and becoming the "strong nation" (:7) at the centre of God's revived Kingdom on earth. But that didn't work out, because most didn't want to return, and those who did didn't respond spiritually. And yet the prophecy will come true therefore in the last days; although this requires a later day 'driving away' of Jewish people from their land, perhaps spoken of in Is. 27:13 where the same word is used of the driven out ones in Egypt and Assyria. However, the Hebrew for "driven away" is that used of how God's people would be driven away from God by false teachers (Dt. 4:19; 13:5,10). And this may be the sense in which the prophecy comes true in the last days. For Micah has previously warned about the damage of the false prophets. Dt. 30:1,4,17 plays on the idea- Israel would be driven away from God, and so God would drive them away into captivity.

And that which I have afflicted- This is literally, 'done evil to'. It is proof enough that both good and 'evil' in the sense of calamity come from God. There is no space left for the existence of a personal, supernatural 'Satan' figure as the source of such 'evil'. The same word is used of evil in a moral sense in Mic. 3:4; Is. 1:16; Judah had done "evil" and so would receive "evil" from their invaders.

Micah 4:7 *And I will make that which was lame a remnant, and that which was cast far off a strong nation: and Yahweh will reign over them on Mount Zion from then on, even forever*- The allusion to Jacob continues; he limped after his exile, as a result of trusting in his own strength (Gen. 32:31). His return from exile is seen as representative of the exiles returning, which would be the time when God's Kingdom would be re-established under a Messianic figure and king. But the exiles who returned under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah failed to become "a strong nation". And so the prophecy has been reapplied and rescheduled to our last days. "The remnant" who repent and 'return' from their being 'driven away' from God (see on :6) will become the "strong nation" at the heart of God's restored Kingdom on earth. "Strong nation" is the very term used in the promises to Abraham about his seed (Gen. 18:18; Dt. 26:5). But "nation" is *goy*, typically used of Gentile nations. This is the paradox- that the seed of Abraham would also comprise Gentiles. This ought to have left all Jewish national pride and elitism stillborn had they thought about it.

Micah 4:8 *You, tower of the flock, the hill of the daughter of Zion, to you it will come*- The Kingdom will come to the temple mount when Yahweh in the person of His Son returns to establish His Kingdom based there. "Hill" is *ophel*, the name of part of Jerusalem, and a word also translated "tower". "The daughter of Zion" usually refers to the faithful remnant. It was Yahweh's hill, but also their hill. The tower or mound of Zion was the

"tower of the flock", although a different word is used for "tower", *migdal*. Hezekiah and Jotham, in whose reigns Micah prophesied (Mic. 1:1), had built towers in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:5 s.w.), and Jotham had particularly built in Ophel (2 Chron. 27:3). There was a "great tower" in Ophel (Neh. 3:26,27) which was rebuilt at the time of the restoration. But this was not to be the full restoration of God's Kingdom on earth. The great towers recently built in Micah's time were not the real thing; a far greater "tower" was to be built in the Messianic kingdom. But "tower" effectively means 'city'; towers were built as the place of final refuge within a city and came to be iconic symbols of the city (Gen. 11:4,5; Jud. 8:9; 9:47,49,51; Ez. 26:4). In the parable of Isaiah 5, a prophecy contemporary with Micah, Yahweh says He had built a tower in the midst of His vineyard (Is. 5:2). "The flock" in view is that of restored, repentant Israel (Mic. 2:12), and there will be a tower built as shepherds built towers to watch their flocks. Yahweh's hill and tower of Zion was to be the place of safety, the hill, tower and Kingdom of His people, the regathered flock of Jacob (Mic. 2:12), parallel with "the daughter of Zion".

Another possibility is that *Edar*, "flock", refers to a village near Bethlehem where there was a shepherd's watchtower, perhaps used by David as a shepherd in that area. This would then prepare us for the forthcoming announcement in Mic. 5:2 that the Messianic king was to come from Bethlehem.

Yes, the former kingdom will return, the kingdom will come to the daughter of Jerusalem- The former kingdom returning speaks of the restoration of God's Kingdom on earth as it once was (Ez. 21:25-27). This restoration could have happened after the 70 years exile in Babylon, but it didn't happen as God intended. And so the prophecies have been reapplied and rescheduled to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Micah 4:9 *Now why do you cry out aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pains have taken hold of you as of a woman in travail?*- The crying aloud was in labour pains; and the "daughter of Zion" of Micah's day was corrupt. She would not bring forth a king, for her king was to be taken away from her into captivity and death (Jer. 52:9). Lam. 4:20 could imply that they believed that even in captivity they would still live under Zedekiah their king; but this was not to be. His counsellors would be proven wrong and perish. "Is there no king…?" effectively means 'he has been taken away'; the same literary device is found in Jer. 49:7 "Is wisdom no more in Teman?". The wisdom of Teman had been taken away. All this has reference to the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. But Micah prophesied in the time of Hezekiah, and this same figure of Zion in travail is used by him at the time of the Assyrian invasion (Is. 37:3). The labour pains at that time were to have issued forth in the rebirth of the nation, and perhaps in the 'birth' or coming of a Messianic king for the revived kingdom. But that didn't happen, although by grace, Zion was saved from her pains by the destruction of the Assyrian army by an Angel.

Micah 4:10 *Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail*- This is perhaps alluded to by Hezekiah in Is. 37:3; when the Assyrians surrounded the city, the remnant were in travail, but failed to bring forth the Messianic king and kingdom as a result of that travail. And so the pangs, as it were, came upon them again during the Babylonian invasion.

For now you will go forth out of the city- In surrender tot heir enemies (2 Kings 14:12; Is. 36:16). This could have happened at the time of the Assyrian invasion, but the response of a minority to Micah's message meant that it didn't. But it was to come true in the later Babylonian invasion.

And will dwell in the field, and will come even to Babylon. There you will be delivered- The idea was that through the experience of captivity in Babylon, dwelling in the fields in temporary camps (Ez. 3:15) and then taken to Babylon, a righteous remnant would be brought forth out of all the suffering there, which would return to Zion and re-establish God's Kingdom on earth. Micah's words are to be connected with those of Is. 39:6, where the punishment for the remnant not then being brought forth was that they would go to Babylon.

There Yahweh will redeem you from the hand of your enemies- Judah in exile were not redeemed from their enemies because most of them didn't want that redemption, and preferred to remain there. This prophecy will therefore have its final fulfilment in the last days, when again there will be travail in Jerusalem which will kill many (Mt. 24:8; 1 Thess. 5:3), but will result in the birth of a righteous remnant and the establishment of God's Kingdom upon earth and final, ultimate redemption.

A rather different prophetic scenario is outline in later Isaiah. Micah 4 suggests that the trauma of the Babyonian invasion was to be Zion's painful labour, but she would go to Babylon and there be delivered of a child- hinting surely at her repentance, bringing forth a spiritual child. Mic. 5:3 continues: "Therefore He will abandon them until the time that she who is in labor gives birth. Then the rest of his brothers will return". Yahweh did abandon them in exile (Is. 54:7) but He put an end to that- even though Zion didn't give birth as intended. She didn't give birth to the child- instead she was given the Gentiles as children. But she refused them. In Isaiah, another scenario is presented, quite different and far more gracious than that found in Micah. Zion had not brought forth the child in Babylon. But God didn't abandon them. The idea was that although in Isaiah's time the child had come to the birth but there had been no strength to deliver (Is. 37:3), yet she would deliver the child in Babylon. But she didn't. In another figure, her children were dead and she was barren, laying drunk in the dust having drunk the wine

of condemnation and having become addicted to it. And they had refused to accept the redemption from Babylon when it was offered. She had indeed been in labour pains but had brought forth the wind, nothing (Is. 26:17,18), they conceived chaff and brought forth stubble (Is. 33:11). Now, by absolute grace, God is offering yet another scenario, whereby the barren and bereaved Zion has children, without pain. And even then they resisted, retreating into hard right wing nationalism and xenophobia, resisting any idea of the Gentiles becoming Zion's spiritual children. And so God redefined Zion, and the essence of these things comes true for that new Jerusalem.

Micah 4:11 *Now many nations have assembled against you, that say, Let her be raped, and let our eye gloat over Zion*- The "now" may suggest that this prophecy was given when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrians and their mercenaries drawn from the surrounding nations. There was however the response of a remnant to the preaching of Micah, and therefore the seemingly inevitable capture of Jerusalem was averted by the Angelic destruction of the Assyrian army; see on :10 *For now you will go forth out of the city.* "Raped" or "defiled" suggests that the rape of a virgin is in view. Isaiah's recent prophecy that a virgin would bring forth the Messianic king at this time (Is. 7:14) was not to be fulfilled; she was to be raped. But Micah's ministry was partially successful; the response to his message was enough to stop the rape, but the virgin did not bring forth as she could have done; see on Mic. 5:1. And so she was finally raped to death in the later Babylonian invasion, as Jeremiah laments in Lamentations. And in Mic. 7:10 Micah appears to have perceived this.

Micah 4:12 *But they don't know the thoughts of Yahweh, neither do they understand His counsel*- The "they" could refer to the invading armies, who are the subject of the second half of the verse. But perhaps the referent of the "they" and "them" in the two parts of this verse are different. Those who don't know Yahweh's thoughts are Judah in Is. 55:8. They didn't perceive the possibilities of the Messianic king and kingdom at that time (Rom. 11:33).

For He has assembled them like the sheaves to the threshing floor- As noted on :11, this could have application to the time when the Assyrians were assembled around Jerusalem. Their destruction could have been the threshing floor judgment spoken of in other prophets as heralding the re-establishment of God's Kingdom upon earth. But Hezekiah let the baton drop. Although the repentance of a remnant averted the destruction of the city (see on Mic. 3:12), the great potential then possible for the more powerful establishment of God's Kingdom didn't come true.

Micah 4:13 *Arise and thresh, daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs brass; and you will beat in pieces many peoples: and I will devote their*

gain to Yahweh, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth- As noted on :12, this may speak of the potential possible for Judah after the destruction of the Assyrians outside the gates of Jerusalem. But the righteous remnant, the daughter of Zion with Hezekiah and the prophets within Jerusalem, didn't go forth and capitalize upon it as planned. Instead Hezekiah became proud and short-termist, and instead of threshing his enemies he accepted their gifts and devoted them to himself rather than to Yahweh. And likewise the Babylonian invaders could have been threshed, if the ministry of the later prophets at that time had been responded to (Is. 41:15,16; Jer. 51:33). And so all these potentials must come true in the latter day fulfilment, when a remnant repent and accept Jesus as Messiah. The Jews in Micah's time were glad that the immediate problem had been solved; the Assyrians lay dead outside Jerusalem. But they didn't heed Micah's call to go forth and thresh them and lead to the establishment of a Messianic Kingdom.

MICAH CHAPTER 5

Micah Chapter 5

Micah 5:1 *Now you shall gather yourself in troops, daughter of troops. He has laid siege against us*- The present tenses of Mic. 4:10-12 suggest that Micah was giving this prophecy whilst Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian armies. And here too- "Now... he *has* laid siege...". Micah's encouragement to gather troops was because he believed that God could give Judah the victory and they could then go out of Zion and thresh their enemies as the preceding verse required (Mic. 4:13).

They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek- Micah foresaw that the Assyrians were to capture Jerusalem and abuse her "judge", Hezekiah. But thanks to his preaching, a remnant repented, and so this didn't happen then (see on Mic. 4:11); but the potential of establishing a Messianic kingdom didn't come about. And so the prophecy was reapplied to the Lord Jesus, the true king of Zion, who was to be smitten with a rod in the cheek (Mt. 27:30). This was clearly in view, hence "judge" and not "king" is used.

Micah 5:2 *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come forth to Me that is to be the ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old*- As noted on :1 and Mic. 4:10-12, Micah was speaking of possibilities at his time. A ruler could have come forth who would have saved Israel and established a Messianic kingdom at that time. Not the Lord Jesus, but a ruler from Bethlehem, i.e. in the Davidic

line. Clearly a pre-existent Divine being was not in view. That ruler didn't then emerge, the potential wasn't fulfilled, and so indeed it was reapplied to the Lord Jesus Christ. But there is no evidence here for the incorrect idea of His personal pre-existence. Bethlehem is mentioned to signal the fact that this individual would be in the Davidic line, and the Lord Jesus also was, on account of His mother Mary being in the direct Davidic line (Lk. 1:31-35). The very fact He was the *descendant* of David puts paid to all fantasies that He personally pre-existed from before all time and somehow came down literally from Heaven to earth, like some Divine comet. His fulfilment of the Davidic seed is reflected in the statement that His "goings forth are from of old". He was the seed of Abraham, of David, of Jacob, and of Eve- the one promised in all those promises of a great, Messianic saviour seed / descendant. Hence the plural: "goings forth". His origins (NAB, NIV, RSV) were in all those ancestors. This plural is a problem for any attempt to interpret this as meaning that He was eternally existent. And He had origins [plural]; He was not uncreate, eternally pre-existent. He had origins, a concept inappropriate for a Divine being, seeing God is uncreate. And this ruler will accept Yahweh as "his God" (:4). The Trinitarian understanding of the Lord Jesus can't cope with this; the Trinity is a wrong turning in theological thought and needs to be abandoned.

The "ruler" was to come forth to "Me", God. This makes no sense if the Lord Jesus had existed eternally with God. The language is very similar to that of Jer. 30:21, where the same word for "ruler" is used: "Their prince shall be of themselves, and their ruler shall proceed from their midst; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach to Me: for who is he who has had boldness to approach to Me? says Yahweh". This was the Messianic ruler which could have arisen at the restoration; and he could have arisen even in Micah's time as the Saviour of Judah from Assyria. None of these potentials worked out, and so the prophecy will come to its fulfilment in the final salvation of Israel by the Lord Jesus.

From everlasting- "From everlasting" doesn't have to mean that the ruler existed before time. He had "goings forth", or origins; that very fact means that He was not eternally existent, seeing He had a beginning. The idea of *olahm* here can simply be "from a long time ago", and other translations bear this out: "whose origins are in the distant past" (NET), "Whose origin is from of old, from ancient times" (NAB); "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (NIV); "whose origin is from of old, from ancient days" (RSV); "whose going out has been purposed from time past, from the eternal days" (BBE); "whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (ESV). Other examples of where "from *olahm"* doesn't mean 'from infinite eternity' but rather 'from a long time ago, but within human history' include Gen. 6:4; Dt. 32:7; Josh. 24:2; 1 Sam. 27:8,15; Job 22:15; Prov. 22:8; Is. 58:12; 63:9,11; Jer. 5:15; Mal. 3:4. Most significantly, the Hebrew phrase here translated "from everlasting" is that used by Micah to mean "the days of old" (Mic. 7:14), referring to days earlier in Israel's history.

Micah 5:3 *Therefore He will abandon them until the time that she who is in labor gives birth*- As noted on Mic. 4:9,10, Micah prophesied in the time of Hezekiah, and this same figure of Zion in travail is used by him at the time of the Assyrian invasion (Is. 37:3). The labour pains at that time were to have issued forth in the rebirth of the nation, and perhaps in the 'birth' or coming of a Messianic king for the revived kingdom. But that didn't happen, although by grace, Zion was saved from her pains by the destruction of the Assyrian army by an Angel. Is. 26:17,18 speaks of this: "Like as a woman with child who draws near the time of her delivery and is in pain and cries out in her pangs; so we have been before You, Yahweh. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we gave birth, it seems, only to wind. We have not worked any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen". And so the Divine intention was that she would "bring forth" to spiritual maturity in captivity (Mic. 4:10). But until that time, God would "abandon" them. And yet that possibility also didn't really come to fruit. And so the prophecies of the virgin daughter of Zion bringing forth were reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus, the individual who epitomized the true Israel as God intended (Is. 7:14; 9:6). Remember that Isaiah was contemporary with Micah. This imagery would have been well understood between them. We marvel at how God tries so hard with people, and yet allows their freewill to be genuine; and yet His prophetic intentions will always come ultimately true.

Then the rest of his brothers will return to the children of Israel- At the intended restoration, Judah and Israel would be united. The "He" in view is the Messiah figure of :2. This figure could then have emerged from Bethlehem, but didn't. The potential wasn't used. The restoration is always presented as a time when Judah and Israel would together return, not just physically from captivity but in repentance to God. But this is yet to happen; they didn't repent, and so the intended possible prophetic path didn't happen and had to be deferred in fulfilment.

Micah 5:4 *He shall stand*- Literally, stand up, perhaps a reference to the Messiah's resurrection, or exaltation.

And shall shepherd in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God: and they will live, for then he will be great to the ends of the earth- The Messiah figure of :2 was to shepherd the reunited people of God (:3). "They will live" recalls the restoration prophecy of Ez. 36, the revival of the dry bones of God's people in exile. But this prophecy didn't then come true as they refused to spiritually revive; it was deferred to a far greater fulfilment, in the literal resurrection of Israel from their graves at the Lord's second coming, when He will be great to the ends of the earth.

Micah 5:5 *He will be our peace when Assyria invades our land*- A Messianic leader born in Bethlehem could have saved Judah in Micah's time. But that didn't happen. And so these words will have a latter day application. Micah 5 speaks of how “the Assyrian” will be in conflict with the Lord Jesus, the one born in Bethlehem who will become “great unto the ends of the earth” at His return to earth when His brethren ‘return’ to Him (Mic. 5:1-4). The establishment of the Kingdom on earth and repentance of Israel will occur “when the Assyrian shall come into our land” and the Lord Jesus saves them from the invasion.

And when he marches through our fortresses- This latter day Assyrian will “tread down our palaces”. This is likely an intensive plural for the great palace of Israel, the temple. The Lord Jesus uses this language in predicting that Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until “the times of the Gentiles” are fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). These times of Gentile treading down of Jerusalem likely refer to the 1260 days / three and a half years of the final tribulation. The treading down of Jerusalem will therefore be by “the Assyrian”, and capturing Jerusalem is the great goal of militant Islam. This is the treading down of God’s people to be done by the little horn of Dan. 8:10. The little horn is therefore “the Assyrian”; and a charismatic leader of the Islamists would fit the job description exactly.

Then we will raise against him seven shepherds, and eight senior leaders of men- Seven, even eight could be read as three, even four in Am. 1,2. That is, a complete fullness of shepherds. The Messiah has just been called a shepherd in :4; perhaps the idea is that this latter day Messiah, the Lord Jesus, will have incorporated within Him many other shepherds. This would then refer to the believers and repentant Israel, who are "in" Christ. For we are to king-priests reigning over the earth at the Lord's return (Rev. 5:10). Or it may be that the Lord's Messianic administration has seven leaders. "Senior leaders of men" is literally "poured out [as offerings] Adams"; appropriate to those who have given their lives to Christ.

As in the prototype with Sennacherib, the destruction of Gog at the second coming will be by Angelic means under the command of Christ. The enigmatic Mic. 5:5 maybe refers primarily to Hezekiah's influence of Angelic forces in leading to the destruction of the Assyrian invader. This would point forward to Christ's use of the Angels to destroy Gog: "This man (Hezekiah/ Jesus) shall be the peace, when the Assyrian (Gog) shall come into our land… then shall we raise against him seven shepherds (an Angelic title in Ps. 80:1 and Is. 63:9-11; cp. the seven eye-Angels of Zechariah and Revelation), and eight princes of men"- another Angelic reference, seeing that "the prince of Persia" in Daniel was an Angel. Maybe this implies that the Angels will use other nations as a means of defeating Gog. Perhaps it is to the seven Angel-spirits of Revelation and Zechariah that

Micah refers: "When the Assyrian shall come into our land. . . shall we raise against him (in warfare, the Hebrew implies- cp. Obadiah 1) seven shepherds, and eight princes of men" (Mic. 5:5). The only beings to fight the Assyrians were the Angels who slew them, seeing that the Jews scarcely fired an arrow in anger at them. Both "shepherd" and "prince" are Angelic titles (see Ps. 80:1; Is. 63:9-11 and Josh. 5:14; Dan. 10:13;12:1 respectively). The Angels could be "princes of men" as those in Daniel were both princes of Heaven and also of human nations, e. g. Persia.

Micah 5:6 *They will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in its gates. He will deliver us from the Assyrian, when he invades our land, and when he marches within our border*- The deliverance from the Assyrian invader within the land borders of Israel will result also in dominating the land of Assyria. This never happened historically, although it had been potentially possible. But it will happen in a moment at the Lord's return. "Marches" is literally 'to tread'; see on :5 *And when he marches through our fortresses.* Micah opened his prophecy by saying that Yahweh through the invaders would tread down Israel (s.w. Mic. 1:3). But now in His grace He will rescue Israel from that judgment through Messiah.

Micah 5:7 *The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples, like dew from Yahweh, like showers on the grass*- The dropping of dew was understood as the teaching of doctrine (Dt. 32:2). The repentant remnant were to go out and teach the Gentile world. This is consciously alluding to the then-famous Messianic prophecy of Ps. 72:6: "*He* shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth". The blessings Messiah brings are to be articulated through the witness of those in Him. Those who have lived in Him will then shine as the brightness of the firmament (Dan. 12:3). But the description of the Lord's face shining as the sun draws on this; as if to say that our shining in the future Kingdom will be because we were and are in Him. We will shine forth then (Mt. 13:43), as the Sun of righteousness Himself.

That don't wait for man, nor wait for the sons of men- The idea may be that men must respond to the teaching and offer of salvation quickly, or else they will miss it, and it will be gone for ever. See on :15.

Micah 5:8 *The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the animals of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep; who, if he goes through, treads down and tears in pieces, and there is no one to deliver*- The preceding verse :7 has spoken of the remnant teaching the nations, but that teaching would be as the dew which appears only briefly. If that teaching will be rejected, then judgment will follow immediately. And the once downtrodden remnant are described in the very language used of their invaders- young lions and a mature lion. This therefore means that the invaders will be treated by Israel as they treated Israel- unless they repent. This is exactly the outline picture of the book of Revelation; the seals

of judgment upon Israel are the basis of the bowls of judgment then poured out upon those who judge Israel in the last days. The tearing into pieces by Israel will then bring about the destruction of the image of Dan. 2 into little pieces. Repentant Israel "in Christ" will be as the little stone which falls in judgment.

Micah 5:9 *Let your hand be lifted up above your adversaries*- Jeremiah quotes this phrase exactly in Lam. 2:17, lamenting what Babylon had done to Judah and the temple. Now that was to be finally reversed. This is the same theme as in Revelation, as noted on :8. The repentant remnant will judge their abusers as they dealt with God's people.

And let all of your enemies be cut off- This could be Micah's statement of approval upon the prophecy in :8 that finally, the repentant remnant of Jacob would destroy their enemies, after having first given them the opportunity to repent (see on :7). The phrase quotes what is repeatedly said about all David's enemies being cut off (1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 7:9; 1 Chron. 17:8). Those enemies referred not only to Saul but to the nations around David; and it is the neighbours of Israel who are the continual focus of latter day prophecies.

Micah 5:10 *It will happen in that day, says Yahweh, That I will cut off your horses out of the midst of you, and will destroy your chariots*- Horses and chariots from Egypt were what Judah in Micah's time had trusted in. However there is a purposeful ambiguity in :10-15; these words could refer to the pagan invaders, the "nations" of :15 (see note there), and yet also to the Jews of Micah's time. They were acting like the Gentiles, and so would meet an identical judgment. All military technology which had seemed so invincible will be rendered useless; and we note an increasing dependence upon technological defence and deterrents in the Middle East situation.

Micah 5:11 *I will cut off the cities of your land, and will tear down all your strongholds*- Again, as noted on :10, this could apply equally to Israel as well as to their enemies. It is a theme of the prophets that all human defences shall collapse (as Is. 2:15), and we are to live daily life in that awareness too.

Micah 5:12 *I will destroy witchcraft from your hand; and you shall have no soothsayers*- There was recourse to these things in Micah's time as the situation got more desperate before the Assyrian advance (also noted in Is. 2:6; 47:12), although the historical record doesn't mention it. The "soothsayers" may refer to the false prophets whom he has criticized in Mic. 2. If Israel had been obedient to the commands about these things in Dt. 18:10, there would have been no need for their day of judgment to have as it were made them obedient in these matters. And so we are left with a powerful logic- we

either accept God's ways now, or the condemnation process will lead us to accept them all too late. Hence John the Baptist offered his audience either fire now, or the fire of damnation at the last day.

Micah 5:13 *I will cut off your engraved images and your pillars out of your midst; and you shall no more worship the work of your hands*- The essence of idolatry is to worship or trust our own works. And we can do this without any images or pillars in a literal sense. The invaders of those times liked to destroy the images of the gods of those they had vanquished, and God says that He will do this, through working with the invaders. But as noted on :12, if Israel had cut them off themselves, they wouldn't have needed a day of condemnation through which it would be achieved. Pillars were acceptable when they merely marked a place of Yahweh's appearance or worship (Gen. 31:13,45), but as with nehushtan, the bronze serpent, those pillars became turned into idols (1 Kings 14:23). The attraction was that they mixed Yahweh worship with the paganism of the flesh; and this is our abiding temptation. For Yahweh demands our all, and not worship of the gods of this world in the name of worshipping Him.

Micah 5:14 *I will uproot your Asherim out of your midst; and I will destroy your cities*- The Asherim were what the Canaanites worshipped, and Israel had been specifically told to uproot their groves (Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5). If they had done that, as explained on :12, they wouldn't have required the day of judgment to do it. We see too that if we allow weakness in one area, the problem is that it morphs and multiplies over time into things which will lead us totally away from God. Their "cities" are paralleled with their Asherim, the tree groves in the countryside. They likely considered that what they did in some lonely spot was somehow different to their normal city life; but all of life is to be sanctified to God, and so this mentality is directly attacked here- and we too need to take heed.

Micah 5:15 *I will execute vengeance in anger, and wrath on the nations that didn't listen*- The idea may be that the "vengeance" is upon Israel, but the surrounding nations will likewise share in it; see on :10. But they will have been given the chance to "listen" (see on :7), and are only judged after they refuse the final appeal by the repentant remnant.

MICAH CHAPTER 6

Micah Chapter 6

Micah 6:1 *Listen now to what Yahweh says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear what you have to say-* As often in the prophets, the analogy of a courtroom meeting is used. God invites His people to answer the case He makes against them through Micah. The case is to be made very public- shouted wide and loud enough for the mountains to hear it. Or pleading before the mountains could be a reference to the fact that the "high places" were literally on the uplands. It is the spirit of Gideon's father, "let Baal plead" for himself, and Elijah asking Israel to witness a legal standoff between Yahweh and the false gods.

Micah 6:2 *Hear, you mountains, Yahweh's controversy-* Remember that Isaiah was contemporary with Micah (Mic. 1:1); and Isaiah likewise invites God's people to reason or enter into judgment together with God (Is. 1:18). The whole idea of course begs the obvious conclusion from the start- God is right, and He will be proven right. Any thought of entering into judgment with God should of itself provoke our immediate capitulation and casting of ourselves upon His grace.

And you enduring foundations of the earth- The LXX suggests "the valleys". But the allusion may be to the myth that the *eretz* / land of promise was upheld by foundations (Gen. 49:26; Dt. 33:15). As with the usage of the language of demons, God in His word does at times go along with wrong understandings, and reasons for a moment as if they are correct, in order to engage with people in their own terms of reference and understanding.

For Yahweh has a controversy with His people, and He will contend with Israel- This continues the courtroom analogy. God is taking out a case against His people. And He is also the judge of all the earth, although He invites them to be the judges. He humbles Himself to simply present the evidence of His case. Man stands self-condemned before God, and the quicker we personally realize that, the better. The judgment of the last day is for those who have not condemned themselves in this life; see on 1 Cor. 11:31,32. God is moving toward us too in judgment, and the only thing to do is to repent and totally capitulate; see on Lk. 14:31.

Micah 6:3 *My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you?-* Some time later, in Ezekiel's time, the people complained that they were suffering unjustly for the sins of their ancestors. This sense that God was somehow unfair was around in Micah's time. Hence the usage of the courtroom analogy. To answer before God is an awesome idea; to reply to Him, the God of all grace, against the accusation that He has treated us unreasonably is a terrifying idea. As noted above, Yahweh is presented not as the judge

but as the complainant, and we are left to judge. By implication, they were claiming God had sinned against man (Jer. 2:5) and burdened them with commandments (Is. 43:23); and in those passages, God in the dock asks Israel to give evidence. Romans uses the same idea, of God in the dock accused by men. And we are left as the judges to immediately conclude that this is deeply wrong. God did not burden His people with legal requirements, because even in the period of the old covenant, He often states that He asks not for ritualistic obedience but for humble, faithful hearts. See on :6.

The truth was that Israel had burdened / wearied God by their insincere rituals (s.w. Is. 1:14; 7:3). Their attitudes implied that they considered that relationship with Him was a burden and wearisome (Mal. 1:13). But this was a false accusation; God has not wearied man, but the other way around.

Answer me!- "Answer me!" is literally, testify, provide evidence (Num. 35:30). And the most hardened atheist and cynic cannot do so when actually in court with God. The bravado of words said over the coffee tables and tapped on social media will soon collapse.

Micah 6:4 *For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage. I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam*- This is cited as the parade example of the fact God loves His people and has poured grace upon them. With us too, the fact we were called out of this world, God intervening in our lives to engage us with the Gospel's call, is really a parade example of His grace. This means we should never accuse God of being unfair. His grace in calling us is enough. Historically, God's bringing up of His people from Egypt was all of Divine grace. The phrase is used of Abraham being brought up from Egypt after his deceit regarding his wife, which would usually have resulted in death (Gen. 13:1); Joseph's family were likewise brought up out of Egypt after having been released by the grace of Joseph-Jesus (Gen. 45:25). And the bringing up of the nation from Egypt when they were still worshipping the idols of Egypt was likewise of pure grace. The redemption of Israel from the house of bondage is the very phrase used in Dt. 7:8, as the exemplification of the simple fact that "Yahweh loved you" and kept His side of the covenant when Israel broke it. Because of this redemption from bondage, Israel were to be obedient to the covenant (Dt. 15:15; 24:18). And not to complain that such a duty was in any sense an unreasonable burden.

Micah 6:5 *My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of Yahweh*- This again is an example of grace which should answer any complaint that God has been unreasonable or harsh toward Israel. Israel at Balaam's time were still worshipping the idols of Egypt which they had taken with them out of Egypt. They were weak. But God's answer to Balak was to inspire Balaam to reveal how

God imputed righteousness to Israel. He had not seen any iniquity in them, and beheld them in their encampments as beautiful and without spot (Num. 23:21; 24:5,6). They passed from Shittim to Gilgal, from the wilderness journey over the Jordan into the promised land, by absolute grace. Righteousness was imputed to them, as Paul would later put it in Romans. Here again was grace; and yet it was done as a 'righteous act', which again is a big theme with Paul. God counts the sinful as sinless without infringing morality, ethics nor righteousness; because He held in mind the future work of His son.

Micah 6:6 *How shall I come before Yahweh, and bow myself before the exalted God?-* The high or "exalted" God is a phrase used only twice elsewhere. God was made high or exalted by His justice / righteousness, which was revealed above all in His redemption of His faithless people from Egypt (Ps. 68:18; 71:19).

Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?- This is one of the many Old Testament hints that the Mosaic sacrifices of themselves couldn't reconcile sinful Israel with God. It is an answer to the complaint that God had burdened Israel with the law (see on :3). The reference to calves is an allusion to the calf worship of the ten tribes, which was presented as a form of Yahweh worship.

Micah 6:7 *Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams? With tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my disobedience? The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?-* This again is an answer to the complaint that God had burdened Israel with the law (see on :3). Micah comes to the point where he would fain make sacrifice for Israel, even to the point of offering his firstborn son, so strongly did he take upon himself the sins of his people; he felt their sins as the sins of his very soul. But he tells Israel that even this will be no good; they must repent themselves. In all this, Micah came close to the spirit of the Father and Son. For the Father *would* give His firstborn for their sin. And the Lord Jesus likewise totally identified with the sins of Israel and all God's people, whilst being personally innocent. "Disobedience" is the same word used in the contemporary prophecy of Is. 53:5,8 of how the suffering Messiah would bear Israel's transgression or disobedience, as God's firstborn dying for their sin. In :4, allusion was made to how God redeemed Israel from Egypt- through the blood of the lamb representing the firstborns. Micah may be implying that *he* and indeed no man could offer his firstborn for Israel's sin; but *God* could, and all man can do is to humbly respond as explained in :8. Perhaps he is making the same point by way of allusion to Ps. 132:11, where Messiah is called the fruit of David's body; and Micah is saying that the fruit of *his* body, therefore, would not suffice.

Micah 6:8 *He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does Yahweh require of you*- Instead of sacrifice and legalistic obedience (:7), this was what God required. In this sense, it was just untrue that the law of Moses was a burden upon Israel (see on :3). The implication is that God had already 'shown' His people what was required of them. The same word is used of how Micah himself was to show or "declare" God's requirements to Israel (Mic. 3:8). Perhaps the idea was that Micah himself was the declaration of what God required of His people at that time. The voice of Yahweh which called to the city in :9 was that of Micah personally. As noted throughout this commentary, Micah was the declaration of God to Israel and yet he also totally identified with sinful Israel. This was the basis of his appeal to them; and in these things he pointed forward to the Lord Jesus, of human nature and yet Divine character. The parallel in Isaiah is when again God enters the courtroom with His people: "Learn to do well, seek justice, relieve the oppressed judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Is. 1:17). "Seek" is the same word here translated "require".

But to act justly- This is the same phrase as in Gen. 18:19; this was to be the lead characteristic of all the true seed of Abraham. And that is true of us to this day. Is. 56:1 urges Israel to do this, so that the Kingdom's re-establishment might be hastened. But there was not a man who did this in the lead up to Judah's destruction (Jer. 5:1; 7:5). Had Judah done this, the Babylonian destruction would not have come (Jer. 22:3,15), and a Messianic kingdom could have come, when Messiah would "act justly" (Jer. 23:5; 33:15). The people were being asked to act like Him in this life. And Micah, at the time of the Assyrian invasion, is saying the same; and it seems some did respond, and the planned destruction at the hands of Sennacherib didn't happen. But finally, Judah was destroyed, and that is described as God acting justly (Ez. 5:8). As noted earlier, the judgment process brings about what men ought to have done by their freewill decisions in this life. To "act justly" was to act in a way that no other nation did (Ez. 11:12,20). True justice is the unique possibility of the true people of God. To "act justly" is the lead characteristic of the righteous (Ez. 18:5,8,9,17,19,21,27; 33:16,19 and often in the prophets); and that is true of us God's people to this day. It is the behaviour of those in the new covenant (Ez. 36:27; 37:24). Micah concludes, as one who has done justly, in appealing for God to do justly for him (Mic. 7:9); and that justice is done on the basis of imputed righteousness.

To love mercy- This love of mercy, a love of being merciful, is the characteristic of God toward those in the new covenant (Jer. 31:3). And it is for us, as it was for Israel then, to reflect our experience of this in our attitudes to those who need our mercy.

And to walk humbly with your God?- Walking humbly is the essence of it all. The humility which comes from realizing our sins will empower us too to "love mercy" and be just.

The only other occurrence of the Hebrew word here translated "humbly" is in Prov. 11:2: "With the humble is wisdom". And it is this wisdom which is spoken of now in :9.

It is tempting to see a parallel between these three things [justice, mercy and walking humbly with God] and Mt. 23:23, which also says that instead of legalistic obedience, God wanted "justice, mercy *and faith*". "Humility" here is therefore understood by the Lord Jesus as "faith". And the two are indeed connected; for to walk in humility is to walk in faith, for without humility there can be no true faith. One spiritual attribute strengthens and enables another.

Micah 6:9 *Yahweh's voice calls to the city, and wisdom sees your name*- The way of wisdom was to see in all the appeals to "the city", presumably Jerusalem, the articulation of God's Name / character as declared in Ex 34:5-7. It was the wisdom which comes from the humility of :8 (Prov. 11:2). And there is another allusion to Proverbs, in that wisdom's "voice calls" to the city in Prov. 8:1-4. The 'voice that calls' is ultimately that of Messiah and His herald, appealing for Israel's repentance (Is. 40:3,6; 58:1). And yet the same 'voice that calls' was the voice that called forth the invaders to come and judge Jerusalem (Ez. 9:1).

Listen to the rod, and He who appointed it- The Assyrians were the rod of God's anger against His people, appointed by Him (Is. 10:5); the appeal was to have the wisdom of humility (Prov. 11:2) to perceive that it was God acting behind them.

Micah 6:10 *Are there yet treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and a short ephah that is accursed?*- "Are there yet…?" suggests the people should have repented by this stage. They needed to urgently give away the results of their fraud, and no longer use false weights. The fact Micah's message resulted in the Assyrian invasion being turned back by God means that at least some responded to his desperate, urgent appeal. "Accursed" is perhaps better "which provokes indignation" (s.w. Zech. 1:12). God's utter indignation was against the quiet, subtle dishonesty of those who made the ephah weigh to the slight advantage of the wicked. I say "slight" because anything too obviously dishonest wouldn't have been credible. Here again we have a major message from a minor prophet. This kind of thing kindles God's deepest ire.

Micah 6:11 *Shall I be pure with dishonest scales, and with a bag of deceitful weights?*- As noted on :10, this kind of thing provoked God's deepest fury, as it does today. The connection with the contemporary words of Isaiah is to Is. 1:16 "Make you clean [s.w. "pure"], put away the evil of your doings". Micah is saying that response to Isaiah's opening call to repentance isn't going to be possible if they continue with their deceitful weights. But more than that, Micah stands as representative of Judah: "Shall *I* be

pure...". Perhaps it was his willing representation of Judah which alone led to the aversion of judgment upon Jerusalem at Sennacherib's time.

Micah 6:12 *Her rich men are full of violence, her inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their speech*- The rich leaders and the ordinary inhabitants are paralleled; Judah was not to be judged simply because of the sin of the minority who were wealthy. The ordinary people were guilty in essence of the same sins. And speaking lies and deceitfully is paralleled with "violence". This is typical of the prophets- to juxtapose apparently minor, quiet sins with major ones; for it is the quiet, subtle sins which are such abomination to God. See on :10. Lying and deceit are likewise mentioned by Isaiah as major reasons for Judah's judgment (Is. 32:7; 59:3,13). It was the false prophets who spoke lies and deceit (Jer. 29:23; Zech. 13:3), but they spoke to a people who did the same.

Micah 6:13 *Therefore I also have struck you with a grievous wound. I have made you desolate because of your sins*- This paradox is also used by the contemporary Isaiah; the wound was incurable, the people and nation had to die. And yet they could still repent and be healed. See on Mic. 1:9. This was the urgency of Micah's appeal; that an incurable illness could be cured. They had already been made desolate, the word of desolation had been spoken, in fulfilment of Lev. 26:32; but in the gap between the pronunciation of judgment and the fulfilment of it, repentance was possible. This was the urgency and intensity of Micah's appeal.

Micah 6:14 *You shall eat, but not be satisfied*- This continues the allusions to the curses for breaking covenant with God (Lev. 26:26). Being never satisfied is the curse of the condemned (Ps. 59:15; Prov. 27:20; Ecc. 1:8; 4:8). Yet the wicked experience this in this life; sin never satisfies them. And this will be their final experience at the last day. Whereas the righteous can live satisfied lives, looking back in satisfaction at God's grace, at lives well lived. The life of endlessly seeking satisfaction without finding it is therefore living out our own condemnation.

Your humiliation will be in your midst- They ought to have humbled themselves (:8), but if they refused, then they would be humbled through the process of condemnation. The humbling of flesh before God must be achieved; either now, or in condemnation.

You will store up, but not save; and that which you save I will give up to the sword- This is so true of our present society. The culture of individualism, breakup of family and the care families have historically provided in old age, fear of the unknown, the need for funds to survive after we stop working... this has all led to a mentality of storing up. They

saved up ["that which you save"], but in another sense they didn't ["but not save"]; because the ultimate end was decreed.

Micah 6:15 *You will sow, but won't reap*- The Lord likened His preachers to men reaping a harvest. He speaks of how they fulfilled the proverb that one sows and another reaps (Jn. 4:37,38). Yet this 'proverb' has no direct Biblical source. What we *do* find in the Old Testament is the repeated idea that if someone sows but another reaps, this is a sign that they are suffering God's judgment for their sins (Dt. 20:6; 28:30; Job 31:8; Mic. 6:15). But the Lord turns around the 'proverb' concerning Israel's condemnation; He makes it apply to the way that the preacher / reaper who doesn't sow is the one who harvests others in converting them to Him. Surely His implication was that His preacher-reapers were those who had known condemnation for their sins, but on that basis were His humbled harvesters in the mission field.

You will tread the olives, but won't anoint yourself with oil; and crush grapes, but won't drink the wine- This again continues the references to the curses for disobedience to the covenant (Dt. 28:39). Dissatisfaction was the curse, and yet living a materialistic life is itself the life of dissatisfaction. Such people live out their own condemnation. Perhaps Micah was predicting that the destruction was to come within months from when he was speaking; they had trodden their grapes and sown their crops, but the invasion would come before the harvest or before the grape juice had fermented. Micah was therefore speaking very close to the intended Assyrian destruction of Jerusalem. The fact the Lord destroyed the Assyrian armies is therefore a testament to the effectiveness of Micah's appeal for repentance; or perhaps to the power of his own intense mediation for Judah.

The LXX adds: "And the ordinances of my people shall vanish away", looking forward to how :16 describes a set of ordinances or commands for idol worship which were established by Israel's kings and followed by many in Judah.

Micah 6:16 *For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab. You live by their commands, that I may make you a ruin, and her inhabitants a hissing*- Judah prided themselves on not following the sins of the ten tribe kingdom, but in reality, they did. The laws and commands of Omri were kept rather than those of Yahweh. Ahab and Omri had therefore issued specific commandments regarding idol worship, perhaps presented as part of Yahweh worship; and the people religiously kept them. Again we see that the fatal temptation is to justify sin in the name of righteousness, and in essence this is our problem too.

And you will bear the reproach of my people- LXX "the reproach of the nations". This would be in line with frequent predictions that the nations would "hiss" at condemned Judah and reproach her (Ez. 34:29; 36:6,15 etc.).

MICAH CHAPTER 7

Micah Chapter 7

Micah 7:1 *Misery is mine! Indeed, I am like one who gathers the summer fruits, as gleanings of the vineyard: There is no cluster of grapes to eat* Having just said that Israel would sow and not reap (Mic. 6:15), Micah feels as if summer has come, and he has gone to gather the harvest, but there is hardly any. Just the equivalent of left over gleaning quality harvest. This may imply that the harvest had been done by someone else; perhaps he envisages himself as picking up the pieces of a tiny repentant remnant after it. Although there was no cluster of grapes, there were a few odd grapes here and there, the kind of thing left behind for gleaning by the poor. Or perhaps this speaks of the tiny remnant who did respond to Micah's message, just a grape here and there; and that was enough for God to change His plans of destroying Jerusalem by the Assyrians.

The voice of the prophets didn't go entirely unheeded. A tiny minority responded. Isaiah had his school of disciples, referred to in Isaiah 8. The books of the prophets were presumably written up (under inspiration) by their disciples, and the biographical sections added by them. So the very existence of the books of the prophets itself indicates they had some converts who hung on and valued their every word. And yet despite this, the prophets felt lonely men, despite the converts they made- Jeremiah "sat alone" (Jer. 15:17). Not only was their perspective on human sinfulness so very different to that of their audience. They preached a message which was counter-cultural and attacked the very bases of the assumptions which lay at the core of individual and social life in Israel. They appeared to back Israel's enemies. Their message was therefore rejected by the vast majority.

My soul desires to eat the early fig- But the lack of wider response was indeed a "misery" to Micah, just as human indifference to our message should not be met by our indifference to that fact. He really wanted their repentance. His desire for the early fig was a desire to see at least some spiritual fruit in Israel, and is alluded to in Mt. 21:19; Micah's character looked forward to the passion of the Lord Jesus in desiring spiritual fruit, however immature, like an early fig, but at least something.

This leads to the reflection that Micah 7 is a prophecy shot through with Messianic allusion. Mic. 7:4 is alluded to in Mt. 7:16. The Lord openly quoted Mic. 7:6 concerning himself and His men in Mt. 10:35,36. There are many references to the Lord's betrayal and arrest: "They all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net" (7:2 = Jn. 8:59; 10:31,39; 11:8). "The prince (Herod) asketh (for a sign, Lk. 23:8), the judge (Pilate) asketh for a reward; and the great man (Caiaphas he High Priest) he uttereth his

mischievous desire: so they wrap it up" (Mic. 7:3), i.e. hatch their plot together. Because of this, "the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh" (Mic. 7:4 = Lk. 19:44). See on :5.

Micah 7:2 *The Godly man has perished out of the land*- Isaiah uses the same word for "perish" to lament the same situation, where "the righteous perish and none lays it to heart" (Is. 57:1). Although it seemed that generally there were no good men left in the land, Micah like Elijah was overlooking the critical importance of the remnant of whom he has just spoken in :1, a grape here and there. But as noted on :1, the reference may here look forward specifically to the Lord Jesus the Messiah, "the Godly man".

And there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood; every man hunts his brother with a net- The spiritual situation at the time of Hezekiah was very low indeed. An individual like Hezekiah with the help of a small minority might impose reforms and appear to redirect the majority toward Godliness, but often the real spiritual level amongst the congregation is very low indeed. It is not the leadership which are specifically criticized here; "every man" was at war with his brother. And our attitude to our brother is chosen as the litmus indicator of how "upright" we are. To hunt with the net implies they considered their brothers small game, small animals who could be caught with a net for their own gain.

Micah 7:3 *Their hands are on that which is evil to do it diligently*- Evil had become a focus and obsession for them. This is the nature of sin; the apparently little things of falsifying weights led to a way of life focused upon it, with both hands (Heb.).

The ruler and judge ask for a bribe; and the powerful man dictates the evil desire of his soul- As noted on :1, this spirit came to its full term in the way the Jews condemned the innocent Lord Jesus. We note that even amidst the reforms of Hezekiah, the judiciary and leadership were utterly corrupt. Genuine spirituality was always in a minority; but that minority was significant enough in God's eyes for the Assyrian army to be slain and Jerusalem saved from the intended destruction. Or, as I have suggested earlier, it was the single intercession of Micah and others which was acceptable to Him, just as likely God would have saved Sodom for the sake of *one* man, or even just Abraham's intercession, had Abraham had the spiritual vision to perceive that.

Thus they conspire together- There was a feedback between the sinful desires of the powerful, and the openness of the judges to bribes. The one encouraged the other, until society slipped into a headlong rush into sin. We earlier noted on Mic. 2 that the desires of the people likewise led the false prophets to prophesy what the people wanted to

hear. An upward spiral of spirituality in any group of people is so much harder to initiate and sustain, but it is possible; for the body of Christ makes increase of itself in love.

Micah 7:4 *The best of them is like a brier. The most upright is worse than a thorn hedge-* Even amongst sinners, God seems to grade them. There are better and worse sinners. This reflects His extreme sensitivity to sin and careful calculation of the meaning of every sin.

The day of your watchmen, even your visitation, has come; now is the time of their confusion- The watchman were the prophets; "the day" they had predicted of Yahweh's judgment "has come" in Micah's time. The word is used of Micah personally in :7, and we can imagine that he had the school of prophets centered around Isaiah in view (Is. 8:18). And yet by grace, the day of Jerusalem's destruction was averted, thanks to Micah's ministry. What was "now" was still changed. "Confusion" is only used elsewhere in the contemporary Is. 22:5, where it is the time when Zion's walls should be broken down. That was effectively "now", but was changed. It did indeed come about in the Babylonian invasion, but that was a rescheduled fulfilment of the words of Isaiah and Micah.

Micah 7:5 *Don't trust in a neighbour. Don't put confidence in a friend. With the woman lying in your embrace, be careful of the words of your mouth!-* As noted earlier in this chapter, those who were truly with the Lord were just a grape here and there on a harvested tree. Being part of such a tiny minority was a lonely experience. Micah implies that this minority were liable to betrayal by their family members, and perhaps he had had the same experience with his own wife (Dt. 13:6) and relatives. Again we see that the judiciary and ruling classes even under Hezekiah were not only morally corrupt but abusive towards the righteous remnant. This is something not immediately apparent in the historical records.

The application to the Lord Jesus is clear. "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide (reference to Judas- Ps. 55:13): keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom". This begins a reference to Samson's experience with Delilah. "I will look unto the Lord (Samson first used the Yahweh Name when he cried in his final suffering)… my God will hear me (cp. "Hear me this once")… rejoice not against me, O mine enemy (the Philistines mocking Samson): when I fall, I shall arise (Heb. elsewhere used about the resurrection); when I sit in darkness (Samson sitting in blindness in the prison), the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him (Samson's thoughts, surely), until he plead my cause ("Remember me")… will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.

Then she that is mine enemy (Delilah, symbol of the Philistines to Samson) shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me (as Delilah did?), Where is Yahweh thy God? mine eyes shall behold her (is this Samson imagining the judgment, with restored eyesight?)". If these connections are valid- and it is hard to deny this- then Samson died full of vision of the resurrection, judgment and the final manifestation of his forgiveness which he would then receive. Paul likewise has plenty of these references in his final writings in 2 Tim. 4. One question remains: why are there these Samson references in a prophecy of the Lord's betrayal? Surely Samson was a type of Christ. It could be that the Lord Jesus was being warned, prophetically, of how a particular woman could be his undoing, as she was Samson's. The way the Messianic Proverbs warn the Son of God against a particular woman lend weight to this. Or it could be that in the same way as Delilah betrayed Samson, so Judas was to betray Jesus, and He would go through the same gamut of emotions. This would be why this prophecy of His betrayal is described in terms of Delilah's betrayal of Samson.

Micah 7:6 *For the son dishonours the father, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house*- These words are alluded to in the Olivet prophecy. The situation in Jerusalem in Micah's time on the eve of the Assyrian invasion was to be that in the Jerusalem of both AD70 and the last days. And we wonder whether Micah's own family had experienced this situation, with Micah divided even from his own wife (:5). We know that he was married, for he speaks of his firstborn son in Mic. 6:7.

Micah 7:7 *But as for me, I will look to Yahweh*- "Look" is the same word as "watch[man]" in :4. Micah is saying that despite the overall lack of response to his message, even amongst his own family, he will focus on his prophetic ministry as a watchman.

I will wait for the God of my salvation- Judah at that time had forgotten the God of their salvation (s.w. Is. 17:10), but Micah had not, and on this basis it seems God was prepared to accept him standing for Judah.

My God will hear me- Micah expresses faith that God would hear *him*, strengthening the suggestion made that the averting of the Assyrian destruction of Jerusalem was due to his personal intercession.

Micah 7:8 *Don't rejoice against me, my enemy. When I fall, I will arise. When I sit in darkness, Yahweh will be a light to me*- I have suggested on :7 and elsewhere that Micah personally was counted as God's people, and his intercession on that basis was accepted, resulting in the salvation of Jerusalem at his time from the otherwise

inevitable Assyrian judgment. And so "my enemy" refers to Israel's enemy, Assyria. Micah expected the fall of Judah and the threatened darkness of judgment descending, but believed that just as he would be saved out of it, so would Judah. It was the Judah and Jerusalem specifically of Micah's day who were to "fall" under Divine judgment (Is. 8:15; 30:25). Indeed, they were to fall and *not* rise again (Is. 24:20). But Micah was confident that he would fall with Judah and rise again, and God accepted this and therefore Judah did rise again. We see foretold the power of the Lord's rising again in resurrection, through which all identified with and in Him would thereby be justified. And yet finally Judah refused to make this identification, and so they did fall, as stated so often (Ez. 5:12; 6:4 etc.).

The "darkness" was that of Divine judgment (Is. 5:30; 59:9; Lam. 3:2; Joel 2:2; Am. 5:18), because Judah themselves had preferred darkness to the light of God's ways (Is. 5:20; Ez. 8:12). It was through the work of Messiah that those who sat in darkness would see light (Is. 9:2; 58:10; 60:2), and Micah surely alludes to these words [remember Isaiah was contemporary with him]. Whilst not claiming to be Messiah, he interceded for Judah in the spirit of Messiah, and so his personal darkness [on account of association with God's condemned people] was turned to light, and he was accepted as the representative of God's people. The hope of Israel was to finally come out of the darkness of judgment (Is. 29:18; 42:7; 49:9), and Micah represented the people.

Micah 7:9 *I will bear the indignation of Yahweh, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case, and executes judgment for me. He will bring me forth to the light. I will see His righteousness*- As explained on :8, Micah was Judah's representative. He was innocent, but he totally identified with their sin. In the metaphor of God having opened a court case against Israel, Micah as it were now stands up in court and gives his witness, and God both pleads his case as his advocate, and is also the judge. And on this basis, Micah and the people he represented were brought to light out of the darkness of Divine judgment (see on 8); and therefore the Assyrian army was slain by God in righteousness, so that Jerusalem did not fall as was otherwise inevitable. In all this we see a foretaste of how God would allow the salvation of His people through the work of the supremely representative and sinless Lord Jesus, who like Micah, totally identified with our sin and consequent condemnation. Therefore Micah as a sinner, by identification with Judah, could confidently ask for Yahweh to plead his case and give the judgment of acceptance, turning the darkness of condemnation into the light of salvation (see on :8).

There are an interesting set of allusions to David's sin with Bathsheba in Micah 7, almost leading us to wonder whether Micah too had a *femme fatale* in his life- whom he speaks of in Mic. 7:10 as "she that is mine enemy...shame shall cover her". He says that "I have sinned against the Lord" (Mic. 7:9), using the very same words as David does in 2

Sam. 12:13; and he marvels how God 'passes by' transgression (Mic. 7:18), using the very same Hebrew word as is found in 2 Sam. 12:13 to describe how God "put away" David's sin. And there are many references throughout Micah 7 to David's Psalms of penitence. Could it be that David's sin and repentance served as a personal inspiration to Micah, as well as being held up as the inspiration to all God's people to repent and experience the sure mercies which David did? Micah saw David's sin as the epitome of Israel's, and his salvation by grace as their pattern.

Micah 7:10 *Then my enemy will see it, and shame will cover her who said to me, where is Yahweh your God?*- I have suggested above that Micah is totally identified with God's people, and their enemy was his. But we also saw hints in :5 and :6 that Micah's own wife betrayed him. Perhaps this is why he speaks of Assyria as a woman, when Assyria is elsewhere personified by Micah as a male (Mic. 5:6). "Where is... God?" was the attitude of the faithless in Judah (Mal. 2:17). And yet this was the attitude of Judah's enemies (Joel 2:17), as exemplified in the blasphemous claims of Rabshakeh and Sennacherib in Micah's time outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Then my enemy will see me and will cover herself with shame. Now she will be trodden down like the mire of the streets- To tread down in the streets was what Assyria was to do to Jerusalem (Is. 10:6 s.w.; Is. 5:5; 28:18; Dan. 8:13). Micah imagined that this would happen to his wife, who like Job's wife had mocked his faith in God. But we can also apply this to the Assyrians themselves, who would be judged as they had intended to judge Zion by the repentant remnant (s.w. Zech. 10:5).

Micah 7:11 *A day to build your walls! In that day, He will extend your boundary*- Micah envisaged that Isaiah's contemporary prophecies about the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and the extension of Judah's boundaries was to happen in his lifetime (Is. 54:2; 60:10). He as it were had a vision of that day coming, and shouts out the message in joy. All this could have happened after the destruction of the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem, but Hezekiah and others were satisfied just by God's immediate deliverance in this life, and shrugged off the great potentials possible. And that is true for many believers today.

Micah 7:12 *In that day they will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt even to the River, and from sea to sea, and mountain to mountain*- After the Angelic destruction of the Assyrians, representatives did indeed come to Hezekiah from such places. But he was lifted up in pride and was drawn down to their level, rather than using this as the springboard for establishing a Messianic kingdom over the surrounding peoples. The reference to the territory from the Nile to the Euphrates recalls the promises to Abraham. The entire *eretz* promised to Abraham could have flowed to Jerusalem and received teaching, leading to them being incorporated into Yahweh's

dominion or kingdom. This looks forward to the prediction in :16,17 that finally some of the invaders would repent and come to Zion in acceptance of Yahweh and His Son.

Micah 7:13 *Yet the land will be desolate because of those who dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings*- Micah appears to have foreseen, or had revealed to him, that Judah would not ultimately make good. Despite the power of his intercession and the response of a remnant to his message, the baton would be dropped by Hezekiah. The land would still be desolated, using the language of the curses for breaking covenant with Yahweh (s.w. Lev. 26:33). Isaiah's many threats of a desolated land would still come true in the end (Is. 1:7; 6:11; 17:9 etc.). However we could understand that the land was indeed desolated at Micah's time by the Assyrians and only Jerusalem remained unconquered.

Micah 7:14 *Shepherd Your people with Your staff, the flock of Your heritage, who dwell by themselves in a forest, in the midst of fertile pasture land; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old*- And yet Micah returns to the great prophetic theme, after recognizing Judah's sin and ultimate punishment (:13). The scattered remnant of the flock, wandering in forests [whereas sheep don't usually live in forests] would be shepherded by Yahweh and herded together into a good pasture land, that of *eretz* Israel. And that would be a re-establishment of God's Kingdom ["as in the days of old"]. Ez. 34 speaks of Yahweh as Israel's shepherd at this time in terms which are applied to the Lord Jesus in Jn. 10. Yahweh's shepherding will be through the Lord Jesus.

Micah 7:15 *As in the days of your coming forth out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvellous things*- I suggest that the "marvels" are not so much the miracles of the plagues, but the "marvellous things" done at Sinai when God entered into covenant with Israel after they had left Egypt (Ex. 34:10 s.w.), and when they crossed Jordan into Canaan (Josh. 3:5 s.w.). Yahweh will do the same when He enters into a new covenant with the redeemed, regathered, repentant remnant. In Mic. 6:4, God reasoned that His bringing Israel forth out of Egypt was a parade example of His grace and desire to save. The marvel will preeminently be His grace in finally saving Israel. In the short term, the destruction of the Assyrians who had surrounded Jerusalem was a foretaste of these "marvellous things", and indeed that phrase is used of how God could save Jerusalem from besieging armies (Jer. 21:2).

Micah 7:16 *The nations will see and be ashamed of all their might*- This is a consistent theme of the prophets; that the nations will be ashamed of all trust in human strength.

And we should learn that lesson now, surrounded as we are by so many temptations to trust human strength.

They will lay their hand on their mouth. Their ears will be deaf- Shame and laying the hand on the mouth all suggest repentance (Job 21:5; 40:4), which we have stated specifically in :17. A remnant of the invaders will apparently repent in the last days, as noted on :12. GNB "and cover their ears" would be another sign of capitulation and recognition of sin.

Micah 7:17 *They will lick the dust like a serpent*- This is the language of Ps. 72:9 and Is. 49:23 about God's enemies bowing before Him when they do this. Their humiliation leads to their repentance. God's hand in human life seeks to humble us, but in order that we may come to Him, and not for its own sake.

Like crawling things of the earth they shall come trembling out of their dens. They will come with fear to Yahweh our God, and will be afraid because of You- As noted above and on :12 and :16, even a remnant of Israel's enemies will come to "fear Yahweh", to become His servants. They will recognize that all human might or 'strongholds' ["dens"] is of no account; for in the lead up to this situation in the last days, human strength and military technology will be seen as of supreme meaning.

Micah 7:18 *Who is a God like You*- No god or idol of any conceivable religion has the grace and forgiveness of the one true God.

Who pardons iniquity- This is the Hebrew phrase usually translated 'to bear iniquity' (Ex. 28:38,43 etc.). God forgives iniquity by as it were bearing or carrying it, as if taking the guilt Himself. For 'to bear iniquity' also means 'to take guilt for iniquity' (Ez. 44:10,12 etc.). This was done by Micah, as noted throughout Mic. 6 and 7. But God did this supremely in the work of His Son, who bore the iniquity of Israel so that God might thereby pardon it.

And passes over- The language of God's Passover deliverance of Israel on account of the blood of the lamb, representative of Jesus (Ex. 12:23), continuing the allusion to those events which began in :15.

The disobedience of the remnant of His heritage?- Not every Israelite or Jew will be saved. Micah's marvel is at God's forgiveness of the repentant remnant. "The remnant of His heritage" is the phrase used in 2 Kings 21:14 of those who would go into captivity. Micah seems to have foreseen this, and yet looked ahead to their repentance and eternal restoration.

He doesn't retain his anger forever, because He delights in loving kindness- God's grace and love only have depth and meaning because He also does feel great anger at sin. But

within His personality, the pole of loving kindness eventually comes out as His dominant feature; His mercy triumphs over His necessary judgment. Quite simply, God loves being merciful and gracious, and asks that we have the same attitude (Jer. 9:24; Hos. 6:6).

Micah 7:19 *He will again have compassion on us*- The salvation of Israel from Egypt was by grace, as they left Egypt with the idols of Egypt and tabernacles of their gods. As noted on Mic. 6:4, God's saving of Israel from Egypt was by grace alone, and "He will again" show that grace. This was the compassion which was to be shown when the remnant were regathered from captivity (Dt. 30:3). It was tragic that the returning exiles were indifferent to this. The same amazing, saving grace is available to all now who wish to quit this world and enter the new covenant which the exiles then spurned.

He will tread our iniquities under foot- As noted on :10, it was Judah and specifically Jerusalem who were to be trodden under foot for their sins. But Jerusalem was saved by grace in Micah's time as a result of his intercession and identity with them, the just for the unjust. This looked forward to the far greater future salvation. God will make a difference between the sinners and their sins. Their *sins* rather than they personally would be trodden under foot, and thus the sinners themselves would be saved. And we are to maintain this same clear differentiation in our dealings with people, between sin and sinner.

David asks God to wash him from his sins (Ps. 51:2). The Hebrew means literally to tread out or down, alluding to how a fuller trod clothes to remove the dirt or old stain. This is the sense of how the word is used in Mic. 7:19 "He will tread our iniquities under foot; and you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea". The Lord's clothing is presented as whiter than any human fuller can whiten; this is the extent of our forgiveness and the total nature of the righteousness imputed to us. Judah of Micah's time were invited to experience the same cleansing as David had. The washing, cleansing and blotting out (:1) speak of the removal of a stain in the way that only God can do.

And you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea- This was the punishment of the Egyptians, and we have noted the Passover allusions on :15 and :18. The destruction of Israel's enemies (cp. the Egyptians) is paralleled with the destruction of Israel's sins. The allusion is also to Dt. 9:21, where Moses "cast your sin, the calf which you had made" into the water. As noted above, their sin is differentiated from the persons. The sin was to be totally and permanently destroyed. It is only those who identify with their sins who will likewise be personally cast into the depths in condemnation (Lk. 17:2). Like Paul in Romans 7, we are to recognize our sins, but not identify ourselves with them. And then the sins are dealt with by God, so permanently that they could be searched for and never found (Jer. 50:20), and we as persons are saved.

Micah 7:20 *You will give truth to Jacob, and mercy to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old*- "Mercy and truth" is a reference to the promises to the fathers; and it is here defined specifically as the total forgiveness of sin (:19). The same interpretation of the blessing embedded in the promises is found in Acts 3:25,26. This is the final word of Micah's prophecy; this is the essence of God's purpose- the blessing of forgiveness by grace. The ultimate truth is of God's saving mercy towards His people.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: NAHUM

NAHUM

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

NAHUM CHAPTER 1

Jonah and Nahum

Nahum also prophesied against Nineveh. When we read his words, it would appear that there was no chance for Nineveh. And yet presumably there was always a chance for them, just as there was at Jonah's time some years previously. But it seems to me that the essential message of Nahum was that of Jonah. They could have repented, even then. Not surprisingly, we find many allusions by Nahum back to Jonah:

Nahum	Jonah [re. Nineveh]
God is slow to anger (1:3)	4:2 [same Hebrew words]- and therefore He saved Nineveh.
"Who can abide in the fierceness of His anger?" (1:6)	God turns away from "the fierceness of His anger" [s.w.] against Nineveh (3:9)- Nineveh had survived God's fierce anger by repenting, and so they could even in Nahum's time. The Hebrew word translated "abide" in Nah. 1:6 is that used in Jonah to describe how the King of Assyria "arose" (3:6) in repentance. The answer to the question: "Who can abide / arise in the [presence of] the fierceness of His anger?" is: 'The King of Assyria if he repents'.
The wickedness of Nineveh "came up" before God's face (2:1)	The same words are used about Nineveh (1:2).
God was "against" Nineveh (2:13)	Same word in 1:2

Judged for “wickedness” (3:19)	Same word in 1:2; 3:8

It becomes apparent that the Ninevites of Nahum’s day are being directed back to the repentance of their city at the time of Jonah; but clearly they are also being invited to share in Jonah’s personal repentance.

Nahum	Jonah [about himself]
God has His way in the storm (1:3)	Jonah’s experience in the storm
God rebukes the sea (1:4)	As God stilled the storm which Jonah was in
Who can stand before God? (1:5)	Jonah had to be ‘stood up’ [s.w.] from his hiding in the ship when fleeing from God’s presence (1:15)
The Lord is a stronghold “in the day of trouble” (1:7) to those who trust Him.	Jonah cried to God in his “affliction” [s.w. “trouble”] (2:2)
An “overrunning flood” will overtake Nineveh (1:8)	“The floods...passed over [s.w. “overrunning”] Jonah (2:2); but Jonah repented and was saved. Note how the connections between Nah. 1:7,8 and Jonah 2:2 are in close proximity- surely an allusion is intended here.
Affliction (1:9)	Affliction [s.w.] (2:2)

From this it becomes apparent that Jonah is seen by God as in essentially the same position as the Ninevites. This was why his appeal to them was so strong. For he had been in just their position, in essence, yet had repented. The fact Nahum makes all these allusions to Jonah’s personal repentance indicates that they well knew the story of Jonah; and his repentance had inspired that of the audience he preached to. In these

we see a very real pattern for ourselves; it is our identity with our audience, as repentant sinners ourselves, which will elicit their response.

Nahum's message was not only a warning of judgment to come upon Nineveh. It was an appeal to Israel, that unless they repented, they would likewise perish. The appeal to Judah to "perform your vows" (Nah. 1:15) is couched in the very same words as Jonah used in Jonah 2:9: "I will pay [s.w. perform] that which I have vowed". Judah were being asked to be like Jonah, and not despise Nineveh, but rather appeal to her to repent.

Nahum Chapter 1

Nahum 1:1 *A divine word about Nineveh*- Literally, "doom". The idea may be that the previous word against Nineveh through Jonah had not come about because of their repentance, but now, 150 years later, the word was to come true. For they had not maintained that peak of repentance.

The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite- Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains* Vol. 1 p. 233, was certain that he had discovered the village of Elkosh near Nineveh. There is no definite evidence that it is the name of anywhere in Palestine. Jonah was buried in Mosul / Nineveh, implying he returned there after his repentance at the end of the book of Jonah and perhaps spent the rest of his days ministering to the converts there, some of whom we know from the Lord's words shall rise in judgment to eternal life. It may be that Nahum continued Jonah's work, despairing as the believing community there turned away over time. Or perhaps he was one of the captives taken there during one of the waves of Assyrian invasions. Nahum says little about Judah and when he rarely addresses them, he speaks as if from a distance. Aramaisms have been detected in his Hebrew at Nah. 2:4,8,13. And the term *taphsar* in Nah. 3:17 is an Assyrian word. Nahum writes as if he was familiar with Nineveh, as would his audience be. If indeed he was prophesying in Palestine, we would wonder at exactly why all the detail was given to his first hearers, about a distant city they didn't know. I note on Nah. 1:13 and often that Nahum may well have been prophesying at the time that the Assyrians attacked Judah and Jerusalem, having been taken into captivity himself by the Assyrians from the ten tribe kingdom some years before.

In this case, we can marvel at his bravery in uttering this prophecy. It would have been unpopular with the Ninevites and seen as blasphemous of their gods and culture. And the Jews with Nahum would not have been inclined to believe him; because they lived there, and the destruction of Nineveh and Assyria by invaders would mean the loss of all they had, and an end of their world. Our message likewise is going to be unpopular with secular society, as well as with worldly Christian believers. For our world is likewise about to collapse around us.

Nahum 1:2 *Yahweh is a jealous God and avenges*- God had promised vengeance on the Assyrians in Joel 2:18. Although they were the rod in His hand and used by Him (Is. 10), they had overstepped their commission, both in what they did to the ten tribes and to the land of Judah during Sennacherib's invasion.

Yahweh avenges and is full of wrath. Yahweh takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He maintains wrath against His enemies- This language is used of God's people as well as the Gentile invaders. He "maintains" or keeps His wrath if people are impenitent (Jer. 3:5,12; Mic. 7:18). There may therefore be a hint that if Nineveh repented as they had at Jonah's time, even this detailed prophecy of judgment need not come about. There is a gap between His statement of judgment and His execution of it; in that gap, His wrath is kept, but it need not be executed if we repent. And that is the intensity of the moment both we and this world stand within.

Nahum 1:3 *Yahweh is slow to anger, and great in power, and will by no means leave the guilty unpunished*- This is an appeal to the basic characteristics of God which are part of His essential Name (Ex. 34:6,7). The slowness to anger refers to the gap commented upon on :2.

Yahweh has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet- This is the language of theophany. As the cherubim would come upon His people in judgment, as Ezekiel's visions visualize, so they would upon Assyria. We see here what is to be a theme in Nahum; that the same Divine judgments upon His people were to come upon those who judged them. We see this in the structure of Revelation; the seals of judgment upon Israel are related to the bowls of wrath upon those who judge them.

Nahum 1:4 *He rebukes the sea*- The language of the Red Sea. The implication may be that the judgment of Assyria, the drying up of her waters, which represent Gentiles, was to issue forth in the return of the Israelites exiled in Assyria- people like Nahum. This was always the Divine intention- that both the ten tribes and Judah would return from captivity and re-establish His Kingdom upon earth in the form of Israel. But this didn't happen; the exiles for the most part preferred to remain amongst the Gentiles, and didn't repent. The same term is used in Mt. 8:26 for the Lord's rebuking of the sea. This doesn't make Him "God" in a Trinitarian sense, it means that He manifested God, just as Moses likewise rebuked the Red Sea, on God's behalf, without being God Himself in person.

And makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers. Bashan languishes, and Carmel; and the flower of Lebanon languishes- "The sea" would refer to Assyria, and "the rivers" to the

peoples and mercenary armies which were part of the Assyrian empire. The idea may be that this was to happen because they had made Bashan and Carmel to languish; or the picture could be of Bashan and Carmel in time of drought, and this is applied to Assyria. Such a reference to a situation in the land of Israel could imply that although Nahum's message was given in Assyria (see on :1), it was also published in Israel and Judah. They were to know that the Assyrian empire was going to dry up, just like Carmel in time of drought.

Nahum 1:5 *The mountains quake before Him, and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at His presence, yes, the world, and all who dwell in it*- This is the language of the exodus from Egypt. God works according to the same hallmark, stamped upon all His actions and judgments over history. The nations ["mountains"] of the *eretz* promised to Abraham had trembled before the cruel Assyrians; but now they were to quake before God. The Assyrians were a fake Kingdom of God, offering *their* kingdom as if it were the actual Kingdom of God (Is. 36:16 cp. Mic. 4:4). And so God was to establish *His* Kingdom at the time of Assyria's judgment. This was the intended path for the development of God's purpose at that time; then, the repentant exiles of Israel and Judah would return to re-establish God's Kingdom. But they didn't repent, and so this scenario didn't come true. But it will ultimately, in the judgment of the latter day Assyria, repentance of the Jewish remnant, and the return of the Lord Jesus to establish God's Kingdom on earth. Then God's "presence" will literally be on earth. The very same language is used of the quaking of the mountains after Gog is destroyed at the Lord's second coming (Ez. 38:20).

Nahum 1:6 *Who can stand before His indignation?*- The words of Ps. 130:3 about the inability of sinners to stand before God's wrath. God counted the Assyrians as sinners and responsible to His judgment. And yet the average Assyrian didn't have a detailed knowledge of Him. The knowledge which makes responsible to judgment is therefore very basic. There are those who will respond to that same basic knowledge in humility and repentance, as Nineveh did at the time of Jonah. And this will be their eternal salvation, as the Lord Himself said of the men of Nineveh. The amount of theological knowledge required for responsibility to God is therefore apparently very low.

Who can endure the fierceness of His anger?- Although Nahum was prophesying to the Assyria of his day, not every detail came true in his time. Yet his words will have their ultimate fulfilment in the destruction of the latter day Assyria, and so these words in this verse are used in other latter day prophecies (Joel 2:11; Mal. 3:2; Rev. 6:17).

His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken apart by Him- This is the language of Jer. 7:20 about God's wrath with Judah. What Assyria had done to God's people was to be done to them; see on :3.

Nahum 1:7 *Yahweh is good*- All this talk of judgment to come must be understood beneath the simple principle that Yahweh is good; He is not unjust, and He goes on now to say that all His true people will be saved out of judgment.

A stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who take refuge in Him- This was perhaps comfort to the Jews in Nineveh, or the faithful remnant of those who had responded to Jonah previously, who were hearing Nahum's message; see on :1. God knew them and is promising to preserve them from the judgment to come upon Nineveh. Assyria would seek for a stronghold in the time of their condemnation and not find one (s.w. Nah. 3:11); because Yahweh alone was the stronghold in the day of judgment.

Nahum 1:8 *But with an overflowing flood*- Floods or waters refer to invading armies, but the allusion is also to how Assyria would be destroyed as the world of Noah's day was. And that implied the survival of a remnant. In these judgments there is always the hint of hope for those who wanted to go God's way. "There is perhaps a special allusion to the mode of Nineveh's capture by the Medo-Babylonian army-namely, through a flood in the river, which broke down the wall twenty furlongs". But the language of "flood" is surely figurative, for Zeph. 2:13 says that Nineveh would be made as *dry* as the wilderness

He will make a full end of His adversaries, and will pursue His enemies into darkness- The Hebrew implies "make an utter end of the place thereof" (AV). But Nineveh still 'stands' in the form of the city of Mosul. This may be an example of where Nahum's prophecy didn't have exact fulfilment; but it will have in the total destruction of the latter day Assyrian.

But to die with no trace is a figure for judgment and need not be taken literally (Ps. 37:36; Dan. 2:35). It resembles the termination of many Assyrian inscriptions which record the defeat of a hostile chieftain: "And no one has seen any trace of him since". Again, what Assyria had done to God's people was to be done to them; see on :3.

Nahum 1:9 *What do you plot against Yahweh? He will make a full end*- To plot against Yahweh is evidently futile. Jer. 49:30 cp. 50:45 develop the point, that Babylon had plotted against God's people to destroy them, but God plotted / planned Babylon's total destruction. Attitudes to God's people are attitudes to Him; how we treat them is how God will treat us. This is a theme enshrined in the New Testament, and should majorly

control our whole attitude to all within covenant relationship with them. They are in our lives and we in theirs, in order to have an arena in which to work out the principles of love, tolerance and correct judgment.

Affliction won't rise up the second time- Assyria in its then present form would not again afflict Judah. But Judah did suffer "affliction" many times again. Here we have another example of where the planned destruction of Nineveh could have been the ending of all Judah's suffering, leading to the return of the repentant exiles and the establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel. But this didn't happen as the exiles didn't repent. And Judah suffered affliction many more times. The fulfilment of these words has therefore been reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, when indeed Judah will never be afflicted again. "Affliction" is the word used of Jacob's final and never to be repeated time of trouble in the last days (Gen. 35:3; Dan. 12:1). But the word is also used of the affliction caused by the Assyrian invasion of Judah in Hezekiah's time (Is. 37:3 and often in Isaiah). This could have been the final affliction which was never to be repeated. But Hezekiah let the baton drop, the repentance of the people was but symbolic, and they lost the kingdom vision. And so these words can only have their total fulfilment in the last days.

Nahum 1:10 *For while they are entangled in thorns*- The idea may be that they would be burnt like thorns, the curse of sin (2 Sam. 23:6,7).

And intoxicated with their drink, they will be consumed utterly like dry stubble- "Their drunken revelries are perhaps alluded to, during which the foe (according to Diodorus Siculus, 2) broke into their city, and Sardanapalus burned his palace; though the main and ultimate destruction of Nineveh referred to by Nahum was long subsequent to that under Sardanapalus". The LXX offers: "Because to its foundation it shall be dried up", alluding to the way Nineveh was captured as explained on :8.

Nahum 1:11 *There is one gone forth out of you, who devises evil against Yahweh, who counsels wickedness*- This seems very relevant to the wicked devices of Sennacherib and Rabshakeh against Yahweh, counselling the Jerusalem Jews to accept the Assyrian offer of a kingdom like that promised by Yahweh, each man sitting under his own fig tree. Their campaign was specifically "against Yahweh" in that they compared Him with the other deities whose supposed power they had overcome; hence "What do you imagine against the Lord?" (2 Kings 19:22,23). The latter day fulfilment will be in Gog, the leader of latter day Assyria, whose invasion of the land is described in the same language as that of Assyria. He too will "devise evil" against God's people; the very same Hebrew phrase is translated "think an evil thought" in Ez. 38:10. And yet the same phrase is several times used of how God devises evil against Israel's enemies as well as against His people (Jer. 18:11; 26:3). The devising of evil by Assyria was in a sense God's

devising of evil; He works out His purpose through the thoughts and intents of human hearts. His activity on human hearts is thus intertwined with the thoughts which human beings themselves have; confirming them but never forcing them to act as robots programmed by Him against their will.

Nahum 1:12 *Thus says Yahweh: Though they be in full strength*- Heb. 'at peace'. These words can apply to both Assyria and Judah in their self confidence. Assyria invaded Judah at the pinnacle of their power and confidence.

And likewise many- We recall Hezekiah's words to the people as the Assyrians approached in 2 Chron. 32:7: "Be not afraid... for all the multitude that is with him".

Even so they will be cut down- Heb. 'shaved', as Assyria did to God's people (Is. 7:20), so it was to be done to them; see on :3.

And he shall pass away- "They shall be cut down, when He (Yahweh) shall pass through," destroying by one Angelic stroke the Assyrian host, just as the Angel had passed through Egypt and done likewise.

Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more- Elsewhere spoken to Judah if they were repentant (Is. 40:1,2; 52:1,2). It's difficult to tell whether Assyria or Judah are being addressed; the point being that both were threatened with the same Divine judgment, and both could have repented and averted it. Nineveh had earlier done this at Jonah's time, and the implication of all these details of judgment is that they could do so again.

Nahum 1:13 *Now will I break his yoke from off you, and will burst your bonds apart*- Surely a reference to the Assyrian's yoke upon Judah (2 Kings 18:14; Is. 10:27). The implication of "Now..." is that Nahum may have been contemporary with the Sennacherib invasion of Judah at Hezekiah's time, having himself been one of those taken captive to Assyria from the ten tribes some years before. Some kind of Messianic kingdom could have been established then, but Hezekiah didn't follow through on his potential, and the exiles didn't repent. The intended scenario was that Nineveh would be destroyed and the exiles return in repentance; but that didn't quite happen as it potentially could have done, although the prophetic word will ultimately come true in the last days.

Nahum 1:14 *Yahweh has commanded concerning you: No more descendants will bear your name*- The idea is that his dynasty would become extinct, which is what happened when Sennacherib was slain by his sons at Hezekiah's time, and they fled away from Assyria (Is. 37:38).

Out of the house of your gods will I cut off the engraved image and the molten image- The Medes are recorded as delighting in destroying the idols of Nineveh. As the Assyrians had "cut off" the idols of other nations, so theirs were treated (2 Kings 19:18). An engraving at Khorsabad shows a man cutting an idol to pieces. The Assyrian palaces of the kings were thought to be sacred, and thus the king's house was also the house of their gods; Layard mentions this repeatedly. "Cut off" is then used about the Assyrians' fate (:15). Those who worship idols are like unto them. The idols were to be cut off when the Assyrians were cut off; they were one and the same. And that is true for all forms of idolatry and idolators today. See on Nah. 2:6.

I will make your grave- The Hebrew implies "'I will make it ["the house of your gods", Nisroch] your grave". And this truly happened: "As he (Sennacherib) was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god… Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword" (Is. 37:38).

For you are vile- The word is also translated "light"; as if weighed in the balances and found wanting (Dan. 5:27).

Nahum 1:15 *Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace!-* The picture is of a herald speeding towards Judah with good news. It could be that Nahum had himself in mind, in that I suggested on :1 that his prophecy of Assyria's destruction was given to him in Assyria, but the scroll or message was sent back to Judah. The good news was the destruction of the seemingly invincible Assyrians, and by implication, the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel under a Messianic figure. These words are quoted in Rom. 10:15 about the Lord Jesus. A Messiah figure, the prophetic word made flesh, could then have come to Judah. But the exiles didn't repent and Hezekiah turned away from the things of God's Kingdom. And so the prophecy was reapplied and rescheduled to the Lord Jesus as Messiah.

Keep your feasts, Judah! Perform your vows, for the wicked one will no more pass through you. He is utterly cut off- This could be an appeal to Judah to return to relationship with God because of the great spiritual potentials which would be enabled by the destruction of the Assyrians. Or the reference may simply be to the way that now Judah [which had been mostly occupied by the Assyrian army] could now keep the feasts again because they had free access to the Jerusalem temple. "Pass through you" is the very term used of the Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah's time (Is. 8:8; 26:20; 28:15,18,19). "Cut off" is the terms used for the destruction of the Assyrians at that time (Is. 11:13); But although the Assyrian army was destroyed in Hezekiah's time, it was not true that the wicked would never again pass through Judah. This prophecy therefore has its final fulfilment in the last days. Nineveh did not fall when the Assyrian army was destroyed at Jerusalem; and yet that is the implication of Nahum. Hezekiah instead

wanted to consort with the Babylonians and there was no repentance amongst the exiles; and so the prophecy must be fulfilled in the last days.

These words are similar to Is. 52:7, referring to a similar deliverance from Babylon. The exiles in Assyria didn't want to return, and yet the appeal is made some years later to those in Babylon. And again, the same potential was possible- the re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth in the form of Israel. But all these potentials came to nothing, and so the words are quoted in Rom. 10:15 with a subtle change of pronoun: “How beautiful are the feet of *him* that preaches the Gospel” becomes “How beautiful are the feet of *them* that preach”. We are the Lord Jesus to this world, because we are brethren in Him. The theme of Romans is the Gospel, and in this context Paul makes the point that because both Jew and Gentile are saved by the Gospel, *therefore* we should preach to both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 10:9-18). In this context, Paul quotes from Is. 52:7 and Nah. 1:15, both concerning preaching to Israel: "How shall they hear without a preacher? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of *them* (cp. 'he' in the originals- our preaching is a manifestation of the Lord) that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings". The Nahum passage is in the context of preaching to Israel the good news of their ultimate freedom from the Assyrian invasion which was then imminent. We are in a strikingly parallel situation in these last days. Rom. 10:16 then goes on to quote Is. 53:1, which again refers to the preaching of the Gospel to Israel, and applies it to our preaching.

NAHUM CHAPTER 2

Nahum Chapter 2

Nahum 2:1 *He who dashes in pieces has come up against you. Keep the fortress! Watch the way! Strengthen your muscles! Fortify your power mightily!*- The prophets continually decry all human strength, and so this is said not so much in sarcasm, but because God wants Nineveh to trust in its strength so that it would in due course repent upon seeing how worthless is any human strength. See on Nah. 3:14.

But we could read this as following on from Nah. 1:15, where a messenger comes to Judah with Nahum's message that Assyria is to be destroyed. If indeed this was at the time of the Assyrian encirclement of Jerusalem, then Nah. 2:1 may be addressed to Zion, encouraging them to keep and not surrender the fortress of Zion, and to strengthen themselves in God.

Nahum 2:2 *For Yahweh restores the pride of Jacob, as the pride of Israel; for the destroyers have destroyed them, and ruined their vine branches*- Clearly the destruction of Nineveh was intended to coincide with the restoration of Jacob, and the shooting forth of his vine branches with fruit upon them. This didn't happen as it could have done in Nahum's time. Jacob didn't bring forth fruit, and his glory was not restored. The restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel was deferred and rescheduled to the last days, when the latter day Assyrian will be destroyed and the repentant Jewish remnant bring forth spiritual fruit. The pride or excellency of Jacob refers to the land promised to Jacob and the patriarchs (s.w. Ps. 47:4; Am. 6:8).

Nahum 2:3 *The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are dressed in scarlet, the chariots flash with steel in the day of his preparation, and the pine spears are brandished*- The Assyrians were noted for their red shields and scarlet military uniforms. Now, that red colour was to be due to their own blood.

The destruction of Nineveh by chariots with flaming fire (2:3-5) suggests that the Medes were but representatives of the Cherubim chariots with Angels made as a flame of fire (Ps. 104:4); thus the "worthies" of 2:5 are the Angels, and the work controlled overall by the "Lord of Hosts" (Nah. 3:5)- of Angels. There are several other examples of human armies being described in Angelic language. Our worst enemies are under Angelic control. The Angel who destroyed the Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time was to then go to Nineveh and destroy their capital city. But as noted above, this didn't fully happen as intended because the people of God didn't bring forth spiritual fruit (see on :2).

Nahum 2:4 *The chariots rage in the streets, they rush back and forth in the broad highways. Their appearance is like torches, they run like lightning*- As noted on :3, this is the language of the Angel cherubim; we note the similarity of language with the cherubim visions of Ezekiel ("appearance", "like torches", 'running', "like lightning"). The Angel who destroyed the Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time was to then go to Nineveh and destroy their capital city. But as noted above, this didn't fully happen as intended because the people of God didn't bring forth spiritual fruit (see on :2).

Nahum 2:5 *He summons his picked troops. They stumble on their way. They dash to protect its wall, and the protective shield is put in place*- Missile shields and other such defensive technology is what the nations trust in today as well. Again the message is that the highest human might and technology, the "picked troops", are unable to defend against God's judgment. These troops did not stumble on their way when they were sent against Judah by God (s.w. Is. 5:27), but now they would stumble. The lesson is that God elevates and brings down, and the greatest of men in secular terms are only given their power and glory for a time, to achieve God's wider plan. See on Nah. 3:13.

Nahum 2:6 *The gates of the rivers are opened*- Various commentators give historical accounts of the fall of Nineveh to the Medes which involve the river being used to overthrow the city, as happened with Babylon. The simple point is that their defences were seemingly unbreachable, but they were breached very easily. And this is a lesson for all who trust in human defences and insurances.

And the palace is dissolved- Some claim that the king of Nineveh burnt the palace over himself. Seeing the palace was also the house of his gods (see on Nah. 1:14), this was a significant recognition that his entire religious and spiritual life had been a failure. He died with his gods, becoming like that which he worshipped.

Nahum 2:7 *It is decreed: she is uncovered, she is carried away; and her handmaids moan as with the voice of doves, beating on their breasts*- The reference may be to the queen of Nineveh (AV "Huzzab"), after her husband had committed suicide in the invasion (see on :6). They were the lion and lioness in the den of :11. But this woman clearly stands as symbolic of the city, which is presented as a prostitute in Nah. 3:4.

The woman who once lived in solitary confinement with her maids was now stripped naked and led away with her maids bemoaning her.

Nahum 2:8 *Like water from a burst dam the people rush away from Nineveh. Stop! Stop! they cry, but no one looks back*- This recalls Mosul, modern Nineveh, under siege in 2017 and the jihadists trying to stop the inhabitants fleeing. The flight of "waters" from Nineveh may suggests these were people from the various nations who had been exiled there; for waters often represent Gentile peoples in the Bible. This verse may be the equivalent of the call for God's people to flee out of Babylon, and like Lot fleeing Sodom, not to look back. Again, the Divine intention was that His exiled people repent and return to the land, now that Assyria was suddenly destroyed. But this didn't quite happen; because they didn't repent, just as it didn't quite happen as potentially possible when Babylon fell. The final fulfilment must be in the last days. See on Nah. 3:7.

Nahum 2:9 *Take the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold, for there is no end of the booty*- This again, as suggested on :8, may be a call not simply to the Medes to pillage Nineveh, but to God's people to treat her as Egypt. They were to take her gold and jewels as Israel had done from Egypt on Passover night, and make their way back to the promised land. Nahum 1 is full of language allusive to the Red Sea and the work of God at the fall of Egypt. As Egypt's chariots were destroyed there, so were Nineveh's to be (:13). They were to grasp the parallels and leave, taking with them the spoil of Egypt.

The glory of all goodly jewels- AV "the glory [of] the pleasant furniture", perhaps a reference to artifacts of Yahweh worship carried away from Judah.

Nahum 2:10 *She is empty, void, and waste. The heart melts, the knees knock together, their bodies and faces have grown pale*- The allusion is to how Assyria had emptied and spoiled (:9) the land of Judah (s.w. Is. 24:3). Faces turned pale, melting hearts and knocking knees is the very language used of what Assyria did to Judah. What Assyria had done to Judah was now being done to her. We see this in the structure of Revelation; the seals of judgment upon Israel are related to the bowls of wrath upon those who judge them.

Nahum 2:11 *Where is the den of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion and the lioness walked, the lion's cubs, and no one made them afraid?*- Lions were the iconic symbol of Assyria, and Nineveh was their den. The reference to lion and lioness may refer to the king and queen of Nineveh, mentioned in :7. "Where is..." Nineveh would suggest that it was to no longer exist. But it did, and still does in the form of Mosul. This may be an example of where Nahum's prophecy didn't have exact fulfilment; but it will have in the total destruction of the latter day Assyrian. See on Nah. 1:8.

Nahum 2:12 *The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his caves with the kill, and his dens with prey*- The exiles such as Nahum had been taken to Nineveh; "dens" is how their exile is described (Is. 42:22 s.w.). The "prey" was the spoil taken from places like Judah (Is. 17:14; 24:3). But it was a restored Judah who were to be the lion who took prey (Gen. 49:9 s.w.). Just as Assyria claimed that their kingdom was as the Kingdom of God (Is. 36:16 cp. Mic.

4:4), so they acted as the lion of Judah. They were an anti-Kingdom of God and their king as an anti-Christ, a pseudo Messiah.

Nahum 2:13 *Behold, I am against you, says Yahweh of Armies, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions; and I will cut off your prey from the earth*- The destruction of her chariots is another connection with the destruction of the Egyptians; see on :9. Burning chariots was what a faithful Israel were to do to their enemies (Josh. 11:6); again the implication was that Nineveh's destruction was to coincide with the repentance of Israel.

And the voice of your envoys will no longer be heard- This is surely a specific reference to the loud voice of Rabshakeh, the envoy of Sennacherib, outside the walls of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time. The word for "envoys", *malak*, is perhaps used about him in Is. 30:4, and certainly in Is. 37:9,14. But Is. 37:36 then says that Yahweh's *malak*, His Angel / envoy, went out and slew the Assyrian army. Again we see the potential for the fulfilment of the prophecy at Hezekiah's time; but there was only a partial fulfilment because Judah did not repent as required, the repentant exiles didn't return, and so the major fulfilment has been delayed until the last days.

NAHUM CHAPTER 3

Nahum Chapter 3

Nahum 3:1 *Woe to the city of blood! It is all full of lies and robbery- no end to the prey!*- This language is repeatedly used about Jerusalem (Jer. 26:15; Ez. 7:23; 9:9; 22:2,3; 24:6,9). Nineveh's destruction for shedding blood, lying and stealing was to serve as a warning to Jerusalem. They were no better than their Gentile enemies. Situations we encounter in our lives are in order to help us see what will happen to us unless we too repent and change. See on :4.

Nahum 3:2 *The noise of the whip, the noise of the rattling of wheels, prancing horses, and bounding chariots*- The reality of the Medes destroying Nineveh is portrayed here in great and vivid detail. The very noise of the horse whips is mentioned, and the rattling of the chariot wheels on cobblestones. The focus upon these minor details, just as in movies today, was to highlight the reality. But all this could have been avoided had Nineveh repented, as they did in Jonah's time.

Nahum 3:3 *The horseman mounting, and the flashing sword, the glittering spear, and a multitude of slain, and a great heap of corpses, and there is no end of the bodies. They stumble on their bodies*- Often, Angels are described in terms of the men, empires or armies they control- the frequent descriptions of human armies in language which refers to Angels too provides proof of this (e. g. Is. 66:15; Ez. 26:7,10; Joel 2:5; Nahum 2:3,4,13). Nahum 3:3 speaks of how the Assyrians will come with the noise of wheels, as pransing horses, jumping chariots, and “the flashing sword”. This is all cherubim-Angel language (Gen. 3:24). The Angels behind those nations and armies were manifested through them, and this there is the use of such similar language. In the same way, the description of the beasts are relevant to the nations they represent, and also to the Angels which control them. Rev. 9:11 provides another example. I have suggested that Nahum wrote at the time of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in the reign of Hezekiah. That invasion was destroyed by just one Angel, and the idea is that the entire Angel cherubim would move on from there to destroy Nineveh itself.

This didn't completely happen as planned, because the repentance of God's people was required. But there was indeed a partial fulfilment, looking forward to that of the last days.

Nahum 3:4 *Because of the multitude of the prostitution of the alluring prostitute, the mistress of witchcraft, who sells nations through her prostitution, and families through her witchcraft*- As explained on Nah. 2:7, Nineveh was personified as her queen, Huzzab. Assyria appeared externally attractive to nations like Judah, offering them a fake kingdom of God if they gave in to her (Is. 36:16 cp. Mic. 4:4). But again, as noted on :1, Jerusalem was also likened to a prostitute, as was Babylon. Jerusalem was to learn that she was no better than Nineveh, and to be warned by Nineveh's destruction; realizing that at the time of Sennacherib's invasion, she had been saved by grace alone at the very last moment.

Nahum 3:5 *Behold, I am against you, says Yahweh of Armies, and I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame*- This is again similar language to the judgment threatened upon God's people (Jer. 13:26). See on :4. The nakedness of the queen of Nineveh as she was led into captivity (see on Mic. 2:7) was to represent the exposing of Nineveh and the Assyrians. The plural "kingdoms" may refer to the combined forces of the Medes and Babylonians. Once inside Nineveh, the shame of her behaviour was revealed to all.

Nahum 3:6 *I will throw abominable filth on you, and make you vile, and will set you a spectacle*- The punishment for a prostitute. Assyria would be revealed for who she really was. "Abominable filth" is a term always (27 times) elsewhere used of idols (Dt. 29:17 etc.). She was to be treated as an idol, because those who make idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8). All the idols of our world shall come to an eternal end, often a tragic end; and so shall we, if we worship them and trust in them.

Nahum 3:7 *It will happen that all those who look at you will flee from you, and say, 'Nineveh is laid waste! Who will mourn for her?' Where will I seek comforters for you?*- To die with no mourners was the worst death for a Middle Eastern person of those times. As noted on Nah. 2:8, we may be intended to understand here a call to flee from Nineveh; for ultimately, everyone would flee from her. Again, the Divine intention was that His exiled people repent and return to the land, now that Assyria was suddenly destroyed. But this didn't quite happen; because they didn't repent, just as it didn't quite happen as potentially possible when Babylon fell. The final fulfilment must be in the last days.

Nahum 3:8 *Are you better than No-Amon, who was situated among the rivers, who had the waters around her; whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was of the sea?*- The allusion is to the previous dramatic victory of Sargon over No-Amon in Egypt; "the sea" would refer to the Nile. This city, like Nineveh, trusted in rivers and moats for her defence. But the Assyrians overcame this, and Nineveh's similar defences would likewise be destroyed. What Nineveh / Assyria had done to others would be done to them. They too were not invincible.

Nahum 3:9 *Cush and Egypt were her infinite strength. Put and Libya were her helpers*- "Infinite strength" is of course only from a human perspective. We have here another example of how God understands how humans see things, and uses their

language in appealing to them; the usage of "demon" language in the New Testament is another example. Assyria had conquered No-Amon, even though that city was confident that Egypt and other nations were "her infinite strength". Judah too was trusting in Egypt at the time of Hezekiah, when Nahum was prophesying. Again, Judah was to learn from the destruction of others who vainly hoped in Egypt. The only source of "infinite strength" is God; they treated human strength, Egypt, as God. "Helpers" is *ezrah*, and 'Hezekiah' is a compound of this word- 'Yah is my helper'. Nahum's words were an encouragement of Judah to trust in Yahweh's help alone, as all human help had been already demonstrated to be worth nothing.

Nahum 3:10 *Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity. Her young children also were dashed in pieces at the head of all the streets, and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her senior leaders were bound in chains*- This language is all used about what was to come upon Israel and Judah (Is. 51:20). As Assyria had done to them, so they would do to God's people, unless they stopped trusting in Egypt. The simple principle is that what we do to others is done to us; not just because God likes poetic justice for the sake of it, but in order to help us realize how they felt, and thereby to come to repentance before God and unity and empathy with those we have sinned against.

Nahum 3:11 *You also will be drunken. You will go into hiding. You also will seek a stronghold because of the enemy*- The fortified palaces of the king of Nineveh were also the houses of his gods; and they provided no refuge when Nineveh was taken. It was a sad end- realizing that the entire spiritual narrative of their lives had been false. They would seek a place of refuge and hiding and not find it; their own teaching / narrative / worldview which they had given to others would itself make them drunk, unable to cope with the reality that they were being condemned and all their belief systems were unable to save them. This is the tragic picture of the condemned.

Nahum 3:12 *All your fortresses will be like fig trees with the first-ripe figs: if they are shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater*- Again, all human strength will be revealed as very fragile- a lesson for us all for all time. But first ripe figs is the image used to portray spiritual fruit upon God's people (Jer. 24:2; Hos. 9:10). Once again, there is the idea that the destruction of Nineveh would coincide with spiritual fruit upon God's people. This didn't exactly happen, and although Nineveh was indeed destroyed, the intended potentially possible scenario didn't happen; but it will, in the destruction of the latter day Assyrian and true repentance of Israel.

Nahum 3:13 *Behold, your troops in your midst are like women. The gates of your land are set wide open to your enemies. The fire has devoured your bars*- Elite soldiers and strong gates were the apparently invincible defences of Nineveh; again the message is that the highest human might and technology, the "picked troops" of Mic. 2:5, are unable to defend against God's judgment. We need to learn the lesson: all that seems a solid, invincible guarantee of our future will not save us. Only God in His Son, Yahoshua-Jesus, can save.

Nahum 3:14 *Draw water for the siege. Strengthen your fortresses*- The prophets continually decry all human strength, and so this is said not so much in sarcasm, but because God wants Nineveh to trust in its strength so that it would in due course repent upon seeing how worthless is any human strength. See on Nah. 2:1.

Go into the clay, and tread the mortar. Make the brick kiln strong- To produce bricks to repair the breaches made in their apparently invincible defences.

Nahum 3:15 *There the fire will devour you*- The fire of their brick kilns, making bricks to repair the breaches in their walls, would devour them. When the Medes took Nineveh, their king apparently burnt his palace over himself. He was devoured by the fire of his own trust in human strength.

The sword will cut you off. It will devour you like the grasshopper. You have multiplied like grasshoppers, bred like the locust- There had been a population explosion in Nineveh, and some historians include overpopulation as a reason for Assyria's decline. But numbers of human strength would not save them.

Nahum 3:16 *You have increased your merchants more than the stars of the skies*- It was the seed of Abraham who ultimately were to be more numerous that the stars of the skies. It was specifically Assyria's actions against that seed which made them so accountable to judgment.

The grasshopper strips, and flees away- The language of Joel 1 concerning the waves of Assyrian incursions into Judah. What they had done to Judah was to be done to them. As noted on :10, this was not just because God likes poetic justice for the sake of it, but in order to help them realize how they felt, and thereby to come to repentance before God and unity and empathy with those they had sinned against.

Nahum 3:17 *Your guards are like the locusts, and your officials like the swarms of locusts, which settle on the walls on a cold day, but when the sun appears, they flee away, and their place is not known where they are*- The distinctly Assyrian word *taphsar* used here is one of many reasons to think that Nahum lived in Assyria and prophesied from there; see on Nah. 1:1. The "guards" would have been from subjugated peoples, who would flee Nineveh. As noted on :8 and Nah. 2:8, we may be intended to understand here a call to flee from Nineveh; for ultimately, everyone would flee from her. Again, the Divine intention was that His exiled people repent and return to the land, now that Assyria was suddenly destroyed. But this didn't quite happen; because they didn't repent, just as it didn't quite happen as potentially possible when Babylon fell. The final fulfilment must be in the last days.

Nahum 3:18 *Your shepherds slumber, king of Assyria. Your nobles lie down, your people are scattered on the mountains, and there is no one to gather them*- Again, this is the language of Ez. 34 about the exiles of God's people, scattered on the mountains without a shepherd. Assyria was to experience what God's people such as Nahum had experienced. But as suggested on :17, this was not merely poetic justice; there was the inbuilt intention that as in Jonah's time, Nineveh might yet repent.

Nahum 3:19 *There is no healing for your wound, for your injury is fatal. All who hear the report of you clap their hands over you; for who hasn't felt your endless cruelty?*- The suggestion may be that this time, unlike in Jonah's time, Nineveh would not repent. There therefore would be no healing. Those who heard the report or news would rejoice; and I suggested on Nah. 1:1 that Nahum's prophecy was first given in Nineveh but was published also in Judah. There was to be joy in Judah on hearing this news; the endless cruelty was to end. "Endless" was how it felt; but it would end. This is another example of God's ability to use human language, even of it is technically

incorrect (as in the language of demon possession in the Gospels). He knows how we feel and perceive things, and wishes to reach out to us in those feelings.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: HABAKKUK

HABAKKUK

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

HABAKKUK CHAPTER 1

Habakkuk Chapter 1

Habakkuk 1:1 *The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw*- According to :5,6, the Babylonians would be raised up and would invade Judah in the lifetime of Habakkuk's audience. This would suggest that Habakkuk lived some time before the first Babylonian invasions of Judah, perhaps in the time of Manasseh or Jehoiakim.

Habakkuk 1:2 *Yahweh, how long will I cry, and You will not hear? I cry out to you Violence!*- The impression we get is of Habakkuk constantly pointing things out to God- as if He were unaware! Jehoiakim's reign (see on :1) was full of such violence (Jer. 22:3,3-17). Habakkuk may be complaining about the violence threatened at the hands of the Babylonians. But he may be complaining that he has cried out to God about all the violence ongoing within Judah, and yet there has been no Divine intervention in the form of the sending of a Divine Saviour, Yah's salvation.

And will You not save?- This is the Hebrew idea of 'Jesus'. By the end of the book, Habakkuk is rejoicing in the God of his "salvation" (Hab. 3:18)- the same word. We see therefore in this intriguing dialogue how a man begins with many questions about the justice of God, both in His actions within the community of believers and in the Gentile world... and how through the humbling struggle with God over these issues, he comes to realize that God is indeed his very own saviour God, even though there is no fruit on the vines, the promised blessings of the covenant aren't realized in his life; yet for sure, God shall be His salvation ultimately in the Kingdom. And in a related way, we could say that through this path of struggle with injustice, Habakkuk finally comes to 'Jesus', to realizing that God does in fact save.

Habakkuk 1:3 *Why do You show me iniquity, and look at perversity?*- Habakkuk uses the same words to complain of what the Babylonians do (:13). The idea seems to be that he finds it unjust that sinful people are punished by equally sinful people. The injustices within Israel which Habakkuk complains of are those of the reign of Jehoiakim, who was punished by the predicted Babylonian invasion (Jer. 22:3,13-17). Habakkuk was therefore contemporary with Jeremiah, and his struggle with God is similar to the way Jeremiah reasons (e.g. Jer. 12:1; Jer. 20:8).

The complaint that God sees iniquity and perversity in Israel is perhaps an allusion to the way that God earlier did not behold these things in Israel (Num. 23:21). Habakkuk was doing what many try to do- proving God wrong from His own book, accusing Him of moral inconsistency etc. Yet the prophets contemporary with Habakkuk had repeatedly and clearly explained that judgment was to come on Judah at the hand of the Babylonians- for very good reason. And Habakkuk, despite surely being aware of that, seeks to wriggle out of it by complaining that the Babylonians were no better, and just asking God to 'sort it out' somehow in a way that meant Judah would not be destroyed.

God’s oscillations of feelings, the sharp opposition between judgment and mercy, were felt equally by the prophets, who were breathing in God’s spirit. Consider all the oppositions and paradoxes which there were in the prophetic experience:

- Speaking for God against Israel, when they themselves were members of Israel

- Appearing to be on the side of their own peoples’ enemies

- Holding an understanding of Israel’s God that was contradictory to Israel’s own understanding of their God

- Understanding why judgment should come, and yet like Habakkuk crying out with the question “Why?” (Hab. 1:2-4). After twice approaching God with this question, and each time being given fresh insights into the awful nature of the judgment to come as a response, Habakkuk ends up with a trembling body and lips that ‘quivered at the sound’... and yet, at the very same time, feels that he still “will rejoice in the Lord” (Hab. 3:16,18). What a torn man he was.

For destruction and violence are before me. There is strife, and contention rises up- He was mentally exhausted at all the insights he had been given into the perversity of God's people, and yet also exhausted at the breadth of evil and destruction which he was being shown as the judgment for it.

Habakkuk 1:4 *Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth; for the wicked surround the righteous, therefore justice is perverted*- The reference to "the law" suggests Habakkuk is complaining at the wickedness he was beholding within God's people. Because the wicked within Judah surrounded the righteous, therefore Judah was to be surrounded by the wicked Babylonians. All Divine judgments are really reflections of prior human behaviour. Out of all the terrible sins in Habakkuk's time (probably that of Manasseh, see on :1), typical of the prophets, Habakkuk focuses on lack of justice. The Hebrew terms for "justice" and "righteousness" are the same; to do justice is the essence of righteousness.

Habakkuk 1:5 *Look among the nations, watch, and wonder marvellously*- This is God's response to Habakkuk's psychological exhaustion noted above. God is open to dialogue with man. God's response to that injustice and sin in Judah would be to raise up the Chaldeans. We could infer that at Habakkuk's time, they were still being prepared; hence he is bidden look and watch "among the nations", for out of them, the Chaldeans / Babylonians would be raised up (:6). Whatever historico-social reasons there were for the Babylonians coming to dominance, they were controlled by God's hand in human history. He specifically developed that group of people to be the judges of His sinful people.

For I am working a work in your days, which you will not believe though it is told you- These words are quoted in the New Testament about Israel's disbelief in the Lord's resurrection or 'raising up'. Yet that isn't the context here- rather is it of the raising up of the Babylonians as judges of God's people. Words are sometimes quoted without attention to context; and that is hard for Western minds to accept, obsessed as they are with seeing logical connections in context, so called 'intertextuality'. Context is not therefore 'king', the main key to correct interpretation, as is claimed by many who set out to explain 'How to interpret the Bible'.

Paul appropriates the words of Hab. 1:5 LXX to his work of preaching: "I *work a work* in your days, which ye will in no wise believe though *a man* declare it unto you". And so when we read of the *men* Barnabas and Saul being sent out on the *work* of the first missionary journey, we are to see an allusion back to Hab. 1:5 (Acts 13:2; 14:26). And yet this passage goes on to say that the work would not be believed. Yet hoping against hope, they embarked on the missionary journey. Cyprus didn't respond, initially- as they had expected. But soon their positive spirit was rewarded, and converts were made, against all odds. The raising up of the Babylonians was as it were grabbed hold of in the New Testament and presented as somehow similar to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, through which God's sinful people would likewise be judged.

Habakkuk 1:6 *For, behold, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, that march through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs*- As explained on :5, the bitterness of the Chaldeans was raised up by God in order to be the ideally appropriate judges of His sinful people. Their whole psychological makeup was controlled by God, developing them to be the tool in His hand to judge Judah. But these words are used of the raising up of the Lord Jesus. Just as the Jews didn't believe that their sin would be judged by the raising up of the Chaldeans, so they were to later disbelieve in the raising up of God's Son in resurrection in order to bring judgment upon them.

Habakkuk 1:7 *They are feared and dreaded*- The Hebrew idea is that they elicited dread or fear. And yet the same word is used throughout Deuteronomy of how an obedient Israel would not fear their enemies or invaders.

Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves- The GNB may be correct in offering "in their pride they are a law to themselves". They were not under Divine law in terms of the Mosaic law; and yet they were still judged for their actions in so far as they were responsible for their actions. This would suggest that the level of knowledge which makes men responsible to God is far lower than some might think; although the question of responsibility leading to resurrection and future judgment is maybe another question.

Habakkuk 1:8 *Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves*- These words are alluded to be Jeremiah when the Chaldeans had indeed arisen as a nation and were about to attack Jerusalem (Jer. 5:6). The many allusions and quotations from Habakkuk made by Jeremiah are a way of saying that Habakkuk's words had come true. Wolves hunt at night and so in the evening when they begin hunting they are hungry and at their most aggressive. But the same term is used of how Judah's leadership were the same (Zeph. 3:3). Again, Divine judgment is appropriate to the sin. They would be made to feel how others felt when they had abused them.

Their horsemen press proudly on. Yes, their horsemen come from afar, they fly as an eagle that hastens to devour- This is the promised judgment of Dt. 28:49 for an Israel who had broken covenant with their God.

Habakkuk 1:9 *All of them come for violence*- "Violence" alludes to Habakkuk's complaint that Judah was full of violence (:3). The *eretz* was full of such violence in Noah's time, resulting in the flood (Gen. 6:11,13 s.w.). And so the injustice and secret sins of Judah (:4) were counted by God as actual violence (s.w. Hab. 2:8,17; Zeph. 1:9), and were punished by violence. We need to think through the implications of our positions and actions; for just as God counts secret hatred as murder, so Judah's injustice against their brethren was counted as actual violence.

Their hordes face the desert- The pack of wolves were about to set off into the desert towards Judah. The implication surely was that Judah just about had time to repent and avert this. An alternative translation is as AV "they shall be as the east wind"; which is how the Babylonian invasion is described in Jer. 18:17; Ez. 17:10; 19:12, coming in across the desert from the east.

He gathers prisoners like sand- The seed of Abraham were as the sand; but they would be gathered and taken into captivity.

Habakkuk 1:10 *Yes, he scoffs at kings, and princes are a derision to him*- Judah trusted in their kings, assuming that having Davidic kings reigning on God's behalf would be enough to save them, whereas the ten tribe kingdom only had usurpers as their kings. But being God's people and having a leadership sanctioned by Him were not, and are not, enough for salvation. That would not avert Divine judgment.

He laughs at every stronghold, for he builds up an earthen siege ramp, and takes it- All human strength and military technology is no way to salvation. Whatever human strength we may trust in is as nothing before God's judgment.

Habakkuk 1:11 *Then he sweeps by like the wind, and goes on further. He is indeed guilty; his strength is his god*- The Babylonians were given the power to judge Judah, but as AV they would "offend, imputing this his power unto his god". There are times when we are indeed used by God; but that is so sign that we are personally acceptable with Him. And we can go beyond that, and assume that the abilities we were given are not from God but rather from our own strength, which we then glory in. Babylon was actually intended to show mercy to the Jews, but their pride in their own strength meant that they didn't: "I was wroth with My people... and given them into thine hand; thou didst shew them no mercy; upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke. And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever; so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it" (Is. 47:5-7).

Habakkuk 1:12 *Aren't You from everlasting, Yahweh my God, my Holy One? We also will not die! Yahweh, you have appointed him for judgment. You, Rock, have established him to punish*- Habakkuk responds by arguing that "we", the righteous remnant, ought not to die; for Nebuchadnezzar would do all this evil in the name of "his god" (:11), whereas Habakkuk and the faithful believed in the one true God as *"my* God". And he struggles with how such an evil nation, attributing their success to their god (:11), could be used by Him. How is this reflective of the holiness of God? Habakkuk develops these complaints in the next verses. But the answer seems to be that Judah had indeed sinned grievously, and so this judgment would really come; but Babylon would themselves not go unpunished for their attitudes and actions. Habakkuk recognized Judah were sinful, and complains of it at the start of this chapter; but he like us didn't realize how awful sin is, and the judgment which must come if we are not repentant.

Habakkuk 1:13 *You who have purer eyes than to see evil, and who cannot look on perversity*- There can be no sinful beings in heaven, seeing that God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13). In similar vein, Ps. 5:4,5 explains: "Neither shall evil dwell with you. The foolish shall not stand" in God's heavenly dwelling place. The idea of there being rebellion against God in heaven by sinful angels quite contradicts the impression given by these passages. But the allusion may also be to how God had imputed righteousness to Israel and did not look upon their evil (Num. 23:21). This of course looks forward to the basis of our salvation by grace in Christ, as Paul develops in Rom. 1-8. But status alone will not save us from judgment; we must live out that status in reality.

Why do You tolerate those who deal treacherously, and keep silent when the wicked swallows up the man who is more righteous than he- Habakkuk believed God's threat of judgment at the hands of the Babylonians would happen, but he considers sinful Judah

more righteous than the very sinful Babylonians. As noted above, Habakkuk failed to realize the seriousness of sin- any sin. He is the one who has just been complaining at the wickedness of Judah; and God is making him see the real implication of it. Or maybe he has in view the idea that the righteous remnant too would be swallowed up by the threatened invasion, and like Abraham pleading for Sodom, was therefore pleading that the judgment on the majority would therefore not come. See on Hab. 2:4.

But although the Babylonians would "deal treacherously", so had Israel (s.w. Ps. 78:57), and so specifically had Judah (Jer. 3:8,20; 5:11 s.w.); and God had 'tolerated' them for so long. Habakkuk's objections were stated in hot blood and in a moment of emotion, but thinking them through would lead to the conclusion that the enormity of God's tolerance to Israel's sin had not been appreciated by him as it ought to have been. Indeed the idea of being treacherous is an allusion to Jacob, as confirmed in Is. 48:8. If God had tolerated them so long, there was no basis for his objection that God tolerated and used the Babylonians. "Tolerate" is the same word as "look" in :3. Habakkuk beheld or tolerated sin in Judah; why should not God also use or 'look to' a sinful nation like Babylon?

Habakkuk 1:14 *And make men like the fish of the sea, like the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?*- Habakkuk objects that the Babylonians would treat men like animals, and the Jews did have a ruler over them- God. But this was how Judah had behaved to each other. They too did not perceive the meaning of persons, and had acted as if they had no ruler over them.

Habakkuk 1:15 *He takes up all of them with the hook; he catches them in his net, and gathers them in his dragnet. Therefore he rejoices and is glad*- The idea is that Babylon would drag off his net of fish to captivity in Babylon, rejoicing over them. "All of them" suggests that the various fish represented the nations of men; and Habakkuk objected to Judah being treated like any other Gentile nation. But the truth was that they had acted like the Gentiles, and even worse. The whole record is teaching the seriousness of sin, and how even a faithful prophet might not perceive that as he ought. See on Hab. 2:5.

Habakkuk 1:16 *Therefore he sacrifices to his net, and burns incense to his dragnet, because by them his life is luxurious, and his food is good*- Habakkuk was irritated by the way that he knew the Babylonians would think their success against Judah was due to their idols (:11) and military strategies. Habakkuk speaks in the present tense as if he saw Nebuchadnezzar before him. But actually he was living at a time when the Babylonians had yet to 'arise' (:6). Habakkuk believed in the prophetic word and saw it as already fulfilling; just as we are to view the promises of the life eternal as so certain of fulfilment that they are already fulfilled in a sense.

Habakkuk 1:17 *Will he therefore continually empty his net, and kill the nations without mercy?*- Is. 47:5-7 criticizes Babylon for not showing mercy to Judah when they were intended to. Habakkuk had seen a prophecy of the Babylonian invasion, and perhaps he saw more than what is here recorded; perhaps he saw Nebuchadnezzar sacrificing to his idols and rejoicing in the luxuries he would take from Judah (:16). But he had not seen any vision of Babylon's judgment. It appeared to go on "continually".

HABAKKUK CHAPTER 2

Habakkuk Chapter 2

Habakkuk 2:1 *I will stand at my watch, and set myself on the ramparts, and will look out*- As a watchman goes to an elevated place to watch, so Habakkuk was eagerly looking out for God's response to his complaints. Perhaps he means that the next time the prophetic word comes to him, he will look carefully for answers. He sensed he would be reproved (:1 AV "What I shall answer when I am reproved"); but he was eagerly looking out for the answer. So often, complaints about the apparent injustice or inactivity of God are posed as questions but those 'questions' are effectively statements of discontent ['Why does God allow suffering??!!'], and judgment upon God. There is no serious looking for an answer. But Habakkuk asks and is confident an answer will come, although he fully expects that answer to rebuke him. The rebuke however doesn't come. God is not mad with man because we have questions. And He will respond to our sincere questioning of His behaviour, if it is made in the right spirit.

To know what He will say to me, and what answer I will get concerning my complaint- As noted on chapter 1, Habakkuk's objections were gut reactions, and the answers are found within the objections. So the answer was really already there. But the original could be translated to the effect: "And what reproof I will receive". Habakkuk senses that God will reprove him, that his complaints are out of step with God's way. And yet we see here the degree of intimacy possible between God and man.

Habakkuk 2:2 *Yahweh answered me, Write the vision, and make it plain on tablets, that he who reads it may run*- "May run" could be an idiom for response to God's word (as in Dan. 12:4). All prophecy, including Habakkuk, has its final fulfilment in the last days. There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run"- using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.)

understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15).

But the literal meaning was that those who believed this prophecy would flee away and thus escape the Babylonian invasion; or flee out of Babylon because it was to fall. But that would only be perceived by those who lived well in the future (:3), because at the time, the Babylonians were yet to arise as a power (Hab. 1:5,6).

Habakkuk 2:3 *For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it speeds toward the end*- The time of the establishment of the Kingdom on earth. Similar language is used in Daniel. Habakkuk had asked whether Babylon would continue abusing for ever (Hab. 1:17). Apparently he had not seen any vision of her destruction. But he is comforted that in the future, his concerns of ethics, justice, theology and morality would all be finally resolved in the establishment of God's Kingdom.

And won't prove false. Though it takes time, wait for it; because it will surely come. It won't delay- Quoted in the NT about the return of Christ (Heb. 10:37). The answer to all Habakkuk's concerns about injustice will finally be at the Lord's return; see on :6. We wonder if these assurances were given because Habakkuk was doubting the reality of the visions he had seen. At the time, the Babylonians were yet to arise as a power (Hab. 1:5,6). Only at the "end" would the while picture concerning Babylon become clear.

Habakkuk 2:4 *Behold, his soul is puffed up*- The individual in view is either a personification of Babylon, or its king Nebuchadnezzar. The following verses clearly speak of Babylon's judgment. Typical of the prophetic perspective, Habakkuk sees the reason for his fall as being essentially because of his pride- when so many other issues could have been raised, such as idolatry and the murder of God's people. This is what makes the prophets so relevant to us; for pride is the weakness which affects us all. And that is at the root of all other sin. "Puffed up" is a term only used elsewhere about the presumption of condemned Israel trying to enter the land when they had been barred from it (Num. 14:44). As so often, a parallel is drawn between the sins of the worst Gentiles and those of Israel, both historically and at the time of the prophet.

It is not upright in him- Babylon was "puffed up", lifted up in pride; but this was not being lifted up "upright" before God. Pride is the depths, and humility is exaltation. Such is the radical inversion of values in God's way compared to man's way.

But the justified one will live due to his faith- Will live eternally, according to how this verse is interpreted in the New Testament. Heb. 10:38 quotes it in this way; and note

that the preceding Heb. 10:37 is quoting the preceding verse here, Hab. 2:3. Eternal life will be given at the Lord's coming on the basis of faith. As noted on 2:6, the real answer to Habakkuk's questions is that they will all have their resolution in the coming of God's Kingdom on earth. "The justified one" may immediately refer to Habakkuk and the faithful remnant, about whom Habakkuk had expressed concern in Hab. 1:13. God's answer was that although they might indeed perish in the Babylonian invasion, they would be justified by their faith in Habakkuk's prophecies and live eternally. Again we wonder if "his faith" is a hint that Habakkuk and the faithful were struggling to believe the prophecies he was giving.

Paul's quotation from Hab. 2:4 is in the context of human pride: "Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith". Paul is interpreting this verse as talking about faith in righteousness being imputed to us, which leads to us being just or justified before God. The practical result of this is humility- for we realize through this process that we have absolutely nothing to be "puffed up" about. Our uprightness isn't because of our own works but because of God's righteousness being imputed to us by grace through faith.

Habakkuk 2:5 *Yes, moreover, wine is treacherous*- This may speak of Nebuchadnezzar, or as a personification of Babylon. His treachery was Habakkuk's complaint in Hab. 1:13. God now uses Habakkuk's word choice, showing that He indeed knows that Babylon will be treacherous, and their leader will be identified with the wine he drinks, so that as wine is treacherous, so will he be. The Bible often demonstrates that God likes to use our words back to us, just as in building rapport in conversation it is helpful to repeat back to our conversation partner words and phrases which they have used. And God likewise is in dialogue with man.

Again we note that God's people had also been "treacherous" (Mal. 2:10,11,14,16 etc.). They would be deceived by the Babylonians, just as they had deceived others in their lives and had been deceitful toward God.

A proud man who doesn't stay at home- He would go out from his homeland to conquer others.

Who enlarges his desire as Sheol, and he is like death, and can't be satisfied- The way of the flesh is insatiable. Flesh cannot be satisfied. The wealthy man wants another billion, the owner of multiple homes or vehicles wants yet another. And thereby the parallel the grave and death, which likewise are never satisfied. The end of this unsatisfied life is the grave. By contrast, God's way is presented as satisfying the believer, in this life and eternally (s.w. Dt. 14:29 and often). Not being satisfied was one of the curses upon Israel for breaking covenant (Lev. 26:26 s.w.). Again we see a parallel between the judgment of the Babylonians and that upon Israel. This was one aspect of God's answer to Habakkuk's issues- that Israel were no better than the Babylonians. This was the

answer to his objection that Israel were being treated like all the other Gentile fish in the sea of nations (Hab. 1:15).

But gathers to himself all nations, and heaps to himself all peoples- The idea may be that he gathers "all nations" [around Israel] into confederacy with him, and heaps together people from all the nations as captives. But it was God who would gather all nations to Babylon, so that He might destroy them (Is. 13:4).

Habakkuk 2:6 *Won't all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say*- Isaiah likewise predicts a taunt song being sung over Babylon by those she had once abused (Is. 14). Those nations who sung it would include Judah- or that was the intention. But when Babylon fell, the Divine intention was that the repentant exiles would flee Babylon and return to Judah, rebuilding and restoring God's Kingdom there. But they didn't repent, and instead became prosperous under the Medes and Persians, as the book of Esther witnesses. But finally this will come true in the fall of the latter day Babylon and repentance of the remnant of Judah. The prophecy was therefore rescheduled and reapplied, but will still come true in its essence.

'Woe to him- Five woes are now pronounced upon Babylon, in that the word "woe" occurs five times, although in fact seven woeful things are mentioned in this chapter. The idea of seven woes coming upon Babylon is of course the message of Revelation, where such woes are presented as having their fulfilment at the time of the Lord's return. The answer to Habakkuk's questions about justice not being done is therefore that the Lord shall return, and woes shall be poured out upon the wicked. This is why these woes are interspersed with language appropriate to the Kingdom of God upon earth (:3 and 14 especially). On a far more extended scale, this is the broad approach taken in the book of Revelation too- woes upon Babylon interspersed with brief Kingdom visions.

Who increases that which is not his, and who enriches himself by extortion!- The criticism of Babylon is framed in language elsewhere used by the prophets about Judah. This was the answer to Habakkuk's objection that Israel were being treated like all the other Gentile fish in the sea of nations (Hab. 1:15).

How long?'- This is the typical cry of the faithful, and this is perhaps Habakkuk's interjection. For these chapters show him in dialogue with God.

Habakkuk 2:7 *Won't your debtors rise up suddenly*- Initially fulfilled in the sudden overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus.

And wake up those who now make you tremble, and you will be their victim?- The GNB offers: "But before you know it, you that have conquered others will be in debt

yourselves and be forced to pay interest. Enemies will come and make you tremble. They will plunder you!". I noted on :6 that the intended Divine program for Babylon didn't exactly come about at this time, although it will in the last days, when the horns of the beast shall hate the whore of Babylon and destroy her (Rev. 17:16).

Habakkuk 2:8 *Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples will plunder you, because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to the city and to all who dwell in it*- Babylon's responsibility before God was for what they had done to "many nations", but in particular to "the land" of Israel and "the city" of Jerusalem. "The remnant of the peoples" is of course intended to suggest the remnant of the exiles, who were to repent and plunder Babylon. But instead, they didn't repent and the majority preferred to remain there and prosper under the Medes and Persians, as the book of Esther explains. The language here is very much that of Is. 14:12-14 about Babylon; and that passage has a clear application to the latter day judgment of Babylon at the Lord's return. Only then will all the angst about justice be answered.

Habakkuk 2:9 *Woe to him who gets an evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the hand of evil!*- Daniel records how Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar wished his house / family dynasty to be eternal; hence he made an image of gold in defiance of the image of Daniel 2, in which his house was to give way to other dynasties. He believed that "the nest" of Babylon was untouchable by "evil". Even though he had made "evil [s.w.] gain" for himself and his family dynasty ["house"]. "Gets an evil gain" is the same Hebrew word translated "to covet". The word means both to covet and to actually grab gain for oneself, reflecting how in God's judgment the thought is as the act. The Lord of course developed this idea powerfully in the Sermon on the Mount.

Habakkuk 2:10 *You have devised shame to your house, by cutting off many peoples, and have sinned against your soul*- Instead of making his dynasty ["house"] wealthy and eternal (:9), by trying to do so, Nebuchadnezzar was thereby shaming them to eternal destruction. He cut off many peoples in order to remove all opposition and establish his house or family line. But by doing so, he sinned against himself, destroying himself and his family.

Habakkuk 2:11 *For the stone will cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the woodwork will answer it*- Buildings were made of two or three courses of stone followed by one of timber. This was how Solomon's palace was built (1 Kings 6:36). Sinscommitted in private we tend to accept as irrelevant to us; yet Hab.2:11,12says that "the stone shall cry out of the wall" because of wickedplans hatched within the walls of that room. The innermost plans of Nebuchadnezzar for his dynasty (see on :9,10) were known by God. Rather than focus upon his idolatry and mass murders, the prophetic perspective instead zooms in upon his internal thoughts. For it is inwards thoughts which are of the essence, and which are the source of our actions.

Habakkuk 2:12 *Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and establishes a city by iniquity!*- The town in view is surely Babylon. But these words are those of Mic. 3:10 about the leaders of Judah: "They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity". Micah is quoting Habakkuk's words about Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar about Judah. Micah learnt the lesson that this prophecy was trying to teach Habakkuk- that contrary to what he thought (see on Hab. 1:15), Judah were as bad as Babylon. Whilst Habakkuk begins in chapter 1 by bemoaning the sins of his people, he had to learn that it's not enough to just think 'Well yes we are all sinners', but lament the apparently far greater sin of the Gentile world. He had to see that God's people were no better, because sin is serious. Even 'little sins' performed in secret. And this is the abiding challenge to us as the body of Christ today.

Habakkuk 2:13 *Behold, isn't it of Yahweh of Armies that the peoples labour for the fire, and the nations weary themselves for vanity?*- The GNB again is helpful in interpreting the sense: "The nations you conquered wore themselves out in useless labor, and all they have built goes up in flames. The LORD Almighty has done this". Babylon was to be burnt, and all the sacrifices in building it thereby rendered futile. However, the Divine intention to burn Babylon, the judgment for a whore (Jer. 51:30,58), didn't really come true when the Medes conquered Babylon. As noted on :6 and :7, the Divine intention didn't come totally true at that time, because the Jewish remnant didn't repent and generally didn't want to restore God's Kingdom in Judah. And so the prophecy will come true in the last days, when "Babylon" shall be burnt with fire (Rev. 18:8).

Habakkuk 2:14 *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh*- That glory is defined in Ex. 34:4-6 as the characteristics of the Yahweh Name. When Babylon was burnt with fire (:13), then the *eretz* would be filled with the knowledge of Yahweh. Knowledge is used here in the Hebraic sense, not of academic knowledge, but of relationship with Him, on the basis of who He really is, His glory. But as noted on :6, this didn't come about when the Medes conquered Babylon. They didn't destroy it with fire, the Jewish remnant didn't repent, and the *eretz* didn't come into relationship with Yahweh. This shall happen in the last days. See on :20.

As the waters cover the sea- We surely are to read in an ellipsis here; 'sea' must stand for 'the sea bed'. For the waters are the sea, and do not therefore cover it. The idea would therefore be that the knowledge of God will be both deep and widespread. The contrast is with Habakkuk's questions against God in chapter 1. God doesn't specifically answer them, apart from to say that He will indeed judge wickedness because He is intensely aware of what goes on in the world. His broader answer is that true knowledge / comprehension of Him, and of His awesome glory, will one day be both deep and universal. And it will involve a realization of His utter glory, rather than

trying to shoot holes in His positions by the kind of petty questioning recorded in chapter 1.

Habakkuk 2:15 *Woe to him who gives his neighbour drink, pouring your inflaming wine until they are drunk, so that you may gaze at their naked bodies!*- Latter day Babylon in Revelation is likewise condemned for making her neighbouring nations drunk with her teachings. We note that the focus is upon the Middle East- the neighbours of Babylon and Judah. And supremely in view is the way that Babylon had made Judah drunk with the wine of her idolatry. But as noted on :16, to drink from a cup of wine is also a symbol of Divine judgment. They were drinking judgment to themselves by partaking. And the end result of accepting Babylon's "wine" was to lay in the naked shame of death, uncovered before all.

Habakkuk 2:16 *You are filled with shame, and not glory. You will also drink, and be exposed!*- Note the present tenses. Babylon had yet to arise (Hab. 1:5,6), but the future of Babylon is so certain, according to God's prophetic word, that what is yet future is spoken of as a present reality. The same is true of promises of the life eternal in John's Gospel. Being exposed and shamed is the language of a woman, especially a prostitute. It is the basis for the condemnation of the whore Babylon in Rev. 17,18. Then, all too late, Babylon will be exposed for what it is. It is the wisdom of God's people to perceive that now.

The cup of Yahweh's right hand will come around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory- To be given a cup of the Lord is a double symbol; we either drink blessing or condemnation to ourselves. For the cup of the Lord is either "the cup of blessing" or of condemnation. This is why the breaking of bread meeting focuses our attention on the only two possible outcomes of our lives. The fact there is no third way inspires us to choose wholeheartedly for Him.

Habakkuk 2:17 *For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and the destruction of the animals, which made them afraid; because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to every city and to those who dwell in them*- God kept a careful note of all Babylon did to His land. Every animal destroyed was noted, and even every animal which was terrified and made to bolt by the Babylonian traumas was likewise noted by God; and how much more the human suffering. This again answers Habakkuk's objection that God appears indifferent to human suffering. There will indeed come a day of reckoning- but not immediately. This again is typical of the prophetic perspective; to focus upon the apparently minor [making animals bolt] in order to reveal the depth of God's appreciation of the more evidently apparent abuses. And all this was in response to Habakkuk's complaint that God appeared unaware of human suffering. See on Hab. 3:11.

Habakkuk 2:18 *What value does the engraved image have, that its maker has engraved it; the molten image, even the teacher of lies, that he who fashions its form trusts in it, to make mute idols?*- The ultimate significance of Babylon's fall was and shall be the declaration that all idols are powerless. We note the tendency of the former of the idol to trust in it- when he of all people ought to have realized that the idol was of his own human device. But this perversity is seen in us all. The woman who labours all her lifetime developing her business is then inclined to trust in its profits as her ultimate salvation; the man who builds his own house is tempted to make that house his idol. But again, the language of Habakkuk about the Babylonians is later applied to God's people. The phrase "teacher of lies" is applied to the false prophets of Judah in Is. 9:15. Likewise the phrase "maker of… images" is applied to the Jews in Is. 44:9,10. Isaiah learnt the lesson that this prophecy was trying to teach Habakkuk- that contrary to what he thought (see on Hab. 1:15), Judah were as bad as Babylon. See on :12.

Habakkuk 2:19 *Woe to him who says to the wood, 'Awake!' or to the mute stone, 'Arise!' Shall this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in its midst*- This woe upon Babylon was equally true for the people of Judah. The same language is used of their false prophets and idolatry; see on :12,18.

Habakkuk 2:20 *But Yahweh is in His holy temple*- This continues the answer to Habakkuk's complaints of chapter 1, that God appears distant from the sin and suffering on this earth. But His apparent silence doesn't mean that He is not watching nor judging; He is in his heavenly temple. And in awe of that, the earth should be silent before Him, rather than arguing back with Him as Habakkuk had done.

Let all the earth be silent before Him!- The same Hebrew word is used in calling for silence because of God's presence (Zeph. 1:7 "be silent at the presence of Yahweh") and because He has arisen up in active outreach in the earth (Zech. 2:13 "Be silent all flesh before Yahweh; for He is raised up out of His hold habitation"). Although God appeared to be inactive in response to the injustices Habakkuk so struggled with, His presence is indeed active. And men should be silent before Him rather than make petty complaint about His injustice. The invitation to "all the earth" to be respectful of Yahweh is part of God's intention that the fall of Babylon would coincide with the repentance of Judah and the spread of relationship with Him to the entire *eretz*. This didn't happen at the time, but will come true in the latter day fulfilment; see on :14.

HABAKKUK CHAPTER 3

Habakkuk Chapter 3

Habakkuk 3:1 *A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, set to victorious music*- We could infer from this that Habakkuk was a Levite involved in the temple worship songs. The preceding verse has spoken of Yahweh being in His temple and the earth being silent before Him (Hab. 2:20). But Habakkuk now breaks that silence; maybe another reflection of his being out of step with God.

Habakkuk 3:2 *Yahweh, I have heard of Your fame. I stand in awe of Your deeds, Yahweh*- This could be Habakkuk responding to God's statements in chapter 2 of what He would do in judging Babylon. In faith, he speaks as if these future actions have already been done, and he praises God for them. But it could be that Habakkuk is still not totally persuaded by the answers given in chapter 2. He concludes in :17,18 that although the blessings he looked for immediately hadn't come, yet he still rejoiced in God by faith. But he reflects here that although he cannot understand God's current and prophesied future actions (as he explains in chapter 1), and he is not totally persuaded by God's responses in chapter 2; yet he takes comfort from the hand of God in history. He realizes that God has worked justly in the past and saved His people from Gentile oppression at the Red Sea, and so He would surely do so again. The Messianic Psalms 22 and 69 represent the Lord Jesus on the cross being in some crisis as to why God was not immediately saving Him, but taking comfort in His historical actions. Habakkuk is doing likewise, as should we.

Renew your work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years make it known- GNB: "Now do again in our times the great deeds you used to do". But the idea of renewing or reviving "in the midst of the years" may mean that Habakkuk didn't want to have to wait until the "end" appointed to see the destruction of Babylon (Hab. 2:3). Knowing that God is open to dialogue, he asks if God can revive His work in the midst of the appointed years, i.e. at his own time. The element of renewal or revival would be in God openly acting as He had done historically, at the Red Sea and the conquest of Canaan- which is the content of the next verses. See on :6.

The LXX renders: "Thou shalt be known between the two living creatures, thou shalt be acknowledged when the years draw nigh; thou shalt be manifested when the time is come". This would be broadly saying the same as just suggested- that God's glory would again be visible between the Cherubim, once "the time" of the end of Hab. 2:3 has come, and God is "acknowledged" by repentant Judah and the nations around her.

In wrath, You remember mercy- God's wrath differs from human wrath in that God is outside of time as we know it. He sees what shall be, and in no way does He lash out due to provocation. His wrath, as expressed in His judgments, always have mercy factored in. Habakkuk recognizes now that Judah have indeed sinned and deserve God's wrath, but he asks that God "remember mercy" and perhaps ameliorate the planned Babylonian judgments, or limit their extent, intervening to save Judah "in the midst of the [appointed number of] years".

Habakkuk 3:3 *God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and His praise filled the earth*- The idea is that despite Habakkuk's reservations about God's judgments, as expressed in chapter 1, he takes comfort in God's historical activity to save His sinful people. And he believes that therefore God can do the same for them, despite the threatened Babylonian

judgments. GNB "God is coming again from Edom" suggests that there will be a revival of what God had historically done; as stated in :2. As His glory was revealed and the earth was filled with His praise, so it was the Divine intention that the judgment of Babylon would involve the repentance of Judah, God's glory being revealed and the *eretz*, the peoples of the land promised to Abraham, coming to praise Yahweh. But Judah didn't repent, and the judgment of Babylon didn't involve these things. But the prophetic scenario will in essence be fulfilled at the time of the destruction of latter day Babylon. Israel at the time of the exodus and wilderness journeys were weak, and still took with them the idols of Egypt. God's praise didn't fill the earth at that time, although it was intended to. But this was the future which Habakkuk now envisaged and prayed for; a delivery from Babylon after the pattern of the deliverance from Egypt, but this time with God's people repentant and the surrounding nations praising Him.

Habakkuk 3:4 *His splendour is like the sunrise. Rays shine from His hand, where His power is hidden*- This fits in with the picture of Christ's return in Mal. 4:2. This will be the time for the fulfilment of the prophecy of Babylon's fall in fullness. This is the language of the lightning flashings of the cherubim alluded to in the LXX of :2 (see note there). Habakkuk is envisaging or praying for the open manifestation of God as it was previously. This was however not granted at his time; but he takes comfort that it has been in the past, and that although things with God haven't turned out immediately as he expected, yet he would trust in Him (:18,19), confident that His saving pattern in history would ultimately continue. In this we see the value of reading Biblical history. Whatever our short term struggles with God about His present and future actions, His past history points forward to "the sunrise" of a new age ultimately. His power in this sense is "hidden" and yet still there.

Habakkuk 3:5 *Plague went before Him, and pestilence followed His feet*- As Egypt had been judged by plagues and this had been the path to Israel's release from them, so Habakkuk foresees that the fall of Babylon will involve plagues upon her which will lead to Judah's release from them. Jer. 50:13; Rev. 18:8 likewise see Babylon suffering "plagues". But the fall of Babylon and her "plagues" at the hands of the Medes didn't lead to the captives returning- because they didn't repent, preferred to stay there and didn't flee Babylon. But this will come true in the overthrow of the latter day Babylon (Rev. 18:8). Historical Babylon wasn't smitten by "plagues" as Egypt was.

Habakkuk 3:6 *He stood, and shook the earth. He looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled. The age-old hills collapsed*- Habakkuk was aware that Babylon would have the *eretz* promised to Abraham under their control. But God had stood up and shaken the entire area when Israel left Egypt, and he saw this happening when they were released from Babylon. Hills and mountains represent peoples and kingdoms. But again as often noted, this didn't happen quite on the scale planned; because actually Judah didn't want to leave Babylon nor repent as required. But it will happen in the fall of the latter day Babylon. The original for "Tremble" is also translated 'to be released / unloosed' (Ps. 105:20; 146:7; Is. 58:6). All the nations subject to the Babylonian empire, including Judah, were to be liberated and used that liberty to turn to Yahweh. But they didn't. They preferred bondage to the Medes and Persians.

His ways are eternal- The idea may be that there is a style and hallmark to God's actions which is eternal. As He had acted at the time of the exodus, so He would to redeem Judah from Babylon (see on :2).

Habakkuk 3:7 *I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction. The dwellings of the land of Midian trembled*- Cush, the same word translated "Ethiopia", was the border of the Babylonian empire, later taken over by the Persians (Is. 11:11; Esther 3:9). And it was Cush which was one of the areas, along with Egypt, that the Jews were to seek help from against Babylon, rather than trusting in Yahweh (Is. 20:5). Habakkuk sees Cush as falling along with Babylon. And at that time, the exiles in Cush were to return to Zion (Zeph. 3:10; Is. 11:11). But again, this didn't quite happen as had been potentially possible. The great regathering of a repentant remnant will happen at the fall of latter day Babylon. And this will lead to the people of Cush and Midian also turning to Yahweh (Is. 60:6), as had been His intention at the fall of historical Babylon. In this sense we could read 'trembling' as 'trembling in respect'.

Habakkuk 3:8 *Was Yahweh displeased with the rivers? Was Your anger against the rivers, or Your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, on Your chariots of salvation?*- Perhaps we are to draw a distinction between mountains / hills, representing nations collectively; and rivers / waters, symbolizing individual people. Habakkuk began praying, but ends up having a vision within that prayer. And he finds himself saying things in that prayer under inspiration which are God's perspective on his questions of Hab. 1 about the fairness of God and the problem of suffering. In this verse we learn that God was not angry against the individual Egyptians; but there was suffering amongst them as God as it were rode forth in *His* Angelic, cherubic horses and chariots to redeem His people from Pharaoh's horses and chariots. This response is reframing the question of God's fairness and the problem of suffering- in saying that all these things must be seen within the context of His purpose of redeeming His chosen people.

Habakkuk 3:9 *You removed the sheath from Your bow, You called for many arrows. Selah*- The ISV seems to best capture the nuances of the original: "Your bow was exposed, and your arrows targeted by command". The NET says the arrows were 'commissioned'. In the context of answering Habakkuk's complaints about the problem of suffering and evil, the idea may be that God's arrows are not sent out at random. They are commissioned to hit specific targets. Hence "Selah", a pause for reflection. If apparently random people perish, we can perhaps assume that God knows that had they lived further, they would have refused His message. See on :14.

You split the earth with rivers- A quotation from Ps. 74:15. The drying up of the Red Sea seems to have involved huge earthquakes and topographical changes throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham- perhaps a way of softening up the tribes of Canaan for conquest. But Israel didn't make use of that potential.

Habakkuk 3:10 *The mountains saw You, and were afraid. The storm of waters passed by, the deep sea roared and lifted up its hands on high*- For "*Waters"*, see on Rev. 16:5. Mountains may represent nations and empires, and the seas the individual peoples. Before God and His people at the exodus, they were fearful and lifted up their hands- perhaps in surrender, or to God in prayer and submission. This happened no matter how loudly they roared or appeared powerful. And so the historical actions of God at the exodus were to assure Habakkuk that the visions he had seen of the

Chaldeans judging Israel would also have their resolution, this storm of water would also 'pass by'.

Habakkuk 3:11 *The sun and moon stood still in the sky at the light of Your arrows as they went, at the shining of Your glittering spear*- This may not necessarily be a reference to the incident at Gibeon in Joshua's time. The context is definitely about the exodus from Egypt rather than the conquest, developing the idea that the fall of Egypt was the release of Israel, just as the fall of Babylon was intended to enable the release of the exiles. The idea may be that God took especial notice of the flight of His arrows; sun and moon stood still as they flew. This again is in answer to the opening dialogue between God and Habakkuk, where Habakkuk expresses his concern with the problem of suffering and evil. God here reveals Himself as carefully targeting every arrow (see on :9), and as it were stopping the sun and moon for the arrows to pass; this was and is the extent of His passionate awareness of the result of His judgments. It's not as if He indiscriminately drops a nuclear bomb upon a nation, and is indifferent to the fall out of suffering and the collateral damage to people and animals. As explained on Hab. 2:17, He was intimately aware of every animal that suffered and bolted for fear because of the actions of the Babylonian military; and how much more was and is He aware of the effects of His judgments upon people, especially His chosen people.

Habakkuk 3:12 *You marched through the land in wrath. You threshed the nations in anger*- The past tenses could be prophetic perfects, i.e. speaking of that which is yet future in the past tense, so certain is it of fulfilment. As just explained on :11, God is not indiscriminately judging people and making them suffer for no reason. The imagery of threshing speaks of judgment; Armageddon is the threshing place. Those who are judged will be responsible to that judgment; God's anger and wrath will have been provoked by how those people had treated His people. He is angry with abusers of His people. Judgment will come, as it has done from God historically.

Habakkuk 3:13 *You went forth for the salvation of Your people*- As explained on :12, this part of the prayer merges into prophecy, so certain of fulfilment that it is expressed in the 'prophetic perfect', as if it has already happened. Again we have the problem of suffering addressed; the threshing of nations in :12 was part of God's going forth to save His people. The fall of Babylon, like the fall of Pharaoh's Egypt, was in order for God's people to exit to salvation. Tragically, they for the most part chose not to do this when Babylon fell historically, and so the prophecies have been rescheduled and reapplied.

For the salvation of Your anointed- The idea could be that all God's people are anointed, in that they were chosen for special rulership (2 Cor. 1:21). This would have been great comfort to the exiles reading or hearing these prophecies in Babylon; they were chosen for something special, to rule the nations, when Israel were the head and not the tail. But the ideas behind "salvation" and "anointed" suggest in Greek 'Jesus Christ'. When historical Babylon fell to the Medes, the prophetic scenarios didn't come very accurately true; because Judah didn't repent and didn't really want to quit Babylon. And so these prophecies were reapplied to salvation from a wider Babylon, in and through Jesus Christ.

You crushed the head of the land of wickedness. You stripped them head to foot. Selah- Crushing the *rosh* of the wicked could refer to the latter day conquest of a similar *rosh* by the Lord Jesus at His return, as spoken of in Ez. 38:2-4. The reference

would be to a standoff between the Lord Jesus as the seed of the woman, and the antiChrist personal leader of "the land of wickedness", latter day Babylon. Crushing the head recalls the struggle of Gen. 3:15, in which the seed of the woman emerges finally triumphant in the last day.

The 'stripping from head to foot' may simple mean 'crushed both from the head down and from the foot upwards'. Or if read as it stands, it would refer to the sign of conquest- stripping the slain.

Habakkuk 3:14 *You pierced the heads of his warriors with their own spears*- "Spears" is literally 'rods'. The word is used in Is. 10:24 of how Judah were to be beaten with the rod of Assyria which was the rod of Egypt. And that would continue the many allusions here to the exodus. The rod would be grabbed from the hands of the abusers and used to slay their leaders. "Spears" or rods is the same word translated "arrows" in :9, where we are assured that God's arrows go to the right target and do not cause indiscriminate damage. Now we learn that the arrows or rods used by God are actually the arrows or rods used by the abusers of Israel, with which they abused them just like the Egyptians beating them with rods. Those arrows or rods used to abuse Israel are grabbed from their hands and used against those who have been using them. This is far from the indiscriminate fear of the 'problem of evil' with which this prophecy opens, and which is constantly addressed throughout it.

They came as a whirlwind to scatter me, gloating as if to devour the wretched in secret- Those slain in the judgments had come as whirlwind to scatter God and His people, thinking they could abuse "the poor" (AV) without facing any justice for doing so ("in secret"). Coming as a whirlwind to scatter is the language of Divine judgment; these people had played God, assuming they had some Divine right to act as they wanted against the very vulnerable, and not face judgment for it because they were somehow playing God. This speaks of many abuse scenarios, but particularly of the abuse of the weak by jihadist Islamists of the last days. This is how they will treat God's people, and they will be judged for it. Habakkuk's opening fears that abusers would somehow get away with it are here resoundingly answered.

Habakkuk 3:15 *You trampled the sea with your horses, churning mighty waters*- The waters represent individual peoples. God's riding forth to save His people inevitably churned the waters; Gentiles were affected. Israel's salvation out of Egypt required the fall of Egypt, their potential salvation from Babylon required the fall of Babylon; Lot's salvation from Sodom required the fall of Sodom (2 Pet. 2:6-9), just as Noah's required the destruction of the world around him (2 Pet. 2:5,9; 1 Pet. 3:20,21). The picture is clear- out of the judgment of the Gentiles there emerges God's redeemed, saved people who would otherwise have been overcome by those Gentiles. In Judah's context, they would only go to Babylon for their sins; but God would destroy Babylon so that spiritually and physically they might emerge free, to restore God's kingdom. It's a tragedy that they didn't do this; but the potential will finally be realized in the fall of latter day Babylon.

Habakkuk 3:16 *I heard, and my body trembled*- What began as a prayer ended up in a Divine revelation. Whilst we don't receive prophetic revelations in the way Habakkuk did, it's true for us that intense personal prayer often leads to spiritual realizations and God opening our eyes to truths. Habakkuk believed what he had understood so deeply that his body trembled. Such trembling was to be the effect upon Judah when God's judgments came (Is. 5:25; 13:13; 14:16; 32:11). Habakkuk identified so strongly with

his sinful people that he took all this deeply into himself, and felt as they would, although he had the personal hope of resurrection to blessing (:17). In this he looks ahead to the Lord Jesus, representative of sinful man, internalizing the judgment for our sins so deeply that He carried them for us, to rise again in triumphant resurrection.

My lips quivered at the sound- "The sound" may be that of God's word pronouncing judgment; or the sound of the invaders which he had heard. His lips quivered rather than his ears because he had to speak this forth to others. What a challenge to us, to speak forth God's word of judgment and salvation with lips quivering at the reality of it all.

Rottenness enters into my bones, and I tremble in my place, because I must wait quietly for the day of trouble- This is an intimation that he must die and wait quietly in the grave [another evidence against heaven going] until the day of Jacob's final trouble which would herald the Lord's return, the resurrection and establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel (Dan. 12:1-4).

For the coming up of the people who invade us- This coming up could be the general arising of the Babylonians which was yet future to Habakkuk's time (Hab. 1:5,6), or their coming up upon Judah. Although Habakkuk would not personally experience it, he had to "wait quietly" in the grave, he still felt that he would be amongst those invaded ["invade *us*"] and suffer with them. This contrasts with Hezekiah who was delighted that judgment wouldn't come in his day, and got on and enjoyed himself.

Habakkuk 3:17 *For though the fig tree doesn't flourish, nor fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive fails, the fields yield no food; the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls*- The promised covenant blessings aren't going to be experienced by Habakkuk in this life, and yet he accepts that finally he personally will be saved (:18) and rejoices in this. See on 1:2 *Will You not save?* His opening objections in chapter 1 to the way God is operating, and his struggle with the problem of suffering, are all now revealed as being a desire to have blessing right now. This is a natural human desire, reflected in the "How long?" question of all the faithful.

Habakkuk 3:18 Yet I will rejoice in Yahweh. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!- See on 1:2 *Will You not save?*. As noted on :17, Habakkuk had expected to see the covenant blessings of a Messianic Kingdom come in his lifetime. But he had been told like Daniel that he must quietly wait in the grave (:16), and Judah must be abused by Babylon before emerging from that abuse as a people ready for God's Kingdom blessing. Habakkuk concludes by focusing upon his personal salvation, which he rejoices in. This perhaps is the answer to the problem of suffering articulated in chapter 1. Like Habakkuk we may not find the ideal explanation, and yet even without that intellectual satisfaction, we can still rejoice in our personal salvation. The Lord was asked "Are there few that be saved?", and He wisely didn't engage with that question, with all the "problem of evil" issues of ethics and morality which are bound within it; rather does His response urge men to focus upon their own walk with God (Lk. 13:23,24).

Habakkuk 3:19 Yahweh, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like deer's feet, and enables me to go in high places- Despite being still intellectually dissatisfied over the answers to the problem of evil with which he began in chapter 1, Habakkuk concludes full of joy at the prospect of being like a deer, able to climb any mountain in God's strength. This is not spiritual selfishness, focusing upon ourselves and

disregarding the wider suffering of others. As noted on "invade us" in :16, this was not how he was. But although the wider questions remain, these should not diminish our personal faith in salvation. That is the crescendo of this prayer which was turned into a temple song.

For the musical director, on my stringed instruments- As noted on :1, Habakkuk was apparently a Levite and he wanted his personal prayer to be sung by others. He knew that his questions about the problem of evil and suffering were those of every man. And he wished to share with others the simple, joyful truth of his personal salvation.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: ZEPHANIAH

ZEPHANIAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

ZEPHANIAH CHAPTER 1

Zephaniah Chapter 1

Zephaniah 1:1 *The word of Yahweh which came to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah*- The detail is perhaps given because the "Hezekiah" could be king Hezekiah, although the generations would have been quite short. In this case, Hezekiah would have been a relative of king Josiah, in whose reign he was prophesying. Putting the listed names together here we have "Yahweh is strength He has spoken, He is great but blackness has come (to His people) because He has hidden His face". The fact Hezekiah had a son with the 'Yah' Name in it might indicate that he did not totally lose faith in his last 15 years.

In the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah- 'Top down' leadership was never very effective in Israel; repeatedly there is evidence that the reforms of Judah's good kings had little effect upon the people. They practiced idolatry at the very same time as the reforms took place, and publicly returned to it as soon as the King was dead. Zephaniah's prophecy is full of exposure of Judah's sins- which were going on at the very time of Josiah's apparently sweeping reforms. The way that "all" in Asia turned away, after all Paul's work there, is proof enough that one good leader, no matter how charismatic and sincere (as Paul was) will not necessarily develop a faithful community. God has always worked with individuals through direct personal relationship.

Zephaniah 1:2 *I will utterly sweep away everything off of the surface of the earth, says Yahweh*- "The earth" here is not the *eretz* but the literal ground or soil. The total destruction of everything on "the surface of the earth" at the time of the flood is in view. But "sweep" is the word translated "gather" in Gen. 6:21 concerning the gathering of animals, people and food into the ark to avoid that destruction. As always with the threats of judgment, there is the hint that a remnant would survive- if they responded.

Zephaniah 1:3 *I will sweep away man and animal. I will sweep away the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and the idols along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the surface of the earth, says Yahweh*- A cataclysm similar in nature to the flood is in view; see on :18. Such total destruction of even birds and animals from the "earth", the ground / soil, recalls the language of the flood. But something of this nature never happened; I suggest that God formulated the plan, but relented because of the intercession of the righteous remnant; or perhaps simply from pity for His own creation.

We note that "man" and "idols" are mentioned as being swept away along with absolutely everything else. Perhaps the idea is that we get a picture of the huge collateral damage caused by human idolatry. This is the nature of sin- that it has such collateral damage to others, far beyond a man quietly bowing before an idol in a "high place" in some remote rural spot.

Zephaniah 1:4 *I will stretch out My hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place: the name of the idolatrous and pagan priests*- Zephaniah prophesied during the time of Josiah, who later in his reign tried to extinguish Baal worship. But there was a "remnant" of Baal still in the temple, from where Zephaniah was prophesying ("this place"). Judgment was to come on all because of this; so whether Zephaniah prophesied before or after Josiah's reforms is irrelevant. Those reforms didn't in fact extinguish Baal worship, not even from the Jerusalem temple (see on :1). "All" were to be judged for the sake of a remnant of Baal worship remaining in the temple, and pagan priests being allowed to operate there. Presumably these were priests of Yahweh who taught that Baal worship was an acceptable form of Yahweh worship; see on :5. Such attempt to do our own thing in the name of serving God has always been the toughest temptation for us all. It was not that the majority ("all the inhabitants") were punished for the sin of a minority. That majority empowered and enabled that minority, just as a population often get the leadership or teachers they themselves really want in their hearts; quite regardless of whether any system of democracy is used or not.

The AV and some other versions offer: "the name of the Chemarims with the priests", literally the black ones, perhaps a group of priests who wore dark clothing rather than the white clothing of the Levitical priests.

Zephaniah 1:5 *Those who worship the army of the sky on the housetop*- Clearly Josiah's reforms were not as they appeared. The housetops of Jerusalem were full of worshippers of the stars, and this was tolerated within society. Hence the condemnation of "all" Jerusalem society in :4.

Those who worship and swear by Yahweh and also swear by Malcam- As noted on :4, the priests were advocating the worship of Baal in the name of Yahweh worship. It is this dualism which is the abiding temptation of every believer of all ages. 2 Kings 23:10 records Josiah's reforms specifically targeting Molech worship. But clearly the population wriggled around this by saying that their worship of Molech was in fact Yahweh worship; even though the Mosaic law mentioned the sin of offering children to Molech more than any other idol is mentioned (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5). Such wriggling around plain Divine teaching is unfortunately something we are all adept at. "Molech" is formed from the same consonants in *melech*, "king"; hence the LXX speaks of those

that "swear by the Lord, and them that swear by their king". They had two kings. But the Lord Jesus observed that no man can serve two masters. We cannot have two kings.

Zephaniah 1:6 *Those who have turned back from following Yahweh, and those who haven't sought Yahweh nor inquired after Him*- This was God's perspective. As explained on :4 and :5, the people had not formally rejected Yahweh. But their claim to worship other gods in His Name was seen by Him as turning their backs on Him. Ez. 8:16 describes men within the temple having their backs toward the sanctuary as they worshipped the sun. They had turned their backs on Him, but claimed they had not. This is all helpful challenge to ourselves in our self-examination. To seek an inquire after Yahweh is to worship Him; but worship doesn't mean we know it all. We are searching and seeking Him closer, and this is understood by Him as worship.

Zephaniah 1:7 *Be silent at the presence of the Lord Yahweh, for the day of Yahweh is at hand*- The silence called for may be an appeal for repentance; a call to respect Him and no other king or god. Such times of literal silence in meditation, without distraction, will also elicit our repentance.

For Yahweh has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests- The sacrifice in view was the total burning of Jerusalem. The guests had been prepared; be they Babylonians, Assyrians or whoever. As noted on :3, God had framed a cataclysm against His people and Jerusalem in particular. It never happened on the scale planned, because of the repentance of a remnant and perhaps simply His pity. All manner of possible futures are prepared by God, but may never happen because He is so open to change in His great respect of human freewill decisions.

Zephaniah 1:8 *It will happen in the day of Yahweh's sacrifice that I will punish the princes, the king's sons*- The ruling dynasty would come to an end. These words seem particularly relevant to Zedekiah and his sons at the time of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. But "the king" in Zephaniah's context was Josiah who also had sons who were princes. This intended judgment was rescheduled and reapplied (see also on :4) because of the repentance of a remnant, perhaps in response to Zephaniah's ministry. Again we see the openness of God to human repentance, His supreme sensitivity to man.

And all those who are clothed with foreign clothing- We noted on :4 that the Chemarim wore back clothing and served as priests; but likely many of the Levitical priests were serving both as priests to Yahweh as well as to other gods, especially Moloch and Baal. It was this dualism which so angered God.

Zephaniah 1:9 *In that day, I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their master's house with violence and deceit*- The priests may particularly be in view, whose master was Yahweh and whose house, the temple, they had defiled by their idolatry. The leaping over the threshold was an imitation of the Philistine custom of not treading on the threshold, after the head and hands of Dagon were cut off on the threshold before the ark of Yahweh (1 Sam. 5:5). The idea is that the temple of Yahweh had been effectively turned into that of pagan gods- despite Josiah's apparent reforms. This whole message is a stern warning against mere tokenism in repentance and reform, and challenges to the core all our self-examination and the results thereof. These priests were filling Yahweh's house with the rewards of their violence and deceit. Typical of the prophets, Zephaniah focuses upon the apparently negligible (the personal gains arising from deceit) rather than what we might consider the more obvious issues of offering children to Moloch.

Zephaniah 1:10 *In that day, says Yahweh, there will be the noise of a cry from the fish gate*- This was on the northern entry to Jerusalem, the point which the northern invaders (Babylon, Assyria) would reach first.

A wailing from the second quarter- A reference to the 'second city', "the city of David", original Jerusalem, being "the first". The second city was highly fortified, but there would be wailing from that too; for human defence cannot in any way stave off Divine judgment.

And a great crashing from the hills- The hills which famously surrounded Jerusalem.

Zephaniah 1:11 *Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the people of Canaan are undone!*- 'Canaanite' and 'trader' are related words in Hebrew. Maktesh was the market quarter; there appears to be a play on words between *maktesh,* 'crushed to powder', and *makdosh*, a holy place. No longer was Jerusalem holy; it had already been crushed to powder in judgment. The prophets consistently criticize the Jews for deceitful business practices; we have just read of how deceit had lead to material gains which were stashed in the temple storerooms (:9). It was appropriate therefore to focus upon the destruction of the market quarter.

All those who were loaded with silver are cut off- Their wealth, acquired by deceit of their brethren (:9), burdened them down so that they were unable to flee.

Zephaniah 1:12 *It will happen at that time that I will search Jerusalem with candles*- The

Lord may have had this statement in view when He spoke of how the Father searches as a woman searches with candles to find the lost (Lk. 15:8). As with all the messages of judgment, there is the implication that the remnant are being searched for. The candle is used to represent the human conscience in Prov. 20:27. The purpose of the judgments was to elicit self-examination. Jeremiah perhaps alludes to this prophecy by urging the exiles to search themselves and repent (Lam. 3:40 s.w.).

And I will punish the men who are settled on their dregs- The same figure is used in Jer. 48:11 to describe those who had not experienced captivity in foreign lands, likened to wine being poured out into different vessels so that it doesn't become settled on its dregs. Yet again we see that exile was intended not only as judgment for its own sake, but to stir up the people to repentance and spiritual improvement.

Who say in their heart, Yahweh will not do good, neither will He do evil- The state of the human mind, our self talk, is of critical importance to God. There was the idea that God was somehow distant, unresponsive to good or evil, and never going to openly act. They were not atheists, but God was felt to be so distant that He would not act. This problem of thinking that God exists but is inactive and unresponsive... is an abiding temptation for all God's people of whatever generation.

Zephaniah 1:13 *Their wealth will become a spoil, and their houses a desolation. Yes, they will build houses, but won't inhabit them. They will plant vineyards, but won't drink their wine*- This is clear allusion to the curses for breaking the covenant in Lev. 26. To live unsatisfied lives, never enjoying the work or wealth acquired, is the great curse of those who live after the flesh. The threat that "the men who are [present] tense settled..." (:12) and the reference to the king's sons (:8) would imply that the threatened judgment was imminent. Those who had planted vineyards would not be there next harvest season. This situation was averted, it seems, by the repentance of a remnant in response to Zephaniah's ministry- and that of other prophets contemporary with him.

Zephaniah 1:14 *The great day of Yahweh is near. It is near, and hurries greatly, the voice of the day of Yahweh*- The judgment day of Yahweh is therefore not a fixed calendar date; for here we read that it is hasting, it was being brought forward in the Divine program, according to Judah's sin and lack of repentance. The last day can likewise be hastened by spiritual development and prayer (2 Pet. 3:12). The actual date is not set, although the preconditions are; there is a final, unknowable algorithm which will be mixed with God's basic pity and love to determine the day.

The mighty man cries there bitterly- Bitter weeping is the language of condemnation at judgment day. The man who trusted in his own might is pictured as already weeping. We too are to live as if future judgment is already upon us; for we live life every moment before the judgment presence of God.

Zephaniah 1:15 *That day is a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness*- Other prophets use the same language, perhaps borrowing from Zephaniah, who at this point doesn't name the invaders because of the principle discussed on :14- that there could be different outworkings of these prophecies, in accordance with whether Judah repented. "Distress" is the word for "trouble", and is used of the time of Jacob's trouble (Gen. 35:3; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1); and this time has a distinctly latter day application, when Zephaniah's words will come fully true. The time of darkness and gloom is that of Dt. 28:29 [s.w.]- the punishment for unfaithfulness to the covenant.

Zephaniah 1:16 *A day of the trumpet and alarm, against the fortified cities, and against the high battlements*- We have here an intentional mixing of meaning. The trumpet was sounded as an alarm to prepare the cities for an invasion. But the day of the alarm is also the day of judgment (:15). In this we see the intensity of the prophetic message- the day of sounding the alarm was also the day of judgment. God had formulated and stated His judgments, they were as good as executed (see on :14); but in the gap between the statement and the execution of it, there was still the chance for repentance. And this was and is the intensity of the moments in which we live, just as Judah lived in them. Repentance and total surrender to God must be urgent, and our appeal for it and baptism of people upon their repentance must likewise be done with a speed appropriate to the urgency of men's position before God.

Zephaniah 1:17 *I will bring distress upon men*- "Distress" is the same word translate 'siege', the punishment for breaking the covenant (Dt. 28:52 s.w.). The "men" are therefore Israel and Jerusalem in particular; "men" is *adam*, alluding to Adam's representation of Israel in his sin and resultant punishment, of being sent out of the *eretz* to the east, just as was to happen to Judah. But the men of Judah had themselves distressed or besieged the just (Am. 5:12 s.w.); what they had done to their brethren was to be done to them. And that is a principle of Divine judgment which challenges us today.

So that they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Yahweh- Walking like blind men suggests walking in a line with their hand on the shoulders of the blind man in front of them. This was a picture of Judah being led into captivity. And yet the very same term is used in Is. 42:16 of how the blind will 'walk' or be lead back to the restored Kingdom of God.

And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung- The sense of the Hebrew is that this would happen immediately- hence GNB "and now their blood will be poured out like water, and their dead bodies will lie rotting on the ground". As noted on

:8 and :13, the judgment was imminent. It was to happen right away. The day of the alarm being blown was the same day of judgment (:16). It only didn't come in Zephaniah's time because God graciously responded to the repentance of a remnant.

Zephaniah 1:18 *Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them in the day of Yahweh's wrath*- There is the vain hope in human beings that wealth can purchase all things, even salvation. Only in the day of judgment will some people learn this; it is for us to learn it before then.

But the whole land will be devoured by the fire of His jealousy- Fire was the result of jealousy in the practice of husbands burning adulterous wives. As found in Hosea, God like Hosea had emotions. Judah's unfaithfulness to Him meant that He felt like burning them for ever; but His love for them was yet greater than that legitimate rage and fury. And so He relented, just as Hosea did of his plans to destroy Gomer. Likewise the whole land was not devoured; always a remnant was saved and in wrath God remembered mercy.

For He will make an end, yes, a terrible end, of all those who dwell in the land- As explained above, God intended to make a total end of everyone in the land of Judah; but He didn't. A remnant was saved, and far from everyone was slain. As explained on :3, God had prepared a cataclysm similar in nature to the flood, intending to destroy all animal and bird life, and certainly every human being. But such is His sensitivity to the prayer and spirituality of a minority that this didn't happen, just as Nineveh was not in fact destroyed after 40 days- because there was repentance. "A terrible end" is literally 'a hastened end'; as explained on :14, the day was being hastened, speeded up; and yet a stop was put to that accelerated program by the likes of Zephaniah and the minority who responded to him. Such is God's sensitivity to every thought and act of spirituality and repentance.

ZEPHANIAH CHAPTER 2

Zephaniah Chapter 2

Zephaniah 2:1 *Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, you nation that has no shame*- Although judgment was so closely upon them that it had effectively arrived, Zephaniah calls the people to repentance. He calls those who "had no shame". He means that those who had not repented should gather together and repent. Shame is associated with condemnation; to have no shame means they had not yet been condemned. To repent means that we bear shame for what we have done; we realize that what we have done or been condemns us, we feel that condemnation ahead of judgment day, and repent; and thereby the verdict is changed. Paul develops this idea throughout Rom. 1-8.

Zephaniah 2:2 *Before the appointed time when the day passes as the chaff, before the fierce anger of Yahweh comes on you, before the day of Yahweh's anger comes on you*- Zephaniah had clearly stated that that day had already come; see on Zeph. 1:14-16. But still there was a desperate, last moment opportunity for repentance. This was and is the intensity of the appeal. The day of judgment would be one of threshing and winnowing, when the chaff would be blown away. They were the chaff and needed to become the wheat.

Zephaniah 2:3 *Seek Yahweh, all you humble of the land, who have kept His ordinances. Seek righteousness; seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of Yahweh's anger*- As explained on chapter 1, God's purpose is open ended. The day of judgment was being brought closer at an accelerated speed because of their lack of repentance (Zech. 1:14); but the Divine intention was that they would repent. He had planned the cataclysmic destruction of absolutely all people in Judah; see on Zeph. 1:3,4. But "it may be" that the righteous remnant would be spared and hidden. And Is. 26:20 suggests that this possibility was as it were agreed by God. There was to be no assumption that the remnant would be spared destruction; it would be by grace. Although they were already righteous and humble, they were to even more intensively seek those things. A truly spiritual person will never consider they have arrived at a position of enough righteousness or humility. That itself would not be humble.

Zephaniah 2:4 *For Gaza will be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation. They will drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron will be rooted up*- "For..." warns God's people that their neighbours were to be judged by the same invaders. And their level of responsibility was far less. There are many word plays here, e.g. between the Hebrew for "Gaza" and "forsaken", "Ekron" and "rooted up", as if Zephaniah intended this to be memorized. In the era of mass illiteracy, such devices would have been necessary. If these four Philistine cities were to be judged, then Judah should be the more aware that they were even more responsible and would be judged the more. Israel should have driven out the Philistines; they ought to have made those cities to be forsaken by the Philistines, they should have desolated and rooted them up. But although they didn't do so, Divine judgment all the same would come upon the Philistines. Judah are also hereby warned not to consider that they were somehow superior to the Gentiles. They had acted as Gentiles, worshipped their idols and intermarried with them; they were no better.

Zephaniah 2:5 *Woe to the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of Yahweh is against you, Canaan, the land of the Philistines. I will destroy you, that there will be no inhabitant*- The "seacoasts" are a very small geographical area. This prophecy has never had such a fulfilment- but God's word will come true. The final victory in the area, however, will be by a "remnant" of Israel, suggesting the majority perish in the last days, just as required in Zech. 14. The fate of Gaza is connected with that of Ashkelon (:4), which is currently in Israeli hands. It would appear that this city must briefly be taken by the Palestinians / Philistines. We note too that the Palestinians / Philistines in Gaza are connected with the people of Cush [:12; North African Moslems, many of whom are attracted to Islamic jihad at this time], Moab and Ammon [Jordan / Kurdistan], and a latter day Assyria [which is reforming in the form of Islamic jihadism]. The connection between these groups and Hamas in Gaza is clearly established. The destruction of the 'coastlands', the Gaza Strip, is

prophesied as being due to a direct Divine 'intervention'; and that surely speaks of the return of Christ to save the remnant of Israel. The 'remnant' is a term used in Bible prophecy not merely with reference to a numerical minority within Israel, but specifically to the righteous, repentant remnant. The picture seems to be of Israel being crushed militarily until a remnant remain, who repent and turn to Christ. And then He appears for their salvation and the final destruction of their enemies. It's not good news for secular Israel, whatever short term military victories they may achieve in their own strength.

"The Cherethites" is literally 'the destroyers' or 'cutters'. The root word is used in Ps. 83:5 of how Israel's latter day enemies will cut a covenant to destroy Israel. These people are located by Zeph. 2:5 as being in the Gaza Strip. And this is exactly the location of the Hamas destroyers of Israel. The word is also found in Am. 1:7: "I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, and it will devour its palaces. I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him who holds the sceptre from Ashkelon; and I will turn My hand against Ekron; and the remnant of the Philistines will perish, says the Lord Yahweh". If this has a latter day application, we could expect Ashdod and Ashkelon, currently in Israeli hands, to fall to their enemies in Gaza, who will 'cut them off' but then be themselves 'cut off' by Yahweh's final judgments. They will 'hold the sceptre' in Ashkelon for a brief time, i.e. become rulers there- before being themselves cut off.

Zephaniah 2:6 *The sea coast will be pastures, with booths for shepherds and folds for flocks*- Instead of the intensive agriculture required by the large urban populations, the land would be used for grazing. This suggests a very sudden change, with the majority of the Philistine inhabitants slain or deported. But this didn't happen under either the Assyrians nor Babylonians; rather did the Philistines only gradually become subsumed into the Persian empire. This then was the prophetic potential, the Divine 'Plan A'; but the whole scenario didn't work out as planned. A remnant in Judah did repent, and so the scenario of mass cataclysm upon the whole area planned by God in Zeph. 1:4 didn't come about, and thereby indirectly the Gentiles within the land were saved from the planned destruction.

Zephaniah 2:7 *The coast will be for the remnant of the house of Judah. They will find pasture there. They will lie down in the evening in the houses of Ashkelon*- Again the prophetic potential didn't come about; most of the Jews didn't want to return from exile, most of those who did still wouldn't repent, and so this picture of returned Judean captives pasturing their flocks in the ruins of Ashkelon didn't happen as planned. So much Divine potential is wasted; so much is possible, but human short termist thinking precludes it.

For Yahweh their God will visit them, and restore them- What Judah prayed for by the rivers of Babylon was indeed heard. There they had asked that God would "visit" them and "return" them (Ps. 80:14). The same two Hebrew words are to be found in Jer. 27:22, where we read that God would exile His people to Babylon and then "visit" them and make them "return". We meet the same two words in Zeph. 2:7, where God would 'visit and return' the captivity of the remnant of Judah. But when God did "visit" His people, just as when He 'visited' His people in the gift of His Son, they didn't want to 'return' or respond. Those who had desired 'the day of the Lord' at that time had been praying for it, when it was 'to no end' for them. And we have to ask ourselves whether we really mean our prayers for the Lord's return.

Zephaniah 2:8 *I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the insults of the children of Ammon, with which they have reproached My people*- God is intensely aware of every word said and thought even by Gentiles. And He is particularly sensitive to what is said or felt against us His people. This should stop us in our tracks in any hard thoughts or words against any who are God's children.

And magnified themselves against their border- God had given bounds to the Gentile nations in relation to Israel (Dt. 32:8). Any attempts to break Divinely imposed limits may appear to initially succeed, but will incur His judgment. And again we have here a challenge for all time.

Zephaniah 2:9 *Therefore as I live, says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, surely Moab will be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, a possession of nettles and salt pits, and a perpetual desolation. The remnant of My people will plunder them, and the survivors of My nation will inherit them*- The prophetic potential was that the returned, repentant exiles would pasture their flocks in the deserted Philistine cities (:7); Moab and Ammon would be struck with Divine judgment in a form as dramatic as that upon Sodom, and then the Jews would plunder them and inherit their territory. This didn't happen when the exiles returned from Babylon, just as the temple system they could have built in Ez. 40-48 didn't happen. In essence, the possession and judgment of Judah's neighbours will come true in the last days, but perhaps not in every literal detail. We notice the language of nettles, recalling the judgment upon the land for Adam's sin.

Zephaniah 2:10 *This they will have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of Yahweh of Armies*- We likely would have chosen many other reasons for the condemnation of Moab and Ammon before coming to "their pride". But this is typical of the prophetic perspective; God focuses on things like pride and injustice as the worst sins imaginable. And indeed they are. Thinking ourselves greater than God's people is a sin worthy of condemnation. We see these Gentiles being condemned for doing so; but in our church lives we continually interact with God's people. Our attitudes to them are so critically important in God's eyes. We note that the people of God in this context were spiritually weak and under Divine judgment; but all the same, Moab and Ammon are condemned for their attitude towards them.

Zephaniah 2:11 *Yahweh will leave them awestruck, for He will starve all the gods of the land*- There would be famine which would reveal all the fertility gods and the Baals to be frauds. Most of the idols were connected with fertility, and famine and drought revealed them as powerless and not in fact existent. We marvel at God's saving passion- He wished to convert even those Gentiles who had mocked and abused His beloved people.

Men will worship Him, everyone from his place, even from every border of the nations- Those who had once tried to push back those borders (:8) will now respect them, and worship Yahweh once they accept that their idols were as it were dead. This scenario could have occurred when the captives returned; but it didn't. Most of the exiles preferred to stay in captivity, they didn't repent, and neither did the Gentiles around them. But this will happen in the last days.

Zephaniah 2:12 *You Cushites also, you will be killed by My sword*- God's sword was

Babylon and Assyria (Is. 10:5), and Ethiopia ["Cush"] was destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Egypt (Jer. 46:2-9; Ez. 30:5-9). Those whom Judah had relied on instead of Yahweh would be permanently destroyed; with the implication that Judah would be left with none but Yahweh to trust in.

Zephaniah 2:13 *He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria, and will make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness*- The northern enemy is here clearly defined as Assyria- not Russia. The making of Nineveh so dry would imply God changed the microclimate around Nineveh after the Medes sacked Nineveh. Or the reference may be to the destruction of the complex system of irrigation upon which Nineveh's fertility depended. But Jonah offered Nineveh a way out of this desolation, and for a time they responded. So again we see the openness of God's plan with people and nations. It has been pointed out that "the Hebrew verbs are not in the simple future, but in the imperative or optative mood, "Let him stretch out his hand," etc.; as though the prophet were praying that the enemies of his people might be overthrown". And so we have an insight into the way God takes so many factors into account before acting in this world. The faithful had prayed for Nineveh's destruction, and yet Jonah offered them repentance and some of them prayed for the sentence of destruction to be voided.

Zephaniah 2:14 *Herds will lie down in the midst of her, all the animals of the nations*- The literal animals who would live in the ruins represented the wild nations. Perhaps in view are the Scythian hordes who also ransacked Nineveh along with the Medes.

Both the pelican and the porcupine will lodge in its capitals- Unclean animals.

Their calls will echo through the windows. Desolation will be in the thresholds, for He has laid bare the cedar beams- The desolated thresholds recalls the condemnation of Judah for fearing to step on thresholds (Zeph. 1:9), in that they followed the pagan fear of stepping on thresholds.

Zephaniah 2:15 *This is the joyous city that lived carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none besides me*- We bear the Name of Yahweh / Jehovah, by reason of our baptism into it. His Name is declared as His character- merciful, truthful, judging sin, patient etc. (Ex. 34:5-7). He who will be who He will be, manifesting His characteristics as He does so, must have His way in us too. Babylon and Nineveh were condemned for having the attitude that “I am, and there is none beside me” (Is. 47:8; Zeph. 2:15). Their self-perception was a parody on the Name and being of Yahweh: He alone can say “I am, and there is none else” (Is. 43:11; 44:6; 45:6,21) and seek to be who He is. He alone can seek to articulate the characteristics that make up His Name onto the lives of others, and onto the things that comprise His Kingdom. We are not to be who we are; to ‘just be yourself’; to ‘just do it’, as foolish slogans and adverts encourage us. We are here to show forth His mercy, truth, judgment of sin, patient saving of the weak etc., not our own personality. We are, in the very end, Yahweh manifested to this world, through our imitation of the Lord Jesus.

The language here applied to Nineveh is used later about Babylon in Isaiah, as noted above. This could simply be because God's judgments have a similar theme and reason to them. But we could also consider that there were different prophetic scenarios which could have come about, as discussed on Zeph. 1:3,4. The intention to destroy Nineveh was as it were reapplied to Babylon. The focus was to move from Nineveh to Babylon. This refocusing and reapplication of Bible prophecy is common, as God's purpose adjusts to human behaviour; especially to repentance or lack of it.

How she has become a desolation, a place for animals to lie down in! Everyone who passes by her will hiss, and shake their fists- Note the confusion of tenses; she "has become...", but the judgment is yet future ("*will* hiss..."). This is God's perspective, speaking of those things which currently are not as if they are (Rom. 4:17); and the life and thinking of faith adopts that perspective, rejoicing in what is not yet as if it is.

ZEPHANIAH CHAPTER 3

Zephaniah Chapter 3

Zephaniah 3:1 *Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, the oppressing city!*- This section could be applicable to both Jerusalem and Nineveh, which is the subject of the preceding verses. The relevance to Nineveh would be in that she had repented at the preaching of Jonah, so deeply that the Lord Jesus says that some of those Ninevites will be resurrected to salvation in His Kingdom. But the Ninevites had let it slip, and as explained in commentary on Nahum, the community of believers there had declined, despite having been joined by some captives from the ten tribes.

Jerusalem was the oppressing city exactly because they had oppressed Gentiles and other vulnerable people (s.w. Ez. 18:12; 22:7; 47:8; Jer. 22:3 and often). And yet the same word is used of how Gentiles oppressed them. Again we see that all Judah's judgments were in essence what they had done to others. *Maarah*, "rebellious", is a word play on Moriah. Such literary devices were important in an illiterate society, where the words of the prophet would be repeated and reflected upon.

Zephaniah 3:2 *She didn't obey the voice. She didn't receive correction. She didn't trust in Yahweh. She didn't draw near to her God*- This would be relevant to Nineveh, who had initially responded to the voice of God through Jonah, but now had slipped back into their old ways. We note the parallels between trust, obedience, receiving correction, and drawing near to God, which is an idiom for serving Him in the sanctuary. God had drawn near to His people (Dt. 4:7), but they would not respond. It is the scene of love unrequited, tragically so, seeing the colossal love of God was on offer. Judah "didn't receive correction" and this was the reason for giving her up to the Babylonians (Jer. 5:28; 7:28; 17:23; 32:33; 35:13 all use the very same phrase); :7 says that God tried to correct Judah so that she would not have to be given up to her enemies, but she refused to accept it. And yet in His grace, the punishment of destruction was also an attempted correction. This is why there were waves of invasions before the final onslaught, both in the Assyrian and Babylonian contexts. God's desire to teach us is amazing. And life gets more messy, with more collateral damage, the more we refuse to hear.

Zephaniah 3:3 *Her princes in the midst of her are as roaring lions, her judges are as evening wolves; they leave nothing until the next day*- Lions were the symbol of Assyria, and the same language is used of Assyria / Babylon as it is of Judah. They acted like Gentiles, and so were treated as Gentiles. Hence the dual application of this passage to both Nineveh and Jerusalem. These words are quoted specifically concerning the prophets, the religious leadership of Judah, in Ez. 22:25. This is how God sees false teaching, when it is designed to abuse and get gain. They are pictured here as totally destroying Judah, 'leaving nothing'. As explained on Zeph. 1:3,4, God had planned a total cataclysm upon Judah which would wipe out the entire area, including all people and animals. But this was ammended, presumably because of the

repentance of a minority, and the way that within His personality, the pole of His grace and pity is finally stronger than that of His anger and judgment.

Zephaniah 3:4 *Her prophets are arrogant and treacherous people*- We would likely have focused upon the actual false prophecies of the prophets; God focuses upon their arrogance. This is typical of the prophetic perspective, which sees pride as the cardinal sin, and all the more obvious sins and errors as arising fundamentally from that.

Her priests have desecrated the sanctuary; they have done violence to the law- It was the Babylonians and Romans who desecrated the sanctuary, but here the priests are described as having done this. Their actions were the judgment; sin is its own judgment and punishment. Is. 43:28 quotes these words in saying that "therefore have I desecrated / profaned the princes of the sanctuary". What they had done was done to them. There could therefore be no complaint on an ethical level concerning God's judgments of His people. These are the priests commented upon in Zeph. 1:4,8. Whilst professing obedience to the law, they taught breaking it by their legal 'get rounds' of Josiah's reforms. Again, as noted on Zeph. 1:1, we understand how Josiah's reforms were got around; the law which he personally tried to uphold was 'taken away violently' by the priests. The taking away of the Law in the Lord's death was simply doing what effectively the Jews had already done.

Zephaniah 3:5 *Yahweh in the midst of her, He is righteous*- Yahweh's presence remained within the temple until the Babylonian invasion; this is symbolized in Ezekiel by the visions of the cherubim of glory departing from Zion and accompanying the captives to Babylon. God doesn't operate 'guilt by association'; He remained in the midst of a sinful people for generations. His righteousness was not infringed by doing so. It is a very presumptuous attitude which claims that because God finally acted, therefore so should we in quitting association with the weak and sinful people of God. In terms of the individual sinners within Judah over those generations of patience, He remained patiently trying to correct them until throughout their lives. And who really can claim to have exercised the awesome patience of God before drawing a line and telling a fellow believer: 'That's it, you're out, I'm gone'. There may be short term discipline within the family of the local congregation, just as Yahweh tried to correct His people, but that isn't the same as a breaking of fellowship. the Jews thought that Yahweh's presence in their midst was their guarantee of salvation (Mic. 3:11 s.w.), just as many assume that their membership of a Christian group means that somehow all shall be eternally well with them.

He will do no wrong. Every morning He brings His justice to light. He doesn't fail, but the unjust know no shame- Court decisions were typically announced in the morning, as in the Lord's trial. Despite their injustice, Yahweh's justice was declared by simply allowing them to continue living day by day. And yet they had done wrong, and deserved justice. As explained throughout Romans 1-8, God's grace operates in such a way that those who justly deserve judgment are not immediately judged. Day by day they are allowed to continue living, with the intention that this goodness of God should lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4). It was the same at this time; but the unjust would not repent, they refused to know shame, to realize and feel the shame of condemnation ahead of time, and to repent. For this is what repentance is all about; perceiving that we are worthy of the shame of condemnation, and changing that verdict by throwing ourselves in repentance upon God's grace. We need to imagine how it would be to appear at the judgment seat and be condemned. And in awe and deepest gratitude accept the change of verdict which there is in Christ.

Zephaniah 3:6 *I have cut off nations, their battlements are desolate; I have made their streets waste, so that no one passes by. Their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, so that there is no inhabitant*- The nations around Judah had been judged by the hoards of Scythians, Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans. The Olivet prophecy taught the same- that there would be a time of war and domination of other nations before it came to Israel. God's people were intended to learn from that, to perceive that they were no better than the Gentiles, and deserved the same judgment. It was likewise God's plan to so destroy Judah that not a man would be left, literally (Zeph. 1:3); only by grace was that plan changed.

Zephaniah 3:7 *I said, Just fear Me. Receive correction, so that her dwelling won't be cut off, according to all that I have appointed concerning her*- The AV is correct: "I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction". We have here a classic example of the willful self-limitation of God. Just as He can limit His omnipotence, so He can limit His omniscience in order to fully enter into our experience and to engage with us in genuine relationship. Just as an educated, wealthy woman may self-limit in order to enter into a legitimate relationship of equals with an uneducated, simple man from a backward village in a developing country. Therefore God expresses shock, anger, disappointment, dashed hopes and expectations. "Surely they will reverence My Son..." is the greatest example (Mk. 12:6). God had appointed total destruction of Judah; see on Zeph. 1:3. But He was 'certain' that they would respond to all His repeated initiatives to correct and teach them. Hence His anger, disappointment and 'frustration' when they did not.

But they rose early and corrupted all their doings- Judah abused God's amazing patience and entrance into their lives and limitations. They purposefully, intentionally corrupted themselves in unfaithfulness to Him; the kind of tragedy played out in the Hosea : Gomer relationship.

Zephaniah 3:8 *Therefore wait for Me, says Yahweh, until the day that I rise up to seize the prey*- God here likens Himself to a lion, the symbol of Babylon and Assyria.

For My determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, even all My fierce anger; for all the land will be devoured with the fire of My jealousy- God returns to His "determination" of Zeph. 1:3, to bring a cataclysm upon Judah which would totally eradicate all life from the area, including all the Gentile nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham. But even then, He relented, such is His grace.

Zephaniah 3:9 *For then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that they may all call on the name of Yahweh, to serve Him with one neck*- As with the situation at the flood, God considered that a total destruction of the entire area was going to be necessary in order to produce a purified people; see on Zeph. 1:3. And that purified people would be comprised "of the peoples" dwelling within the area He would cleanse by literal fire (:8). As is true today, unity between the peoples would be achieved by a common consent to put their necks under His yoke. The Lord Jesus ultimately will fulfil this intention, seeing that He is the yoke which alone brings about unity between those who come beneath it in order to serve Yahweh; see on Mt. 11:30. It would be a reversal of Babel, when all the *eretz* was of one lip (s.w. Gen. 11:1). There is implied here a psychological change, brought about by the working of the Holy Spirit in the spirit of

men; hence the GNB: "Then I will change the people of the nations, and they will pray to me alone". This is the work of the new covenant.

Zephaniah 3:10 *From beyond the rivers of Cush, My worshippers, even the daughter of My dispersed people, will bring My offering*- It is doubtful whether the Jews were ever dispersed beyond those rivers, presumably referring to the great river of Cush [an intensive plural], the Nile- referring to what is now South Sudan, "beyond" or at the limits of that river. This was part of the potential scenario which never quite came about because of God's grace and the intercession of a minority. But "the daughter of" the dispersed Jews could refer to a group similar to but not identical with them- perhaps to be fulfilled in Africans turning to the Lord Jesus and coming to Zion when the Kingdom is established on earth. We already have a spiritual foretaste of that in the conversions to Christ in those areas.

Zephaniah 3:11 *In that day you will not be ashamed for all your doings in which you have transgressed against Me*- The total removal of shame is the sign of forgiveness so deep that it involves the psychological action on the mind of the forgiven, so that they feel no shame any more. This is the work of the Spirit promised in the new covenant. The process of judgment reveals all our "doings", our sins; and yet we are left able to see them all tabulated, as it were- and yet we are without shame, so confident are we that they have all been dealt with.

For then I will take away out of the midst of you your proud exulting ones, and you will no more be arrogant in My holy mountain- Again, for all the sins committed on Mount Zion, it is pride and arrogance which was seen as the worst. A difference is made between those who "transgressed against Me", and those who were "proud exulting ones". The idea of the original is that they were proud about "My holy mountain"; they were proud of the externalities of their religion, but would not exalt [s.w. "be arrogant"] God Himself (Is. 13:3 s.w.). This is intensely relevant to those who were raised as Christian believers and socialized into their denomination and all its symbols of faith, rather than grasping the wonder of who God really is on a personal level. The same Hebrew words are used here as in Is. 13:3, where the faithful are those who exult in God's pride or highness.

Zephaniah 3:12 *But I will leave in the midst of you an afflicted and humbled people, and they will take refuge in the name of Yahweh*- This appears to be a flashback explaining how the situation in :11 is arrived at. The tiny remnant were intended to repent and be humbled, and turn to God, the only "refuge" from the tribulation. But this didn't happen after the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, nor after the Roman one. So the prophecy is rescheduled to the latter day tribulation, which will elicit this humbled and repentant people out of Judah. There may be a parallel with :5, where Yahweh Himself is "in the midst of you"; manifest through the humbled and afflicted. We noted on Zeph. 1:3 that God had intended to bring upon Judah a cataclysm as total as the flood. There are allusions to the flood narrative throughout Zephaniah. "Leave" here is the same word used in Gen. 7:23 of how only Noah and the chosen animals "remained alive". This was how small the minority was to be. But the people were urged to be "humbled" before the tribulation came (Zeph. 2:3 s.w.); but they would not, and so they had to go through the tribulation in order to be humbled. And it is the same for God's people in the last days; whether or not they pass through the tribulation depends upon whether they have responded to His word in the lead up to it (see on Rev. 3:10). Again, God's plans are in this sense open ended.

Zephaniah 3:13 *The remnant of Israel will not do iniquity, nor speak lies*- This quotes :5, which states these things about God who will be in the midst of Israel. Yet as noted on :12, it is the humbled and afflicted remnant who will be left "in the midst". The remnant will have taken refuge in the Name of Yahweh (:12), which refers to His characteristics. They will have the Name counted to the, just as we do through baptism into that Name. All that is true of God, His righteousness, is counted to us.

Neither will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth, for they will feed and lie down, and no one will make them afraid- They will be so at peace with God, without fear of men, that they will no longer need to be deceitful. Out of all their many sins, having a deceitful tongue might be thought to be well down the list. But typical of the prophetic perspective, this is focused upon. These words are alluded to in Rev. 14:4,5, where they are applied to the latter day repentant Jews.

Zephaniah 3:14 *Sing, daughter of Zion! Shout, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem*- The mention of "Israel" rather than Judah suggests the final reunion of God's people when they repent and marvel together at the extent of their forgiveness. For common experience of grace, repentance and forgiveness is what binds together. Disunity is caused by a lack of personal experience of these things.

These words in the LXX are applied by Gabriel to Mary in Lk. 1:28-31. The teenage, poor village girl Mary is set up as the representative and epitome of all Israel / the people of God should have been. She was the seed of David, the daughter of Zion from whom Messiah came. The “highly favoured…blessed” woman (Lk. 1:28) is the daughter of Zion of Joel 2:21-27; Zeph. 3:14-17; Zech. 2:14,15; 9:9. She “rejoiced” as the daughter of Zion was to rejoice at the coming of her king. She was the “servant Israel”, the “handmaiden” (the female form of “servant”) who was now “helped” by God (Lk. 1:54). The daughter of Zion had not responded as she ought to have done; and so Zephaniah's words were reapplied and rescheduled, to be fulfilled both in the last days and in Mary and her Messianic child.

Zephaniah 3:15 *Yahweh has taken away your judgments*- To "take away" judgments means to not carry out legal judgments; the same phrase is translated to "decline from... sentences / judgments" in the sense of not carrying out judicial decrees (Dt. 17:11). Here again we have an Old Testament version of Paul's argument in Romans. The judgment is and was to condemnation; but it has been taken away, it will not be carried out, because as explained on :13, God has imputed righteousness to His repentant people who have identified themselves with His Name, just as we are baptized into that Name and abide within it.

He has thrown out your enemy. The King of Israel, Yahweh, is in the midst of you- God has stated that He was right then in the midst of them (:5). Yet here, the time in view is clearly that of the Messianic Kingdom of the future, seeing that in practice the remnant refused to fully repent and accept their king. The Kingdom age will therefore be but a literal manifestation of the spiritual situation which there already is amongst God's people, for whom He is already their King in their midst, and they His dominion or kingdom.

You will not be afraid of evil any more- This must therefore speak of the last days.

Zephaniah 3:16 *In that day it will be said to Jerusalem, Don’t be afraid, Zion*- This is the same message to Zion as recorded in Is. 40. Zion will be assured that she need not

fear God's judgments any more; for she really has been forgiven. The preachers of that message will be us, and indeed we ought to be telling Jewish people right now.

Don't let your hands be weak- The words spoken to the returned exiles as they rebuilt Jerusalem (Ezra 4:4; Neh. 6:9). But those exiles did not finally restore the temple nor the kingdom as intended; the temple commands of Ez. 40-48 were not fulfilled in that they were not obeyed. Weak hands were a result of fear of Divine judgment to come (Ez. 7:17; 21:7 s.w.). But the reassurance of the new covenant and of God's gracious forgiveness meant that they need not have fear nor weak hands.

Zephaniah 3:17 *Yahweh your God is in the midst of you, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with joy, He will calm you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing*- They needed calming from their fear of judgment for their sins. His strength and might are particularly manifest in His desire to save, even the most sinful. Any review of His majesty in creation must be taken further to this very personal conclusion; that all that might and power are nothing compared to His might and power to save and transform sinners. 'Rejoicing over with joy' is the language of the groom rejoicing over the bride (s.w. Is. 62:5; 65:19). God presents Himself as in love, with all the giddiness of emotion when finally the intended climax of commitment is reached with the beloved. He is presented as He Himself singing as an expression of that joy. Zion, the beloved, is presented as the young woman who needs calming before the expression of all this love, fearful and nervous. And this is on one hand the only appropriate response, for we who are so unworthy to become the object of such love. This rejoicing over Judah to do them good could have come about at the restoration from Babylon (s.w. Jer. 32:41), had the returning exiles entered into the new covenant. It was indeed tragic that they did not.

Zephaniah 3:18 *I will gather those who mourn with longing for the appointed feasts, you will no longer suffer reproach*- They could have gathered themselves before the traumas of captivity (Zeph. 2:1); but chose not to. And so the tribulation had to come, so that they would desire to be gathered. Again the primary reference is to the captives, unable to keep the feasts in captivity but longing to do so, mocked as they sat by the rivers of Babylon. But when they were "gathered" through the decree of Cyrus allowing them to return, relatively few did; and as the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi make clear, those who did return were not very penitent and had their own selfish agendas rather than any desire to re-establish God's Kingdom. So much potential was wasted. And so the prophecies of the restoration, which form a large part of the prophets, became reapplied and rescheduled to those who wish to appropriate them to themselves in Christ now, and to the remnant of Judah who will repent in future, around the time of the Lord's return.

Zephaniah 3:19 *Behold, at that time I will deal with all those who afflict you*- The restoration from Babylon didn't lead to this; Judah's lack of repentance meant that the intended scenario didn't happen as planned. But as noted on :18, it will happen in the last days.

And I will save those who are lame, and gather those who were driven away- The allusion is to limping Jacob being regathered to his own land after "the time of Jacob's trouble" in the last days (Dan. 12:1). Jacob, like Judah and Israel, was driven away for his own deceit and sinfulness. And yet the focus is upon the joy of restoration, rather than mentioning the past sins. The language of "driven away" is used of the exiles who

were once driven away being regathered (Neh. 1:9 s.w.); but they refused to realize the huge potential for restoration.

I will give them praise and honour, those whose shame was once in all the earth- The gift of such honour alludes to the gift of imputed righteousness, covering the shame associated with condemnation, which we have alluded to above.

Zephaniah 3:20 *At that time will I bring you in, and at that time will I gather you*- The repeated emphasis upon "at that time" (as in :19) is to underline the point that Judah's triumphant return will coincide with the time of judgment upon their enemies. The fall of Babylon was supposed to be the signal for Judah to return of their own will. But they didn't; and so as soon as Cyrus was established over Babylon, in the first year of his reign, he was moved by God to make a decree urging the Jews to return, offering them material incentives to do so. The fact the majority still didn't return is a tragic example of men refusing to go the way God's grace wishes them to. And so the prophecies will have their rescheduled fulfilment in the salvation of the repentant remnant at the fall of latter day Babylon.

For I will give you honour and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes, says Yahweh- This 'giving' is the gift of grace, of imputed righteousness, as noted on :19.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: HAGGAI

HAGGAI

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it,

respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

HAGGAI CHAPTER 1

Haggai Chapter 1

Haggai 1:1 *In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month-*

Haggai prophesied at the time when the Jews had been told to cease rebuilding the temple (Ezra 5:1). We might expect the message of Haggai to have been "Have faith! Keep building although you've been told to stop, God will be with you, all will be good in the end". Instead Haggai focuses upon the spiritual weakness and poor motivation of the Jews and appeals for their repentance. This would suggest that the real reason God allowed the command to cease building was because He was only confirming the Jews in their lack of desire to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem.

The many restoration prophecies had stated that the Jews would return from Babylon after Babylon had fallen and restore God's Kingdom in Judah under a Messianic ruler. Ez. 40-48 contains commands more than predictions of how a temple system would be rebuilt, with a "Prince" who was also a priest as the Messianic leader. They would repent and enter a new covenant which would replace the old covenant. Tragically, most of the Jews preferred the soft life of Babylon, and those who did return were impenitent and are revealed by Haggai, Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah as seeking their own personal gain from emigration to Judah. And so the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied. There is an element to which they will come literally true in the last days when latter day Babylon falls, a remnant of Judah repent, and the Lord Jesus returns to earth to re-establish God's Kingdom on earth based in Israel. But they are also reinterpreted in many New Testament passages which allude to the restoration prophecies, being

reapplied to Christian believers entering the new covenant and coming out of 'Babylon' in a more spiritual sense.

Some exiles did return and began rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. But they were several times interrupted by seemingly invincible opposition from the local peoples and the king of Persia. But through the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the exiles were encouraged to keep on keeping on, and against all odds, a temple was rebuilt (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). So we should not read Haggai and Zechariah as merely droning on against the Jews and not getting very far. It was due to their inspired words that the discouraged, spiritually weak people of God were inspired to rise up and do the work of God's Kingdom, and succeed with every man's hand against them. In this is their abiding value to us. There is however the repeated theme of wasted potential- so much could have happened at that time, even the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in the form of the kingdom of Israel, replete with a Messianic ruler. But it didn't, because of short termist, self-satisficing attitudes, a failure to look beyond the immediate and personal to a far bigger picture.

The Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet- Literally, 'by / in the hand of', a classic statement of Biblical inspiration.

To Zerubbabel- Haggai is addressed specifically to two men, Zerubbabel and Joshua ['Jesus'], who could have been the Messianic rulers at the time of the restoration. They both let the baton drop. It's a sad story of not using huge potential which is there in God's plan for men. He is also called Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1:8; 5:14, 16; Sheshbazzar was probably his Chaldean name; just as Daniel was called Belteshazzar.

Is. 53:2 speaks of Messiah, in a restoration context beginning in Is. 52, as ‘growing up’, the same word used to describe the ‘coming up’ from the dry ground of Babylon. This potential Messiah was Zerubbabel, but one wonders whether when he failed to fulfil the prophecies, there was the possibility that another man could have fulfilled his role. Nehemiah ‘came up’ from Babylon, and was “the servant” who ‘prospered’ Yahweh’s work (Neh. 1:11; 2:20), just as the servant prophecies required (Is. 53:10; 48:15); and he was thereby the redeemer of his brethren (Neh. 5:8). He encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (Neh. 9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfil the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion’s gates in Messiah’s Kingdom would be praise. He was “despised” as Messiah would be (Neh. 2:19; Is. 53:3 s.w.). He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as Messiah would (Neh. 2:12 cp. Zech. 9:9); and Neh. 2:16 sounds very much like “of the people there was none with me” (Is. 63:3). The Gentiles round about came to sit at Nehemiah’s table to eat and drink (Neh. 5:17), just as Isaiah had prophesied could happen on a grander scale at the restoration of the Kingdom. One wonders if the potential fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies was transferred to him? And yet

Nehemiah returned to Babylon at least once, and there is no record that on his second visit he stayed on, but rather, the implication seems to be, he returned again to the service of Babylon. The total lack of Biblical information about his later life may reflect this disappointing decision. This train of thought enables us to appreciate the joy and pleasure which the Father had when finally His beloved Son lived up to all that He sought and expected.

And yet according to Jewish tradition, Nehemiah's real name was Zerubbabel, the branch (*Sanhedrin* 38a)- perhaps the same Zerubbabel as mentioned in Haggai and Zechariah. The Hippolytus Chronicle 7:3:37 even claims Nehemiah was a direct descendant of David and in the direct kingly line. His name, 'comfort of Yahweh', invites us to see him as the potential fulfilment of the Is. 40:1,2 prophecy about a Messiah figure arising to the exiles, giving them God's comfort. At the time of Judah's redemption, while the temple had been trodden down by her enemies, the promised Messiah figure of Is. 63:1-3,18 was to come from Edom and Bozrah - both code names for Babylon. The words "Bozrah" and "Babylon" have similar root meanings ('high / fortified place'). And he was to lament how the people of Judah were not with him- "of the people there was none with me". But this is the very spirit of Nehemiah, when he returns to Jerusalem from Babylon and looks around the 'trodden down' city at night, not telling the people of the Jews about his inspection- i.e. the people were not with him (Neh. 2:11-16).

Son of Shealtiel- The Salathiel of Mt. 1:12; Lk. 3:27. He was directly in the Messianic line and could have therefore legitimately been the king of Judah. His father is called Pedaiah in 1 Chron. 3:17,19- presumably he was adopted by his uncle Salathiel on the death of his father.

Governor of Judah- Sheshbazzar / Zerubbabel was the one given the temple vessels, appointed "governor" of Judah and who laid the foundation of the temple (Ezra 5:14-16).

And to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying- The Divine intention was that Zerubbabel was to be the king in the line of David, and Joshua ['Jesus'] the high priest.

Haggai 1:2 *This is what Yahweh of Armies says: These people say, 'The time hasn't yet come, the time for Yahweh's house to be built*'- The problem was that they thought it was a "time" to build their own houses (:4). They wrongly reasoned as do so many today that they must build their own stability and wealth, and then serve God's house. But His house / family comes first. Their priorities were absolutely wrong. And all attempts to build up personal wealth will be frustrated unless this is our focus. And to justify that essential position, they were perhaps arguing that the start point of the 70 years was from the destruction of the temple, rather than from the time the first captives were

taken into exile. There were waves of captivities, so the start point for the 70 years was potentially open to debate. But Haggai's point to them is so relevant to this day: supposed problems of interpretation, academic issues, complaints that God's word is hard to understand, are often but a smokescreen for an underlying moral and spiritual problem. Haggai doesn't correct them about the interpretation of the 70 years prophecy- he addresses the real issue, which is that their lethargy was because of their own selfishness. Likewise we note that Haggai makes no reference to the fact that the decree to rebuild the temple had been abrogated by another decree to stop the rebuilding. Haggai never says "Just ignore that second decree, keep on building!". Rather his focus is solely upon the selfish attitude of the Jews. If they had the right attitude, Persian decree or no decree, they would be blessed and achieve the rebuilding that was potentially possible.

They reasoned that “the time” of which Jeremiah spoke hadn’t come- even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Isaiah 45:13 “not for price nor reward”). They felt that all the prophecies were “marvellous” in the sense of something incapable of concrete fulfilment in their experience (Zechariah 8:6). This is why they are rebuked them for saying “the time is not come...that the Lord’s house should be built”. They didn’t want the prophecy to be fulfilled, because it would mean ‘going up’ from their ceiled houses- both in Babylon and in the farmsteads they had built in Judah- to build the temple.

The context of this, according to Ezra 5:1, was of the people losing heart in the rebuilding because of the opposition from the Samaritans and the temporary ban on the work from Babylon. They argued: 'We'll do God's work if we get the chance, but this ban is clearly a sign from God not to go ahead'- when really it was their self-satisfaction with their "ceiled houses" (:4) that made them give up so easily. But the Angels were eager to go ahead! The paltry excuses for shirking the Lord's work today are no better. As ever, they stem from the apathy born of materialism, but are wrapped up in pseudo-spiritual reasoning.

The exiles asked for ‘deliverance’- but they redefined ‘deliverance’ as meaning being allowed to live prosperously in the land of their captivity (Baruch 1:12 cp. 2:14), rather than being delivered from Babylon and returning to Judah. In a way, the book of Esther shows how God heard this prayer. But the book of Esther therefore has a sad ending, with the Jews prosperous, loved and respected, and even further away from returning to the land. Indeed, Baruch 2:21 records them misquoting Jer. 27:12 about the need to obey the King of Babylon during their captivity, and understanding this as meaning they were to remain in Babylon! Baruch 6:2 is perhaps the most serious example of misquoting and wilfully misunderstanding God’s word. Here, Baruch [as Jeremiah’s scribe] changes the prophecy of Jer. 29:10, that Israel were to be 70 years in Babylon and then return: “When you reach Babylon you will be there many years, a period seven

generations long, after which I will bring you back". The 70 years are turned into seven generations. This was precisely the mindset spoken against in Haggai 1:2, whereby the Jews reasoned that the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple. "The time" referred to the time spoken of by Jeremiah- but Baruch had re-interpreted the 70 years as meaning seven generations. And yet all this was done with a surface-level reverence for God's word- the exiles considered themselves blessed because they had God's law (Baruch 4:4). Indeed, much of Baruch is a condemnation of idols and a demand to worship Yahweh.

Haggai 1:3 *Then the Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying*- We may at times wonder whether anything, even God's word, has the power to shift human complacency. But at least some responded to Haggai: "the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet" (Ezra 6:14). Haggai was addressed specifically to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the elders; and initially they did respond.

Haggai 1:4 *Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies waste?-*

The words "you… yourselves… your" are laboured. It could as well have simply been "… for you to dwell in paneled houses". But the point is laboured that it was all about "you", and God noticed this. Living in luxurious homes whilst neglecting the larger picture of God's people was exactly one of the reasons cited for the exile: "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness… who says, I will build me a wide house and spacious rooms, and cuts him out windows; and makes a ceiling with cedar" (Jer. 22:13,14). Ezekiel records how the exiles blamed their judgment upon the sins of their fathers, but they were in fact repeating their fathers' sins. A house with panels is a house that has been built [or rebuilt] and been cosmetically finished within. Whereas God's house was still in ruins. Their argument was that the "time" was to build their own houses and then build God's house; just as many reason today. But the point is, they had finished their houses, even putting on decorative paneling; but, true to human nature, they considered they had still not finished their own houses, and therefore the time for building God's house hadn't come.

There is a clear connection with how David had a conscience that his house was grandiose than God's tabernacle (2 Sam. 7:2), and this led him to a desire to build the temple. But the returnees didn't have that conscience, or didn't respond to it.

As explained on :1, this prophecy was addressed specifically to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the elders. We can conclude that they particular were living in luxurious houses,

focused upon their house rather than God's. And that is an abiding challenge to us all, especially noting that the Hebrew idea of "house" refers to a family as well as a building.

Is. 60:7 prophesied that God would "*glorify* the *house* of my glory". But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes "to *beautify* [s.w. "glorify"] the house of the Lord" (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God's special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building "cieled houses" for themselves (Hag. 1:4 AV). The word for "cieled" or "paneled" occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Haggai 1:5 *Now therefore this is what Yahweh of Armies says: Consider your ways*- "Consider your ways", literally "set your heart on your ways". The idea is not so much to look at their ways at the present time, but to consider the ways / paths of their past which have led them to where they are. "Consider" is a key word in Haggai (s.w. :7; 2:15,18). To 'set our heart upon' (Heb.) our "ways" is difficult- self-examination doesn't come easy to any of us. Ultimately the exiles didn't go in God's ways, their "thoughts" and "ways" of thinking were not God's- when they should and could have been (Is. 55:8,9; the later chapters of Isaiah are a lament that the returned exiles would not go in God's way). The root cause for the failure was right in the heart- they were not spiritually minded, God's passion for His Kingdom was not theirs. The spiritual intention of the exile had been that Judah would consider their "ways" (Ez. 20:43,44; 36:31). They hadn't done this, and therefore those who returned did so from motives of personal improvement rather than spiritual desire for the things of the Kingdom- as :6 now laments.

Haggai 1:6 *You have sown much, and bring in little. You eat, but you don't have enough. You drink, but you aren't filled with drink. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm, and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes in it-*

In the context of the restoration from Babylon, Ezekiel and Zech. 8:12 prophesied: "For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things". But we know that in reality, Judah were not obedient to the heavenly vision of Ezekiel, and therefore Judah's agriculture was *not* blessed in this way; the vines cast their fruit, and the fruit of the ground was destroyed (Hag. 1:6,11; Mal. 3:10,11). The reason was that Zech. 8:12 was conditional- upon Zech. 8:16,17: "These are the things that ye shall do [i.e. to bring these prophecies about]; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD". But Judah abused each other, and didn't fulfil the conditions for the prophecy.

They were gathered back [although they resisted this in that many preferred to stay in the soft life of Babylon], but they hardly dwelt safely or confidently in their land as the prophecies of the restoration had foreseen. They planted vineyards, but received a poor harvest due to their lack of attention to God's house; their enemies destroyed their fruits, and their vine "cast her fruit before the time" (Hag. 1:6; Mal. 3:10,11). Haggai and Malachi criticized Israel for this, saying it could be rectified by their obedience: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:10). Yet in Nehemiah's time, Judah refused to pay tithes properly; but even then, if they had thoroughly repented, the Kingdom conditions were still possible. Such was God's desire to continue working with His hopeless people.

This frustrating lack of achievement of wealth is typical of what most secular people experience. Haggai doesn't teach that if we put God first, then we will 'get there' in our personal materialism. Rather we are to focus upon the work of God's house rather than our own. And all necessary things will be added unto us. As in Hag. 2:17, all this alludes to the curses for disobedience. They had argued that they were simply delaying obedience until what they considered the right time. But God saw through that excuse and counted it as disobedience. God saw through all their mind games, as He does today.

Haggai 1:7 *This is what Yahweh of Armies says: Consider your ways*- See on :5. "Ways" can refer to literal roads. Judah were commanded to return from Babylon in Jer. 31:21:

“Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities”. The same command to flee from the land of the north [Babylon] is to be found in Isaiah 48:20; Jer. 51:6; Zechariah 2:6; and they were to “get thee up to the high mountain” (Isaiah 40:9), using the same word about Judah ‘going up’ from Babylon to Israel. "A woman shall compass a man" (Jer. 31:22) suggests that the woman, Judah, were to take the initiative with God by mapping out the roads they would take back to Zion- the suggestion could be that the 70 year period of captivity could have been shortened had Judah taken the initiative.

Haggai 1:8 *Go up to the mountain, bring wood, and build the house-*

"The mountain" could be mount Zion now overgrown, or mount Lebanon, or the King's forest near Jerusalem of Neh. 2:8. Neh. 8:15 uses similar language concerning the Mount of Olives. The majority of Judah remained in Babylon. And the majority of those who did return, only did so in order for purely personal benefit- of having their own house and land. They ‘went up’ to the land, but not to Zion. With reference to Isaiah 40:9 [“get thee up to the high mountain”] Haggai exhorted them: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. *Go up to the mountain*, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much [i.e. they expected the promised Kingdom blessings], and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house”. Their focus was on their own lands and farms rather than the glory of Zion (as Nehemiah 13:10,11). They stood related to the things of God’s kingdom, but never ventured beyond their own personal self-interest. They would not accept that God manifestation rather than human salvation and pleasure was the essential purpose of their God.

Haggai's prophecy can be dated quite precisely- it was given August-September 520 BC. This was harvest time. And at this very labour intensive season, where all hands had to be on deck out in the fields, the prophet called for a dedication of labour to building up God's house. Yet Judah were too concerned with their own harvests than the harvest of God's glory. They were asked to do something counter-instinctive- to take time out from harvest, and spend that time on building up God's house. And they failed the challenge. But it wasn't that they were simply lazy. Hag. 1:8, a prophecy given 18 years after the decree of Cyrus, orders the people to go up into the hills of Judah and get wood with which to build the temple. And yet according to Ezra 3:7, the decree of Cyrus 18 years earlier had resulted in cedar wood being brought from Tyre and Sidon, enough for the temple to be built. Where had the wood gone? Is the implication not that the leadership had used it for their own "cieled houses" (Hag. 1:4)? It all seems so petty minded. But

this is what we are tempted to do, time and again- build up our own house and leave God's house desolate and in a very poor second place. And use what is intended for God's house on our own house. Instead of telling them to re-order more wood from Lebanon, using the king's grant to do so, Haggai tells the people to go and cut down local timber. As if time is of the essence. Perhaps this was because the Persian support for the temple building was suspended at Haggai's time. But it may be too that he was challenging them to make this effort to cut down wood and immediately rebuild the temple in order to bring about the promised blessing of immediate agricultural fecundity discussed on :9. We note Haggai's great insistence that the returnees build the temple. Yet God had never been enthusiastic for the temple, right from David's first enquiry about building it. I suggest His enthusiasm for it at this point was because He wanted them to build according to the commands of Ez. 41-48, so that His Kingdom could be re-established as envisioned there.

I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says Yahweh- "That I might appear in glory", Heb. See on Hag. 2:9. The idea of God 'accepting' or taking pleasure in Israel is found in Ez. 43:27; when the temple was built and the sacrifices offered, "I will accept you". If Judah resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel's plan, "I will take pleasure" in it, God offered. They should be more committed to building the temple "that I may appear in my glory" (RSV). The glory of Yahweh as described at the end of Ezekiel could have appeared in Haggai's time- but this wonderful possibility was held back by Israel's petty minded, self-satisficing laziness. The same word is used in Ez. 43:27- *then*, when the temple of Ezekiel was built, Yahweh would "accept / take pleasure in" His people and temple. But because they built and served Him with such a mean spirit, He did not "accept" them at that time (Mal. 1:10,13 s.w.). Note how Hag. 1:8 describes the need to go up onto the mountain and build the temple- as if to recall attention to Ezekiel's opening vision of the temple as built on a mountain. But Judah would not, and therefore the Kingdom blessings of corn, new wine and oil, as well as fruitfulness on the mountains, were all withheld (Hag. 1:11).

Haggai's criticism of the returnees is more understandable if we understand that most of them were the poor, who hadn't 'made it' in Babylon. It would be fair to infer that only the poor Jews returned from Babylon. The record in Ezra 2:64-70 speaks of 42,360 people returning, along with 7,337 servants and 200 singers, making a total of 49,837. And yet only 8,100 animals went with them to transport them. This means that many would have walked. They carried 5,400 vessels for use in the temple- so the picture could be that their more wealthy brethren laded them with goods, but only the poor returned. Further, the list of towns of origin in Ezra 2 suggests it was mainly those who had originally lived in peripheral villages who returned, rather than the inhabitants of Jerusalem and larger cities.

Haggai 1:9 *You looked for much, and, behold, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away-* The people expected "much" harvest, and were disappointed at the poor yields in Palestine. This would confirm the suggestion that many of those Jews who did return from Babylon were amongst the poor in Jewish exile society, and returned in home for personal betterment- rather than because they wished to obey the call of the prophets and establish God's glory in the land. That's a sober warning for all of us who may go through an external appearance of zeal for our God, whilst having very selfish and human motives underneath. Why, e.g., does a young woman so zealously attend church? Is it to worship God and build up His family... or because she perceives it as a potential meeting place with 'Mr. Right'? And so the examples could be multiplied.

It was when they 'brought home' their harvest wealth that God blew it away. The implication is that they should have brought their harvest not to their house but to God's house. Mal. 3:10,11 is surely relevant- that had they paid their tithes [Haggai here implies they didn't do this], then God would have blessed them.

The people were disappointed because they held the Ancient Near Eastern view that the start of temple building would bring blessings from the gods; and they "looked for" this. One of the neo-Sumerian temple hymns of Gudea of Lagash recorded on the Gudea cylinder proclaims: "When the foundations of my temple will be laid, abundance shall come. The great fields shall bring forth for thee (fruit), (the waters of) the ditches and channels shall rise out of the fissures of the ground, whence the water no longer sprang forth, water shall spring forth. In Shumer oil shall be poured forth in abundance". Yahweh was showing that such mere tokenism is not how He works. They were going to have the opposite of such blessings, because their heart attitudes were wrong.

Why? says Yahweh of Armies, Because of My house that lies waste, while each of you is busy with his own house- Haggai's words are full of implication that these men could have achieved so much, and yet chose not to rise up to their potentials. Hag. 1:9 takes on particular significance when read in this light: "My house lies desolate whilst you run about, each man [i.e. Zerubbabel and Joshua] to his own house". It was those two who preferred to dwell in their "cieled houses" whilst God's house lay desolate (Hag. 1:4). The reference to "cieled houses" would be only relevant to the upper classes- it would hardly be applicable to all the returned exiles. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we can understand these two men as focusing more on their own homes than on God's house, and fulfilling the great potential possible if it had been built according to Ezekiel's specifications.

"Busy" is literally to run or hasten. How true this is- men and women show far greater drive, energy and initiative in their secular lives than in the Lord's service. Haggai is basically saying that if in the drought and in their poverty they prioritize rebuilding the

temple, then they will have rain and blessing. They were arguing that the time for rebuilding the temple hadn't come because they needed to get their material prosperity right first- and then they would do the Lord's work. This is a very common wrong attitude- to think that once we are set up in material prosperity, then we will do the Lord's work. Haggai argues for the very opposite. Indeed Hag. 2:15-19 seems to imply that there would be an immediate material blessing if they started rebuilding the temple, possibly in that the drought would then immediately end: "From this day on I will bless you" (Hag. 2:19). Zech. 8:12 in context seems to say the same- the drought would suddenly end and amazing harvests appear immediately: "They will sow their seed in peace and the vine will yield its fruit, and the ground will give its increase, and the skies will give their dew". Mal. 3:10,11 likewise: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says Yahweh of Armies, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough for. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field". Quite possibly this was the amazing fertility of land surrounding the temple spoken of in Ez. 47:12: "By the river on its banks, on this side and on that side, shall grow every tree for food whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall its fruit fail: it shall bear new fruit every month, because its waters issue out of the sanctuary; and its fruit shall be for food, and its leaf for healing".

Haggai 1:10 *Therefore for your sake*- Perhaps specifically the selfishness of Zerubbabel and Joshua led to a drought which affected many. This is the problem with sin- it affects others, and we learn from the account of Adam and Eve.

The skies withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit- This is exactly the language of 1 Kings 8:35, which said that in such case, the people were to repent and pray towards the temple in Zion! But they didn't want to build that temple, they wanted rather to build up their own glory and homesteads. All things could've worked so wonderfully together for good; but they didn't want to participate in the program God had arranged, and so instead a downward spiral kicked in.

Haggai 1:11 *I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on that which the ground brings forth, on men, on livestock, and on all the labour of the hands*- These are all aspects of the promised Messianic Kingdom which could have come about at the restoration (e.g. Joel 2:19,24; Jer. 31:12). The very same sequence of words occurs in Neh. 5:11; 10:37,39; 13:5- instead of giving those things to Yahweh, the Jews stole them from each other, and jibbed about paying them as tithes to Him. And thereby they precluded the possibility of Yahweh richly blessing all His people with those very same things in a Kingdom setting. As with all those who are

rejected from God's purpose, they effectively rejected themselves from His Kingdom by their behaviour, rather than Him rejecting them Himself. There's a play on words here. God's house was left "waste" (*chareb*) by them (:4,9); and therefore God sent a "drought" (*choreb*).

Haggai 1:12 *Then Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of Yahweh, their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Yahweh, their God, had sent him; and the people feared Yahweh*- see on Jer. 23:18,22. This was a commendable humility, for it is hard for leaders to repent. It seems that they didn't maintain this level of intensity of repentance, but all the same, God responded positively to them at that time, in response to their repentance of that moment.

Even amongst those who returned to the land, only a minority wished to take their spiritual possibilities seriously. The returned exiles are called "this people" (Hag. 1:2; 2:14) or "the people of the land" (Hag. 2:4), but only "the remnant of the people" actually responded to the call of the prophets like Haggai who encouraged them in the work and vision of what was possible.

The implication of Hag. 2:17 is that they had not totally turned to Yahweh. They had responded to Haggai's call to resume work in Hag. 1:12,13 and God had been as it were much enthused by it. But after a month's work they needed more appeal. They still hadn't turned completely and permanently to Him, with a 'repentance not to be repented of' as Paul would say. Zechariah's prophecy came two months after Haggai (Zech. 1:1). And he appeals again for the people to turn to God (Zech. 1:3). And even after Zechariah's time, the people still didn't really return to Yahweh in repentance, despite their focus on legalism and xenophobic hatred of Gentiles: "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'" (Mal. 3:7). Clearly their turning to Him had been only temporary. But still God was enthusiastic over their even very temporal response. Despite surely foreknowing how they would very quickly flag. He so wanted the Kingdom to be restored and His people to live in all joy and peace of relationship with Him. And that desire is unabated to this day, despite having been frustrated by His people so often, so deeply and for so long.

Haggai 1:13 *Then Haggai, Yahweh's messenger*- An example of *malak* referring not only to supernatural beings ["Angels"] but to men; references to 'sinning Angels' must be understood as referring therefore to men and not heavenly beings. Haggai is presented as the mediator, taking the message of repentance to God, and Him sending Haggai back to the people with a message. The Messiah figure was to be accompanied by a messenger, "the messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1); and Haggai could have been that to Zerubbabel, whilst he was willing to live up to the call to be the Messianic figure

of that time. But he failed, and so the prophecies of the restoration with their Messianic figure and his messenger were reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who was heralded by John the Baptist as the "messenger".

Spoke Yahweh's message to the people, saying, I am with you, says Yahweh- The allusion is to the repeated promises that "I will be with you" in leaving Egypt and going in to possess the promised land and establish God's Kingdom there (Num. 14:43). This is what could have happened had the exiles left Babylon and returned to the land wishing to fulfil the restoration prophecies. Yahweh was "with" them despite the fact He also saw them as unclean (Hag. 2:14). His Spirit remained amongst them (Hag. 2:5) despite this. His being "with" them, His presence, is thus parallel with the abiding of His Spirit with them. This is the same language used of the Comforter in Jn. 14-16. The Spirit / presence / God's being "with" us is abiding, despite our failures and periods of uncleanness, but we must respond to it. Here in Haggai we have a profound window onto how God sees His people.

Haggai 1:14 *Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest*- The returnees had laid foundations for a temple far smaller than that commanded in Ez. 40-48. But still God was eager to work with them, and part of Haggai's message is to encourage them to believe this. The temple system of Ez. 40-48 carefully avoids any mention of a high priest; it speaks only of a "Prince". Haggai addresses Zerubbabel the prince [who was a descendant of king Jehoiachin, 1 Chron. 3:17-19] and Joshua the high priest; and in 1:14 God stirs up Joshua's spirit to go ahead with the restoration. This could be read as another concession to a less than idea restoration- God was willing to work with a human high priesthood, although the new covenant didn't require that. But Joshua was clothed in filthy garments (Zech. 3:3), was rebuked, forgiven ["I have caused your iniquity to pass from you", Zech. 3:4] and encouraged to have another go at being a pure High Priest. And still he failed. God was trying again and again to try to force through the restoration of the Kingdom.

God stirs us up, but Timothy was told to stir up the gift of the Spirit within him (2 Tim. 1:6). There has to be some human response or else man becomes a mere puppet. In response to their desire to respond to the call for repentance, God stirred up their spirit / mind. He can work directly on the human heart, giving us attitudes and ideas; and He does so especially in response to our desire for this. Here we have a classic Old Testament example of the work of God's Spirit on human hearts, which becomes such a characteristic of New Testament Christianity. The same word is used of how He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to allow the exiles to return (Ezra 1:1), and also the spirits of the exiles who decided to return (Ezra 1:5). Although their motives were on one hand not

right, God also worked on their hearts. Human motivation is complex, but God worked there, confirming them as needed. It seems that the stirring up of spirit occurred when they left Babylon, and now again once they had flagged. It is similar to the New Testament idea of being filled up with the Spirit, as if there are moments of filling and refilling. And this stands true to our spiritual experience.

And the spirit of all the remainder of the people; and they came and worked on the house of Yahweh of Armies, their God-

"*Came* and worked" suggests they had shirked the work of rebuilding God's house and Jerusalem in order to go to reclaim and resettle their ancestral land. As noted on :12, only a remnant of the people left Babylon and of them, only a remnant repented.

Even with Ezekiel's prophecies behind him concerning "the prince", Zerubbabel was easily discouraged in the rebuilding, and needed the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah to encourage him again. He kept the feast of tabernacles (Ezra 3:4) but without dwelling in booths (Neh. 8:17)- i.e., half heartedly. He *could* have been Messiah, perhaps- he may well have been age 30/33 at the time of the restoration (Mt. 1:12,13). When Judah returned, they could have entered into the new covenant, featuring "nobles [an intensive plural, meaning 'the great noble']... and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (Jer. 30:21). Zerubbabel the Governor could have fulfilled this; but he flunked out. Yet God lifted up his spirit a second time (Hag. 1:14 cp. Ezra 1:5); he was given a second chance, such was God's enthusiasm that he should achieve what was potentially possible for him. But again, he failed. He saw the glory of Babylon as more attractive than the hard work required to bring about Yahweh's eternal glory in Zion. It is noteworthy how God worked through this man's failures, and desired to give him (and all Israel) further opportunities. See on Zech. 5:11; 11:17 for evidence of Zerubbabel's return to Babylon.

Haggai 1:15 *In the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king-* The peoples' response to God's word only lasted a limited time. For over the next three months, Haggai will give further messages to encourage them. Although their initial response was confirmed by the Spirit stirring them, it only lasted a limited period. Just as our seeing sense about our materialism, or other spiritual indolence, only lasts a short time before needing to be reaffirmed by us. For repentance and commitment are decisions which by their nature need to be lived out in an ongoing sense and not just at one moment in time. It took 23 days for the whole process of appealing for repentance, repentance and then Divine stirring up of the minds of Zerubbabel. This seems to connect with how an Angel caused the 21 day - year delay in the rebuilding (Dan. 10:12,13; Zech. 3:1 etc.); that was maybe representing the apathy of the Jews as well as the opposition of the Samaritans in the court of Heaven. The two Angel chariots sent to overcome this opposition (see notes on Zech. 6) would therefore

have tried to influence the Jews to be more genuinely committed to Zion's cause. Part of their work was in the inspiring of Haggai's words (note the many references to "the Lord of Hosts" in Haggai). Again, the context of Ezra 5:1 must be remembered- Haggai prophesied to encourage the people during the 21 year cessation of the rebuilding (details in Ezra 4).

HAGGAI CHAPTER 2

Haggai Chapter 2

Haggai 2:1 *In the seventh month, in the twenty-first day of the month, the word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying*- As noted on Hag. 1:14,15, this allowed about a month for the Spirit of God to stir up the spirit of Zerubbabel and Joshua in response to their repentance. But despite that work of the Spirit on their hearts, they still needed to be called to respond to it (:4). This date was the seventh day of the feast of tabernacles, exactly when the first temple was dedicated (2 Chron. 8:8-10), around when the altar was dedicated (Ezra 3:1-7). This was the time to celebrate harvest- but the harvest had been pathetic and they were facing starvation. And Haggai will go on to point out that the new temple was nothing compared to Solomon's temple (:3). But his message was that despite the failure to build according to the commands of Ez. 40-48, and not even according to the pattern of Solomon's temple... God was still prepared to carry on working with His people, to bring about His restored Kingdom on earth. He would shake heaven and earth and make that house glorious worldwide (:6,7). The essence of that Spirit is to be seen in His work with men today.

Haggai 2:2 *Speak now to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remainder of the people, saying*- As noted on Hag. 1:14, only a remnant ["remainder"] returned from Babylon, and out of them, it seems only a remnant were responsive to the Spirit once they returned to Judah. But from this minority of a minority, God was prepared to work- even though there had not been the wholesale repentance and return which He envisaged, still He was eager to work with a handful of people. And yet tragically even they appear to have not responded in the long term to God's possibilities which He had set up for them. This is encouragement to keep on and on working with people, adjusting to whatever their dysfunction throws back at us, ever seeking the extension of the principles of God's Kingdom and His glory through whatever we have left to work with.

Haggai 2:3 *'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Isn't it in your eyes as nothing?*- The allusion is to how some wept and some rejoiced when the restored temple was completed (Ezra 5:13). Those who wept did so because it was nothing like the original temple, let alone that commanded by Ezekiel. There is the hint in Hag. 2:3-9 that despite the planned temple being smaller than that commanded by Ezekiel, causing some to weep when the foundations were laid rather than rejoice (Ezra 3:12), God was still willing to force through His intention of restoring the Kingdom: "'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Isn't it in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel!' says Yahweh. 'Be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest! Be strong, all you people of the land', says Yahweh, 'and work, for I am with

you', says Yahweh of Armies... 'Don't be afraid'... 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former', says Yahweh". Likewise Zech. 4:10 appealing for the faithful not to despise the day of small things.

As the walls rose from the foundations laid, the contrast with the earlier temple and that commanded by Ezekiel would have become increasingly obvious. Some very old exiles would have remembered the temple from 70 years ago in their childhood, before the deportation. But the chronologies vary; Daniel 9,10 would suggest that the 70 year period was extended, hence Daniel's concern that the period had ended but still there was no restoration. So Haggai may mean 'Who is left who saw the previous temple? Nobody. And how do your eyes see it? As nothing, compared to the importance of your own houses?'.

Is. 60:7 had prophesied that God would "*glorify* the *house* of my glory". But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles, if *they* wished to glorify that house. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes "to *beautify* [s.w. "glorify"] the house of the Lord" (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God's special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building "cieled / paneled houses" for themselves (Hag. 1:4). The word for "cieled" occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9), and even that may require a reapplication and reinterpretation of the concept of God's house. And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Haggai 2:4 *Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel!' says Yahweh. 'Be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest! Be strong, all you people of the land', says Yahweh, 'and work*- "Work" is the same word as used in Hag. 1:14 to describe how a month or so earlier, the people had begun again to "work". But now they were flagging and needed further encouragement to go and "work". We noted on :1 that a month had passed since the Spirit of God began working on their hearts. But they still needed to be stirred up to actually use that potential power- to be "be strong... and work". The Corinthians likewise were given the Spirit, as 1 Cor. 1 makes clear, but they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1) and needed exhortation to live according to the spiritual potential given them. And we are all in this position.

"Be strong... and work" [Heb. 'do'] is a phrase designed to recall previous usages in the context of returning to the promised land and building the temple. David often used it in encouraging Solomon to establish the Kingdom and build the temple (1 Chron. 28:10,20); it was the prophetic word to king Asa, encouraging him to re-

establish temple worship and a spiritual revival (2 Chron. 15:7), and to Joshua in encouraging him to re-enter the land and overcome all opposition from the local tribes there (Josh. 1:7; 23:6); and particularly of being strong and working in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple (Ezra 6:22; Neh. 2:18; 6:9). They were to accept that God was willing and eager to strengthen their hands in the work; but they had to make use of it.

For I am with you', says Yahweh of Armies- The repeated title "Yahweh of Armies" would have been understood as a reference to Yahweh as captain of armies of Angels. God makes His Angels spirits; they were a vehicle for the work of the Spirit at that time, as the book of Daniel demonstrates. All that Angelic working was behind every effort Judah would make to rebuild the temple. But they didn't use it. "I am with you *to save you* from Babylon" (Jer. 42:11) focuses God's presence upon His salvation- Jesus. The prophetic potential became reapplied and rescheduled to us, in that the ultimate term of "I am with you" is in the Lord Jesus and the gift of the Spirit to enable us to extend and establish the work of the Kingdom (Jn. 7:33; 13:33).

Haggai 2:5 *This is the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and My Spirit dwelt among you. 'Don't be afraid'*-

The idea seems to be "The word which I covenanted with you, as well as My spirit, remains amongst you". God was still seeking to propel forwards His Kingdom purpose, despite the weak commitment of His people. Just as He did at the Red Sea, and just as He does to this day with those He took out of the world through baptism. There is a similar idea in a restoration context in Is. 59:21: "As for me, this is My covenant with them, says the Lord; My spirit that is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, will not depart out of your mouth". God's spoken word of covenant was to save His people, and His Spirit would continually work to bring this about. The restoration was to be by the work of the Spirit, not by human might, as also stressed in Zech. 4:6 "Not by might but by My Spirit". And we see that work in stirring the hearts of the exiles to leave Babylon, and now again years later stirring up their hearts to respond further. The idea seems to be that "My Spirit abides" with the people, despite their being so weak and temperamental in their spiritual enthusiasm (see especially on :17). This is the language of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, abiding with us. The Corinthians likewise had the Spirit, it abode with them, but they didn't use it, they weren't open to its influence, and they were "not spiritual". For those who have become God's people, the help of the Spirit is always available, although they have to choose to make use of it.

"My Spirit (Angel- Ps. 104:4) remaineth among you" (AV), just as the same Angel was with them "when ye came out of Egypt". And with us too. God encourages those rebuilding Jerusalem to have faith because the Angel is still among them: "Yet now be strong. . . and work: for I (the Angel) am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts (Angels): according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt (the Angel made that covenant) so My Spirit (Angel) remaineth among you; fear ye not". Similarly Nehemiah recounts the past activities of God's Angel (Neh. 9:19-24) as a stimulus to faith in God bringing them through immediate problems. See on Gen. 24:40,56.

But as mentioned on :4, the Spirit was not simply an Angel; it was articulated through the work of God's Spirit on the human spirit or mind. The word of covenant when they came out of Egypt was the entire old covenant; the phrase is thus used at the time of the exodus (Ex. 24:8; 34:27; Dt. 29:1). But throughout Deuteronomy, the second statement of the covenant, there was the repeated encouragement: "Fear not"

(Dt. 1:21; 3:2; 20:3 etc.). The context is always of not fearing the local tribes of Canaan, and of being assured that it was simply God's good pleasure to give them the Kingdom. That essential desire of God was true in Haggai's time as it had been in Moses', and it abides true for us. As He sent the Angel before them and amongst them, so His Spirit was and is active in the hearts and circumstances of all who wish to be in His Kingdom and do the work of that Kingdom.

Haggai 2:6 *For this is what Yahweh of Armies says: 'Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land*- In a "short time", God would yet once more (GNB) shakes the heavens and earth as He had done at Sinai when Israel had previously entered the land and taken the Kingdom (s.w. Ps. 68:8). The potential was that soon after Haggai's words [in "a little while"] there would be direct Divine intervention involving earthquakes and the shaking of all nations (:7) to support the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel under the Messianic rulership of Zerubbabel. This is also foreseen in Zech. 14, where the earthquake is seen as creating a new plateau upon which a new temple could be built. This plateau was also see in the opening of the Ez. 40-48 vision of the commandments as to how to build the new temple complex. This could be brought about by the shaking / earthquake which could have come at the end of the Ez. 38 invasion: "in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel... all the men who are on the surface of the earth, shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall and every wall shall fall to the ground" (Ez. 38:19,20). Had Judah accepted the new covenant offered to them in Ez. 33,34, they would have revived as in Ez. 37, the Ez. 38 invasion and earthquake would have happened and then on the resultant plateau, the new temple would have been built. Despite Judah's failures to engage with these things, Haggai and Zechariah were saying that if the people wanted, they could have the earthquake and temple. God really was trying to force through His saving purpose.

But it didn't happen then. Judah didn't repent, and Zerubbabel beat it back to Babylon. These words have therefore been reapplied and rescheduled, to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and to the final literal establishment of the Kingdom at His second coming; in this context they are quoted in Heb. 12:26-28.

Haggai 2:7 *And I will shake all nations*- This is the equivalent of Daniel's image of the nations being ground to powder and replaced by the mountain of God's Kingdom which cannot be shaken (:22; Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:27). Then the prophecy of Ez. 38:20 could have come true, that all the nations within the *eretz* would "shake" (s.w.). These prophecies could have come true then, but they were rescheduled. The nations in the land and also the Medo Persian empire would be shaken to destruction soon, and so the exiles should not fear them and resume the rebuilding of the city and temple. This is powerful encouragement to us, who are to live as if we are on the eve of the Lord's return. But the Hebrew here is "I am shaking", whereas the shaking of :6 is in a future tense. The idea is that God was already working among the nations to bring about the re-establishment of His Kingdom which was then potentially possible.

The precious things of all nations will come- This could mean that they would all donate their wealth to the new system of worship in Jerusalem. Or the phrase could be translated "the desire of all nations", referring to Messiah. We note that the same word is used of Saul, the anointed ['messiah'] king of Israel (1 Sam. 9:20). This prediction would then be directly relevant to Zerubbabel, the intended Messianic ruler. We could translate: "The desired one of all the nations will come", a clear reference to a

Messiah figure 'coming' who would be associated with the "house" being filled with glory. This is exactly the picture in Ez. 40-48.

This message was given by Haggai at the time that temple building had been stopped by the Persian authorities for fear that they would lose tax revenue, and that the Jews would seek to create an independent state. And now Haggai prophesies exactly those things. Hag. 2:8 is absolutely specific that all wealth belongs to Yahweh, God of the Jews: “The silver is mine and the gold is mine”- not Persia's. This points up the miracle worked by God in the heart of Darius to restore the original decree of Cyrus, allowing the Jew to go ahead rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. They had been encouraged by Haggai and Zechariah, who both had predicted that Zerubbabel would become an independent king of Judah (Hag. 2:23; Zech. 6:12,13), and indeed before him, the great mountain would fall. Surely that would have been understood as the Persian empire: "Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain; and he will bring out the capstone with shouts of ‘Grace, grace, to it!’" (Zech. 4:7). These prophecies were exactly what the adversaries of Judah were informing the Persians about. And yet against all secular sense, the Persians commanded the rebuilding work to go on. Because of the power of God's Spirit on human hearts.

And I will fill this house with glory, says Yahweh of Armies- Just as Solomon’s temple was filled with glory (1 Kings 8:10,11; 2 Chron. 5:13,14; 7:1,2). Haggai sought to inspire the people when they had flagged in their zeal for the Lord’s house; and the method he chose was to remind them that they *could* bring about Messiah’s Kingdom if they wholeheartedly worked with God to allow His ideal intentions to come to pass. Note the stress on *this* house- but that temple they built wasn’t filled with glory, the vision of Ezekiel about the glory returning and entering the temple wasn’t fulfilled- and Solomon’s former temple was more glorious than that of the second temple. Why? Because they didn’t get on and build it and glorify it as they were intended to. Although they had built the new temple on wrong or suboptimal foundations, smaller than the former temple and not according to the commands of Ez. 40-48, God would still work through it and enter it in glory. This is huge encouragement to those who lament they set their life up on poor foundations, through marriage to an unbeliever, entry into a career or financial obligations that strap us for life... although as the walls rise up from those foundations we realize how far we are from how we should have built. But the huge encouragement is that God still wants to drive forward His purpose by abiding within us.

If "the desire of all nations" does refer to Messiah coming with an earthquake and glory filling the temple, then this is a prophecy of what *could* have happened at that time, but it has been deferred to the second coming of the Lord Jesus. This is exactly the picture we have in Ezekiel 43, of a Messiah figure entering the temple in glory. But in Haggai’s context, he is encouraging the Jews of his time that this is what really and truly could have happened then and there, had they been obedient. The cherubim visions of Ez. 1,9 and 10 are applied in the New Testament to the glorified Christ (Rev. 2:18; 1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Pet. 2:4-9). This surely implies that they were ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah; and perhaps we are to understand that they could have had fulfilment in a Messiah figure at the time of the restoration.

It was God's plan that the light of His glory would enter into Zion at the restoration; but Israel had to act as if they believed this, and likewise show forth glory: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon

thee" (Isaiah 60:1). He eagerly prophesied that "strangers shall build up thy walls… in my favour have I had mercy upon thee" (Isaiah 60:10)- not 'I am prepared to have mercy upon you', nor 'I will have mercy…'. God had had mercy upon them, and invited them to respond to it.

Perhaps Nehemiah was some kind of potential Messiah- for the surrounding Gentiles 'came up' to him and shared in the luxurious temple meals (a common Kingdom prophecy- the same Hebrew words are used for the Gentiles 'coming up' to the temple in Is. 60:5,11; Jer. 16:19; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). Those meals could have been the Messianic banquets. See on Mal. 1:10.

Haggai 2:8 *The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine', says Yahweh of Armies*- This may be in answer to the feeling of the exiles that 'We can't afford to do this work on God's house. We need to sort out our own houses first' (Hag. 1:4). Such reasoning is often encountered amongst believers. God's response is that all the silver and gold on the planet is His. He would provide. And indeed He had done, through the generous provision of Cyrus for all the material needs connected with the rebuilding project. The reference could also be to the "precious things" of :7 which the nations will bring; they are already His, and to give wealth to Him is only to accept that we do not own it. For we 'give' to Him what is already His. "*The* silver and *the* gold" could refer to all the silver and gold [wealth] that there is. This would imply an urgency to the rebuilding- if all the wealth of the surrounding world was to enter the temple as a store house for it, then the temple must be rebuilt to store it. By being slack to rebuild the temple (Hag. 1:4) and not doing so according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48, the Divine purpose with it could not therefore come about. Petty human short sightedness therefore precluded the fulfilment of so much Divine potential.

Haggai 2:9 *'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former', says Yahweh of Armies*-

Glory is a theme of Haggai (cp. Hag. 1:8 "that I might appear in glory", Heb.). This is his way of saying that the glory prophesied to enter Ezekiel's temple (Ez. 43:1-5) could indeed enter Zerubbabel's temple; despite the disobedience of the builders to so many details. This entry of glory into the temple is found in Isaiah's restoration prophecies: "I will add glory to My glorious house... I will make the place of My feet glorious" (Is. 60:7,13).

As noted on Hag. 1:8, God would have appeared in glory at the restoration of the temple. The glory of God and His presence was to appear in the temple; but if the Jews wouldn't rebuild the temple, then it wouldn't. In common with Ezekiel, Zechariah and Isaiah, Haggai speaks here of the possible glory that could have been at the restoration, but which has now been postponed until the second coming. Compare this with what actually happened- the old men wept because the new rebuilt temple was nothing like the former temple; see on :3. The glory of the restored temple was prophesied as being far greater than that of the former; Is. 60:17 alluded to this in prophesying that "For brass [in Solomon's temple] I will bring gold, and for iron [that was in Solomon's fixtures] I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron". But it simply didn't happen, because God's people were satisfied with a small, inglorious temple so that they could get on with building their own "cieled houses" (Hag. 1:4; the same word is used in describing how the temple of Solomon was "covered", or cieled, with cedar).

'And in this place will I give peace', says Yahweh of Armies- Peace with God, forgiveness through grace. When the foundation stone of the temple was laid, there should have been excited acclamation: "Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4:7). But instead the old men wept when the foundation was laid, knowing that the temple was nothing compared to what it ought to be (Ezra 3:12). This would have been possible in Haggai's time, had they built the temple according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48. But it was reapplied and rescheduled to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, and His second coming. God's promise of peace "in this place" couldn't come about if Judah would not rebuilt the "place". This is the urgency of the appeal. The gift of peace clearly alludes to the blessings for obedience to the old covenant, which Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah taught had been permanently broken: "I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will remove evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land". The blessings for obedience would be given without their specific obedience- this was the wonder of the new covenant's offer, which they tragically turned down, instead seeking to half heartedly obey the old covenant through keeping parts of the law of Moses. This attempted obedience to the now broken old covenant is stressed several times in Ezra. The promise of peace and glory in the temple never came true. But the essence did, in that in that place, Jerusalem, the Lord was to die and "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). Note that God's "glory" consists in this "peace".

Haggai 2:10 *In the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying*- The wonderful potentials mentioned in the preceding verses were precluded by Judah's unspirituality, and Haggai now addresses that. In the two months since that prophecy (:1), there had been little progress. The 24th day of the 9th month was when the foundation of the temple was laid (:18), exactly three months after the building work on the temple resumed. Whilst the foundation had been dug and laid out in Ezra 5:16, the symbolic laying of the foundation stone [with some kind of ceremony] was not done until later; or perhaps this was a rededication ceremony as the work revived. The following arguments are therefore in relation to the temple. Purity was not spread by physical contact e.g. with a temple; and impurity spread easily. The returnees were impure already, and could not be made any further unclean through the 'guilt by association' which they feared by fellowshipping with Gentiles or the Jews already living in Judah.

Haggai 2:11 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying*- Haggai is addressed to Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. Perhaps they were being asked to ask this question. The answer of the priests is given in :12 and :13 so we assume this was literally asked and answered. But in :12 Haggai asks the question, so perhaps this is addressed to Haggai. It is a common Divine method to ask a question in order to elicit a conclusion within the conscience of the questioned person.

The point of this section in 2:11-14 is really an appeal for purity, and an understanding that purity cannot be obtained by mere contact with the pure. It is a matter of the heart. The need for the returnees to be cleansed is major. But it was exactly their lack of repentance and cleansing which precluded the restoration prophecies from fulfilment at that time. Ez. 43:9 implies that had they cleansed themselves at this time, Yahweh would have literally dwelt for ever in Zion: "Let

them put their apostasy and the corpses of their kings far from Me, and I will dwell among them forever". We note that the question in Hag. 2:13 was specifically about defilement from a corpse, so it is alluding to Ez. 43:9. They were still unclean and thus precluding the fulfilment of Ez. 40-48.

Haggai 2:12 *'If someone carries holy food in the fold of his garment, and the garment touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or any food, will it too become holy?'. The priests answered, No*- The questions of :12 and :13 lead up to the bald statement in :14 that the Jews are "unclean" and their work for God unacceptable. This hard statement is in juxtaposition to all the wonderful Messianic and Kingdom prophecies of the preceding verses, uttered just weeks previously. The questions of :12 and :13 add up to this: Uncleanness can be passed on easily, whereas holiness is not passed on. Just a scrap of sanctified food caught up accidentally in the fold of a robe doesn't make that garment holy, and if that garment then touches the things offered in sacrifice to God, they are not thereby made holy. This was the essence of the argument being used by the Jews. They considered their unclean offerings were made clean through the most contorted and unrealistic path of reasoning. They thought they could be acceptable to God because of some legalistic, theoretical 'acceptability by association', even though the Mosaic law didn't support such reasoning. The mentality is seen today, in those nominal believers who imagine that their external association with some organized religion or denomination somehow guarantees their acceptability with God. The argument serves as a caveat against the mentality that holiness is spread physically- and there clearly were some who imagined that a rebuilt temple would somehow make the people holy.

Haggai 2:13 *Then Haggai said, If one who is unclean by reason of a dead body touch any of these, will it be unclean? The priests answered, It will be unclean*- As explained on :12, the Jews were thinking that they were acceptable to God by some quasi spiritual, pseudo logical path of reasoning whereby a fragment of holy bread could pass on to them personal acceptability before God. But the reality was that this wasn't support by God's principles in the law. What the law emphasized instead was that uncleanness spreads. And they were unclean (:14).

Judah in the new temple would not "defile" Yahweh's Name any more (Ez. 43:7,8) e.g. by touching dead bodies (Ez. 44:25); but they were lazy to keep the uncleanness laws, they *did* defile Yahweh by touching dead bodies and then offering the sacrifices (Hag. 2:13,14 s.w.), just as Israel previously had been defiled by touching the dead bodies of their kings and then offering sacrifices (Ez. 43:7); but now, Judah thought they were above God's law, and therefore did exactly the same things which had caused the temple to be destroyed in the first place. The promise that Yahweh would dwell in the new temple was conditional on them not touching dead bodies (Ez. 43:9); but Hag. 2:13 makes it apparent that they did this very thing at the time of the restoration.

LXX adds "they shall be pained because of their toils; and ye have hated him that reproved in the gates".

Haggai 2:14 *Then Haggai answered, 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me', says Yahweh; 'and so is every work of their hands. That which they offer there is unclean*- The specific work of their hands was surely their partial rebuilding of the temple and offer sacrifice there, but not according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48. Their work was so compromised by their wrong attitudes that what they built

was therefore unclean. The reference may also be to the animals and crops raised by 'the work of their hands' (:17) which they then offered as sacrifices; but this was rejected by God as unclean. The people who had returned from exile were obsessed with separation from the Samaritans and also from their own brethren who had remained in the land. Haggai is warning them that the returnees themselves were unclean because of their attitudes, so all attempts to remain pure from the supposedly impure were irrelevant. "This people" may refer to the returnees and "this nation" to all the Jews including those already living in the land when the returnees arrived. They were all alike unclean, so the returnees were wrong to treat the other Jews as unclean and to argue that they had to avoid contamination from them. They were already unclean themselves by their attitudes. And this is a big argument against 'guilt by association' in all its forms.

"What they offer there" refers to the altar they had rebuilt in Ezra 3. They wrongly thought that that altar would somehow make them clean. But because their attitudes were wrong, it actually made all sacrificed upon it unclean. Or the idea may be that because they were unclean, they had made the altar unclean and therefore so were their sacrifices offered upon it. Zechariah prophesies soon afterwards of how even this problem of uncleanness could be resolved. The vision of Zech. 5 speaks of the banishment of sin and sinners from Judah and back to Babylonia.

Haggai 2:15 *Now, please consider from this day and backward, before a stone was laid on a stone in Yahweh's temple*- Every day counted. Haggai asked them to look back through the few months during which he had given his prophecies about the great possibilities for re-establishing the Kingdom with God's abundant blessing. Even during those days, they had been guilty of not responding, and so the drought had not been lifted.

Haggai 2:16 *Through all that time, when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty, there were only twenty*- Blessings of good harvests, corn and wine, were all part of the blessings promised for obedience to the covenant. But throughout the days Haggai had been appealing to them, their last harvest had been eaten away by disease and plague ("blight, mildew, and hail", :17). These words may be addressed specifically to Zerubbabel and Joshua (see on hag. 1:1). They had lost their harvests, because of refusing to respond to the call of Haggai.

This verse gives very precise commentary on the state of the harvests in Judah after the return- grain stores were 50% below the norm, and the amount of wine produced was 60% less than *expected*. Surely these figures were well known to the people- for they had presumably worked them out, and Haggai is quoting their figures back to them. Notice how the people had worked out the yield of wine which they *expected*. The implication would seem to be that they returned to Judah expecting material prosperity, good harvests and personal wealth; hence their bitter disappointment when they didn't get it. This, then, would appear to have been their motivation for the return- rather than obedience to the words of the prophets or a desire to see God's Kingdom established in His land.

Haggai 2:17 *I struck you with blight, mildew, and hail in all the work of your hands; yet you didn't turn to Me', says Yahweh*- This striking of the harvest had been over

the two months or so since Haggai had prophesied and encouraged them to live up to their potential; see on :16. They had returned to the land, but not to God. They were still impenitent, blaming their situation on the sins of the fathers and of the Gentiles around them. The afflictions mentioned were the very punishments mentioned for committing unfaithfulness to the covenant, and which would climax in being removed from the land (Dt. 28:22; 1 Kings 8:37). They had returned to the land, but were doing the very things which had led to them being expelled from the land, and experiencing the same judgments which they had in the lead up to the exile (Am. 4:9).

"I smote you with blasting and with mildew" alludes to the curses for disobedience in Dt. 28:22 and Am. 4:9. They had argued that they were simply delaying obedience until what they considered the right time. But God saw through that excuse and counted it as disobedience. They are rebuked for not turning i.e. repenting, a tacit acceptance that their consciences had been touched by the disparity between their houses and God's house. But they had subdued those prods of conscience beneath the reasoning that they would be obedient, but at a later time. Here we see how God analyses the human mind and sees right through all our mind games.

The tragedy of "You didn't turn to Me" in Hag. 2:17 is that God has repeatedly tried to comfort the returned exiles that "I am with you" (Hag. 2:4; 1:13)... "My Spirit dwelt [and dwells] among you" (Hag. 2:5). But they didn't want to be with Him, to realize the presence of His Spirit amongst them, just as the Corinthians were not spiritual although they had been richly given the Spirit. The returnees were preoccupied by the immediate, and their desire to live their petty dreams. And so it is oftentimes with man. Haggai's call echoes to us- not to be preoccupied with life and material things. The final restoration prophet concluded with the promise that God would have to send the Elijah prophet to turn their hearts to God: "He will turn the hearts..." (Mal. 4:6). Despite the religious system developed by the returnees and their exclusion of others, they didn't obey Haggai's call to turn their hearts to their God. And so through the Elijah prophet it was God's plan to almost forcibly turn their hearts to Him. But even the fulfilment in John the Baptist and the appearance of God's Son only achieved this in a minority. The problem was [and still is] preoccupation with man's immediate agendas, be they religious or secular.

The implication of Hag. 2:17 is that they had not totally turned to Yahweh. They had responded to Haggai's call to resume work in Hag. 1:12,13 and God had been as it were much enthused by it. But after a month's work they needed more appeal. They still hadn't turned completely and permanently to Him, with a 'repentance not to be repented of' as Paul would say. Zechariah's prophecy came two months after Haggai (Zech. 1:1). And he appeals again for the people to turn to God (Zech. 1:3). And even after Zechariah's time, the people still didn't really return to Yahweh in repentance, despite their focus on legalism and xenophobic hatred of Gentiles: "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'" (Mal. 3:7). Clearly their turning to Him had been only temporary. But still God was enthusiastic over their even very temporal response. Despite surely foreknowing how they would very quickly flag. He so wanted the Kingdom to be restored and His people to live in all joy and peace of relationship with Him. And that desire is unabated to this day, despite having been frustrated by His people so often, so deeply and for so long.

Haggai 2:18 *'Consider, please, from this day and backward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day that the foundation of Yahweh's temple was laid,*

consider it- See on :10 for discussion of how this was a later laying of the foundation stone after the initial foundations had been laid. They were being asked as in :15 to think back over the days since the rebuilding program began. Although they had apparently worked to rebuild the temple, day after day had been of drought and pestilence. Their work for God had been "unclean" (:14) because their motives were impure, as noted on Hag. 1:4. But there is a purposeful ambiguity with the word translated "backward"; it can also mean "upward" or effectively 'forward'. In this case, as suggested on :19, Haggai was urging them to repent that very day, and see the changes that would happen in the weather and the fertility of their land. "Consider..." was therefore an appeal for repentance. This appeal was repeated in the eighth month (Zech. 1:1,4,6); and there was apparent response to that appeal (Zech. 1:6). But now in the ninth month, it was apparent that the repentance was only nominal.

Haggai 2:19 *Is the seed still in the barn? Yes, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree haven't brought forth. From this day on I will bless you'*- The original could imply that God had promised blessing upon them, from the first day the rebuilding program started (:18). But it hadn't come. Their harvests were so small that it was as if they had never even sown anything, and the seed was still in the barn; and the fruit trees had not born anything. We see here how God can promise things which are conditional even if the conditions aren't highlighted; and so the promised blessing will not come about automatically. Or the original could equally suggest that although indeed there had been no harvests, from that very day on "I will bless you", because God through Haggai hoped for their immediate repentance that day. See on Hag. 1:8. There was no seed in the barns for sowing. They faced real starvation. Hence God promises to give them miraculous blessing from that day, immediately, if they responded from the heart. They had no seed to sow, therefore it was no good promising them a better harvest next time. They needed food there and then.

Haggai 2:20 *The Word of Yahweh came the second time to Haggai in the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying*- This must be the same 24th day of the ninth month which has been twice mentioned (:10,15). As expounded above, on that very day Haggai had begged for repentance, and invited them to make a note of the day and to see how God's blessing would be poured out afterwards, whereas before that it had been withheld. Haggai had declared this day a watershed. And now we have a prophecy which seems to assure Zerubbabel that he would in fact be made the Messianic ruler. Perhaps he did repent that day, and so God eagerly went ahead in the following prophecy and assured him that he could indeed achieve the Messianic potential he had.

Haggai 2:21 *Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I will shake the heavens and the earth*- The repetition of "I *will*" is as if to say that the promise of major Divine intervention and the re-establishment of the Kingdom promised in :6 (see note there) would not come about, whereas its fulfilment had been in question. This would fit the suggestion made on :20 that Zerubbabel repented and so the Divine program and possibilities with him resumed.

The day when heaven and earth would be shaken was the day when the second temple was to be filled with glory as Ezekiel had said. *Then*¸ there would be major war between the Gentile nations, and Zerubbabel would be some kind of Messiah figure. But none of these things happened. Their fulfilment was delayed until the last days, when all nations who come against Jerusalem will slay each other, and "my servant"

the Lord Jesus will be proclaimed as Messiah. *Then*, in our time of the end, the heavens and earth will be shaken (Heb. 12:26,27). It could have happened while the second temple was standing- but it didn't, thanks to Israel's indolence.

2:21-23 is a sad ending to the prophecy. The idea is clearly enough that Zerubbabel would become king and the whole planet would be brought under his reign, with the thrones of all kingdoms uprooted by him. Zech. 4:9; 6:12 likewise prophecy that Zerubbabel would complete his intended work. But that didn't happen. At best Zerubbabel just disappears from the scene, and according to tradition he returned to Babylon and gave up on the restoration. The essence will be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, but this, like Ez. 40-48 and the prophecies there about "the prince", is a detailed potential prophecy about a man that just never came true.

Haggai 2:22 *I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overthrow the chariots, and those who ride in them. The horses and their riders will come down, everyone by the sword of his brother*- Haggai 2:6,7 clearly stated that *very soon* the desire of all nations would come to the temple, and Yahweh would fill the temple with His glory, just as He had when the first temple was built (this is another proof that the temple of the restoration was to be based upon the pattern of Solomon's). This was to be brought about by Yahweh shaking all nations, with the result that in a great battle, they would kill each other; and *then* Zerubbabel "my servant" (a Messianic title) would be the King of God's Kingdom. But this didn't happen "soon" after those words were spoken. Indeed, they are quoted in Heb. 12 as now having relevance to our last days. "I will overthrow…kingdoms" is the language of Dan. 2:44- perhaps it could have been that four kings arose after Nebuchadnezzar and then Babylon would have been destroyed. Thus Dan. 2:42 speaks of *the* singular Kingdom being divided, as if referring to the Kingdom of Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar. Thus the image stood complete when the stone hit it- the whole dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar was to be destroyed. But this didn't happen, and so other interpretations of the image prophecy became possible, each fitting perhaps less accurately than the intended fulfilment would have done. Likewise Haggai 2:22 continues by saying that in that "overthrow", "the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother". This is the language of Zech. 14:13; that prophecy also could have had a fulfilment at the restoration, but it is now deferred until the last days. That same passage also envisages an earthquake around Mount Zion, preparing a plateau upon which the temple could be built, as required in the temple plans of Ez. 40.

In the immediate context, the prophecies of Haggai encouraged the Jews to persevere with building the temple; but clearly he expresses the agenda that this will become a kingdom that will take over other kingdoms. The adversaries of Judah made exactly this point to the Persian emperor. They weren't wrong nor exaggerating. The fact the decree was given to re-start the temple building program is therefore real evidence of the amazing hand of God moving the hearts of men to go against all that is sensible or rational. This is the power of His Spirit on the human heart. For in the Ancient Near East, temple building was definitely associated with political power; it was never merely religious. And Darius encouraged the Jews to build the temple with all that was implied by it.

In his memoir known as the book of Ezra, Ezra is asking us to join him in pondering whether he had been right to accept material help from Persia in order to teach God's law to the people in Judah, whilst at the same time reinforcing Persian control over Judah. Haggai a generation earlier had rebuked Zerubbabel: "Speak to

Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overthrow the chariots, and those who ride in them. The horses and their riders will come down, everyone by the sword of his brother" (Hag. 2:21,22). I take this as a rebuke, because Zerubbabel was being told that Yahweh would bring down the Persian empire, whose puppet and "governor" he was. The focus of God's people should have been upon the total freedom and glory of Zion, inhabited by the returned exiles, as spoken of in Isaiah.

Haggai 2:23 *In that day, says Yahweh of Armies, will I take you, Zerubbabel, My servant, the son of Shealtiel', says Yahweh, 'and will make you as a signet ring, for I have chosen you', says Yahweh of Armies*- Setting as a signet ring effectively means Divine appointment as the king of Judah, as in Jer. 22:23-25. The re-established kingdom could have had a Divinely appointed Messianic king in the line of David, Zerubbabel. Just a few months later, Zech. 3:8 speaks of "My servant the branch", a clear reference to Zerubbabel, "branch of God", as the Messianic ruler figure. God says He will do this; but it seems Zerubbabel didn't want it, and the people weren't ready or willing for it. And so the prophecy in essence is reapplicable to the Lord Jesus, the "My servant" of Isaiah's prophecies.

Dan. 9:25 appears to identify "the anointed one, a prince" with the restoration of Jerusalem after the return. The Masoretic punctuation of Dan. 9:25 actually suggests that 'Messiah the prince' appears after the first seven of the seventy weeks- perhaps there was the possibility 49 day-years after the command to rebuild Jerusalem for a Messiah to have appeared? This would've fitted Zerubbabel perfectly. Lk. 3:27 describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term Rhesa is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (Mt. 1:16). Zerubbabel was the 'head' of the house of David (Ezra 4:3; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:8; 6:12,13), as was his descendant Hattush (Ezra 8:1-3 cp. 1 Chron. 3:22). As the grandson of Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled king, Zerubbabel would've been the legitimate king of Judah. Potentially, Hos. 1:11 could have come true: "Judah and… Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head [Zerubbabel?]; and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (RSV). And perhaps as head of the house of David, Zerubbabel was intended to be the "David my servant" who would be the one king and one shepherd who would lead Israel back to the land from exile (Ez. 37:22,24). Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called "the people of Israel" (cp. Ezra 2:2).

Zerubbabel like his people simply didn't live up to it; and the prophecies came to be fulfilled finally in Jesus. He could have been Yahweh's signet ring (Hag. 2:23), His specially favoured son- but he baulked at the height of the calling. These things remain a continual challenge to we who likewise have so much Spirit-enabled potential. Zech. 6:12,13 repeats this prophecy that Zerubbabel would be king: "he shall bear royal honor, and shall sit upon his throne and rule. There shall be a priest by his throne". We have here a clear example of a potential prophecy; like Cyrus, Zerubbabel was specifically named as having a future which didn't materialize for him. Because he and others chose for that not to happen. This helps us understand how the detailed command / prophecy of Ez. 40-48 was all likewise potential, as in fact are all of the restoration prophecies. The Davidic line from Jeconiah had been

cursed by Jeremiah, saying that no offspring of "Coniah" would sit on the throne (Jer. 22:30). However, Zerubbabel was of the main Davidic line through Solomon and Jeconiah. This is stressed in the Lord's genealogy in Mt. 1:12,13: "Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud". Again we see how God's prophetic plan and even His curses are open to renegotiation. Zerubbabel the cursed not to be king could have become king. But he failed to live up to the potential, and so God's word of curse still came true.

However we can also argue that Zerubbabel's mysterious disappearance from the narrative is not necessarily his fault. Haggai is appealing to the Jews to rebuild the temple. Had they done so, then the Persian empire would have fallen and the Messianic Kingdom conditions would have been given by God, miraculously. And part of that scene would have been that Zerubbabel would have been the Messianic king. But the temple wasn't built as commanded, therefore the Messianic scenario didn't come about, and so Zerubbabel just disappears from the narrative. And the Persian empire didn't suddenly fall as if in an earthquake, shaken, overthrown and destroyed (:21,22), but continued another 200 years. And yet at the start of the reign of Darius, the Persian kingdom was divided and at risk of collapse. "After the assassination of Pseudo-Smerdis in September 522, there were rebellions in Susiana, Babylonia, Persia, Middle Assyria, Armenia and other provinces of the Persian empire. Darius had to fight [for some time] before authority was established". The prophecies of Persia's destruction show that it could've happened at that time- for Haggai and Zechariah prophesied at the start of the reign of Darius. But because the exiles weren't ready and didn't really want the Kingdom, the Persian empire stabilized and continued. Just as because the exiles didn't really want to rebuild the temple, the Persians decreed that they cease.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: ZECHARIAH

ZECHARIAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don’t fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the

wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 1

Zechariah Chapter 1

Zechariah 1:1 *In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying*- The immediate context of Zechariah is that he and Haggai prophesied to the dejected Jews who had returned from Babylon. Their indolence had led to God reflecting this by making the Persian king decree that they cease building the temple. But Zechariah and Haggai prophesy to the people and they resume. Whilst Haggai very directly criticizes the Jews for having other agendas for the return apart from rebuilding the temple, Zechariah takes the tack that events on earth are reflective of massive Divine activity. The people should not think that the time for rebuilding hasn't come, nor should they imagine their God as somehow dormant, disinterested and distant. There is a huge amount of Angelic work going on and they could be a part of it on earth. In this sense, Zechariah is similar to Ezekiel, who encourages the exiles that there is a vast system of cherubic-angelic activity going on as it were over their heads. But like Haggai, Zechariah insists that the restored kingdom of God in Israel could still come about- if they, despite their failures, worked with Him.

See on :7. The many restoration prophecies had stated that the Jews would return from Babylon after Babylon had fallen and restore God's Kingdom in Judah under a Messianic ruler. Ez. 40-48 contains commands more than predictions of how a temple system would be rebuilt, with a "Prince" who was also a priest as the Messianic leader. They would repent and enter a new covenant which would replace the old covenant. Tragically, most of the Jews preferred the soft life of Babylon, and those who did return

were impenitent and are revealed by Haggai, Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah as seeking their own personal gain from emigration to Judah. And so the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied. There is an element to which they will come literally true in the last days when latter day Babylon falls, a remnant of Judah repent, and the Lord Jesus returns to earth to re-establish God's Kingdom on earth based in Israel. But they are also reinterpreted in many New Testament passages which allude to the restoration prophecies, being reapplied to Christian believers entering the new covenant and coming out of 'Babylon' in a more spiritual sense.

Some exiles did return and began rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. But they were several times interrupted by seemingly invincible opposition from the local peoples and the king of Persia. But through the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the exiles were encouraged to keep on keeping on, and against all odds, a temple was rebuilt (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). So we should not read Haggai and Zechariah as merely droning on against the Jews and not getting very far. It was due to their inspired words that the discouraged, spiritually weak people of God were inspired to rise up and do the work of God's Kingdom, and succeed with every man's hand against them. In this is their abiding value to us. There is however the repeated theme of wasted potential- so much could have happened at that time, even the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in the form of the kingdom of Israel, replete with a Messianic ruler. But it didn't, because of short termist, self-satisficing attitudes, a failure to look beyond the immediate and personal to a far bigger picture.

Zechariah 1:2 *Yahweh was very displeased with your fathers*- That may sound obvious; but as Ez. 18 explains, the mentality amongst the exiles was the fathers had been punished too severely, and they their children were unfairly suffering the results. "Very displeased" translates a Hebrew phrase meaning 'with intense, fiery anger'. And yet even that is described in :15 as God being only "a little angry" compared to the anger He felt against the nations combining to attack Zion (:15 LXX). The comparison is intentional. God is indeed very angry with His people when they turn from Him; but that anger must be seen in context. The fact Judah had so sinned and incurred God's wrath didn't mean that He was therefore insensitive to their abusers; His anger with their enemies was so much greater. And so in a strange way, "the wrath of God is [or reflects] the love of God". Who would a man be more angry with? His wife because she cheated on him repeatedly and is exposed; or a bunch of hoods who rape her after her infidelity has been exposed? The man who truly loved his wife would be more angry with the rapists, and so it was with God.

Zechariah 1:3 *Therefore tell them: Thus says Yahweh of Armies: 'Return to me', says Yahweh of Armies, 'and I will return to you', says Yahweh of Armies*- The triple repetition of "Yahweh of Armies" / "Lord of Hosts" clearly points towards the Angels, through

whom God was practically manifest in Judah's history. 'Turning' back to God has the implication of patching up a marriage: "If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again?... yet return again unto Me, saith the Lord" (Jer. 3:1). This is similar to Jer. 31:32 and Mal. 2:14, where again God, through the Angel, implies He would be justified in divorcing Israel. Mal. 3:7 seems a parallel passage: "Even from the days of your fathers (cp. Zech. 1:2,4,5) ye re gone away from Mine ordinances (given by an Angel), and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Angels).

Judah thought they had returned to God by having literally returned to Judah. But here we see the difference between the external and true spirituality. The literal return was to be part and parcel of the return to God which He so earnestly sought. But they had only externally returned, but not internally. Hence this appeal to "return". So easily we can think we have repented when in fact we simply went through a motion of so doing.

Time and again in the context of the restoration it is emphasized that God would return to His people if they returned to Him (also Mal. 3:7). And they didn't return to Him- most chose not to return to the land, and those who did for the most part did not return to their God in their hearts. The whole basis of Israel's covenant relationship with God was that if they were exiled from the land for their sins, they must repent and *then* God would return to them (Dt. 30:1-10). Yet God graciously states to the exiles: "I am returned unto you" (Zech. 1:16; 8:3). Here was grace indeed. Passages like Ez. 36:24-31 therefore speak as if God's grace to the exiles was effectively a new covenant- which has in essence been extended to us. Having stated the conditionality of His 'returning' to His people, and recognizing they hadn't fulfilled their part of the conditions- God all the same returns to them, such was and is His almost desperate desire for relationship with His beloved people. This is a lesson for us in our relationships with others- to continue our acceptance and 'return' to them, even if they don't fulfill their part of the deal. For this, day by day, is how our God deals not only with us but with His weak and wayward people as a whole.

The implication of Hag. 2:17 is that they had not totally turned to Yahweh. They had responded to Haggai's call to resume work in Hag. 1:12,13 and God had been as it were much enthused by it. But after a month's work they needed more appeal. They still hadn't turned completely and permanently to Him, with a 'repentance not to be repented of' as Paul would say. Zechariah's prophecy came two months after Haggai (Zech. 1:1). And he appeals again for the people to turn to God (Zech. 1:3). I discuss on Zech. 8:19 the insincere penitence of the Jews, fasting from a sense of nationalism and ritual rather than from repentance. And even after Zechariah's time, the people still didn't really return to Yahweh in repentance, despite their focus on legalism and xenophobic hatred of Gentiles: "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’" (Mal. 3:7). Clearly their turning to Him had

been only temporary. But still God was enthusiastic over their even very temporal response. Despite surely foreknowing how they would very quickly flag. He so wanted the Kingdom to be restored and His people to live in all joy and peace of relationship with Him. And that desire is unabated to this day, despite having been frustrated by His people so often, so deeply and for so long.

Zechariah 1:4 *Don't you be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying: Thus says Yahweh of Armies, 'Return now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings'* - This appeal to repent in the eighth month follows on the appeal to repent made in the seventh month (Hag. 2:1). But as noted on Hag. 2:18-20, by the ninth month it was apparent that the apparent response to Zechariah's appeal in :6 was only nominal. The "fathers" in view may have been the generation before them in exile in Babylon, who had refused to repent. Or they could be those of previous generations who had refused the multiple appeals for repentance (2 Chron. 36:15). The appeal was to repent of ways and doings- individual acts of sin as well as a general direction of life and thought.

But they did not hear, nor listen to me, says Yahweh- There seems no semantic difference between the terms "hear... listen" (also in Zech. 7:11). Just as returning to God was more than physically returning to the land, so hearing God was and is far more than literally hearing or reading His word.

Zechariah 1:5 *Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?*- The reference may be to the false prophets, in the spirit of Jer. 37:19: "Where now are your prophets who prophesied to you saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land?". They would contrast with the prophets who were "My servants" (:6). Their fathers died, many of them in the Babylonian invasion. The words of judgment had come true upon them; and now Zechariah's generation were tempted to think that such judgment could not overtake the returned exiles. But they and the false prophets who appeared at the return from exile were just as liable to judgment as the generation who went into exile. We have a human tendency to assume that 'this shall not happen to *me*'. But it shall, unless we repent.

Zechariah 1:6 *But My words and My decrees, which I commanded My servants the prophets, didn't they influence your fathers? Then they repented and said, 'Just as Yahweh of Armies determined to do to us, according to our ways, and according to our practices, so He has done with us'*- We can read this as saying that the prophetic words to their fathers were responded to in repentance. But this would contradict the argument of :5; and in any case, it was historically not the case. The opposite was true. "Influence" is also "overtake (AVmg.), as if the threatened judgments did indeed come upon their fathers. For all their token repentances, they did not really repent, and so the Babylonian judgment had come. So I suggest the rhetorical question is asked as to

whether their fathers really repented; with the expected negative answer, as to the questions in :5.

The remained of the verse would then be a statement about the response of the people to Zechariah's words. "They repented", but they go on to state what was merely axiomatic, that God had done to them what He had planned to do. This again hints at a lack of total repentance. This was all in the eighth month (:1). But as noted on Hag. 2:18-20, by the ninth month it was apparent that the apparent response to Zechariah's appeal in :6 was only nominal.

However, given the fact their fathers didn't repent, we can also consider the NET translation: "But have my words and statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, not outlived your fathers? Then they paid attention and confessed, ‘The LORD of Heaven’s Armies has indeed done what he said he would do to us, because of our sinful ways’”. This implies the audience of Zechariah repented; "then they… confessed" would be the comment of the inspired narrator concerning Zechariah's audience. Although this would then be just one of many repentances, each of which was clearly just temporary- repentances that were repented of, as Paul would say.

Zechariah 1:7 *On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying*- As noted on :6, the repentance of the exiles was at best tokenistic. But God's response was to assure them of the huge potential power available to them, and His purpose to all the same bring about the restoration of His Kingdom. It was over to them as to whether they wanted to be a part of that, both then and eternally. "Shebat" is Chaldee, reflecting how the Jews had very quickly assimilated with Babylonian language and ways in their exile. But the Hebrew equivalent means "shoot", the month of the shoot. And the shoot was intended to be Zerubbabel, the potential Messiah, whose name meant 'shoot of God'. Allusion may also be intended to how the mountains of Israel were to "shoot forth" (Ez. 36:8) when the exiles returned; rather than suffering the drought of God's displeasure which existed now the exiles had actually returned, as we see reflected in Haggai who was contemporary with Zechariah. The same allusion to the potentials possible is found in the meanings of the names Berechiah ['knee of Yah', i.e. His blessing] and Iddo ['timely']. The time for Yahweh's blessing had come, if Judah responded to the message of 'Zechariah', 'Yah has remembered'. He had not forgotten His plan to restore His Kingdom in Judah with a Messianic ruler, as might have appeared through the years of exile. He was now 'remembering' it, but Judah needed to do their part in bringing about what was potentially possible.

Zechariah 1:8 *I had a vision in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in a ravine*- The man is defined in :10,11 as an Angel. The red, speckled and white horses behind him (1:8; Zech. 6:2-7) would therefore also appear to be ridden by Angels- indeed they are called "the four spirits (Angels; Ps. 104:4) of the Heavens" in Zech. 6:5 (see note there). The visions in this chapter serve the same function as the cherubim visions of Ezekiel- to assure the returning exiles that there had been and still was a huge system of careful, attentive Divine operation going on in the land and people of Judah, orchestrated by God's Spirit through the Angels.

Myrtle trees were associated with the feast of booths, at the time of harvest. The harvest that year had been very bad, as Haggai explains. The vision was received in the 11th month, literally 'shoot month', when harvest should have been forthcoming (:7).

The valley could refer to the Euphrates valley where Babylon and other cities of the exiles was situated. On this reading, we would interpret the situation as one of peace, with the lesson that the various marauding enemies of Judah had been Angelically controlled, and were now at rest, so that the exiles could rebuild the Kingdom.

"Myrtle trees" is "the [two] mountains" in the LXX, connecting with the later prophesy of Zech. 6:1, where again horses and chariots appear from between two mountains. This is all the language of theophany and the cherubim of Ezekiel's visions, which speak of God's potential activity at the time of the captivity and restoration. Zechariah sees the same Angel chariots emerging from between two bronze mountains (Zech. 1:7-11 LXX, AV "myrtle trees"; Zech. 6:1), perhaps designed to recall the bronze pillars of the temple (1 Kings 7:15-22). The rebuilt temple was intended to be the point from which the Angel chariots would go forth; but that didn't happen at the very limited restoration from Babylon, and so the first four seals of Rev. 6 are full of allusion to this Zechariah vision- it was not left unfulfilled because of Israel's indolence, but rather was reapplied to the latter day events of which Revelation speaks.

And behind him there were red, brown, and white horses- Zechariah 1 opens the prophecy with a vision of three kinds of horses- red, white and speckled. These represented the powers which had subdued the land of Judah and left it in the desolate state it was at the time of Zechariah. It's tempting to interpret them as Assyria, Babylon and Medo-Persia; or perhaps Babylon, Media and Persia. Or it could refer to the surrounding nations- Straight away, we read of *four* horns, representing the powers who had desolated God's people; and how they would be destroyed by the carpenters, surely looking forward to the carpenter Messiah. And the vision of Zech. 6 has *four* and not *three* kinds of horses- red, black, white and speckled. This may be Zechariah's way of saying that because of Israel's inability to fulfil the required spiritual preconditions, the longer version of the prophetic program was going to come into play. Although as always, there is the distinct message of hope, that finally God's triumphant purpose

with Israel shall come to realization. However we should note that the LXX here has four groups of horses: "behind him were red horses, and grey, and piebald, and white".

The first four seals and the four coloured horsemen of Rev. 6, are based upon the horsemen of judgment in Zechariah 1, which vision is repeated in Zechariah 6 but with the difference that the four horsemen go out to judge the nations who have performed these judgments upon Israel, e.g. “the north country”. The four horsemen of Rev. 6 inflict punishments and judgments which are full of Old Testament allusions to prophecies concerning how God would judge His people, and Zech. 1 and Zech. 6 are obvious source passages. The focus of the four horsemen is upon God’s people in their land, and especially the city of Jerusalem, in the last days; and this is the focus of Revelation also.

Zechariah 1:9 *Then I asked, ‘My lord, what are these?’. The angel who talked with me said to me, I will show you what these are*- An Angel is called *adon*, demonstrating that *adon* or "Lord" doesn't mean 'God Himself'. The Lord Jesus is indeed Lord, but is not God Himself; for the term is used about others who were not God, such as this Angel here. If Zechariah had not wanted to understand, would the explanation have been given? It is a desire to understand God's word which is so critical, rather than intellectual or exegetical prowess and background knowledge of languages and history.

Zechariah 1:10 *The man who stood among the myrtle trees answered*- LXX: "The man that stood between the mountains", i.e. those of Zech. 6:1; see on :8. The Angel who rides the red horse followed by others was the one speaking with Zechariah.

They are the ones Yahweh has sent to go back and forth through the earth- The horses represented the Angels who had controlled the various nations who had devastated the *eretz* promised to Abraham. It is Yahweh's "eyes" who go back and forth in that earth (Zech. 4:10); it is through them that He 'sees' what happens there (Gen. 18:21; 2 Chron. 16:9; Dan. 4:17). Similar language is used by the Satan-angel in the book of Job; see on Job 1:7; Dt. 11:12. Job was a real enough story, but I suggest it was re-written under inspiration in the exilic period, as encouragement that the adversaries of God's suffering people [Job] were under Angelic control. And despite personal failure and lack of help from the accepted religious leadership [the friends], Job as the people of God would be fully restored in the end. The various waves of invaders and desolators had been used to bring the *eretz* to a position of peace, so that Judah could rebuild God's temple and Kingdom in Israel (:11).

Zechariah 1:11 *They reported to the angel of Yahweh who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked back and forth through the earth, and behold, all the earth is at rest and in peace*- Myrtle trees have been seen as a symbol of peace. The idea was

that there was peace in the Persian empire and in Judah at this time. As noted on :10, the various waves of invaders and desolators (represented by the horses of various colours and significance) had been used to bring the *eretz* to a position of peace, so that Judah could rebuild God's temple and Kingdom in Israel.

The horses of Zechariah 1 are those nations who have trampled up and down the earth / land of Israel, subduing it until it is quiet. The chariots / horses of Zechariah 6 are the Angel cherubim representatives of those nations, who are sent out against them in judgment. Such judgment is portended in Zech. 1 also, where straight after the vision of the horses we read of the four horns who have abused Israel being cut off by the carpenter Messiah of Israel. There is an Angel stationed with the horses in the valley from which they emerge, as if to show that the judgments upon the land were Angelically controlled; Israel was not at the hands of chance human evil, indeed the horses report back to the Angel. This sets the scene for the horses / chariots of chapter 6 going out in judgment against those nations. The land lying still and at rest is explained further in Zech. 1:11,12- it was because the cities of Judah were lying in ruins after the horse powers had trampled over them. This all looks forward to how Jerusalem shall be trodden down in the last days, after the pattern of how the Babylonians trod it down (Is. 5:5; 28:18; 63:18; Lk. 21:24)- which is when this prophecy will have its final fulfilment. We can look, therefore, for the three or four entities which trod down the land and people of Israel to have their latter day equivalent, and a like judgment from Heaven. And this is what Revelation 6 is explaining in more detail- in a latter day context. The immediate message in Zechariah's time was therefore that a future treading down of the land and Jerusalem was to happen, but the silver lining of that cloud was that this would finally lead to the eternal restoration of Israel. This is exactly the same style as in Ezekiel 38; we noted in studying the context of that prophecy that it was given at the time when news of Jerusalem's fall had come to the rebellious captives in Babylon amongst whom Ezekiel was sitting. They were being told that another even worse desolation was to happen, patterned after the events they were now hearing of, and yet from this would come the eternal restoration of Israel in God's Kingdom on earth. But not immediately.

Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel "found grace in the wilderness" before, and they would do again, "When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest" (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would "cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". This is why Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11). Jer. 31:2 had prophesied of the returning Jews: "The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him *to rest*"- just as Zech. 1:11 describes the land being "at rest" when

they returned to rebuild Zion. My point is that Yahweh didn't give up with His people because many chose to remain in Babylon, and those who did make the journey didn't believe His promises of protection very strongly. He zealously worked with whatever they could present Him with. And the conditions for Judah to enter the new covenant of Jer. 31 had been prepared by the work of the Angels; the land was now at rest and in peace. But the exiles sadly wasted all this Divine potential, so that the offer of a new covenant was recalculated and offered to the Gentiles through the work of the Lord Jesus. The prophecy will come true in the last days, when after the desolation of the *eretz* by Angelically permitted and controlled invaders [as explained in Revelation], the *eretz* will again be cleansed, at peace and the Kingdom can be eternally established upon it.

The land was "at rest and in peace" in the sense that it was ready for the Kingdom of Israel to be restored; LXX "is inhabited". The people of God were now inhabiting the entire area promised to Abraham, those still in exile by the Euphrates and those now returned to Palestine. The land was in fact in disarray at the start of Darius' reign (see on :13), but Zechariah gives the Divine perspective- it was therefore just ready for the establishment of the Kingdom. The four horsemen would then speak of the four Angels associated with the cherubim, who had now returned to Zion as Ezekiel had predicted. They proceeded from the myrtle trees in the ravine [possibly a reference to the deep depression of the Kidron Valley which separates the rocky plateau of Jerusalem from the ridge of Mount Olivet]. The colours of the horses may simply represent the different parts of the Persian empire which then covered the land promised to Abraham. The fiery sorrel (representing the sun's blaze) corresponds to the south, black to the north, white to the east, and gray to the west (the gray of the evening). The colours need not faze us; nor the appearance of four horses of similar but not identical colours in Rev. 6 [the colours depend on which Greek text we follow]. The similarities are simply that as four angels prepared a situation on earth in the time of the restoration, they will prepare another situation on earth in the last days. We note how Zech. 2:6 describes the Jews as having been "spread abroad as the four winds of the sky". They had now prepared the earth / *eretz* and it was now ready- leading to the question as to why was there any further delay in re-establishing the Kingdom. The myrtle is not a native of Palestine but of Persia; but it came to Palestine and thrived when the exiles returned. The tree came to represent the returnees from Persia, who could have thrived in Judah. The Angel had returned there, and from there had orchestrated the Angelic preparation of the entire Persian empire, or at least the land promised to Abraham.

Zechariah 1:12 *Then the angel of Yahweh replied, O Yahweh of Armies, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah*- We have an example here of how Angels pray for more knowledge. They "earnestly desire to look into" spiritual things

and seek for signs of the times as much as we do. If we are to made like Angels, this opens up a window into what the nature of eternity will be like. In this particular case the Angel was representing those of God's people such as Ezra and Daniel who were asking God "how long?". And in response to that, the Angel seeks to persuade other Angels ["Yahweh of hosts"] to act. See on Dan. 8:15. The way the Angel prays to the "Lord of Hosts" is interesting, as this title refers to His Angelic hosts. Do we have here one Angel asking another Angel or group of Angels? Angels have the same problems grappling with time periods as we do!

Against which You have had indignation those seventy years?- The way prophetic words can be rescheduled in fulfilment is demonstrated by the elastic interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years exile. They came to fulfilment at the time of Daniel's prayer in Dan. 9:2; but also at the fall of Babylon and edict of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1); and yet also in the second year of Darius (Zech. 1:1,12). This latter period would have been timed from the actual destruction of the temple (2 Kings 25:2,8,9); whereas the captivity began before that. And the predicted restoration didn't happen as prophesied. But it will ultimately happen- at the Lord's return. Another suggestion is that the seventy years have been rescheduled as seventy jubilees, meaning that the Lord returns to establish the Kingdom at the 70th jubilee. But this is problematic, because Judah has not lain waste for 70 jubilees, and at this time is inhabited by Jews and prosperous.

"Indignation" translates a strong word, meaning to foam at the mouth. See on :2. God's anger with Israel was indeed intense. But the same word is used in Num. 23:8: "How shall I defy, whom [i.e. Israel] Yahweh has not defied?". Israel in covenant were counted righteous by grace, and so the wrath of God was not upon them. But they had broken that covenant, and so that wrath was indeed upon them. Mic. 6:10 makes the point that it was the apparently minor issues such as having dishonest weights which provoked this intense wrath (s.w.). This is how seriously God views what we might pass off as surface level sins.

Zechariah 1:13 *Yahweh answered the angel who talked with me with kind and comforting words*- The enquiry of the Angel was reflective of the "How long?" enquiry of the faithful remnant. In response to them, the consolation of Zion would be forthcoming from God. There is a highly significant connection here with Is. 40, the start of Isaiah's prophecies concerning the restoration, repeated in Is. 57:8 [s.w.]. Nehemiah means 'Comfort of Yah'; 'Nehemiah ye, Nehemiah ye My people'. The Angel spoke comfort to Jerusalem through the words and work of Nehemiah. The 'comforter' prophecy was refused by the returned exiles, and was reapplied to John the Baptist heralding the coming of the Lord Jesus; and now the promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, reflects a reapplication of this comfort to those who now flee Babylon and commit themselves to the things of the Kingdom.

The Angel's question is likely a representation of the question in the hearts of God's people. The answer is clear from :3 and from the prophecy of Haggai. The people had not turned / returned / repented, and so God had not turned their captivity and restored the Kingdom. God's answer, however, is full of compassion and enthusiasm for His people just because, it seems, they had even asked the question. He was so eager for any sign of their interest in Him and His work. The people were unclean, according to Haggai 2. And they weren't particularly penitent; lasting repentance didn't happen. And yet the vision of Zech. 3:9 describes the unclean and "filthy" High Priest Joshua being cleansed personally: "I have caused your iniquity / guilt to pass from you". He is representative of the people and the whole land: "I will remove the guilt [s.w. "iniquity" in :4] of this land in a single day". The idea was that Joshua-Jesus would carry the sins of the unclean people, and his cleansing would mean the guilt of the people was taken away. This explains why there is no mention of any specific sins of Joshua or why he personally needed cleansing; I suggest he was so filthy and unclean because he was representative of the people's uncleanness. But there is no record of any such ceremony as envisioned in Zech. 3 actually happening; and Zerubbabel and Joshua fade from the scene. Perhaps Joshua was unwilling to go through with it, arguing that he was himself clean. But the essence of the prophecy was fulfilled in another Joshua-Jesus. But we marvel at how God tried so hard to overcome every obstacle to restoring the Kingdom there and then- even the lack of repentance in the people.

I noted on Hag. 2:23 that Haggai and Zechariah prophesied at a time of instability in the Persian empire, and Haggai 2 had made it clear that there was the real possibility that the Persian empire could fall and God's Kingdom be re-established under Zerubbabel. I noted on :11 that from Heaven's viewpoint, the land was ready and set for the re-establishment. It was the lethargy of the Jews that meant this didn't happen. The Persian empire didn't suddenly fall as if in an earthquake, shaken, overthrown and destroyed (Hag. 2:21,22), but continued another 200 years. And yet at the start of the reign of Darius, the Persian kingdom was divided and at risk of collapse. "After the assassination of Pseudo-Smerdis in September 522, there were rebellions in Susiana, Babylonia, Persia, Middle Assyria, Armenia and other provinces of the Persian empire. Darius had to fight [for some time] before authority was established". The prophecies of Persia's destruction show that it could've happened at that time- for Haggai and Zechariah prophesied at the start of the reign of Darius. Zechariah will go on to prophecy and describe how the great mountain of Babylon / Persia will be levelled, the coronation of Zerubbabel and the cleansing of Joshua the High Priest; and the returning of all the uncleanness amongst the exiles back to Babylon (Zech. 5). But because the exiles weren't ready and didn't really want the Kingdom, the Persian empire stabilized and continued. Just as because the exiles didn't really want to rebuild the temple, the Persians decreed that they cease.

Zechariah 1:14 *So the angel who talked with me said to me, Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says Yahweh of Armies: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy-* "Jealous" being the same Hebrew word translated "zealous", we see the tremendous zeal of God through the Angels for the restoration. Hence the ability of Ezra and Zerubbabel to achieve so much, seeing that they worked with the Angel, the eye of their God upon them for good whilst they wished to work with Him (Ezra 5:5). The pathetic, half hearted response of the Jews due to their obsession with materialism as decried by Haggai, Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah must have been so 'frustrating' for the Angels, who were willing to provide so much power and success for those who would whole-heartedly commit themselves to the work. How many similarities with the new Israel? God's enthusiasm to work with His people was to be 'proclaimed' by Zechariah, literally 'cried out'. God *so* wishes to work with us in the Kingdom work, and will overcome all obstacles.

Zechariah 1:15 *I am very angry with the nations that are at ease-*

The reason for the 'delay' in fulfilling the restoration prophecies is given clearly in Haggai, who had prophesied only months before Zechariah. The reason was that the Jews weren't interested in the restoration, were "unclean", focused on their own houses rather than God's etc. But here God says His anger is not with them but with the Gentiles. This is a God truly "in love" with His people, seeing them so positively.

LXX "And I am very angry with the heathen that combine to attack her: forasmuch as I indeed was a little angry, but they combined to attack her for evil". This idea of combined attack recalls the historical banding together of the Jews' enemies against the temple project as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. The historical record doesn't reflect the intense anger of God against the likes of Sanballat. But here we see the depth of His feelings against any who work against the work of building His Kingdom and house. May we not be amongst that group, through our exclusive policies and church politics. These prophecies all have their final fulfilment in the last days, seeing Judah at Zechariah's time failed to respond in order to enable their fulfilment. The combining together of the surrounding nations against Judah at a time when they are apparently at peace (:11) is the scenario of Ez. 38, and perhaps this was the intended primary fulfilment of Ez. 38:11.

For I was but a little displeased, but they added to the calamity- God's huge displeasure with Judah was indeed fierce, but it was only a fraction of His anger against her abusers. See on :2; Zech. 8:2. God was furiously angry with Judah, as Lamentations and so many other prophecies make clear. But He says here that His anger was not that great and He is more furious with the nations He sent to punish Judah. This is no contradiction, apart from the contradiction of love and compassion.

Zechariah 1:16 *Therefore thus says Yahweh: I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it, says Yahweh of Armies-*

Haggai's answer to 'Why the delay?' was that Judah didn't really want the restored Kingdom of God. Zechariah got the answer that in fact God was eager to restore the Kingdom. All Judah had to do was be willing for Him to do so.

"I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: My house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of Hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem". As the Jews literally returned to Jerusalem, the Angel too physically returned to "My house"- where He used to live. To some limited degree the Angel must have literally been in the temple- as Ez. 40 prophesied would happen. The Angel cherubim which departed from Zion in Ez. 1,10 would return. However, in the same way as the temple described by Ezekiel was not built on the scale intended by the Angels because of Israel's apathy, so maybe the Angelic presence too was greatly diminished to what it could have been. The presence of the temple Angel in Lk. 1 indicates that He was there to some degree.

God had stipulated that He would return if Judah returned to Him (:3). But He took the initiative and returned to them; such is His grace and earnest desire to rebuild relationship with His sinful people. And yet a far greater level of Divine 'return' was promised if they indeed repented (see on Zech. 2:10). This is to be our pattern in building relationships with others; forgiving and accepting the impenitent in the hope they will be led by God's goodness to repentance.

And a builders' line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem'- Isaiah 54:2 bids the returning exiles to "enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords!". Yet Isaiah so often uses the idea of 'stretching out' the Heavens with reference to His creation of His new Kingdom (Isaiah 40:22; Is. 42:5; 44:24; 45:15; 51:13; 65:17,18). Zechariah 1:6 cp. 12:1 show that to stretch out Jerusalem is parallel with stretching out the 'heavens'. The 'singing' of the heavens refers to Judah's intended joy at the restoration (Isaiah 49:13 cp. 48:20). Israel were being told to peg out their tent as wide and far as they could; because this would be the extent of their Kingdom. The Kingdom would be as 'large' for them as they had vision for in this life. And sadly they gave up on the rebuilding plans to focus upon their own houses, as Haggai laments.

The Lord of Hosts stretched the line upon Jerusalem by the Angel surveying and measuring Jerusalem as described in Ez. 40-48. But the prophecy was reapplied in Rev. 11 to mean that the Angels would measure Jerusalem unto destruction in the last days, because they failed to fulfil these prophecies.

The exact dimensions of the temple given in Ezekiel recall Zech. 1:16 and 2:11, where

the Angel accurately measures Jerusalem in preparation for the rebuilding of the temple. In the same way as it is possible to argue that Christ's second coming in AD70 was described in detail but was postponed to the last days because of Israel's lack of spiritual response, it may be that Ezekiel's visions of the temple were what should have been achieved during the restoration, but were re-interpreted and reapplied in later fulfillment.

This prophecy of Jerusalem being measured began to be fulfilled by the Angel in Zech. 2:1, but God's love and enthusiasm for the restoration of the Kingdom bursts out and He asks that Angel to not measure Jerusalem but let her rebuilt without measure. The Angel / man with the measuring line is that of Ez. 40:3. The scenario of Ezekiel could have been fulfilled, but then in Zech. 2 it seems God decided not to go that way and achieve the restoration without this measuring and strict adherence to dimensions. Because the foundations they had laid were far smaller than what had been commanded.

It could also be argued that the use of a plumb line implied that things were wrong with the rebuilt temple. The plumb line was suspended over the city; it was not used as a tape measure, but to reveal what was not straight or right. The city and temple had not been built according to the size commanded in Ez. 40-48, and Haggai 2 says they were still defiled by dead bodies and the people were "unclean", directly contrary to the requirements of Ez. 40-48. But God still wanted to push ahead with the restoration of the Kingdom, and the use of the plumb line might suggest God was willing to straighten out and correct things in His measurement and judgment of that temple.

Zechariah 1:17 *Proclaim further, saying, 'Thus says Yahweh of Armies: My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and Yahweh will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem'*-As noted on 13: , this was the same "comfort to Zion" of Isaiah 40:1. But Israel would not follow God back to Jerusalem, and those who did generally were consumed with their own petty self interest. And so the prophecies and promises of "comfort to Zion" were re-interpreted and fulfilled in a spiritual sense in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. God had gone ahead of them- He had returned to Zion already, and bid Israel follow Him there.

Haggai and Malachi lament the effects of the famine in Judah which was affecting the exiles. The cities of Judah were not overflowing with prosperity; but the tragedy was that they could have done. The choosing of Jerusalem is always associated with God's respect of the covenant with David (1 Kings 11:13,32,36; 14:21; 2 Kings 21:7; 23:27 and often). Zerubbabel was in the direct line of David and could have been established as a Messianic king in the restored Kingdom of God; but it seems this didn't work out, and he returned to Babylon.

Zechariah 1:18 *I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, four horns*- Daniel 2,7

envisaged the passage of four kings / kingdoms until a brief confused period leading to the open establishment of God's Kingdom or mountain in *eretz* Israel. The sequence of four could have had its conclusion at the time of the restoration. The little horn of Daniel 7 grows out of the fourth kingdom, represented by the fourth beast. But in Daniel 8, a very similar horn grows out of Greece, the third kingdom. We can therefore conclude that the antichrist figure of Daniel 8 would have appeared as an outgrowth of the Greek kingdom, and been destroyed by Messiah's coming. But this didn't happen, and Antiochus Epiphanes became but an incipient fulfilment of the antichrist of the last days. Zechariah, like Daniel, contains many conditional prophecies- "And this shall come to pass, *if* you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God" (Zech. 6:15). Zech. 9:13 appears to be another such conditional prophecy, similar in reference to that of Daniel 8 about the possibility of Messiah's coming at the time of the Greek empire. God says He will place Ephraim within the bow of Judah, to be fired at her enemies; and He would "raise up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece" (Zech. 9:13), leading to the final salvation of God's people, the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom, and her Messianic king coming unto her (Zech. 9:9). But this didn't come true; the resistance of the Maccabees was not based on true spirituality, and the Romans took over control of the land from the Greeks. No Messianic Kingdom was established. This would explain the purposeful ambiguity of interpretation which there is in the image of Daniel 2; a good case can be made for the sequence Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece, and yet also for the sequence Babylon-Medo Persia- Greece-Rome. Daniel 8 predicts the breakup of the Greek empire after Alexander's death into four horns, out of which a little horn arises (Dan. 8:8). The only other prophetic reference to four horns is again here in Zechariah, when we read of how the four horns who had scattered God's people were to be cut off by the carpenters (Zech. 1:18,19). The carpenters surely look forward to the carpenter Messiah. He could have appeared and cut off those four horns; but He did not, and so another prophetic sequence was allowed, in which another [fourth] beast arose, this time with ten horns, not just four. And in Revelation we find this developed further, in that seven heads also appear on the beast, and a whore rides the best, sitting upon [another?] seven hills / kingdoms. The number and ferocity of the enemies of God's people seems to increase over time. If Israel had repented earlier, then all this would have been unnecessary. The three horses of Zechariah 1 thus become four horses in Zechariah 6. The fact the four cherubim chariots are sent out in judgment of those same coloured horses speaks of how all earthly entities have their representative Angels in Heaven. See on Zech. 1:12.

The number four may simply refer to every point of the compass. The four horns or powers are those who had already scattered Judah (:19), so they could refer to Assyria, Egypt, Babylon and Medo-Persia. But I suggest the idea is simply of all Judah's enemies on every side, who had scattered Judah to the "four winds". In this case from the North

were the Assyrians and Babylonians; from the East, the Moabites and Ammonites; from the South were the Egyptians; and from the West were the Philistines.

Zechariah 1:19 *I asked the angel who talked with me, What are these? He answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah*- "Four horns... which have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem". The number four is associated with the four cherubim Angels- the four types of Angel-controlled punishment often presented in the prophets. The horns were the powers which scattered Judah, but they refer also to the Angels. The simple takeaway is that all evil in the lives of God's people is under His strict control. Thus the four horns here would equate with the four living creatures of the cherubim and also of Daniel, and therefore the four nations of Dan. 2. Dan. 8:8 provides an example of these links: "When he was strong, the great horn was broken (see the link between horns and the cherubim- Angels in Hab. 3:3-5; the Angel behind Alexander); and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of Heaven". This would therefore describe the division of Alexander's Kingdom between four Angels- the "notable ones" or "winds", each of whom controlled one of Alexander's succeeding generals. His Kingdom was "divided toward the four winds of Heaven" (Dan. 11:4)- the Kingdom was not literally scattered throughout the world, but divided to four Angel-winds.

Israel, and Jerusalem- It was God's purpose to regather not only Judah but also the ten tribe kingdom of Israel. But very few of the ten tribes wished to return; so again, the fulfilment of the Kingdom prophecies and acceptance of the new covenant was precluded by God's people not wanting to respond to it, preferring rather to cling on to the shell of their religion rather than experiencing it for real for themselves.

Zechariah 1:20 *Yahweh showed me four carpenters*- The horns who dominated the land were Angelically controlled, but so was their destruction. But the LXX here and in :21 reads differently: "And the Lord shewed me four artificers. And I said, What are these coming to do? And he said, These are the horns that scattered Judah, and they broke Israel in pieces, and none of them lifted up his head: and these are come forth to sharpen them for their hands, even the four horns, the nations that lifted up the horn against the land of the Lord to scatter it". The idea could be that the preparation of Judah's enemies had been in Angelic hands, and so their restoration likewise was.

The impression is that four powers / workmen would destroy the powers / horns. The number "four" may refer to the "four living creatures" of the Angel-cherubim with their four faces and four sides (Ez. 1:5,6,8). But they were perhaps controlling powers on earth. They are the four chariots mentioned in Zech. 6:1-3, 6,7. We could posit a continuous historical fulfilment: Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar, was the carpenter / workman who overturned the empire / horn of the Assyrians. The second was Cyrus, who destroyed the Babylonian empire / horn. The third would then be

Alexander the Great, who destroyed the empire / horn of the Persians. And then Ptolemy, who destroyed Egypt, Israel's historical oppressor.

Zechariah 1:21 *Then I asked, What are these coming to do?*- Zechariah assumed that this was a prophecy of future desolation of the land, but was told that the horns were the powers which had already scattered Judah.

He said, These are the horns which scattered Judah, so that no man lifted up his head- Judah was "scattered", throughout the territories controlled by Babylon and later Persia. A man who cannot lift up his head is a man in penitence (Lk. 18:13). The Divine plan was that the exile would elicit repentance amongst the Jews; but this didn't happen. Only when it occurs in the last days will the Kingdom be re-established.

But these have come to saw them off, to cast down the horns of the nations, which lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it- See on :20. The sawing off of animal horns was done to make the beast powerless and no longer dangerous. No longer would Judah need to fear the beasts of the nations. The "horns" are therefore assumed to be on beasts; we therefore have here a repetition of the four beasts of Daniel 7. And the point is that there were Angels appointed to do this for each of the horns; and those same Angels were powerful to restore Judah.

The four carpenter Angels "frayed" the horn Angels which had scattered Israel. The Hebrew for 'fray' means to shake, and this is the equivalent of Haggai's prophecy that Yahweh would shake all nations and establish Zerubbabel as Messianic king. But it by extension also means 'to hasten (with anxiety), to frighten'. Thus one group of Angels hastens the fulfilment of other Angels' work; hence in :12 an Angel prayed to the Lord of Hosts (Angels) encouraging them to end their indignation because the 70 years were ended. Similarly the Comforter Angel says that Jerusalem has "received of the Lord's hand (Angel) double (i. e. too much?) for all her sins" (Is. 40:2), and that her warfare ('appointed time') has ended, or expired. The phrase "appointed time" is the same word translated "host", used concerning the Angels, thus indicating that the period of the captivity was under Angelic control. Thus Dan. 10:1 also points out that "the time appointed was long"- implying too long, seeing that "the thing was true"?. This helps us to explain Angels being in some ways in opposition to each other in Daniel, e. g. the Angel prince of Persia withstanding another Angel in His action because of the need to execute a certain time period first. Again, the simple takeaway comfort was and is that all experience of evil is under careful Divine control, mediated at that time through Angels; and it is used to propel forward God's saving purpose.

However, we can understand the word translated "saw... off" as also meaning to prepare or even 'create'. Those horns / enemies of Israel were all prepared by God's Angels, and those same Angels were powerfully at work now to restore Judah.

However, any reference to "four horns" would have immediately suggested the four horns of the altar. The first thing the exiles had done was rebuild the altar, or at least, reinstate it. The cutting off of the horns would have spoken of the destruction of the altar. Yet the cutting off of the horns is interpreted as the destruction of the powers that had scattered Israel. We must recall Haggai's harsh criticism of the exiles and their unclean ways relating to the altar just a few months previously. Quite possibly Zechariah is giving yet another possible scenario: the altar would be destroyed at the same time as the nations were cut off, as just prophesied in Haggai 2. The restored Kingdom of God would then be established, as God sought to as it were force through His Kingdom purpose with Israel.

I suggest the immediate, potential reference was to how Zechariah's audience would have feared the major Gentile opposition to any establishment of Israel as an independent nation with its own king. They were being reminded that all their historical aggressors were to be cut off by Divine power. The four Angels referenced earlier in the chapter had prepared the land and the then weak state of the Persian empire, and any opposition from Persia / Babylon would be cut off. Likewise Zech. 2 goes on to address the fear that Jerusalem had no walls and could not withstand a siege; Yahweh Himself would be present amongst them. The allusion is to de-horning bulls or strong beasts; leaving aside the precise interpretation of the horns / beasts, the simple message is that all the beasts surrounding Israel [from the four points of the compass] had been de-horned by the Angel-cherubim. We recall Zechariah's audience were fearful of opposition from the surrounding nations. But they had been de-horned.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 2

Zechariah Chapter 2

Zechariah 2:1 *I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand*- To measure is a double symbol, of measuring unto destruction (as in Rev. 11), and also measuring to build up. According to the response of God's people, so His purpose with Jerusalem would be of either destruction or redemption. The "man with a measuring line" is the Angel of Zech. 1:16; cp. Ez. 40:3; 47:3; Rev. 21:15-17.

If the measuring is taken as judgment, as in Rev. 11:1; Mt. 7:12; 1 Cor. 4:21, then we have an Angel beginning to prepare judgements on Jerusalem, but in :3 being interrupted by another Angel who describes God's plan to restore Jerusalem, and quickly correcting the impression made on Zechariah by the first Angel. There, the angel is told to run back and tell Zechariah that "Jerusalem shall yet be inhabited". We see here the conflict between God's judgment and His grace, reflected in the situation amongst the Angels in the court of Heaven; and His mercy rejoices against judgment.

Ezekiel's temple prophecies begin with a man / Angel with a measuring reed, measuring Jerusalem and the temple. This recurs here, where the Angel again measures the temple and then promises that Yahweh will be a protecting wall of fire

around the city, meaning that the Jews should fearlessly return from Babylon (2:5-10). There follows a description of God's Kingdom on earth, with God Himself dwelling in Zion and all nations converting to Him. Yet the Jews returned with fear from Babylon- or some of them did. And they fussed so much about building a wall to protect them, in studied disregard of God's promise here. God helped them build the wall- He was still so keen to work with them. And He later encouraged them that "I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth [s.w. used about Judah's return from captivity, Ezra 2:1; 6:21]: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more" (Zech. 9:7,8).

We could take Zech. 2:1-5 as being a vision of the rebuke of a man with a measuring line going forth to measure Jerusalem's length, breadth and height, as if he were going to build a wall. The Angel challenges him: "Where are you going?". And then the man planning to build the wall is basically told not to: "Run, speak to this young man, saying, 'Jerusalem will be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I', says Yahweh, 'will be to her a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory in the midst of her". In this case, Nehemiah's rebuilding of the wall was in fact his own obsession and not actually what God wanted at that time. As I have argued throughout Nehemiah 3-6.

Zechariah 2:2 *Then I asked, Where are you going? He said to me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its breadth and what is its length*- As noted on :1, measuring is a double symbol- measuring in judgment, and in upbuilding. Jerusalem was being measured as it was; the idea here may be that God was assessing the spiritual condition of Jerusalem, and if they were indeed repentant, then the city would be built up into the capital of the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. Ultimately, God's desire to push through His Kingdom purpose with Israel at this time didn't work out. But these prophecies shall come ultimately true, when the new Jerusalem is built and the Angel then finds the length, breadth and height to be "equal" (Rev. 21:15-17).

I discussed on Zech. 1:21 how the potential was for the Kingdom to be re-established there and then whilst Persia was riven with revolt and division in the early years of Darius' reign. But the Jews feared that they had no walls, and wanted to measure their own strength. Hence the man in the vision wanting to do this is effectively stopped from doing this by the promise of :3. And later God addresses the fear that Jerusalem had no walls and could not withstand a siege; Yahweh Himself would be present amongst them.

Zechariah 2:3 *Behold, the angel who talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him*- See on Is. 37:36. As explained on :1, the Angel measuring Jerusalem for judgment is as it were interrupted by another, who is told to run back and tell Zechariah that in fact Jerusalem will be reinstated by God, even though Judah were lacking in their spiritual dimensions.

Zechariah 2:4 *And said to him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, 'Jerusalem will be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it*- As explained on :1, the 'running' [back] was in jubilation at the good news; Jerusalem had been measured, and although spiritually wanting [as Haggai and Malachi make clear], yet by grace it would be built up and the promised conditions of the restored Kingdom would come about. This was by grace alone. The fact the exiles refused to respond was indeed tragic. We note that Zechariah was a "young man"; God so often uses youth in His service. The language of blessing here is that of Ez. 36:4; these things could have come to pass if Judah had truly accepted the new deal

offered them in the new covenant. But they didn't, and so such prophecies are delayed in fulfilment until the last days. “Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded”. They were happier to settle outside of Jerusalem and concentrate on building up their own farms in the villages and small towns of Judah, rather than sense the importance of Zion. Nehemiah 11:1-3 suggests that so few wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there, that they had to draw lots to get at least a tenth of the total population to live there- in what should have been the capital. *If* more had returned from Babylon, *if* more had lived in Jerusalem, then Yahweh *would have been* a wall of fire to them, and then the Kingdom conditions described in the rest of Zechariah 2 would have come about. Although the restoration prophecies speak as if the increase of Zion’s population was to be unconditional, Ez. 36:37 implies that this would only happen if they prayed for it: “Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock”. But they got on with building their own homes and farms outside Jerusalem, they blessed those who had the courage to live in Zion itself, but didn’t earnestly pray for the fulfilment of the prophecies. They figured that the time for their fulfilment hadn’t come, as Haggai laments; instead of praying for their fulfilment.

The Jews were asked to leave Babylon so that Jerusalem would have an "abundance of peoples", in language evidently appropriate to the Messianic Kingdom. And yet they for the most part remained in Babylon, and thus showed they didn't want to do their part in making that prophecy of the Kingdom come true in their experience.

Jerusalem could have been a city without walls, with God's protection (2:4-6). But Israel lacked faith, and therefore God came down to their lower level and allowed them to build a wall, and worked with them in this. The exercise of building that wall was a display of great faith and zeal on Nehemiah's part; yet in fact the work he did was a result of Israel's limiting God by their lack of faith, even though Nehemiah himself had faith. Indeed the whole failure of Israel became "riches for the world." (Rom.11:12) Nothing is ultimately wasted or lost. Nothing can be done against the Truth (2 Cor. 13:8).

So the Jews built a wall and appointed human guards over them (Neh. 4:15,22), even though Yahweh Himself had promised to be their wall and their guard (Zech. 2:4,5). And Zech. 12:8 had repeated it: “In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David”. But they didn’t want to believe it, as they cowered in fear from those who “came to fight against Jerusalem” (Zech. 4:8), whom Zechariah prophesied would be destroyed by Yahweh. And yet He graciously worked with them in their plan to build a physical wall, just as He worked through their desire for human kingship and a physical temple in earlier days, even though it was not His ideal intention.

"Villages without walls" is s.w. “unwalled villages" in Ez. 38:11. The restoration could have happened as outlined in Ez. 37 and then the unsuccessful attack upon Zion spoken of in Ez. 38, followed by the glorification of the temple spoken of on Ez. 40-48. But instead Nehemiah built a wall and the people preferred to live in their homes and get on with their own petty materialism, as decried in Malachi.

Zechariah 2:5 *For I’, says Yahweh, ‘will be to her a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory in the midst of her-*

The walls of Jerusalem were destroyed by the fire of God's judgment (Jer. 49:27; Am. 1:7,10,14); now this is reversed, and His fire will protect the city. But this didn't

happen, hence the tragedy of the pictures in Nehemiah of Jerusalem's walls broken down and consumed by fire. The allusion would be to the Persian ritual capital at Pasargadae, a city without walls and with fire altars on its perimeter, which was built by Cyrus to celebrate his victories. It would have been familiar to the exiles who returned. Yet some years later, Nehemiah was to rebuild the physical walls of Jerusalem, ignoring the potential spoken of here- in a prophecy he was surely aware of. And yet he did that work in faith and with God's amazing blessing- for God is always open to taking an alternative, suboptimal path with His people if that is what it takes to keep moving forward with them towards the restored Kingdom. And yet the command to rebuild the temple in Ez. 48:30-35 speaks of a city with gates, implying it had walls. The exiles had laid the foundations for the restored temple far smaller than Ezekiel had commanded. So we can conclude that God was so eager for the ultimate project of the Kingdom to be realized, that through Zechariah He offers yet another possible scenario. Ezekiel saw the glory of Yahweh specifically within the temple: "This is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of
Israel forever". But here in Zech. 2:5 He implies His glory will dwell generally within the entire rebuilt city of Jerusalem. Likewise there is no High Priest in Ez. 40-48 only "the prince"; whereas Zech. 3 is clear that Joshua will be cleansed and forgiven, and then resume his work as high priest, in tandem with a Davidic king as political ruler [the vision of the two olive trees makes this clear].

This is the situation foreseen in Ez. 48, where God's presence and glory would be in Zion because the cherubim which had departed in Ez. 1 would return there. Ezra had recognised this promise, that God would be a wall to them (Ezra 9:9). Note how this prophecy is introduced by an Angel with a measuring reed measuring out the rebuilt Zion (Zech. 2:1), just as we have in Ezekiel 40. But Judah disbelieved the promise of a Divine wall of fire, and insisted on building a physical wall to protect them; and the record in Nehemiah has plenty of reference to their setting up of bars and gates in their fear (Neh. 3:3,6,13-15). By doing so they disallowed the fulfilment of Ez. 38:11, and thereby precluded what was prophesied as subsequently following. If they had trusted Him and paid their tithes, their cattle would have multiplied, and the Scythian tribes would have come down to seek to take them, as Ez. 38:12,13 foretold. But as it happened, their cattle were diseased and their agriculture not blessed because of their dilatory attention to Yahweh’s house that lay waste (Haggai 1:11). So therefore there was no invasion, and no victory against the nations, and no Kingdom established at that time.

The reference to fire has reference to the Angels' part in the restoration and protection of Zion. As the Angel had been a pillar of protecting fire to Israel previously, He would be to them instead of a physical wall as they started rebuilding Jerusalem amidst great opposition, with no physical wall to protect them. The Angelic language continues: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts (Angels)... I will come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee" (2:8,10 AV)- i.e. the Angel and the associated shekinah glory would physically return to Jerusalem. The primary fulfilment of this was in the return from Babylon- the Angel led them back across the deserts, physically moving with them, to enter Jerusalem; as foreseen in the cherubim visions of Ezekiel. This would explain the restoration from Babylon in terms of the wilderness journey and the Angel's guidance of them then- because this very same Angel was involved in leading them through a different wilderness, back to Israel.

Joshua didn't live up to the conditional prophecies made about him in Zechariah. Ezra and Nehemiah seem to have taken over the priestly and kingly work of Joshua and Zerubbabel respectively. Nehemiah's record concludes on the negative note that Judah had forsaken Zion (Neh. 13:11)- even though God promised to come and dwell in the midst of Zion! Nobody wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there; the Levites even went and lived outside it where they had "fields", because they weren't given their tithes (Neh. 13:10). Lots had to be drawn to get people to live there (Neh. 11:1). It became a ghost town, when it should have been inhabited as a town without walls for the multitudes of returned exiles joyfully dwelling there (:5). It was God's intention that ten men (a reference to Israelites of the ten tribes?) would take hold of the skirts of a Jew (i.e. one of Judah) and come with him to worship in the new temple (Zech. 8:23). But in fact the opposite happened. So few wanted to live in Jerusalem, that the rulers had to cast lots to force one in ten Jews to go and live in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:1). And the ten tribes didn't really unite with Judah, but went off and got lost in the Gentile world.

Zechariah 2:6 *Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north', says Yahweh*- By Zechariah's time there had already been ample opportunity for the people to return from captivity. But most remained there. A greater return was required for the restoration prophecies to come true, but that depended upon whether they wished to quit their idolatry and comfortable life which arose especially after the history of Esther. Fleeing is the word so often used of fleeing into a city of refuge(Num. 35 etc.). The implication would be that indeed Judah had sinned in the land of the north, but they were to flee to Zion as the ultimate city of refuge, protected by a wall of Divine fire. "Come!" translates the word usually used for "woe" or "alas". The idea was that if they remained in the land of the north, they were under threat for their lives. But when Babylon fell, the Jews prospered under Cyrus [consider how the Jews came to popularity at the end of Esther]; so much so that he eagerly encouraged them to return to their homeland. The threat was therefore of spiritual death; that was the danger, and it came true for them. Thus Jer. 51:6 urges flight from Babylon "and deliver every man his soul" (Jer. 50:6).

'For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the sky', says Yahweh- Zech. 1:21 made it clear that it was the Angelically controlled "horns" who had scattered Judah. Again God assures His people that it was He who had done this; all that had happened to them had been under His direct control, and was all part of His wider purpose in preparing them for the wonders of the restored Kingdom of God on earth. The "four winds" connect with the four horns; and God makes His Angels spirits or winds (Ps. 104:4). The number four recalls the four living creatures of the cherubim Angels. The four horsemen and the four workmen of Zech. 1 had worked to prepare these "four winds of the sky", or perhaps they are parallel with these four winds / Angels.

Zechariah 2:7 *'Come, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon'*-

This call to flee Babylon was made by Zechariah in the second year of Darius, at the time of Ezra 5 when the exiles were forbidden to continue rebuilding the temple and Zechariah and Haggai prophesied to them. Soon afterwards, there was another return led by Ezra as recorded in Ezra 7. This may well have been in direct response and obedience to the call to "flee from the land of the north!" made in Zech. 2:6,7.

The prophets clearly link the exodus of the Jews from Babylon and the destruction of Babylon. But the Jews didn't leave Babylon as commanded, or at least,

not in significant numbers. And this affected the Divine program for Babylon's destruction. On two occasions in the reign of Darius, Babylon rebelled against the Persians and made an effort to regain its independence. These rebellions are recorded in the great inscription of Darius cut into the rock at Mount Behistun, and they appear to have happened in the fifth year of the reign of Darius (two or three years after this prophecy was given in the second year of Darius). These two attacks upon Babylon could have flattened the city. They would have done, had all the Jews left as commanded. But they didn't, and so the potential destructions didn't happen as planned. God's love put Him as it were in a hard position. He didn't want to destroy His disobedient people and so He delayed or ameliorated the potential destructions of Babylon.

The Jews were to use their own initiative to leave the north country, but the prophecy was that God would bring them: "I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth" (Jer. 31:8). Likewise "The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them" (Jer. 23:8). If we make the move, God will eagerly confirm us, bringing and leading us. Ezra's return in Ezra 7 was in response to this call but the majority didn't want to know. The huge Divine confirming potential was wasted and left unused, as with so many and so much today.

As noted on :6, the need to "escape" was not from literal extermination, but from spiritual death there. "Come out from among them and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:17) is picking up this language (also of Is. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8) concerning the return of the exiles from Babylon. The edict of Cyrus for the Jews to return to the land is in a sense pointing forward to God's command to us to leave the spirit of Babylon, the Gentile world, and go up to do His work. The returned exiles are us. Those who left Babylon did so of their own freewill (Ezra 7:13), and yet providential events stirred up their spirits to do this (Ezra 1:5); and the way was prepared in miraculous way. And so it is for us, in our exodus from this world and from the flesh. In spiritual terms, Judah in Babylon were as captives in the prison cell, waiting to be released and return to their land, according to Isaiah's images. And these pictures are picked up and applied to all who know the redemption and restoration of Christ.

"The daughter of Babylon" is contrasted with "the daughter of Zion". 'The daughter of' means having the characteristics and spirit of the father or mother. The daughter of Zion, identifying with Zion, could not dwell with the daughters of Babylon- unless she had become a daughter of Babylon herself. The fact most of the exiles chose to remain in captivity speaks sadly so much of their sense of identity.

Zechariah 2:8 *For thus says Yahweh of Armies: 'For honour He has sent me to the nations which plundered you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye-*

AV "after the glory" would refer to how the Divine glory could have entered Zion and then the nations would have been converted into God's Kingdom. But the glory didn't enter.

The idea of someone being the "apple of His eye" alludes to how a person, by looking into the eye of another, will see his own image perfectly expressed in the pupil, though in extreme miniature. If we are the apple or pupil of God's eye, it means He closely looks at us and our person and image is ever impressed on His pupil. This is one of the most profound expressions of intimacy between God and man. David asked to be kept as the apple of God's eye (Ps. 17:8) by God's grace. Yet God still

kept disobedient Judah as the apple of His eye. In Hebrew, the eyelid is literally 'the keeper'. This is alluded to in how Ps. 121:3 speaks of how "He who keeps you will not slumber". The slightest dust, or even possible approach of a foreign object, causes the keeper, the eyelid, to come down to protect the apple of the eye. This is how sensitive God was and is to His people. And yet when God says Judah are the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:8), He appeared far off, distant, disinterested in the fact that the life of the returnees hadn't turned out well. Haggai bluntly tells them that this was because they had strayed from God; Zechariah takes another tack in showing that God is still totally sensitive to His people and so loves them.

The GNB is close to the correct sense here: "Anyone who strikes you strikes what is most precious to me. So the LORD Almighty sent me with this message for the nations that had plundered his people". Verse 9 then becomes Zechariah's message to the Gentiles, which presumably he actually took to them. As explained on Zech. 1:2, God's great anger with Judah was less than His anger against those who had plundered them. Even in their suffering and punishment, God's people were still the apple of His eye. "The apple of His eye" speaks not only of God's extreme sensitivity toward His people; this phrase was a Hebraism for a man's wife. Who would a man be more angry with? His wife because she cheated on him repeatedly and is exposed; or a bunch of hoods who rape her after her infidelity has been exposed? The man who truly loved his wife would be more angry with the rapists, and so it was with God.

Isaiah had prophesied that God would not rest until Zion be restored. Watchmen would be set upon Zion's walls who would give Him no rest until the walls be rebuilt (Is. 62:1,6,7). At this time, Zion was felt by God to be the "apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8). This prophesy started to be fulfilled straight after the Babylonian invasion when Jeremiah urged the desolated people to pray: "O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease" (Lam. 2:18). The prayerful remnant were to give *themselves* no rest; and thus was fulfilled the prophecy that *God* would have no rest. Sincere prayer according to God's will would have meant that there was a strange mutuality between the Father and those who prayed to Him. Both He and they would consider Zion to be the apple of their eye; and thus the prayers would ultimately be answered and Zion was restored. And yet despite this fervent prayer, God still attempted to restore Zion. Such was His grace and desire to bring about His saving purpose even with those who were indifferent to it.

Zechariah 2:9 *For, behold, I will shake My hand over them-* An idiom for direct Divine action in the destruction of Babylon (:7). Although Babylon had fallen to Cyrus, he left the city intact. The total destruction of the city envisioned in the prophets didn't happen at that time- perhaps because God's people weren't ready to leave as they should have done. For the exit of the Jews from Babylon was envisaged as preceding Babylon's total destruction (Isaiah 13,48; Jeremiah 50,51). Although the people hadn't left Babylon, God now gives another scenario- they could leave now, and then Babylon would fall as predicted. Ezra leads another group from Babylon in response to this call (Ezra 7), but again there was very limited response to his efforts to get the Jews to leave. We marvel at God's desire to somehow make it all work out. We note too how what happens amongst nations is directly related to the readiness of God's people to respond. Thus the Persians reversed the decree to rebuild the temple because God's people didn't really want to build it. Darius could easily have failed to regain control of Persia and Persia would have fallen before Zerubbabel; had the Jews left Babylon, the city would have been reduced to rubble as prophesied.

And they will be a spoil to those who served them-

NET brings out how immediately Persia was to fall by internal division: "I am about to punish them so that they will be looted by their own slaves", or "by those who were once their servants". This began to happen on the death of Smerdis as the subject tribes and territories began to rebel. This was what could have happened and was set to. But Judah just didn't respond despite all God's enthusiasm, and so Darius stabilized the empire and it continued another 200 years.

This repeats the message of Jer. 50:10, which uses the same word for "spoil": "Chaldea shall be a prey: all who prey on her shall be satisfied". When Babylon fell, the Jews were intended to spoil her and take that spoil to the promised land, just as they had done with Egypt on Passover night. The prophecies that the Gentile rulers of Judah will be their servants clearly show that Judah wasn't intended to remain a mere subject kingdom of the Persian empire. So much was possible- but they chose to remain, to take the easier option- which is always to remain within the structures we are safe and familiar with.

And you will know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me- See on :11.

Zechariah 2:10 *Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion; for, behold, I come, and I will dwell in the middle of you', says Yahweh-*

NET "I have come; I will settle in your midst" says the LORD". Yahweh had returned to Zion but His glory did not settle down there. But things were really so close to the Kingdom being restored.

God had already returned to Zion by grace even though they had not returned to Him (Zech. 1:3; see on Zech. 1:16), and yet He promises a far greater 'return' if His people rejoice at that prospect and repent. He did the same in Zech. 1:3: "'Return to me', says Yahweh of Armies, 'and I will return to you'". God's glory would have dwelt not only in the temple but in the whole city of Jerusalem, according to Isaiah's prophecies. But there is no evidence that the shekinah glory ever actually returned to the rebuilt temple let alone was visibly present over the whole rebuilt city of Jerusalem.

Baruch 1:12 records the exiles praying "that we may live long under the protective shadow of [the] king of Babylon". This is in sad contrast to Daniel's prophecies that the sheltering tree of Babylon was to be cut down! There ought to have been an urgency about the need to flee from Babylon. Zech. 2:10 speaks of the need to "flee" and "escape"- the language of crisis. And the call "Ho!" means quite literally "Hey!!". The urgency to flee was spiritual rather than physical- for there's no evidence that when Babylon fell to the Persians, the Jews were punished. Indeed they appear [from Esther] to have prospered even more. Hence the urgent appeal was to flee from the spiritual crisis which they faced in Babylon. And yet they didn't perceive the danger, just as so many today don't. For the call to leave Babylon is applied in New Testament passages like 2 Cor. 6 to our call to leave the world in which we live. The urgency of 'fleeing' from Babylon was understood by Nehemiah, when he referred to those who had returned to the land as those who has "escaped" from Babylon (Neh. 1:2)- even though they had returned with every blessing from the authorities. He perceived as few did the vital danger of remaining in the soft life of Babylon. Ezra likewise had referred to the Jews in Babylon as those "in bondage... bondmen" (Ezra 9:9)- when historical records, as well as the book of Esther and the fact Nehemiah the Jew was the king's cupbearer, show that the Jews were very far from being servants in Babylonian society. Yet Ezra perceived the spiritual poverty and servanthood of remaining in that affluent society.

Zechariah 2:11 *Many nations shall join themselves to Yahweh in that day, and shall be My people; and I will dwell in the middle of you-* The Hebrew grammar is

ambiguous, the nations 'shall join themselves to Yahweh', or 'be joined to Yahweh' [the difference between reading as a niphal or a reflexive]. Here we see the mutuality between God and man; He joins us to Himself, but we must be willing to join ourselves. The verb 'to join' is always used elsewhere in the context of joining in a covenant. Clearly the idea is that a new covenant was going to be in operation, which Gentiles could join into. But the returned exiles tried to stick with the old covenant, which had been irreversibly broken- rather than accept the new covenant offered to them in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

NET "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on the day of salvation". 2 Cor. 6:2 says that "now is the day of salvation". In our age, God is likewise constantly enthusiastic to reestablish His Kingdom. But it depends if we meet the precondition. The term "day of salvation" is used in the restoration prophecy of Is. 49:8,14, but the lament is that God's people refused that great salvation: "In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee... But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me".

The Divine intention was that the Gentile nations in the land would be joined to Yahweh in repentance along with the repentant Jews. But instead, the Jews copied the pagan ways of those nations (as latter Isaiah, Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate), and became arrogantly exclusive of them personally. And so the fulfilment of this prophecy was precluded by the behaviour of the exiles, and it has been rescheduled to the last days. That Yahweh Himself would dwell in the rebuilt temple is stressed here in Zechariah; it would be the fulfilment of Ez. 48:35, that the name of the rebuilt Zion would be "Yahweh is there". But Judah didn't build the temple according to the preceding specifications in Ez. 40-48; and so Yahweh's intimate presence was not found there.

The implication is that many nations *as well as Judah* would join themselves to Yahweh. Jer. 50:4,5 had described the possibility after the fall of Babylon: "In those days, and in that time, says Yahweh, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; they shall go on their way weeping, and shall seek Yahweh their God. They shall inquire concerning Zion with their faces turned towards it saying, Come, and join yourselves to Yahweh in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten". But Israel and Judah did not then reunite, they did not accept the new covenant offered. The Gentiles' envisaged 'joining themselves to Yahweh' is that spoken of in Is. 56:6, where it is stated that this would involve their keeping the sabbath. Sabbath keeping is now not required for those in Christ; we are therefore reading of a situation envisaged as happening at the time of the restoration which never actually came about. It was a scenario also envisaged in Is. 14:1: "For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land. The foreigner will join himself with them, and they will unite with the house of Jacob". But instead, Hezekiah joined himself with the spirit of Babylon, rather than the other way around.

And you shall know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you- The implication would be that the Jews viewed this young man (:4) Zechariah sceptically, perhaps disliking his message of union with God on an equal footing to Gentiles. But he would be vindicated when the Kingdom prophecies were fulfilled, with the implication being that his generation would live to see this joining of the Gentiles to Yahweh and His presence in a restored Zion. All these things were rescheduled and reapplied to Jew and Gentile being joined together in Christ under the new covenant, to come to literal fulfilment at His second coming.

Zechariah 2:12 *Yahweh will inherit Judah as His portion*- The allusion is to Dt. 32:8,9, where Israel are God's personal portion and inheritance: "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the children of men, He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For Yahweh's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance". The metaphor reflects how intimate is His relationship with them, and how passionate His hope for them. Despite the other nations being joined to Him (:11), Judah would still be His special portion.

In the holy land- The idea is that the land would be made holy, cleansed by God's forgiveness; not that it is holy of itself.

And will again choose Jerusalem- As explained on Zech. 1:17, the choosing of Jerusalem meant the re-establishment of the Davidic throne in the person of Zerubbabel. But this possibility didn't happen when it could have done. The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to "inherit" the land; yet the same word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing Israel to "inherit" the land again after their return from "the north country" (Zech. 2:12; 8:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the "north country", then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized "throne of the Lord" (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn't even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

Zechariah 2:13 *Be silent, all flesh, before Yahweh*- The idea of silence before Yahweh is of repentance. This was an invitation to the Gentile nations to repent, and this bring about the joining of the nations to God spoken of in :11.

For He has roused Himself from His holy habitation!- This implies that God had been dwelling with His people throughout the exile, and was now as it were rousing from that and going out visibly into the world again. This didn't happen at the restoration, although it could have done. But the point to note is that Yahweh was still within His temple, physically broken down as it was. He didn't need a nicely built temple to inhabit His people; just as He had explained when David first wanted to build a temple. And that principle is true today. God dwells in people quite independent of any visible, religious structures.

NET speaks of how God was "being moved to action in his holy dwelling place". Judah were largely indifferent. What was moving God to action? Surely His absolute love and desire for His people. These same feelings are with Him now as He again earnestly seeks to restore all things, despite the indifference of His people.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 3

Zechariah Chapter 3

Zechariah 3:1 *He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Yahweh*- The altar was rebuilt before the temple in Ezra's time. Perhaps we are to envisage Joshua standing before Yahweh in that he was present before His appointed

place of worship. The prayers offered by Joshua the high priest were represented by an Angel presenting his case; whilst the satan Angel opposed Him, representing whatever groups in opposition to those prayers. Zechariah 3:8 clearly tells us that the characters of verses 1 and 2 are “men of sign” (A.V. margin), i.e. we have to interpret them and see them as representative of others.

A theme of Zechariah's early prophecies is the opposition between groups of people, individuals or Angels who want to rebuild the temple and restore Israel, and adversaries to them. Thus in chapter 1 there are the carpenters opposed to the horns, and the Angel who wants to measure (judge) Jerusalem being countermanded by the Angel who decrees that Jerusalem is to be inhabited in chapter 2. This is continued in chapter 3:1 by the vision of Joshua and satan standing before the Angel. It is suggested that this 'satan' is an Angel (we are familiar with satan Angels from 1 Chron. 21:1 and Num. 22:22 at least); this is because groups of people, even evil ones, have their viewpoint represented or brought to the notice of the court of Heaven by a satan Angel- a 'devil's advocate', as it were! Although as I have laboured at length in *The Real Devil,* Angels themselves don't sin. The satan Angel "resists" the Angel representing Joshua. The resisting was during the 21 year period when the temple rebuilding was suspended (Ezra 4:24). This corresponds to the 21 days (years), during which the Angel prince of Persia resisted Gabriel's work of rebuilding (Dan. 10:13). Taking this further, this 21 day-year period is the same as the three weeks (21 days) which Daniel spent praying for the rebuilding to commence. Somehow the period Daniel spent praying was over-ruled; there is a sense of time in the court of Heaven, and probably will be in the Kingdom too (e.g. Zech. 14:16), even if we are ourselves outside of that dimension. His prayer was answered from the first day he prayed (Dan. 10:12), but despite one Angel being eager to answer it, another opposed it on account of representing those humans who opposed it. For God never treats people as puppets, never forces, but works along with human freewill and respects it, even if it is contrary to His will.

The returned exiles were very influenced by Persian and Babylonian thinking and language. It has been shown that the Babylonians believed that each person has a god who accuses them (Rivkah Scharf Kluger, *Satan in the Old Testament* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 134,135). As elsewhere, Zechariah and the prophets allude to contemporary beliefs and deconstruct them, i.e. they show the truth about these matters as Yahweh wished His people to understand them, just as Moses alluded to creation myths in order to show what was false and to explain the truth about some of the matters they touched upon. So here Zechariah is making the point that the truth is that in the court of Heaven, Angels represent human beings and organizations and their positions and accusations against God’s people; and it is God who judges those accusations, and sends forth His Angels to implement His subsequent judgment of the cases upon earth. Paul may have this in mind when he exults that if God and Christ are on our side, we now have no accusers – for they are the only ones who can bring valid accusation against us. And even if we have accusers, the fact that *they* are our justifiers means that effectively, no such accusation is of any power (Rom. 8:33,34).

And Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary-

The Satan / adversary may be a specific representative of the Persian empire who was questioning why Joshua and Zerubbabel were persisting in building the temple, with Haggai and Zechariah's encouragement. That meeting was played out in the

court of Heaven. Or quite possibly, this vision speaks to the fear that such an encounter was bound to come.

Zechariah speaks of the Angels in the time of the exile and restoration from Persia "running to and fro in the earth" on God's behalf (Zech. 1:10,11; 4:10). The 'satan' in Job likewise does this. The references to 'wandering about on the face of the earth' have great similarities with the language used to describe the Persian empire's spies, called "The King's Eye" – a kind of agent of the King who wandered around picking up information and reporting back to him. But of course, "The King's Eye" was on the King's side and not working against him! Satan's walking / running "to and fro in the earth / land" and reporting back to God about an individual is thus very much taken from the Persian idea of the King's "evil eye", "the eye of the King", a kind of *agent provocateur*, a secret police–type agent, travelling around the Kingdom and reporting back to the King about suspect individuals. The implication of course was that God and His Angels, and not the Persian King and his agents, were the ones really in control of the land. It's maybe significant that the Septuagint translates "going to and fro" in Job 1:7 with the word *peripatei* – and we find the same word in 1 Pet. 5:8 about the adversary of the early Christians 'going about' seeking them – a reference to the agents of the Roman and Jewish systems. I have elsewhere demonstrated that much of the Hebrew Bible was rewritten [under Divine inspiration] in Babylon, to bring out relevant issues for the Jewish exiles in Babylon (See my *Bible Lives* Chapter 11). This includes the book of Job. It can be understood as an allegory – Job, the suffering servant of the Lord, becomes a type of Israel, the suffering servant of Isaiah's later prophecies. I have traced the similarities between Job and Israel, and Job and the "suffering servant", in *Bible Lives* Sections 3-1-3, 3-1-5 and 3-3-7. There are many links between Isaiah's prophecies and Job – a glance down the margin of most reference Bibles will indicate that. Just as the returning exiles faced 'satans' in the form of local Arabic opposition, so did Job. The Zechariah 3:1,2 passage uses the word 'Satan' to describe this opposition to the returned exiles. Note that both Zechariah 3 and Job 1 use the idea of a Heavenly court. As God put a fence around Job (Job 1:10), so He was a "wall of fire" to the returning exiles (Zech. 2:5). And his final triumph and restoration, by God's grace, was intended as a prototype for Judah in captivity. J.B. Russell mentions a Babylonian document consisting of a dialogue between a sufferer and his friend (J.B. Russell, *The Devil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 87). Perhaps the re-writing of the book of Job during Judah's captivity in Babylon was intended as a counter to this, explaining Yahweh's perspective on suffering. More documentation of this in Rivkah Kluger, *The Satan of the Old Testament* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967). This view is confirmed in other research by Harry Torczyner, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryat–Sefer, 1981) pp. 38–45. Note that Torczyner also interprets the Satan as being in God's service, and not in opposition to Him: "The figure and role of the Satan derives from the Persian secret service... We now understand that there are in God's service, as in that of any earthly king, secret roving officials, who go and come and report to him on the doings of his subjects".

The Angel in this vision of the court of Heaven was a satan / adversary by reason of representing the Samaritan opposition to the rebuilding of the temple. "The people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building" (Ezra 4:4), i.e. they acted as Satan – adversaries – to the Jews. They are actually called "the adversaries of Judah" in Ezra 4:1. They wrote "an accusation against the (new) inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem" to the king of Persia (Ezra 4:6). The

Hebrew word for “accusation” is related to that translated “Satan”. The implication is that the inhabitants of the land, the Satan, were complaining to God, manifested in the angel, that the new Jewish high priest was not really valid, as he did not wear the proper clothes (they had probably been lost during the captivity). The angel tells Satan, “The Lord rebuke you”, and proceeds to clothe Joshua with a set of priestly clothes and a mitre (vs. 4,5), thus showing God’s acceptance of him. The inference behind the complaint was that God had not really chosen Jerusalem for the Jews to rebuild, and that therefore they were going ahead with their plans without God behind them. But the angel says that “the Lord... *has* chosen Jerusalem”, in the same way as He had chosen Joshua to be high priest. Thus Joshua represented Jerusalem.

But it is possible that the "Satan", the adversary to the rebuilding, was the Jewish false prophets and the resistance to the rebuilding program noted on Haggai 1. In our notes on Jer. 24:1 we suggested that the two baskets of figs placed before the Angel in the temple laid the basis for this vision. The baskets represented the faithful and apostate Jews. The Joshua Angel would have represented the faithful Jews eager to rebuild Jerusalem, whilst the satan Angel would represent the apostates whose very existence militated against God answering the prayers of the rest of Israel. Does the same principle apply to Israel after the spirit- that the apostasy and apathy of some hinders the answering of the common prayers of the others? And our common prayer is surely for the second coming and the greater restoration of the true temple.

At the time of the restoration, the Jewish opposition to Yahweh's prophets argued that Israel had been rejected by God and that there could be no High Priest any more. A convenient excuse to get on with building their own houses rather than God's (Hag. 1:3,4). It seems to me that it is the Jews who are the 'satan' who is rebuked in the court scene of Zech. 3:1-10. I have elsewhere traced the connections between the 'satan' concept and apostate Jews (see "The Jewish Satan" in *The Real Devil*). This view was rebuked in the vision; but the point is that it was the Jews who were the satan / adversary to the prophets and the faithful minority. Is. 58:1,2 is a criticism of Judah in exile and also of those who did return to the land- they sought God daily, and yet abused their brethren (Is. 58:6), just as recorded in Neh. 5:15. If they had ceased from their sins, "*Then* shall your light break forth as the morning", *if* they had fed the hungry etc., *then* would've been fulfilled the Messianic Kingdom prophecies of the light of Zion rising above the Gentiles etc. (Is. 58:10,12 cp. Is. 60:1).

Zechariah 3:2 *Yahweh said to Satan, Yahweh rebuke you, Satan! Yes, Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!*- This passage is alluded to in Jude 9. "Michael the Archangel" there is the "Angel of the Lord" or "Yahweh" here.

The Angel-Lord (Jude 9) says that despite the sins of the bad figs in Israel and the opposition of the Samaritans, His choice of rebuilding Jerusalem will stand. Jude 8-10 lends support to this line of interpretation. Jude says that Michael the Archangel did not "bring a railing accusation" against the satan Angel, nor did He "despise dominion" (another Angel-ruler) or "speak evil of glories" (AV: "dignities"; the same word is in Jude 24 "the presence of His glory"- the Angels). This marked lack of aggression which Jude emphasizes shows that there was no conflict between the Angels, as may be wrongly inferred from the severity of the English word "rebuke". Our demeanour generally, especially with each other when it is necessary to have divergent opinions, or to correct others' ways of executing God's purpose as they see it, should be done in the same mutually loving spirit. Notice how Jude 8 links the

satan of Zech. 3 with a "dominion"- a ruler or 'prince'. The satan Angel who resisted the Joshua Angel for 21 days is "the prince of Persia" in Dan. 10:13. "The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?". Another allusion in Jude (v. 23) interprets this: "Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh". The implication is that God through the Angel just about decided in favour of saving Jerusalem out of the 'fire' of eternal punishment (cp. Jer. 17:27) for her sins- He had "compassion, making a difference" (v. 22). The "garment spotted by the flesh" must connect with the "filthy garments" worn by Joshua as he came into the Angel's presence.

Isn't this a burning stick plucked out of the fire?- Jude continues his allusion to the passage when he writes of "Pulling them [weak believers] out of the fire" of condemnation for sin (Jude 23). The idea is that Jerusalem had been saved from condemnation for the sake of God's grace in hearing a faithful minority; a condemnation Jerusalem rightly deserved. The rhetorical question is asking: "Would the same hand that had plucked from the fire the brand, charred, blackened and half-consumed already, cast it back again into the flames? And should He, who had delivered the remnant of His people from the furnace of Babylon, now listen to the charges of the accuser and yield them again to destruction?".

Zechariah 3:3 *Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the angel*- Joshua was without a mitre on his head (:5 implies). He was not qualified to be High Priest; and "filthy garments" Biblically speak of sin and lack of acceptance before God. Clearly :4 uses the symbol in this way. In His zeal to bring about the restoration of His Kingdom with a High Priest and Messianic King, i.e. Joshua and Zerubbabel (see on Hag. 1:1), God wanted to demonstrate that He would make Joshua acceptable to Him; and the arguments against him by the adversaries, the 'satan', whether they be Jewish or Gentile, would be overcome by His acceptance of Joshua. It would have jarred all religious sensibility to hear or read that a man in filthy garments could stand before God. But God permitted this, and changed Joshua. And in essence He is willing to do the same with sinners to this day.

Zechariah 3:4 *He answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying*- These persons have not been mentioned specifically; but we are to understand that this is a vision of the throne room, the court of Heaven, and it is Angels who are addressed. Those who stood before Joshua are his "fellows" (:8); his priestly helpers were also represented by Angels in the court of Heaven; and the words of :8 are applied to the Lord Jesus in Heb. 1:9, in demonstrating that He was greater than Angels, above His Heavenly "fellows".

Take the filthy garments from him. To him he said, Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe you with rich clothing- See on Lk. 19:24. Joshua was representative of the remnant; they too would be forgiven and cleansed by grace. The same Hebrew phrase is in Mic. 7:14: "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the disobedience of the remnant of His heritage?".

Although all was done by God to make Joshua a legitimate High Priest, he disappears from the scene. He didn't live up to his potential. The prophecy was reapplied to another Joshua-Jesus, the Son of God, Mary's Son. The clothing of Him in glory is the theme of Rev. 4 and 5, which describe the important part that the Angels had to play in welcoming Christ into Heaven on His ascension, and in giving

Him then His full reward and glory. Verse 8 about Joshua is quoted about the Lord Jesus in Heb. 1:9.

Zechariah 3:5 *I said, Let them set a clean turban on his head. So they set a clean turban on his head, and clothed him*- Zechariah apparently interjects in the course of what was revealed to him, as the prophets often do. For they were not mere machines of transmission, they were themselves passionately involved. He was concerned that Joshua lacked even the high priestly mitre. It was as if this was no barrier for God to accept Joshua as high priest, because the new covenant package He was offering the exiles was not exactly the same as the Law of Moses. Thus the legislation of Ez. 40-48 differs in many points from the Mosaic ordinances, although similar to it in outline terms. But God as it were takes on board Zechariah's cultural and legalistic concerns, and so the vision is added to. A clean mitre is placed on his head.

And the angel of Yahweh was standing by- Does this mean that the Angel commanded other Angels to arrange Joshua's forgiveness and to end his being "polluted from the priesthood" (due to lack of proven ancestry and the high priestly garments, cp. Ezra 2:62; Neh. 7:64)?

Zechariah 3:6 *The angel of Yahweh protested to Joshua, saying*- As noted on Hag. 1:1, the whole prophecy of Haggai was an appeal to Joshua and Zerubbabel to live up to their potential as the priest and king of the re-established Kingdom of God in Israel.

Zechariah 3:7 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: 'If you will walk in My ways, and if you will follow My instructions, then you also shall judge My house*- "My house" refers to the Angel dwelling again in the temple. For it is the Angel speaking here. I submit that the prophecies *could* have had their fulfilment in Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel, or some other Messianic figure at that time. Everything was made possible to enable this- Joshua, who couldn't prove his Levitical genealogy, was given "a place of access" amongst the priesthood, those who "stood" before the Lord (Zech. 3:7 RV). Ezra thanked God that they had returned and that they had "a nail in his holy place" (Ezra 9:8), a reference surely to a Messiah figure whom he felt to be among them, the "nail in a sure place" of Is. 22:23. According to Mt. 1:12 and Lk. 3:27, Zerubbabel was the Prince of Judah, and the rightful heir to David's throne. But due to his weakness, the fulfilment was deferred to Jesus.

And shall also keep My courts- The "courts" are so often mentioned in Ez. 40-48. But Joshua didn't. He didn't keep the courts, but allowed Tobiah the Ammonite to set up his office for subversion in the temple chambers. Likewise Zerubbabel was to hold a measuring line in his hand and rebuild the temple (Zech. 4:10), just as the Angels had held the same measuring line over the temple in Ez. 40 and Zech. 2:1.

And I will give you a place of access among these who stand by- The "places to walk" is the same word in Ez. 42:4 about the walkways in the prophesied temple. Those who stood by were the Angels (:5); the offer of places to walk among the Angels is the same idea as being "made equal unto the Angels" in Lk. 20:35,36.

Zechariah 3:8 *Hear now, Joshua the high priest, you and your fellows who sit before you; for they are men who are a sign*- The priestly helpers of Joshua were represented or signified by Angels in the court of Heaven. These words are applied to the Lord Jesus in Heb. 1:9, in demonstrating that He was greater than Angels, above His

Heavenly "fellows". For Joshua didn't live to his potential, or at best, Judah rejected him; and so the prophecy was to be fulfilled in another Joshua, the Lord Jesus.

For, behold, I will bring forth My servant, the Branch- see on Zech. 4:14. The reference is to Zerubbabel, 'branch of God', who could have been the Messianic ruler at that time; see on Hag. 2:23. According to Ezekiel, the prince-Messiah offers sacrifice for his own sin, and has children, to whom He will pass an inheritance. And he has to be warned not to oppress the people (Ez. 46:18). It is a more comfortable interpretation, surely, to see him as primarily referring to Zerubbabel or Joshua the High Priest (Ez. 44:3). But all this huge potential wasn't realized. Dan. 9:25 appears to identify "the anointed one, a prince" with the restoration of Jerusalem after the return. The Masoretic punctuation of Dan. 9:25 actually suggests that 'Messiah the prince' appears after the first seven of the seventy weeks- perhaps there was the possibility 49 day-years after the command to rebuild Jerusalem for a Messiah to have appeared? This would've fitted Zerubbabel perfectly. Lk. 3:27 describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term 'Rhesa' is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (Mt. 1:16). Zerubbabel was the 'head' of the house of David (Ezra 4:3; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:8; 6:12,13), as was his descendant Hattush (Ezra 8:1-3 cp. 1 Chron. 3:22). As the grandson of Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled king, Zerubbabel would've been the legitimate king of Judah. Potentially, Hos. 1:11 could have come true: "Judah and… Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head [Zerubbabel?]; and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (RSV). And perhaps as head of the house of David, Zerubbabel was intended to be the "David my servant" who would be the one king and one shepherd who would lead Israel back to the land from exile (Ez. 37:22,24). Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called "the people of Israel" (cp. Ezra 2:2). See on Zech. 6:12.

And perhaps there were other possibilities apart from Zerubbabel. It could have been Eliashib- but despite his apparent enthusiasm, he didn't even build the wall outside his own house (Neh. 3:20-22), and arranged for his grandson to marry Sanballat's daughter (Neh. 12:10,11). Or it could be that "the Branch" here refers to Joshua himself. It is evident from Ez. 44:3; 46:3 that the promised Messiah figure was to be both a king and a priest- which would fit Joshua. Here he is described as a crowned High Priest, called "the branch", who would build the temple and reign as "a priest upon his throne". But this didn't happen. Because Zechariah concluded this prophecy with the comment: "And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord" (Zech. 6:10-15). Joshua-Jesus didn't live up to it. And Zerubbabel never ruled in Jerusalem- he returned to the soft life in Babylon after the temple was rebuilt. But the prophecies only suffered a deferral. They will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the branch.

Zechariah 3:9 *For, behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes: behold, I will engrave its engraving', says Yahweh of Armies*- See on Ex. 25:19. The removal of Joshua's filthy garments, his sin (:4), was therefore to be seen as representative of the removal of the iniquity of all dwelling in the land. This alone ought to have encouraged the spiritually minded exiles to return to that land!

The stone could be a symbol of Messiah, for the Messianic lamb had seven eyes in Rev. 5:6. In this case, we are being told that Joshua could have become the Messiah figure for his time. He failed, and so the prophecy was applied to the Lord Jesus. The

language is a criticism and deconstruction of the ideas which Judah had encountered in Babylon which later became the Zoroastrian faith. The allusion would be to the Persian belief in the seven Amshaspands who surround the throne of the Supreme, which is why the Persians referred to the senior servants of their ruler as his eyes and his ears. These ideas are being deconstructed; the One who was all these things would be the Jewish Messiah.

But the stone which flashed with eyes may allude to the urim and thummim, which were two stones which flashed. The seven eyes which are the engraving may refer to the seven letters in the Hebrew "Holiness to Yahweh" which was inscribed upon the High Priestly mitre. See on Dan. 2:35. Ez. 42:13 commanded that in the restored temple "The priests that approach unto the Lord shall eat the most holy things". The same words are found in Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65- it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ezekiel 13:9: "Neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. These were two engraven stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zech. 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraven stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfil Ez. 42:13. In a restoration context, Is. 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD". This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zechariah 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and 'bearing the glory', i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was conditional on Joshua's obedience: "This shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey" (Zech. 6:15). Because Joshua failed, he wasn't given the urim and thummim, or there was no response from them; therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the 'Kingdom' prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration feature "the servant"- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Is. 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there". His obedience would enable the peoples' establishment as the Kingdom. And so all these prophecies had to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, seeing the earlier possibilities had all failed.

The seven eyes are interpreted in Zech. 4:10 as the Angels who would rejoice with Zerubbabel if he lived up to his potential. "On one stone are seven eyes" could be translated to the effect that the seven eyes were not on the stone but above it, looking down "on" it. Which would support the overall message of Zechariah, that Angelic involvement was so strong at this time. All the Angels, "seven", were looking upon the stone, orchestrating things so that he could be king and / or priest.

And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day- Joshua's rehabilitation and forgiveness (:4,5) could have been that of the whole land. But this didn't happen; but

it was reapplied to the work of Joshua-Jesus, whose death removed sin for all time in the day of His death.

The people had not turned / returned / repented, and so God had not turned their captivity and restored the Kingdom. God's answer, however, is full of compassion and enthusiasm for His people just because, it seems, they had even asked the question. He was so eager for any sign of their interest in Him and His work. The people were unclean, according to Haggai 2. And they weren't particularly penitent; lasting repentance didn't happen. And yet the vision of Zech. 3:4,9 describes the unclean and "filthy" High Priest Joshua being cleansed personally: "I have caused your iniquity / guilt to pass from you". He is representative of the people and the whole land: "I will remove the guilt [s.w. "iniquity" in :4] of this land in a single day". The idea was that Joshua-Jesus would carry the sins of the unclean people, and his cleansing would mean the guilt of the people was taken away. This explains why there is no mention of any specific sins of Joshua or why he personally needed cleansing; I suggest he was so filthy and unclean because he was representative of the people's uncleanness. But there is no record of any such ceremony as envisioned in Zech. 3 actually happening; and Zerubbabel and Joshua fade from the scene. Perhaps Joshus was unwilling to go through with it, arguing that he was himself clean. But the essence of the prophecy was fulfilled in another Joshua-Jesus. But we marvel at how God tried so hard to overcome every obstacle to restoring the Kingdom there and then- even the lack of repentance in the people.

Zechariah 3:10 *In that day', says Yahweh of Armies, 'every man will invite his neighbour to come under his vine and under his fig tree'*- Under Joshua, the iniquity of the land could have been removed, and the Kingdom conditions realized, re-establishing the situation that was in the early days of the Kingdom (1 Kings 4:25)- instead of the drought and lack of harvest which Haggai and Malachi lament. The Messianic Kingdom could have been brought in, the new covenant accepted by Israel.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 4

Zechariah Chapter 4

Zechariah 4:1 *The angel who talked with me came again, and awoke me, as a man who is awaken out of his sleep*- The context of Zechariah is God's desire through him to make the returned exiles realize that God was intensely active for them. They had the impression that He was somehow distant and otherwise occupied. He wishes them to see that He is extremely present. The waking of Zechariah from sleep perhaps hints at the need to spiritually awake and perceive the critical importance of responding immediately and zealously to God's passionate activities for His people.

Zechariah 4:2 *He said to me, What do you see? I said, I have seen, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon*- The "seven lamps are the seven eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth" (Zech. 4:2,10)- i.e. they represent the Angels active in the land of Israel to enable the restoration. They are energized by the spirit in the bowl; for God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4). God's Spirit is just as much at work today, mediated by His Son rather than through the Angels as it was in Old Testament times. The candlestick being part of the tabernacle was therefore also a "pattern of things in the Heavens"; it represented how the Heavenly organization of Angels works. See on Jer. 1:11,12. The candlestick in the tabernacle had seven bowls (Ex. 25:31), but this has

only one. As noted often, the restored temple of Ez. 40-48 was significantly different, although broadly similar to, the Mosaic arrangements. The seven lamps "are the seven spirits of God" in the vision of the temple in Rev. 4:5. The whole vision speaks of the activity of God through His Spirit and through the operation of the Angels in order to enable His work to go ahead. It was to encourage the returned exiles that so much was now possible, so much strength was behind them. The sons of Zion were as fine gold (Lam. 4:2); the candlestick system was to be the restored Israel. They were to be the light of the earth / land promised to Abraham, manifesting and empowered by God's Spirit. This whole system was God's vision for the returned exiles. It didn't come about, and so the system has been reapplied to the new Israel, who are to shine as lights in the world, enlivened by the Spirit.

There are seven pipes to each of the lamps, which are on the top of it- "Seven pipes" is literally "seven and seven pipes to the lamps"; it could mean 14, or 49. In this case the vision was of a lampstand far larger and brighter than that in the Mosaic tabernacle. It didn't come about then, and so was fulfilled in terms of the Christian church, presented in Revelation 1 as seven candlesticks with seven lamps on each, i.e. 49 lamps. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen.

Zechariah 4:3 *And two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl, and the other on the left side of it*- The bowl is presented visually as the central point of the system. The two olive trees are said to stand on both sides of "The Lord of all the earth / land" (:14). The candlestick system was envisaged as central to the earth; and this was to be the restored Judah, as noted on :2, ruling over the earth / land as the spiritual light of those peoples. The candlestick system differed from the Mosaic one in that it didn't require maintenance or feeding by man; and this is the enduring message, that it is the work of the Spirit and not of flesh.

Zechariah 4:4 *I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?*- See on :14. The response in :5 suggests that Zechariah was supposed to have perceived himself what this was all about. But even he as a spiritual person didn't grasp the degree to which God was at work through the Spirit. We likewise need our eyes regularly opening to the extent and force of God's working, and all that is potentially possible for those who wish to walk in step with the Spirit. The response in :6 was not initially an explanation of the symbolism, but rather the overall conclusion- that the restoration would not be achieved by human strength, but by God's Spirit. It's as if Zechariah is being sidetracked by struggling with decoding the symbolism to miss the bigger picture; and that remains an abiding problem for us as we read and reflect upon such visions.

Zechariah 4:5 *Then the angel who talked with me answered me, Don't you know what these are? I said, No, my lord*- This could be read as a rebuke, as if Zechariah is now recording his own slowness to understand. It is that admission of weakness which

would have made so much more credible his appeal to his audience to understand. Likewise the Gospels were written by the disciples, and they admit so often their failure to understand, thereby strengthening their credibility in appealing for others to understand quicker than they did. In the work of preaching and teaching, the more real the more credible.

Zechariah 4:6 *Then he answered and spoke to me, saying, This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel, saying, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit', says Yahweh of Armies*- See on Jud. 14:6. The returned exiles were "feeble" (Neh. 4:2), and they were considered like this by the surrounding peoples to the point that this was how they too saw themselves. They were indeed feeble. But this is the trademark of God's work; the feeble are used, that the work of His Kingdom may be of His Spirit and to His glory. "Might" translates a word which can mean "wealth" or "army". He is told that it will not be due to "an army" but due to God's Spirit / Angel, the "Lord of hosts" of Angel armies ("Lord of hosts" s a common title for God in Zechariah). The "army" may refer to the army which the King of Babylon was willing to send with the returning exiles in order to support the returning exiles. But Israel's attention is focused instead on how the Spirit / Angel would enable all things.

And yet this statement could be taken as an implied criticism of Zerubbabel. He was warned that the restored Kingdom would be brought about not by "might" (military force) but by God's Spirit, operating through the Angels. This had been the message of Ezekiel as well as Zechariah's visions- that through the Angelic cherubim, God was ready to work out the promised and miraculous restoration of His Kingdom, so that Yehud would no longer be merely a province of Persia. Perhaps Zerubbabel thought that a Persian army would help them establish their autonomous kingdom by force. Hence Zech. 4:14 pleads with them to understand that Yahweh is Lord of *all* the earth, and His Angels are everywhere active; He as well as Judah were to be lords and not servants of all those in the earth / land. The cherubim chariots are seen roaming the "land of the north" just as much as Israel (Zech. 6:5-7). But Zerubbabel and the Jews believed in what they could see, rather than in God's unseen armies. They presumably thought that such independence could only be achieved by armed rebellion against their Persian benefactors, or by getting the Persian military onside with them. The history of the Maccabees soon afterwards showed this mentality. The Jews saw what was going on around them as a "day of small things" and despised it (Zech. 4:10). And yet *great* things were potentially possible. It's all *so* bitingly relevant to us- for we too see a day of small things, but the eye of faith sees great things prepared.

The returned exiles could have entered a new covenant with God, as offered to them in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. That new covenant involved the specific promise of the work of the Spirit in their hearts and lives. But their resistance to the Spirit and trust in human strength meant that they rejected that new covenant. Ez. 37:10 had spoken of the exiles as receiving the Spirit so that they might become a great army (s.w. "might" here). There was no other way to become mighty.

Zechariah 4:7 *Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain-*

This message was given at the time that temple building had been stopped by the Persian authorities for fear that they would lose tax revenue, and that the Jews would seek to create an independent state. And Haggai also prophesied exactly those things. Hag. 2:8 is absolutely specific that all wealth belongs to Yahweh, God of the Jews: "The silver is mine and the gold is mine"- not Persia's. This points up the miracle

worked by God in the heart of Darius to restore the original decree of Cyrus, allowing the Jew to go ahead rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. They had been encouraged by Haggai and Zechariah, who both had predicted that Zerubbabel would become an independent king of Judah (Hag. 2:23; Zech. 6:12,13), and indeed before him, the great mountain would fall. Surely that would have been understood as the Persian empire: "Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain; and he will bring out the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace, to it!'" (Zech. 4:7). These prophecies were exactly what the adversaries of Judah were informing the Persians about. And yet against all secular sense, the Persians commanded the rebuilding work to go on. Because of the power of God's Spirit on human hearts.

Or we can understand that the "great mountain" of Babylon was to become a plain before Zerubbabel (Zech. 4:7)- a clear allusion to Dan. 2:44, in which the little stone of Messiah destroys the Kingdoms of men and becomes a great mountain to replace the statue headed by Babylon. But Zerubbabel didn't destroy Babylon- according to Jewish tradition he returned there after 'giving up' in Jerusalem. Perhaps Zech. 11:16 refers to him as "the worthless shepherd" who didn't gather "those that be scattered", who didn't encourage the Jews scattered in Babylon to return to the fold of Zion, and who didn't care for their spiritual wellbeing. And so the prophecy that Babylon would be destroyed before Zerubbabel has to be reapplied, and will be fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus. It has also been reapplied in a more spiritual sense. For the same words for "mountain" and "plain" are used in Is. 40:4; the mountains were to become plains when Judah returned from exile, and over that levelled ground was to be made the proclamation of a Messianic king by his herald, and then his appearance. This didn't happen as was potentially possible; and so the prophecy was reapplied to the coming of the Lord Jesus.

The words may be intended literally if we consider that the great mountain might refer to mount Zion and not only Babylon. If Zerubbabel lived up to his potential, then a flat tableland would be prepared as a "platform" [Heb.] on which the new temple could be built; an we see this in the vision of the restored temple which the captives were intended to build in Ez. 40. But this didn't happen- and so this language was reapplied to the work of John the Baptist in making the rough places of men's hearts smooth, in order for them to accept Jesus, the true temple. Zechariah concludes with a vision of Jerusalem falling to the Gentiles, and the Lord Jesus returning to break Mount Zion in two- not into a plain.

And he will bring out the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace, to it!'- When the foundation stone of the temple was laid, there should have been excited acclamation: "Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4:7). But instead the old men wept when the foundation was laid, knowing that the temple was nothing compared to what it ought to be (Ezra 3:12). The glory of the restored temple was prophesied as being far greater than that of the former (Hag. 2:9); Is. 60:17 alluded to this in prophesying that "For brass [in Solomon's temple] I will bring gold, and for iron [that was in Solomon's fixtures] I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron". But it simply didn't happen, because God's people were satisfied with a small, inglorious temple so that they could get on with building their own "cieled houses" (the same word is used in describing how the temple of Solomon was "covered", or cieled, with cedar). And the old men wept at the fact that the glory of the new house was *less than* that of the earlier one.

The capstone however may not have to mean the foundation stone, which had already been laid some years before. It could mean that Zerubbabel would lay the

final stone in the temple, and everyone would shout out in realization of how this was all of grace. And that was the point of the vision of the candlestick; it was all of God's Spirit, and therefore of grace. Paul in Romans speaks of the work of the Spirit in this same context- as the exemplification of how we are saved by grace and not works. Indeed *charis,* "grace", is often used about the gift of the Spirit. But it seems Zerubbabel didn't complete the temple but returned to Babylon; and there was not the deep appreciation of grace which was intended.

Zechariah 4:8 *Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- The "moreover" is to emphasize how Zerubbabel was indeed to lay the "capstone" of :7; his hands were to do this. And yet for all this repeated emphasis, it seems Zerubbabel returned to Babylon and didn't complete the work.

Zechariah 4:9 *The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house. His hands shall also finish it*- God through the Angel would work with Zerubbabel- but he would not. The original for "finish" more correctly means to fulfil; Bible prophecy has potential fulfilments which may never come about. But in essence, the prophetic word will be fulfilled in other ways. It was all potentially possible for Zerubbabel. But he beat it back to Babylon instead. Before him, all nations of the earth could have fallen, the whole 'mountain' of Babylon could have crumbled as before a mighty stone; in him Dan. 2:44 could have had its fulfilment (Zech. 4:7). And so much is potentially possible for us, too. The Lord may have many people in a city, all is prepared for their conversion- but we may not do our part, and so the potential harvest is never reaped. Isaiah 41 describes the Messianic saviour as coming to the land from Babylon, from the north and from the east. Babylon was east of Judah, and yet the approach road came down from the north. This was the way Zerubbabel and Joshua would have come; but the prophecies suffered a massive deferment to the coming of the Lord Jesus in a more figurative sense from the north and east.

And you will know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you- This repeats Zech. 2:9,11. The implication would be that the Jews viewed this young man (Zech. 2:4) Zechariah sceptically, perhaps disliking his message of union with God on an equal footing to Gentiles. But he would be vindicated when the Kingdom prophecies were fulfilled, with the implication being that his generation would live to see this joining of the Gentiles to Yahweh and His presence in a restored Zion. That didn't quite happen; all these things were rescheduled and reapplied to Jew and Gentile being joined together in Christ under the new covenant, to come to literal fulfilment at His second coming.

Zechariah 4:10 *Indeed, who despises the day of small things?*- Both the faithless Jews and the mocking local peoples considered the temple so far rebuilt to be "as nothing" (Hag. 2:3). Zerubbabel was being urged to rebuild it according to the grand plans given in Ez. 40-48, obeying the precepts laid out there, and then Yahweh would come and dwell in it. But those small beginnings were not to be despised; they were a beginning, and instead of condemning the Jews for not having built it according to the plan of Ez. 40-48, instead God sees the cup half full rather than half empty, and urges them to go on from those small beginnings to greater fulfilment. The question as to who has despised those small things may beg the answer: 'Not God. Even though you didn't do as I asked you, go on from that start to do greater things'. Really His gentle approach is similar to how we may talk to children as they initially fail to fulfil a task. See on Hag. 2:3.

For these seven shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. These are the eyes of Yahweh, which run back and forth through the whole earth- See on :6; Jer. 1:11,12; Zech. 1:10,11. The entire strength [seven as completeness] of the Angelic eyes of God would rejoice with Zerubbabel when the temple was built as commanded, using a plumb line to measure and build the edifice according to the regulations in Ez. 40-48. No wonder the whole of Haggai is an encouragement to Zerubbabel and Joshua to live up to their potential. The builders need fear no opposition; the Angel eyes of God were running throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham, through all of it, the whole of it, including the areas governed by far superior powers, and as explained in earlier visions, they had prepared the whole area for the Kingdom to be restored in Judah. To run is an idiom for response to God's word (e.g. Dan. 12:4; Hab. 2:2). The Angels were going out to fulfil the word of restoration; but it still required the freewill response of Zerubbabel and the Jews. The people did "rejoice" at the rebuilding of the temple (s.w. Ezra 6:22; Neh. 12:43). But this was but an incipient fulfilment of the far greater joy envisaged here.

Zechariah 4:11 *Then I asked him, What are these two olive trees on the right side of the lampstand and on the left side of it?*- These were the obvious, major difference with the Mosaic candlestick. Typically a candlestick required human care to fill it with oil. But this system had a source of oil in two olive trees. There was apparently a silence, because Zechariah has to ask again in :12, and is told in :13 that he ought to have figured it for himself. And we see here a principle; sometimes there is a Divine silence in response to our prayers and situations, or to our requests to understand and see the meaning attached to even. And that silence is intended to elicit from us the answer from our own reflections. Knowledge of God isn't just dished up on a plate in the Bible. We need to work things out for ourselves, as God knows that this is the way to really learn anything.

Zechariah 4:12 *I asked him the second time, What are these two olive branches, which are beside the two golden spouts, that pour the golden oil out of themselves?*- As noted on :11, there was an initial lack of response which was designed so that Zechariah would work it out himself. He is therefore somewhat rebuked for not getting it himself. His slowness to perceive is perhaps the more rebuked because one interpretation of the two sources of oil is that they referred to himself and Haggai, who were providing the prophetic word and the articulation of God's Spirit to enable God's people to function as the candlestick to the world around them. Zechariah's focus in the second question was upon the tubes which took the oil from the trees, appearing as branches leading from spouts. The oil appeared golden because it was going into the golden candlestick; the gold of God's people Judah was to be a function of the golden oil going into them.

Zechariah 4:13 *He answered me, Don't you know what these are? I said, No, my lord*- As noted on :11,12, this rebuke was because the Divine silence after the first enquiry was intended to elicit in Zechariah an understanding. This in broader terms is one reason for the Divine silences in our lives. The rebuke was the more necessary if the pipes, the conduit of the Spirit, were representative of Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets at the time.

Zechariah 4:14 *Then he said, These are the two anointed ones*- I have suggested on

:12,13 that they refer to Haggai an Zechariah, who as prophets were the vehicle of the Spirit's articulation to Judah the candlestick. But perhaps they were specifically represented by the pipes or spouts, and the actual trees were Joshua and Zerubbabel. Or perhaps the other way around; the trees were Haggai and Zechariah, the source of the Spirit, and Joshua and Zerubbabel were to be the conduit of the Spirit to Israel. Hence Haggai's prophecy is specifically and solely addressed to those two men; see on Hag. 1:1.

Joshua and Zerubbabel were both anointed or commissioned to be the king and priest of the restored Kingdom. Joshua anointed is the same idea in Greek as 'Jesus Christ'. He failed in this calling, and so the prophecies were reapplied and fulfilled in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The reference is to Joshua and Zerubbabel. The whole 'lightstand' depended upon these two anointed ones, these providers of oil, and the fact they both in various ways failed to deliver true faith and spirituality meant that the victory over the world which the vision also prophesied could not come about; the final fulfilment had to come through the Lord Jesus, who was the ultimate Priest (cp. Joshua-Jesus) and Prince of Judah (cp. Zerubbabel). This prophecy could have been fulfilled at the restoration; but when we read in Rev. 11:4 that "These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks", the Lord is saying that now He has redefined and rescheduled the fulfilment of that vision in a latter day context.

Who stand by the Lord of the whole earth- The olive trees stood either side of the candlestick. And yet the candlestick is presented as a person. I suggest that the gold candlestick was the purified, return exiles (Lam. 4:2), who were intended to bear lordship over the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. The leadership were therefore incidental to the centre of the vision and candlestick system, which was the people of Judah themselves who were to be the light and lords of the *whole* earth, the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham, including Babylon and Persia.

But the symbology is mixed. The various elements here all also represent Angels. By responding to the word of restoration, Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai, Zechariah and the obedient masses were all represented by things which otherwise refer to the Angels. They would be identified together with those who had practically enabled all this to happen. Hence the seven Angelic eyes of :10 were to rejoice together with Zerubbabel when he completed the temple as specified.

The olive trees "are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth". The "Lord of the whole earth" is the Angel of Zech. 3:1 (making "the God of the earth" in Rev. 11:4 also an Angel?). The olive trees actually stand by the candlestick, thus making the whole arrangement of bowl, branches, pipes and lamps represent the workings of the one Angel- in the same way as the Angel of Jesus in Rev. 1 can somehow stand in the midst of a candlestick.

The olive being a symbol of leadership (in Judges 9:8 the olive tree was the first tree to be thought of as a national leader), it would be fitting that they represented Joshua and Zerubbabel. However, there is a definite allusion to the Angel cherubim here. "Within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive tree" (1 Kings 6:23); "and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two (olive tree) cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony" (Ex. 25:22). If the olive trees are like the Cherubim, then "the Lord of the whole earth" of Zech. 4:4 which was between them connects with the ark- the Angel that dwelt over the ark, between the Cherubim. Josh. 3:11-13 also makes the connection between the ark and the "Lord of all the earth". The candlestick therefore represents the Angel co-ordinating the restoration, as well as the other "seven" Angels in His control. This shows the close

association between the Angel-cherubim and Joshua and Zerubbabel. Thus from the Angelic inspiration of these two men, the spirit was supplied to the candlestick through the gold pipes- the faith they showed and their prayers supplied the spirit which enabled the seven lamp Angels to act. However, the close link between the two olive trees and the Cherubim Angels once again shows that the ultimate impetus to our faith, prayers and spirituality comes from God's spirit in the Angels rather than from any personal inspiration we may feel. This idea of the flow of the spirit, enabling God's action through the Angels as a result of our prayers, is found elsewhere: "This shall turn to my salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19); "... how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit ("good things", Mt. 7:11) to them that ask Him?" (Lk. 11:13). Thus in the vision of the seven lamps, the prayers and faith of Joshua and Zerubbabel were the oil, the spirit that was supplied to activate the seven lamp Angels that went to and fro in the land of Israel preparing the way for the restoration. However, the olive trees were "sons of oil" (AVmg)- they were anointed with the oil initially. Is this a dim foreshadowing of the birth of the spirit ("sons of oil")? The men of the olive trees were sons of the spirit word through their belief in the word of God concerning the restoration. The olive branches emptied the golden oil out of themselves- if we are to have the same victory of faith as Joshua and Zerubbabel, we have to in the same way pour ourselves out in prayer and golden faith. The amount of oil flowing into the bowl determined the amount flowing out of it to the lamp Angels, seeing that there was a constant flow of the oil in the vision. Thus the amount and intensity of our prayers and spirituality affect how brightly the Angels burn in their zeal to fulfil our requests. Notice too the power of the prayers of a small minority of God's people. But the envisaged situation didn't come about. The two olive branches which feed the bowl were replaced by Christ, the one branch (Zech. 3:8; 6:12), who would provide the Spirit in abundance so that the true spiritual temple could be built- "the branch... shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord" (Zech. 6:12).

We can however translate: "Against the Lord of the whole earth", which was a common title of Darius. This would provide more evidence that here we have a prophecy of overthrowing the Persian empire. See on Zech. 1:13. The two anointed ones could refer to the Angels Michael and Gabriel, who in turn represented Joshua and Zerubbabel.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 5

Zechariah Chapter 5

Zechariah 5:1 *Then again I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, a flying scroll*- The previous visions have spoken of how the rebuilding work faced opposition from the adversaries ["satan"] of both apostate Jews amongst the exiles, and from the local Gentiles. We know that in practice, those 'satans' derailed the envisaged and possible restoration of the Kingdom at that time. This vision now deals with this in more detail.

Hag. 2:14 had spoken of how the returnees were unclean; and this could preclude God's plan to restore the Kingdom. But here Zechariah prophesies soon afterwards of how even this problem of uncleanness could be resolved. This vision of Zech. 5 speaks of the banishment of sin and sinners from Judah and back to Babylonia.

Zechariah 5:2 *He said to me, What do you see? I answered, I see a flying scroll; its*

length is twenty cubits, and its breadth ten cubits- Zechariah's vision of the flying scroll indicates the extent of Judah's weakness. The size and proportion of it was unreal for a scroll- "twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide" is about 10 meters by 5 meters. This disproportion was obviously to draw attention to something- and we find that the size of the temple porch / entrance in Solomon's temple was exactly of this size (1 Kings 6:3). This was where God's word was read from. And yet the scroll is described as entering into "the house of the thief" (Zech. 5:4). Nehemiah records how the poor returnees were abused and effectively thieved from by the wealthy. And the Lord Jesus lamented how God's house had become "a den of thieves". But there's another reference to this 20 x 10 cubits size. The cherubim over the ark were ten cubits high and their wings were 5 cubits long, and one wing pointed back, whilst the other pointed forward, to touch the wing of the other cherub. Thus each cherub occupied a space 10 cubits high and 10 cubits across; and the two cherubim over the ark thus occupied a space 20 cubits long and 10 cubits wide- exactly the size of the flying scroll. The fact the scroll 'flies' invites us to make another connection with the cherubim, flying / hovering as it were over the ark. Yet this *shekinah* glory is changed in the vision into a curse. This is how *very* displeased God was with what was being done by those who returned- His presence and glory were no longer there, only a curse upon them. Effectively, the returnees had turned God's temple into a parody of the Babylonian temples; see on :6,8,9.

Zechariah 5:3 *Then he said to me, This is the curse that goes out over the surface of the whole land*- The Angelic eyes of God had been going over the "whole land" preparing it for the great potential, of God's Kingdom being reestablished in Judah. But over the whole land there was sin. What had been declared a holy land through the imputation of righteousness by God's grace (see on Zech. 2:12) was in fact very sinful.

For everyone who steals shall be cut off according to it on the one side; and everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off according to it on the other side- The scroll was written on both sides, just as the tables of the covenant were (Ex. 32:15). The two of the ten commandments mentioned here as being broken were the third and eighth; which according to Jewish tradition were written on different sides of the tables. The idea would be that Judah had broken covenant relationship with Yahweh by disobeying the most basic of the ten commandments. They were stealing and searing falsely just as they had done before the captivity (s.w. Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2). There were 'false swearers' amongst the returned exiles (s.w. Mal. 3:5). False swearing may not simply refer to perjury; it is defined in Jer. 5:2 and often as meaning to swear both by Yahweh and by other gods, thereby making their oath by Yahweh a false oath.

Zechariah 5:4 *I will cause it to go out, says Yahweh of Armies, and it will enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him who swears falsely by My name; and it will remain in the midst of his house*- Nehemiah records how the poor returnees were abused and effectively thieved from by the wealthy; and Zech. 8:17 later alludes to this. And the Lord Jesus lamented how God's house had become "a den of thieves". The houses of the Jews were as corrupt as the house of God they had rebuilt, although it was not according to the principles and pattern commanded them in Ez. 40-48; those prophecies often command that the previous temple abuses were not to be repeated in the new house of God. But they were.

And will destroy it with its timber and its stones- This is the fate of a house which had been dwelt in by lepers (Lev. 14:45). The house of Judah had previously been condemned as a leprous house, and now they had returned to the land they were no better. For all God's enthusiastic grace to forgive them, as described previously in Zechariah.

Zechariah 5:5 *Then the angel who talked with me came forward, and said to me, Lift up now your eyes, and see what is this that is appearing*- The command to lift up the prophetic eyes and see is a repeat of what Ezekiel was told, when he was invited to lift up his eyes and see the apostacy of Judah within the temple (Ez. 8:5,16). Zechariah would have perceived the similarity. He was being given an insight into how sinful were the returned exiles.

Zechariah 5:6 *I said, What is it? He said, This is the ephah basket that is appearing*- See on :2. The ephah measure was representative of the measure of their sin. And they had changed the weights of the ephah to deceive their brethren. The winged pseudo-cherubim of :9 carry this "ephah" back to Babylon. The Sumerian word for one of the Babylonian ziggurats, a shrine to a goddess, was *e'pa*, the same Hebrew word as translated "epha" (C.L. & E.M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004) p. 296). The foreign woman in the vision wishes to return to Babylon and build a house / temple there. The terrible picture that will appear is that the apostate Jews who had returned ostensibly to rebuild Yahweh's temple in Zion were really the spiritual "daughter of Babylon" and would return to Babylon to build an idol temple there.

He said moreover, This is their appearance in all the land- "Appearance" translates the word for "eye". The Angelic eyes of God ran to and fro in the land (Zech. 4:10). And this is what they saw all over- sinful Jews.

Zechariah 5:7 *(And behold, a talent of lead was lifted up); and this is a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah basket*- They had changed the weights of the ephah to deceive their brethren (Am. 8:5). This apparently minor sin was seen by God as being as heavy as lead. Judah, the woman, had been weighed by God in judgment and found wanting. This was why all the great potential prophecies of earlier visions would not in fact come true at that time.

Zechariah 5:8 *He said, This is Wickedness!*- The woman is simply called "wickedness". Judah had previously been characterized as a wicked woman who was punished with captivity in Babylon, and now she is still unreformed (Is. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; Ez. 23:1-49 and throughout Hosea 1-3). Is there not here a hint that the essence of Judah's failure was in their marriage to foreign women, perhaps even their own wives were from Babylon and wanted to return there. Marriage to Gentiles is stressed in Ezra 10 and Neh. 13:23-27 as the epitome of Judah's sin. Even the four sons of Joshua the High Priest had married Gentiles (Ezra 10:18). The Hebrew word translated "wickedness" is *harisha*- an anagram of 'Asherah'. She is presented as a goddess- in that the foreign women are always associated with the idols they served. We know that the first temple was destroyed because of the Asherah entering the temple (2 Kings 23:4-7; 1 Kings 15:13). And it seems Judah never learnt that lesson. Zech. 13:2 is clear that there was idol worship throughout the land amongst the returned exiles.

And he threw her down into the midst of the ephah basket; and he put the weight of lead on its mouth- It was as if the due weight had been reached, and now it was closed and being sent back to Babylon. Judah, the woman, was entrapped in her own sins. This is the same idea as the previous inhabitants of Canaan reaching a certain level of sin after which they were to be thrown out of the land (Gen. 15:16).

Zechariah 5:9 *Then lifted I up my eyes, and saw, and behold, there were two women, and the wind was in their wings. Now they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the ephah basket between earth and the sky*- The two female winged creatures who remove the ephah to Babylon are surely parodies of the Angel cherubim; see on :2. Note how the Angel 'comes forth' (Zech. 5:5), and then the winged women are here described as 'going forth' with the same Hebrew word. The glory of God was simply not there, whereas Ez. 48:20 and often in Zechariah it was predicted that it would be, if they built and operated the temple according to the commands of Ez. 40-48. Who was it who caused the apostate Jews to be thrown out of their land and removed to Babylon? Perhaps the two women propelled by the wind / spirit were the prophets Haggai and Zechariah who were now denouncing them and pronouncing this judgment upon them. Perhaps we are to understand the 'chasing away' of the apostate Jews by Nehemiah as meaning they were chased off back to Babylon (Neh. 13:28).

Zechariah 5:10 *Then I said to the angel who talked with me, Where are these carrying the ephah basket to?*- If it were not for Zechariah's questions, his desire to understand, we would not have the explanations. The prophets, like the Angels, desired to look into the words they spoke, there was implied an intellectual process of struggle to understand (1 Pet. 1:12). We are seekers of God; we will never understand all, and the desire to understand is itself built into our spiritual experience.

Zechariah 5:11 *He said to me, To build her a house in the land of Shinar. When it is prepared, she will be set there in her own place*- "Shinar" is the title used for Babylon here because of the connections with building Babel, a building condemned by God. It could be that this prophecy concerning the wickedness in the land of Judah somehow returning to Babylon and there building a temple is a reference to how Zerubbabel was to re-direct his energies into building a corrupted house for himself on his return to Babylon, a pseudo-temple. He was personally criticized for building a ceiled house for himself in Judah rather than focusing upon rebuilding God's house (Hag. 1:3,4). So it seems the apostate Jews returned to Babylon and built a temple there to their gods. It was built in Babylon upon her own “base”, the same word used in Ezra 3:3 about the altar being established upon its own “base” in Zion.

Nelson’s Bible Dictionary comments: “For some mysterious reason, Zerubbabel is not mentioned in connection with the Temple dedication. Neither is he mentioned after this time”. The reason seems to be that he returned to Babylon. R.K. Harrison in the Zondervan Encyclopedia mentions that “a 6th century AD Jewish chronicle preserved the tradition that Zerubbabel returned to Babylonia after 515 BC and succeeded his father Shealtiel as the prince of the exiled remnant there”. He chose to be a prince in Babylon’s Kingdom, the kingdoms of men, rather than in the Kingdom of God. And so many have followed his decision in the centuries since, thus frustrating what could have been for them and many others within their influence. Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.3) records that “Zorobabel, who had been made governor of the Jews that had been in captivity, came to Darius from Jerusalem, for

there had been an old friendship between him and the king". He was friendly with the King of Babylon, and chose to follow where *this* lead rather than friendship with the Almighty. Compare this with how the 'friendliness' of a boss or worldly friend has lead so many into promotions or situations where they walk away from doing the work which God intended for them. And such huge potential was and is thereby wasted.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 6

Zechariah Chapter 6

Zechariah 6:1 *Again I lifted up my eyes, and saw*- The Hebrew has: "I turned [the word used also for repentance] and lifted up my eyes". After the exposure of Judah's sin in the preceding vision, Zechariah repents, as it were, for the situation. Just as Daniel and Ezra sought to, identifying themselves with God's sinful people. From now on in Zechariah, the visions appeal for repentance, interspersed with visions of the restored Kingdom that was even then possible. There is mention of the judgment to come upon the surrounding nations, whose idolatry clearly influenced the returning exiles. And the prophecy concludes with the picture of final judgment upon Judah in the last days, leading up to the return of the Lord Jesus to reestablish God's Kingdom in Judah for ever. The amazing potential for Zechariah's generation had been explained in chapters 1-3, but it wasn't realized by them. But the prophetic word was to come finally true in the work and coming of the Lord Jesus.

And behold, four chariots- Zechariah 1 opens the prophecy with a vision of three kinds of horses- red, white and speckled. These represented the powers which had subdued the land of Judah and left it in the desolate state it was at the time of Zechariah (Zech. 1:12). It's tempting to interpret them as Assyria, Babylon and Medo-Persia; or perhaps Babylon, Media and Persia. Straight away, we read of *four* horns, representing the powers who had desolated God's people; and how they would be destroyed by the carpenters, surely looking forward to the carpenter Messiah. And the vision of Zech. 6 has *four* and not *three* kinds of horses- red, black, white and speckled, although only three of them were used at the time (see on :6). This may be Zechariah's way of saying that because of Israel's inability to fulfil the required spiritual preconditions, as stated clearly in chapter 5, the longer version of the prophetic program was going to come into play. Although as always, there is the distinct message of hope, that finally God's triumphant purpose with Israel shall come to realization. The chariots are Angels (:5); the world empires were directly under their control, as taught in the vision of Dan. 2.

This vision follows on from the judgment of chapter 5 against the sinners amongst the returned exiles. They were to be sent back to Babylon. This vision of the chariots may be saying that the Angels who had controlled the previous judges of Judah were now again called into action; they would pursue the sinful Jews to wherever they went to, be it to Egypt or Babylon, and judge them. That is the immediate sense of the vision, although it also means that the longer term judgments were to also come into operation before the reestablishment of God's Kingdom as the mountain of Dan. 2:44.

Came out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass- It has been said that Judah rejected idolatry on their return from Babylon. I submit that the Biblical evidence is different, as expounded throughout chapter 5; see on Zech. 13:2. They mixed pagan thinking with their form of Judaism, and although

physical idols were later rejected by them, the results of this idolatry by the early returnees influenced Judaism permanently. Thus Zech. 6:1 pictures Yahweh's cherubim, Angelic chariots coming out from between two bronze mountains. In the ancient Near East there was the common idea that the sun god appeared each morning in his chariot from between two mountains (See C.L. & E.M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004) p. 319 for documentation). Zechariah's point [as is the point of Psalm 19, which uses the same images] is that it is the God of Israel who is the God of the sun, and not Shamash or some such similar deity of men's imagination. But the exiles clearly needed this reminder; we remember how only a generation or so before, Ezekiel found them worshipping the sun god in Yahweh's temple (Ez. 8:5). And earlier, Josiah had removed the "chariots of the sun" from the temple mount (2 Kings 23:11). Yet it seems that the Jews' desire to mix Yahweh's temple with the sun god was still just as strong even after the exiles returned.

The two brass mountains of Zech. 6 are from where the horses / judgments issue forth- towards the north and south of Israel. The mountains must therefore be in central Israel; the reference could be to the valley of Jehoshaphat. I suggest the mountains in view are both in Jerusalem- the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion, in between which is what was called the valley of Jehoshaphat. These mountains and that valley are from where God's latter day judgments proceed (Joel 3:2,16; Zech. 14:14). The envisaged judgments upon the apostate Jews and Gentiles at Zechariah's time didn't fully happen because so many preconditions weren't met; but they will come in the last days. Or it may be that they are the two mountains formed by the cleavage of the Mount of Olives predicted in Zech. 14:4, at which time "half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half toward the south". This would connect with the horses / chariots going out towards the north and south here in Zech. 6. Any difficulties with exact chronology may be accounted for by the suggestion that the meaning and nature of time will change in the time around the Lord's coming, as I have outlined at length in *The Last Days*.

Zechariah 6:2 *In the first chariot were red horses; in the second chariot black horses*- The vision in Rev. 6 of horses going forth to bring judgment is clearly alluding to the similar vision in Zech. 1:8-12; 6:1-8. Chariots of horses recall the cherubim visions of Ezekiel, and suggest Angelic activity controlling the entities on earth which they represented in the court of heaven. The horses of Zechariah 1 are those nations who have trampled up and down the earth / land of Israel, subduing it until it is quiet. The chariots / horses of Zechariah 6 are the Angel cherubim representatives of those nations, who are sent out against them in judgment. Such judgment is portended in Zech. 1 also, where straight after the vision of the horses we read of the four horns who have abused Israel being cut off by the carpenter Messiah of Israel. Significantly, there is an Angel stationed with the horses in the valley from which they emerge, as if to show that the judgments upon the land were Angelically controlled; Israel was not at the hands of chance human evil, indeed the horses report back to the Angel. This sets the scene for the horses / chariots of chapter 6 going out in judgment against those nations and the apostate Jews influenced by them of the preceding vision in chapter 5.

Zechariah 6:3 *In the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot dappled horses, all of them powerful*- The particular significance of the colours may not be that important; they could represent death, famine, disease etc. ; or they could simply

be references to the various world powers represented. Zechariah, like us, wanted a detailed explanation of the colour scheme, but the answer was that they represent the Angels (:4,5).

Zechariah 6:4 *Then I asked the angel who talked with me, What are these, my lord?*- Zechariah, like us, wanted a detailed explanation of the colour scheme, but the answer was that they represent the Angels (:4,5). No specific interpretation is given. The colours may simply have been to visually differentiate them.

Zechariah 6:5 *The angel answered me, These are the four spirits of the sky*- see on :4; Zech. 1:8-11. The four horses / chariots are understood by most commentators to have connection with the four metals and beasts of Daniel's prophecies. Their connection with the four winds / spirits of the Heavens recalls the way that the four beasts of Daniel 7 arise as a result of the same four winds / spirits / Angels being active. That is the simple takeaway lesson- that our world is not out of control, but all is carefully orchestrated towards the final consummation in the establishment of God's Kingdom in Judah.

These things didn't come to term in Zechariah's days as they could have done, but they will in the last days. I have explained elsewhere that the four metals and beasts of Daniel's prophecies refer to powers that will dominate the land and people of Israel in the last days, whatever historical application they may have had. The metals and beasts all exist together in the last days, because they are all judged together at the coming of Christ to earth.

Which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth-
The horse riders of Rev. 6 are clearly based on this vision in Zech. 6, and they would therefore be Angels. Zech. 6:5 describes the horses as "standing before the lord of the whole earth"- the mighty Angel of the Cherubim that stands for the land (earth) of Israel, perhaps Michael. In Zech. 1:8 they are behind Him, although He then sends them out to survey the state of the land of Israel. They return to Him, reporting that "we have walked to and fro throughout the earth (land), and behold, all the earth sitteth still and is at rest". Is there any reason to doubt that these Angels literally walked about in the land, albeit unseen, perhaps at a similar speed to which we walk? They walked "to and fro" because it is not in their ability to know the exact situation of a country just from a cursory glance. The comment of the Angel on this was: "I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease" (Zech. 1:15)- that were sitting at rest in God's land. This scenario is similar to that in 1 Kings 22, where Angels come and go from God, reporting back information and receiving commands, showing how much the Angel in the myrtle trees, "the Lord of all the earth" (land), was a representation of God Himself.

'Chariots' and the 'cherubim' are linguistically connected, and thus also connected in Biblical usage- e. g. "He rode upon a cherub (chariot)" (Ps. 18:10). The number four has links with the Angel cherubim; John Thomas interprets these "four (chariot) spirits of the Heavens" (6:5) as the same as the four faces of the cherubim. The whole vision is full of Angelic language. "The chariots of God are... thousands of Angels" (Ps. 68:17); God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4). The horses within the chariots also represent Angels, under the control of the four mighty cherubim Angels. This is similar to Ps. 68:17 describing God's chariots as being full of Angels.

Zechariah 6:6 *The one with the black horses goes out toward the north country; and the white went out after them; and the dappled went forth toward the south country*-

See on :4. "The north country" must be Babylon (Zech. 2:6; Jer. 1:13,14 etc.)- those Angels went to minister to the Jews there and to enable the hearts of the Persian rulers to continue to support the work of rebuilding (or is this looking back to the judgements on Babylon in preparation for Cyrus' decree concerning the restoration?). Another group of Angels went toward the South- Egypt or the land of Judah (Ez. 20:46,47). If the *eretz* of the South is in fact the area of Judah south of Jerusalem, as it is in Zech. 7:7, then we would have confirmed the idea that the Angels of judgment went forth because of Judah's sins, but didn't actually judge them. But they did judge Babylon, the north.

We note there were four coloured horses in :2,3, but we don't read of the red horses doing anything. Perhaps red represents blood and judgment. This was prepared against Judah for their sins, but the red horses weren't used. The restored Judah wasn't then destroyed. See on :2. In the longer term application, the four horses and chariots represented the nations of Daniel 2 who would dominate Judah. The red horse would then not be mentioned because it had already achieved its purpose upon Babylon, which had by then fallen to the Medes. Bible prophecy has multiple applications, in accordance with human prayer, repentance or lack thereof. And so these two suggested interpretations can both be legitimate.

Zechariah 6:7 *The strong went out, and sought to go that they might walk back and forth through the earth: and he said, Go around and through the earth! So they walked back and forth through the earth*- These Angels, the same as those who originally surveyed the whole area by walking "to and fro through the earth" in Zech. 1:10,11, "sought" permission from the co-ordinating Angel to continue their work. The Angels wished to do something but needed the permission of Michael the Angelic "lord of all the earth" to do so. We shall take over the roles of Angels in the future Kingdom. There will be scope therefore to serve God upon our own initiative; and what we earnestly desire to do for Him will be empowered. In this life we are to develop that desire to serve, and then all the limitations will be taken away. The "earth" here is probably 'the land' of Israel- which would have included Babylon, at its proper extent from 'sea to sea'.

Zechariah 6:8 *Then he called to me, and spoke to me, saying, Behold, those who go toward the north country have quieted My spirit in the north country*- The "spirit" must be understood in the light of :5, where the reference is to Angels. Maybe the reference is to an Angel crying out for judgment upon Babylon. Or the Spirit-Angel that needed quietening in Babylon was perhaps the satan-Angel that was resisting the Angel seeking to further the rebuilding work; . He would have gone (literally?) to Babylon to give the "prince of Persia" the idea of banning the rebuilding. The two Angels that quietened Him were those of Dan. 10:12,13- the Joshua-Angel of Zech. 3:1, and Michael who "came to help Me" (Gabriel) in Dan. 10:13. Alternatively, note that Dan. 9:21 describes Gabriel being "caused to fly with weariness"- thus it may have been Gabriel who was 'quieted' or 'given rest' (AVmg.) in Zech. 6:8, implying He was in Babylon trying to enable the rebuilding but needed the support of the other two Angels.

Zechariah 6:9 *The word of Yahweh came to me, saying*- Despite the awful sins and weaknesses of Judah revealed in the previous chapter, God wanted still to try to force through His plan for reestablishing His Kingdom, even if some details had to be changed.

Zechariah 6:10 *Take of them of the captivity*- Note how this still calls the returned community "the exiles"- as if to suggest that they still had the mentality with which they went into captivity. The temptation to mix flesh and spirit is simply very powerful, and recurs daily in our lives in various forms. In those temptations we face what the exiles faced- a desire to appear faithful to God externally whilst doing exactly what they wanted, influenced by the world around them.

Even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah; and come the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah, where they have come from Babylon- They had apparently only recently arrived and were staying in the home of Josiah. It could be that they had brought with them some of the gold and silver artifacts of temple worship which had been taken into Babylon earlier, but were now released. Their names are significant. "Heldai" ['worldliness'], "Tobijah" ['Yah's goodness / grace'], "Jedaiah" ['Yah knows'], living in the house of Josiah, "Yah has founded"]. The impression is that despite the worldliness of the exiles, known by God, God's grace had led to the foundation of the new temple being founded, and they were to continue building upon it. See on Zech. 11:8.

The grace of God to the exiles is of course a foretaste of His grace to us. Time and again God speaks of the exiles in such positive language. For all that they had willingly adopted the gods of the captors, God still fondly describes them as 'Zion who dwells in Babylon' (Zech. 2:7). They were the Kingdom in embryo, waiting to just be transplanted from Babylon to Judah, just as we are the temple of God prepared symbolically in Heaven and waiting to be revealed on earth. Putting that grace another way, God proclaimed that despite all their idolatry and weakness in Babylon, Judah had 'paid off' their guilt for former sins by their service there (Is. 40:2). We can only marvel at God's grace, and the tragedy was that it was wasted and unperceived by them. May we do somewhat better.

Zechariah 6:11 *Yes, take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest*- Zech. 6:11-15 is clear enough that Joshua-Jesus could have become a king-priest, and the Kingdom of God been reestablished in his time. Perhaps the crowning of Joshua was because God realized that Zerubbabel was not going to make it as the king He had intended. But there is no record that Judah ever got near having a king again. Joshua the high priest never became king Joshua. Or perhaps the allusion is to High Priestly mitre, the lack of which in Zech. 3:5 was a cause for concern to Zechariah. "Crowns" plural would suggest that the priestly mitre was to be complemented by a crown of rulership.

Zechariah 6:12 *And speak to him, saying, 'Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place; and he shall build Yahweh's temple*- see on Zech. 4:14; Jer. 23:5. "The Branch" was a title for Messiah, who was to appear at the restoration (Jer. 23:5; 33:15). The Hebrew here reads rather strangely: "Behold there is a man- Shoot is his name". Seeing Zerubbabel's name means 'Shoot from Babylon', it's odd that Zerubbabel isn't named specifically. Perhaps the implication is that Zerubbabel had failed, but another person with the same basic name still could fulfil the prophecies. But with the failure of Zerubbabel, there was no other king-priest to fulfil the prophecies. The Maccabees attempted to force a fulfilment, with opportunists like Simon and John Hyrcanus claiming to be king-priests- but with no actual dynastic evidence. And they hardly fulfilled the prediction that the King-Priest Messiah would sit on David's throne (Zech. 6:10). It could be that "Behold the man" is an invitation to look at the priest Joshua as "the man"; he was to replace Zerubbabel by becoming a king-priest.

It seems that Haggai and Zechariah returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in order to prepare the way for Zerubbabel- they were therefore the primary fulfillment of the prophecies of an Elijah-type prophet heralding the coming of the Messiah king. Zerubbabel's failure therefore meant that their ministry was re-scheduled and fulfilled in the work of John the Baptist. Zerubbabel is called “the branch” (Zech. 3:8; 6:12; Jer. 23:5,6), and this obviously invites connection with the prophecy of a branch / Messiah who would grow out of the cut down stump of Jesse (Is. 11:1). Again, Zerubbabel fits the picture perfectly. The house of David had been cut down in judgment, but the prophesied branch would not be from the royal line of Kings- but rather simply from the ‘stump’ that had been left, i.e. a descendant of Jesse who was not in the direct line of kings. Mic. 5:2 speaks of a similar person- a Messiah-king who would be from Bethlehem, i.e. the family of Jesse, rather than from Jerusalem where the royal line of kings were born. His origins would be “from old”- i.e. a person who is still a descendant of Jesse, but not in the direct line of kings. See on Zech. 3:8.

But finally, all the immediate candidates to fulfil these words failed to do so. And yet the prophetic word was to come true in the person of the Lord Jesus. The Kingdom He restored was a spiritual one, and will only be physically manifested at His second coming. And thus the mocking “behold the man..." would have been seen by the Lord as a reference to Zech. 6:12, where He is foreseen as a Priest crowned with silver and gold, introduced to Israel with the same phrase: “Behold the man...". The Lord would have taken encouragement that in the Father’s eyes, He was crowned there and then in glory, as He magnified His priestly office. But it would have seemed so, so different in the eyes of those mocking men. He was an intellectual genius without compare, and He applied His genius to the Father's word. He would have been conscious of all these links, and so much more. This way of His didn't seem to leave Him in His time of dying. And His awareness would doubtless have been a tremendous encouragement to Him. God likewise can control our trials so that we take strength from them in accordance with our appreciation of His word.

Zechariah 6:13 *Even he shall build Yahweh’s temple; and he shall bear the glory*- In :11 we saw Joshua crowned with a priestly mitre; this 'bearing the glory' might mean that he was also to have the urim and thummim. Ezra 2:63 and Neh. 7:65 had perhaps prophesied that a priest would stand up with the urim and thummim in the envisaged restoration of the Kingdom. I explained on Zech. 3:9 that possession of the urim and thummim was also envisaged at this time.

And shall sit and rule on His throne; and he shall be a priest on His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both- Being a priest upon a throne implies a king-priest, after the order of Melchizedek and not according to the Mosaic system. There would be peace or a merging into unity between the concepts of priesthood and kingship which had previously been kept separate. Joshua-Jesus could have become the king-priest. But he like Zerubbabel failed and dropped the baton.

Or we can see this as a repeat of the prophecy of Hag. 2:23, that Zerubbabel would be king, with Joshua as the High Priest. We have here a clear example of a potential prophecy; like Cyrus, Zerubbabel was specifically named as having a future which didn't materialize for him. Because he and others chose for that not to happen. This helps us understand how the detailed command / prophecy of Ez. 40-48 was all likewise potential, as in fact are all of the restoration prophecies. The Davidic line from Jeconiah had been cursed by Jeremiah, saying that no offspring of "Coniah" would sit on the throne (Jer. 22:30). However, Zerubbabel was of the main Davidic line through Solomon and Jeconiah. This is stressed in the Lord's genealogy in Mt.

1:12,13: "Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud". Again we see how God's prophetic plan and even His curses are open to renegotiation. Zerubbabel the cursed not to be king could have become king. But he failed to live up to the potential, and so God's word of curse still came true.

Zechariah 6:14 *The crowns shall be to Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in Yahweh's temple*- The idea is that the crowns were to be left in the temple for a sign of the potential that was possible; for Joshua and the three new arrivals from Babylon were never in fact crowned kings and rulers. "Heldai", 'worldliness'] of :10 is now renamed "Helem", 'vision' or 'vision of God'. If they quit their worldliness, then God's envisioned purpose of reestablishing the Kingdom immediately would come about. All the time, the message is of potentials. Another person, "Hen", is mentioned in addition to those of :10. This is the word for "grace", which Yahweh had kept secret ['Zephaniah']. By grace, these men could still participate in the reestablished Kingdom.

Zechariah 6:15 *Those who are far off shall come and build in Yahweh's temple*- Those far off could refer to the Jews still in Persia who were yet to return. Or the reference might be to the Gentiles- or perhaps both groups are in view. The implication of "come" is that Gentiles would enter the sacred space of the temple in order to rebuild it. The acceptance of Gentiles within God's house is clearly implied. But Gentiles didn't come and help the Jews in building as the restoration prophecies required. It could be that their refusal of Gentile help to build the temple, insisting that *only* Jews work in it (Ezra 4:3 cp. Neh. 2:20), was actually going too far; by being so exclusive, they were disallowing the fulfilment of the prophecies both in Zech. 6 and in Isaiah, that Gentiles would help in the final rebuilding of Zion. As with some of us, their quite correct refusal to allow "the adversaries of Judah" (Ezra 4:1) to fellowship with us in the work can lead us to an exclusive approach to fellowship, that actually disallows the essentially outgoing and inclusive spirit of the God we serve. The Jews returned from Babylonian having swung to the opposite extreme from their earlier worldliness; they returned proud and refusing contact with the Gentile world, considering themselves saved by their own strength. And this is perhaps reflected in the way they refused on principle to allow any Gentiles to help them in the building work. Is. 60:10,11 had foretold: "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee [as in the decree of Cyrus]... Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night"; and them as Ez. 43 had also described, "I will glorify the house of my glory" (Is. 60:7). But due to the Jews' abuse of the Sabbath and their refusal to believe Yahweh would be the promised wall of protecting fire to them, the gates could not be open continually, and had to be shut at night (Neh. 7:3; 13:19). And Antiochus quite soon after Nehemiah's time destroyed them [which shows how the spirituality involved in what we do, e.g. the building of the wall, is the essential thing, rather than the achievement of anything in itself]. The implication of the prophecies about Zion's open gates was that whosoever would could then come at any time to seek Yahweh. But men were potentially turned away from Him, and His Kingdom not realized...just because greedy, materialistic Jews wanted to have a few more coins in their pocket as a result of their trading on the Sabbath. And so with us, our meanness, our disabling of adverts to be placed, preaching to be done...by our selfishness, our desire to have more than we need to cover us in the case of an y eventuality, all this effectively shuts

up the Kingdom against men. If the Pharisees could do just this, it is possible for us to do it. The salvation of others has been delegated into our hands.

And you shall know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you- As noted on Zech. 2:9; 4:9, there was distinct scepticism about Zechariah. But he recognizes in the next sentence that the fulfilment of his words and his personal justification would only happen if his audience were obedient. The implication is that his visions of the restored Kingdom could have come about in that generation.

This will happen, if you will diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God'- One of God's greatest tragedies must be all the potential He has set up, which we don't use- the plans He's made possible, which are left unfulfilled because we don't rise up to it. Ez. 40-48 describe a great temple which the returning exiles could have built; but they didn't. Most didn't even bother returning from Babylon; those who did traded with the Gentiles, married their women, and built their own houses rather than God's. Zech. 6:15 says the same in the context of this temple being built: "And this shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord".

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 7

Zechariah Chapter 7

Zechariah 7:1 *It happened in the fourth year of king Darius that the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Chislev-* We note the usage of Babylonian forms for the months, reflecting how deep was the assimilation of the Jews into Babylonian language and culture. The temple work would be completed two years later (Ezra 6:25). But it was not at all on track to complete a temple according to the specifications required in Ez. 40-48, hence this prophecy of encouragement.

Zechariah 7:2 *The people of Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem Melech, and their men, to entreat Yahweh's favour-* The people of Bethel were amongst the first to return to the land and rebuild their own houses, whilst leaving God's house unfinished, as Hag. 1:3,4 laments. 223 of them returned in Ezra 2:28, and another 123 at the time of Neh. 7:32. "Regem Melech" is a mixture of an Assyrian and Hebrew word, implying 'friend of the king'. Again we see how deeply assimilated the Jews had become. "Sharezer" likewise reflects this, equivalent to the Assyrian *Sar-usur* or *Asur-sar-usur*, "Asur protect the King"; and it was the name of one of Sennacherib's sons (2 Kings 19:37).

Zechariah 7:3 *And to speak to the priests of the house of Yahweh of Armies, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years*?- Weeping implied fasting (Neh. 1:4; Joel 2:12). This fast had been established to remember the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the burning of the temple in that month (2 Kings 25:8,9; Jer. 52:12,13). They had instituted several other such fasts and feasts (see on Zech. 8:19). The only fast required by God was that on the day of atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month. That fasting was intended to elicit repentance; and it was exactly that which was lacking in Judah. Instead they had fasted basically out of self pity, lamenting their national judgment as a tragedy, but without personal repentance. "These so many years" could refer to the 20 or so years since the first returnees had arrived in Judah. Or it could refer to the entire 70 years of captivity, since the destruction of the temple which this fast celebrated- which would make this another of several indications that

there had been some retention of Yahweh worship in the land, and the returnees were wrong to consider the pre-existing Jewish population as somehow not in covenant with Yahweh. I have discussed this in commentary on the early chapters of Ezra.

Zechariah 7:4 *Then the word of Yahweh of Armies came to me, saying*- The question was used as an opportunity to call Judah to deeper repentance, and there are several answers given to the question as to whether they should continue their self-imposed fasts of Zech. 7:3, each introduced by this same rubric "Then the word of Yahweh of Armies came to me, saying".

Zechariah 7:5 *Speak to all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month for these seventy years*- As explained on Zech. 8:19, the Jews had instituted a fast in the seventh month, to mourn the murder of Gedaliah (Jer. 41:1,2). But this had eclipsed the fast of the seventh month which God required- on the day of atonement, to mourn their personal sins and seek His atonement.

Did you actually fast to Me, really to Me?- God's answer is that they hadn't really fasted for Him. They'd fasted, publically appearing to love the temple and the idea of a restored Kingdom... but in reality they had not done it *for God*, but somehow for themselves. And the challenge echoes to us today; we can go through all manner of religious ritual when it is effectively to ourselves and not to God.

The returned exiles were intended to keep feasts as commanded in Ez. 40-48, but it seems they didn't. The pertinent command about the seventh month was in Ez. 45:25: "In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, shall he [the prince] do the like in the feast of the seven days, according to the sin offering, according to the burnt offering, and according to the meat offering, and according to the oil". But here God through Zechariah criticized the Jews for keeping this feast only externally, but not "unto me". Hag. 2:1 records how on the 21st day of the 7th month- i.e. once the seven day feast that began on the 15th had finished- Haggai was sent to rebuke "the prince", Zerubbabel, for being so slack in fulfilling Ezekiel's vision. Even by the time of Neh. 8:14-17, it was so that the feast of the 7th month had not been kept by Judah since the time of Joshua. They subconsciously switched off to Ezekiel's words; just as we can all do.

Zechariah 7:6 *When you eat, and when you drink, don't you eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?*- The challenge echoes to us today; we can go through all manner of religious ritual when it is effectively to ourselves and not to God. We can sing hymns- but to ourselves; pray, but to ourselves, as portrayed in the Lord's story of the Pharisee praying ostensibly to God, but actually to himself (Lk. 18:11). And so it was with the Jews' fasting. Zechariah is answering their question about whether or not to continue fasting on the anniversary of the temple's destruction. He doesn't say yes or no, but rather comments that all their fasting and lamenting the destruction of the temple had been mere religious ritualism and not from the heart. So the question of continuing to do so was to be answered 'No' if they were going to continue fasting in that meaningless way; the answer was not yes or no, but rather, in what spirit were they fasting? Fasting is associated with repentance, and as discussed on Zech. 1:3 the 'return' of the Jews to God was not very deep; their repentances were insincere. Although Yahweh had by grace 'returned' them to their land anyway. Daniel's repentance for the sins of the exiles and their fathers involved prayer and fasting (Dan. 9:2); but their fasting was clearly not of that quality. If they believed the

prophecies about the restoration of the Kingdom and the temple, then they would now not need to continue lamenting the destruction of the first temple.

Zechariah 7:7 *Aren't these the words which Yahweh proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and its cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?'*- The point was that it was whilst the Jews were in prosperity formerly that they were so far from God and needed the radical call to repentance made by the former prophets. The returned exiles had been motivated by a desire for personal gain, and were bitterly disappointed by the drought and poor harvests (see on Hag. 1 and Malachi). The idea was that even if they attained prosperity, they would still be in sin. Bethel was one of the "cities" in view, and the answer was being given to the delegation from there (:2).

Zechariah 7:8 *The word of Yahweh came to Zechariah, saying*- See on :4.

Zechariah 7:9 *Thus has Yahweh of Armies spoken, saying, 'Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother*- The Levites were to judge justly in the restored temple (Ez. 44:24). But here and in Zech. 8:16, the same word is used to exhort them to stop judging unjustly. They were not therefore restoring the temple system and kingdom as commanded in Ez. 40-48. The records of Ezra and Nehemiah lament the lack of justice, kindness and compassion shown to their own brethren at the time of the restoration. These were the very attributes of the Yahweh Name (Ex. 34:4-6). Who God is must be an imperative for us to be likewise; and that is an abiding principle for all time. And it was the lack of these things which had been the basis for their exile (Jer. 7:5-7; 22:3). And the returned exiles were now behaving in just the same way.

Zechariah 7:10 *Don't oppress the widow, nor the fatherless, the foreigner, nor the poor*- The implication is that the returned exiles were committing the same sins as Judah had done before the exile. They were no better than their fathers, and the earlier prophetic criticisms of them still applied to this later generation. This is demonstration enough of how God's word is a living word and speaks to subsequent generations rather than solely to the initial audience; and that is surely why the relevant prophetic words have been preserved for us in the Bible. Thus prophetic appeals to Old Testament Israel are quoted in the New Testament as being directly to us.

And let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart'- LXX "Let none of you remember in your hearts the malice of your brother". This balances the first half of the verse, which criticizes those in power. If it were only the sins of a minority which were in view, then the judgment of the entire community would have been inappropriate. But remembering the malice of our more powerful brothers is just as much a sin as the oppression of the weak by the strong. Here again we see a major message in a minor prophet.

Zechariah 7:11 *But they refused to listen, and turned their backs, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear*- This quotes Nehemiah's words of warning to the returned exiles in Neh. 9:29. There are three progressive positions described here. They refused to listen, then turned their backs upon the warnings of the prophets, and then psychologically turned off their hearing. This same downward spiral is observable in human beings of all ages.

Zechariah 7:12 *Yes, they made their hearts as hard as flint*- Like a diamond. The same figure is used in Ez. 3:9, meaning to be psychologically unimpressable by anything other than what we already believe in our hearts. Hence LXX "They set their heart disobedient".

In case they might hear the law, and the words which Yahweh of Armies had sent by His Spirit in the previous prophets- The human mind can resist the Holy Spirit, powerful as that Spirit is. Otherwise, we would not have freewill. We wonder why people are apparently deaf to God's word. It's not merely busyness with life, or inability to intellectually grasp what it says. There is a psychological basis for all apparent intellectual failure; and that basis is that they do not want to hear and face God's demands.

Therefore great wrath came from Yahweh of Armies- The invading, desolating armies had been those of Yahweh, controlled by His Angelic armies, as previous visions in Zechariah have made clear.

Zechariah 7:13 *It has come to pass that, as He called, and they refused to listen, so they will call, and I will not listen, said Yahweh of Armies*- "They" as in the former generation were already dead. But as noted on :10, God's word is a living word. Just as the former generation had refused to listen to God's call, so the present generation would call to God and God would not listen. Our attitude to God's call to us in His word is reflected in how He responds to our calls to Him in the words of our prayers. Prayer and our attitude to God's word are therefore related. As He calls to us and we respond, so we call to Him and He responds; or doesn't respond, according to our lack of response to Him. And yet Zechariah's generation were calling out for increased prosperity; and were having no response. Because they were not hearing His word about restoring the Kingdom. The delegation from Bethel (:2) had come calling to God for an answer. And there was no yes / no answer as they sought.

Zechariah 7:14 *But I will scatter them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they have not known. Thus the land was desolate after them, so that no man passed through nor returned: for they made the pleasant land desolate*- We note the mixing of tenses; "I *will* scatter... the land *was* desolate". This is explicable once we grasp the principle explained on :10 and :13 (see too on Zech. 8:9); God had called to a previous generation of Judah through the prophetic word, and they had refused to respond. And so the land had been desolated. But that same call came to the current generation; and they too would be scattered. But God was so gracious with the returned exiles; that scattering took centuries to happen, until the temple was again destroyed and the Jews scattered in AD70. We note that the desolation of the land was because *they* had made the land "desolate". The judgments were a reflection of what they themselves had done. And it was a "pleasant land", Heb. a land of desire- God's desire was to reestablish His Kingdom there, but they made no use of that huge potential.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 8

Zechariah Chapter 8

Zechariah 8:1 *The word of Yahweh of Armies came to me*- After the heavy condemnation of the returned exiles in the previous verses, we can but marvel at

God's grace in now assuring them that He would still bring about His Kingdom purpose with Judah: "'Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother. Don't oppress the widow, nor the fatherless, the foreigner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart'. But they refused to listen, and turned their backs, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear. Yes, they made their hearts as hard as flint, in case they might hear the law, and the words which Yahweh of Armies had sent" (Zech. 7:9-12). Again we see God seeking to as it were force through His purpose of restoring the Kingdom, despite the weakness of the people's repentance as lamented in Zech. 7.

Zechariah 8:2 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath*- The wrath was with Judah. The allusion is to Jer. 32:37: "I am going to gather them from all the lands to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place". The wrath was a reflection of His jealousy for her, the wrath of love. Zech. 7:12 has just stated God's great wrath with Judah. But His wrath against the Gentile desolators of His people was even greater. See on Zech. 1:2,15. The even greater wrath He had over Zion's treatment, deserved as it was, is a reflection of the profound depth of His passionate love for Zion. It's as if a husband who has an unfaithful wife is more angry with those who punish her than he is with her. Because, quite simply, he loves her so deeply. Again we note the title "Yahweh of Armies". The Angels' tremendous zeal for the restoration comes bubbling through. No wonder the Kingdom prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah could have been fulfilled if only the people had worked together with the Angels to their full potential!

Zechariah 8:3 *Thus says Yahweh: I have returned to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem*- Many times God says that He will return to Zion if they returned to Him. They had physically returned, but not spiritually. And yet He still returned to Zion. Such was and is His grace, His desire to bring about His promise of the Kingdom and restoration. The physical movement of the Angel back to Jerusalem is suggested here. The cherubic glory of God, representing His presence, had departed from Zion in Ez. 1, but Ez. 43:4 envisaged it returning: "The glory of Yahweh came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east". But there followed a stern warning to repent: "Now let them put away their prostitution, and the dead bodies of their kings, far from Me; and I will dwell in their midst forever. You, son of man, show the house to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. If they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the form of the house" (Ez. 43:9-11). The glory returned by grace, but that grace was to elicit repentance, and a building of the temple according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48. But Judah didn't respond to the tremendous initiative of God's grace.

The language of Israel's return from captivity as found in Isaiah and Ezekiel all has evident reference to the second coming and the final establishment of the Kingdom. It isn't just that Israel's return under Ezra and Zerubbabel was a type of that final homecoming. It could have been the Kingdom- had they obeyed the prophecies. It was all about a potential Kingdom of God. But they were too caught up with their own self-interest, with building their own houses rather than God's; and so it was all deferred. Using the prophetic perfect, God had prophesied that at the time of the restoration, He would come and dwell in rebuilt Zion- just as Ezekiel's prophecy had concluded: "The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there" (Ez.

48:35). Clearly, Ezekiel's prophecies could have been fulfilled at the restoration; God was willing that they should be. But human apathy and self-interest stopped it from happening as it could have done.

Joshua didn't live up to the conditional prophecies made about him in Zechariah. Ezra and Nehemiah seem to have taken over the priestly and kingly work of Joshua and Zerubbabel respectively. Nehemiah's record concludes on the negative note that Judah had forsaken Zion (Nehemiah 13:11). Nobody wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there; the Levites even went and lived outside it where they had "fields", because they weren't given their tithes (Nehemiah 13:1). Lots had to be drawn to get people to live there (Nehemiah 11:1). It became a ghost town, when it should have been inhabited as a town without walls for the multitudes of returned exiles joyfully dwelling there (Zechariah 2:5).

Jerusalem shall be called 'The City of Truth;' and the mountain of Yahweh of Armies, 'The Holy Mountain'- "Truth" is a word associated with covenant relationship. The Mount Zion would be "holy" as opposed to all the abominations being practiced there, both before and after the restoration. But that depended upon whether Judah would be faithful and holy, and they ultimately chose not to be. It is in the Messianic Kingdom that Jerusalem will be called the "city of truth" (Is. 1:26); at the time when Messiah would be enthroned upon "my holy mountain of Zion" (Ps. 2:6; Is. 11:9). This could have happened at the restoration; but Joshua and Zerubbabel failed to be the required Messianic figures, and so the prophecy is delayed in fulfilment until the return of the Lord Jesus to earth. But the city had to be of truth and holy, for these prophecies to come true. And Haggai has just condemned the returnees as "unclean". Jerusalem "shall" be a city of truth can be read more as commandment than prediction. For :16-19 will go on to beg the people to live in "truth", "therefore love the truth" (:19), so that the wonderful potentials might be made possible.

Zechariah 8:4 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Old men and old women will again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age*- The prolonged lifespans envisaged are those of the Messianic Kingdom in Isaiah 65. As noted on :3, this could have happened at the restoration, but it was delayed until the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory. The dwelling of Yahweh in the midst of Jerusalem would be the time when aged men and women would likewise dwell there. The significance of very old people in the immediate context was that these were those who would have seen Zion before the Babylonian invasion. But this never came about. Instead those older ones wept as they realized the rebuilt temple was far smaller than the first temple, and not according to the prophecies of Ezekiel they had heard during the captivity.

Zechariah 8:5 *The streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets*- Jeremiah in his Lamentations had lamented the murder of the children in its streets. This was now to all be reversed. But instead, Nehemiah records how hard it was to get the returned exiles to dwell in Jerusalem. They preferred to build their own homes and farmsteads outside of Jerusalem. They thereby precluded the fulfilment of such prophecies. This is the undoing of the judgment of Jer. 9:21, that children would be cut off from the streets of Jerusalem. The same concept is found in the final visions of the Kingdom in Revelation; the curses upon earth for human disobedience will be reversed. Likewise the turning of fasts to feasts in :19 reverses Am. 8:10 "I will turn your feasts into mourning". Long life (:4) and prosperous children (:5) were the blessings of obedience to the old covenant, and are alluded to in Is. 65. But Judah had

broken the old covenant and had been offered the new covenant by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They had refused that, and focused instead on trying to keep the Mosaic law as best they could. And yet still God is eager to move ahead with them even on that basis. The new covenant had offered "the sound of merrymakers. I will make them many, and they shall not be few" (Jer. 30:18,19), which in essence is the picture here in Zechariah, of children playing safely in the streets.

Zechariah 8:6 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: If it is too hard in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be too hard in My eyes? says Yahweh of Armies*- Here again is a timeless challenge; we can assume that what is hard for us must therefore be hard for God. This is the root psychological problem we have which is the basis for our lack of faith in His abilities. They reasoned that “the time” of which he spoke hadn’t come (Hag. 1:2)- even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Is. 45:13 “not for price nor reward”). They felt that all the prophecies were “marvellous” (AV) or "too hard" in the sense of something incapable of concrete fulfilment in their experience. This is why Hag. 1:2 rebuked them for saying “the time is not come… that the Lord’s house should be built”. They didn’t want the prophecy to be fulfilled, because it would mean ‘going up’ from their ceiled houses- both in Babylon and in the farmsteads they had built in Judah- to build the temple. They thereby brought God down to their level of capability and potential; and this is what we do likewise through our lack of faith in His ability. And note that it was "the remnant", those who by grace God was prepared to accept, who suffered this lack of faith. "Too hard" is surely an allusion to how Abraham and Sarah felt that God's covenant promises were "too hard" to be fulfilled, earning the rebuke of Gen. 18:14 (s.w.). The exiles likewise were precluding the fulfilment of the covenant by the same attitude. Note the connection between the "covenant" and God's "marvels" [s.w. "too hard", Ex. 34:10]. Nehemiah had lamented that the exiles were not mindful of God's previous "marvels" (s.w.), His historical doing of that which was "too hard" for man, time and again (Neh. 9:17). This is why we have Biblical history; to remind us that God repeatedly achieves that which is "too hard" for men.

"These days" are the day of small things of Zech. 4:10. There seemed too large a divide between present experience and the glorious future promised. Lack of faith in our day is likewise a sense that it is a bridge too far, over too much troubled water, between present realities and the promised future. But because we tend to feel that way doesn't mean God sees it that way, and faith is the ability to see things from God's ultimate perspective. The equivalent in Jeremiah's prophecies of the restoration is Jeremiah's comment that "Nothing is impossible for You" (Jer. 32:17), confirming God's comment: "is anything impossible for Me?" (Jer. 32:27).

Zechariah 8:7 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Behold, I will save My people from the east country, and from the west country*- At that time, the Jews were in the south (Egypt) and what was called "the north". Hardly any of them were in the West. This could have come true in Zechariah's time in the sense of their regathering from the sun's rising [east] to it's setting [west]. But they didn't want to be regathered, for the most part, and remained in captivity. The allusion is to how God both saved and brought (:8) His people out of Egypt and to the promised land. But in their hearts they returned to Egypt. And so the prophecy will have a latter day fulfilment, when as today, the majority of Jews are located to the west of Palestine. The context is of God forcing through His saving purpose. The calls to flee from the land of the north

alluded to in Zech. 2 had gone unheeded. Now it seems God has a plan to recall the Jews in the west and east. God had earlier said that the exiles would return from all points of the compass: “I will bring thy seed from the east and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Keep not back” (Is. 43:5,6). But those in the north and south, Babylon and Egypt, hadn't returned in any great numbers. And there were very few Jews literally to the west and east of Palestine at that time. And even they it seems didn't come; for the prophecy eventually will be fulfilled in the Gentile converts: "Many shall come from the east and from the west [note no mention of north and south], and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8:11).

Zechariah 8:8 *And I will bring them, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness*- The connection is with :3; when God dwelt in the midst of Jerusalem, so would His people. Zion would be "the city of truth" (:3) in that truth and righteousness would characterize God's people and His relationship with them. God did indeed "bring them" from exile through stirring up the spirit of Cyrus by His Spirit to enable them to return. But the majority resisted that call, that 'bringing'; likewise it was His intention that they would return not just physically but also spiritually, in repentance. And those who did return likewise resisted that potential bringing back to Him. Just as so many of all ages have resisted the series of Divine nudges throughout their lives, designed to bring them to Him. "In truth and in righteousness" meant the people could preclude this by not living in truth and righteousness- which is the basis for Zechariah's appeal a few verses later. "I will be their God" is the language of the new covenant and restoration prophesied, or offered, in Jer. 30:22,25. It is the language of the promises to Abraham, which are the basis for the new covenant. But if they didn't live in truth and righteousness, then God would not be their God in the sense offered.

Zechariah 8:9 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Let your hands be strong*- The context of Zechariah is that the hands of those rebuilding the temple had been weakened (Ezra 4:4). The idea is 'let your hands be strengthened'. There had to be some conscious volition on the part of the temple rebuilders; but God would strengthen their hands. We recall God strengthening the hands of Lot to leave Sodom whilst he himself delayed (same phrase in Gen. 19:16); the call was to those still in Babylon to likewise flee lest they be spiritually consumed there. The very phrase "let your hands be strong" is used repeatedly in the record of the rebuilding in Nehemiah 3, rendered in the AV "Next [s.w. "hands"... repaired [s.w. "strong"]", literally 'their hands strengthened'. Nehemiah had prayed "let their hands be strengthened" (Neh. 6:9), just as initially they had "strengthened their hands to this good work" (Neh. 2:18), just as Ezra had been strengthened by God's hand (Ezra 7:28). God has turned the heart of the king to strengthen their hands (Ezra 6:22 "[God] had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, to strengthen their hands in the work of God’s house"), and yet by this point in time they needed the encouragement to again be strengthened. And that strengthening was mediated through the words of the prophets.

You who hear in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets who were in the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh of Armies was laid, even the temple, that it might be built- As noted on Zech. 7:10,13,14, God's word is a living word and speaks to subsequent generations rather than solely to the initial audience; and that is surely why the relevant prophetic words have been preserved for us in the

Bible. The prophets who had predicted the laying of the foundation stone of the restored temple should still be listened to. That prophetic word of purpose was still capable of fulfilment in later years. The prophets in view therefore may not necessarily be Haggai and Zechariah. The idea is that the essence of the prophetic message through Zechariah was the same as that of the earlier prophets. The restoration wasn't happening, despite all the potential, because that generation of Jews were just repeating the basic errors of their ancestors who had also rejected God's appeals for true repentance. That is exactly the point made in Zech. 1:4; 7:11,12. They had laid the foundations of the temple, and not according to the commands of Ez. 40-48. But God urges them to go ahead, He would accept and work through that smaller version. And so Zechariah reminds them that the foundations had been laid that the temple might be built.

Zechariah 8:10 *For before those days there were no wages for man, nor any wages for an animal*- The economic situation was so bad that men worked for nothing, and there wasn't enough to even feed the beasts of burden. God could give and take prosperity so easily. This is the scenario mentioned by Haggai, of earning wages and putting them into a bag with holes in it. This was all an outcome of their lack of devotion to the work of restoring the Kingdom.

Neither was there any peace to him who went out or came in, because of the adversary. For I set all men everyone against his neighbour- This was the state of affairs in the land before the rebuilding started. But through Angelic work, God had made the land peaceful and at rest so that the rebuilding work could start and prosper (Zech. 1:11). We note that God can set men against each other, and also bring about peace between persons. This is all the work of His Spirit upon the spirit of people. There really should be no excuse for disunity and 'every man against his neighbour' when God is willing and eager to create unity amongst His people. This is the unity of or caused by the Spirit, which Paul exults in later. Lack of unity would therefore be due to a resistance to the work of His Spirit.

Zechariah 8:11 *But now I will not be to the remnant of this people as in the former days, says Yahweh of Armies*- The terrible situation in Judah at the time of the founding of the temple (:10) would not continue. The people had returned motivated by a desire for material betterment, and God had given them drought and bad harvests (Hag. 1) to try to direct them to Him in repentance. They hadn't responded, and now God all the same wants to pour out the covenant blessings of good harvests (:12). Haggai had made it clear that God's blessings would appear if they focused on His house rather than their own. And so He had given them famine and plague to lead them to a better focus. But Zechariah seems to be saying that God would just pour out His blessings anyway (:12) if they were willing to accept it. He so wanted to force through His Kingdom program with them.

Zechariah 8:12 *For they will sow their seed in peace and the vine will yield its fruit, and the ground will give its increase, and the skies will give their dew*- See on Hag 1:9. God was willing to send the Kingdom conditions at that time, the blessings of keeping the covenant (Dt. 33:28). But we know that in reality, Judah were not obedient to the heavenly vision of Ezekiel, and therefore Judah's agriculture was *not* blessed in this way; the vines cast their fruit, and the fruit of the ground was destroyed (Hag. 1:6,11; Mal. 3:10,11). The reason was that Zech. 8:12 was conditional- upon Zech. 8:16,17: "These are the things that ye shall do [i.e. to bring these prophecies

about]; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD". But Judah abused each other, and didn't fulfil the conditions for the prophecy.

And I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things- The remnant referred to those who had returned at Zechariah's time. They could have experienced this. The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to "inherit" the land; yet the same word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing Israel to "inherit" the land again after their return from "the north country" (Zech. 2:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the "north country", then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized "throne of the Lord" (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn't even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

Zechariah 8:13 *It shall come to pass that, as you were a curse among the nations, house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Don't be afraid*- The Divine intention was that the ten tribes along with Judah would be a blessing to the nations living in the *eretz* promised to Abraham. It was "fear" which held them back from realizing this, just as it was fear which stopped God's people possessing that same land at the time of Moses and Joshua. But all this was conditional upon their wanting to leave the lands of their captivity, and to live according to the spirit of :16.

Let your hands be strong- See on :9. Jerusalem being told not to fear and to have strong hands is a direct fulfilment of the kingdom prophecy of Zeph. 3:16: "In that day it will be said to Jerusalem, Don't be afraid, Zion. Don't let your hands be weak". The people of Judah who had returned were on the very cusp of the Kingdom of God being reestablished. It so nearly happened, such was God's enthusiasm for the salvation of that generation. But it didn't happen because they were focused on the immediate and material rather than the spiritual.

Zechariah 8:14 *For thus says Yahweh of Armies: As I thought to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked Me to wrath, says Yahweh of Armies, and I didn't repent*- God pronounces "evil", but in the gap between the pronunciation of judgment and carrying it out, there is the possibility of human repentance and God's repentance / change of mind. So this statement that God did not repent is effectively saying that Judah had not then repented. Judah had still not returned / repented, but God had returned them to their land all the same. Zech. 8:14,15 uses the language of the new covenant in Jer. 32:42: "For *thus says the Lord... Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you...* so again I have purposed in these days to do *good* to Jerusalem... do not be afraid". This matches Jer. 32:40-42: "For thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the *good* fortune that I now promise them... I will rejoice in doing *good* to them". Although the Jews wanted to continue keeping the Old Covenant, God was eager to push forward their entrance

into the New Covenant. But all this was conditional upon their 'doing good' (:16,17). They didn't, and remained committed to the [broken] old covenant, and so these things have been reapplied to us who enter the new covenant today.

Zechariah 8:15 *So again have I thought in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Don't be afraid*- There is no equivalent to "And I didn't repent" in :14. God was not promising that He would not change His mind, because He cannot force through salvation upon people. The conditions of :16 were still required. The gap between Divine statement and its fulfilment still existed, as it did in :14. And there needed to be freewill response from the people, in the terms of :16. The appeals for repentance in :16,17 are likely against a background of the people assuming that since they had some kind of a temple rebuilt, therefore they must be automatically acceptable with God. The repeated assurances "Don't be afraid" beg the question, 'Afraid of what?'. I suggest it was the basic human fear of being taken beyond the narrow confines of their initial vision of life as it is.

Zechariah 8:16 *These are the things that you shall do: speak every man the truth with his neighbour. Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates*- These were the conditions for God's insistent desire to reestablish the Kingdom to come about immediately. They seem petty demands compared to the magnitude of what was on offer. But this is the major message of the minor prophets- that things like truth, justice and peace are of utterly paramount importance. And upon them stands or falls the part of men in God's Kingdom. And Judah at this time failed. The Levites were to judge justly in the restored temple (Ez. 44:24). But here and in Zech. 7:9, the same word is used to effectively exhort them to stop judging unjustly.

Zechariah 8:17 *And let none of you devise evil in your hearts against his neighbour, and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, says Yahweh*- As explained on :15,16, in return for apparently petty changes, God was prepared to reestablish the Kingdom in glory there and then. But to God, these things were not petty. They were requests for attitudes of mind, not loving falsity, not scheming in their hearts against their neighbour. It is mental attitudes that God hates. This itself sets up the colossal importance of being spiritually minded, and the primary importance of the heart over any external religious rituals. God was looking for them to love truth and peace (:19); rather than loving falsity. The same phrase for 'devising evil' is used of how the opponents of the exiles 'devised evil' against them (Neh. 6:2; Esther 8:3). Yet the exiles were doing to their brethren what had been done to them. This is the classic cycle of abuse; to do to others as was done to us. Only repentance and a response to Divine grace will break it. God had 'devised evil' against His people (:14; Mic. 2:3). But they were devising evil against that same people, their brethren. They were unconsciously playing God, responding to their own rightful receipt of God's judgment by judging others; instead of accepting guilt and the rightness of God's judgment. We note the parallels between :16,17 and Jer. 9:3-8, which list these very things as the reason Judah went into captivity and the old covenant was broken. If they continued behaving like this, then the possibility of entering the new covenant (see on :14) and the restored Kingdom of God would be precluded. And according to Malachi, the returnees failed.

Zechariah 8:18 *The word of Yahweh of Armies came to me*- See on Zech. 7:4. This

appears to still be in answer to the question posed by the delegation from Bethel about fasting in Zech. 7:2.

Zechariah 8:19 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months shall be for the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts-*

Zechariah chapters 7 and 8 clearly form a unit. In Zech. 7:6 Zechariah answered their question about whether or not to continue fasting on the anniversary of the temple's destruction [in the fifth month]. He doesn't say yes or no, but rather comments that all their fasting and lamenting the destruction of the temple had been mere religious ritualism and not from the heart. So the question of continuing to do so was to be answered 'No' if they were going to continue fasting in that meaningless way; the answer was not yes or no, but rather, in what spirit were they fasting? Fasting is associated with repentance, and as discussed on Zech. 1:3 the 'return' of the Jews to God was not very deep; their repentances were insincere. Although Yahweh had by grace 'returned' them to their land anyway. Daniel's repentance for the sins of the exiles and their fathers involved prayer and fasting (Dan. 9:2); but their fasting was clearly not of that quality. If they believed the prophecies about the restoration of the Kingdom and the temple, then they would now not need to continue lamenting the destruction of the first temple. Indeed, by faith, they would turn those fasts into feasts of celebration. But the Jews didn't do so. The fasts "shall be" feasts- I take that as a command more than a prophecy. But true to human nature, they preferred to remain myopic, lamenting the past and comfortable doing so because it gave a sense of tradition and community, rather than seeing the very real possibilities of living a Kingdom life of all joy and peace through believing. The challenge is not simply to those who think the Christian walk is a glum holding on to tradition, lamenting every step of their lives in this world, taking comfort in thoughts that they are preserving God's Truth in a dark and wicked world as the miserable faithful have ever done. In fact, the problem is basic to human nature. We actually prefer to walk in myopic flat emotion, rather than be inspired and 'be strengthened' by the Spirit to see the great possibilities there are for us both now and eternally, and to change fasts to feasts. Ask believers whether they are 100% certain of their personal salvation... and the answers are disappointing. The Jews have been criticized in Zech. 7:5,6 for effectively fasting for themselves and not for God: "Did you actually fast to Me, really to Me?". To live in the postmodern world of flat emotion and continual borderline depression is in fact selfish; so much art and culture glorifies the inane and negative and people live in that same spirit. Just as Judah fasted for themselves, and refused to turn the fasts to feasts.

Joy, gladness and cheerful feasts is the language of the restoration prophecies like Jer. 33:10,11: "Yet again there shall be heard in this place, about which you say, It is waste, without man and without animal, even in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without animal, the voice of *joy* and the voice of *gladness*, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, Give thanks to Yahweh of Armies, for Yahweh is good, for His loving kindness endures forever; who bring thanksgiving into the house of Yahweh. For I will cause the captivity of the land to return as at the first, says Yahweh". The Messianic banquet could have happened then- if they wanted it. Just as people can make what they will of the breaking of bread banquet. We could argue that the sound of joy and gladness had been taken from the nation for 70 years- but if they turned the fasts into feasts as commanded, then the restoration would be with them: "I will take from them the voice of *joy* and the voice of *gladness*, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride... This whole land shall be a desolation

and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. It shall happen that when seventy years are accomplished, then I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, says Yahweh, for their iniquity" (Jer. 25:10-12; Jer. 7:34; 16:9). The reversal of fasts to feasts was to be part of the new covenant experience prophesied in Jer. 31:12; 33:11: "I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow". But they preferred to mope around in mourning, and those days of mourning are kept in Judaism to this day. The essence of these things is to be found in the experience of those on the Lord Jesus, who said that His disciples would feast and not fast because of His presence with them.

The Jews had instituted their own fasts: the ninth day of the fourth month, in memory of the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans; in the fifth month, in remembrance of the burning of the temple and city (see on Zech. 7:3); in the seventh month, to mourn the murder of Gedaliah (Jer. 41:1,2); and in the tenth month, in memory of the commencement of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. But the only fast required by God was that on the day of atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month. That fasting was intended to elicit repentance; and it was exactly that which was lacking in Judah. Instead they had fasted basically out of self pity, lamenting their national judgment as a tragedy, but without personal repentance. We see here the human tendency towards religion; and even when ostensibly based upon spiritual things, it can end up a totally separate religion to the one God desires. In their case, fasting to lament Gedaliah's death took precedence over fasting in repentance for personal sins, which was what God wanted.

Therefore love truth and peace- Without loving truth, these feasts would not be joyful to the Jews who had returned. The prophecy was conditional. As noted on :17, they had loved falsity; God was and is intensely concerned with the state of the human heart. What do we really love and aspire to? Hence all who truly love the Lord's appearing, with all that entails, shall be saved (2 Tim. 4:8). To love truth is not to love achieving intellectual truths of interpretation. Rather the idea is of loving integrity and rightness, righteousness. So that Jerusalem could be called a "city of truth", inhabited by people who 'did truth'. And this is the idea of Jer. 31:23: "Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its towns when I return their fortunes: “The Lord bless you, O abode of righteousness, O holy mountain!". That meant, however, that for the restoration to happen- there had to be righteousness and holiness within Jerusalem. Haggai had declared the people there "unclean"; and now Zechariah appeals for integrity, truth in its moral sense, which in the end is true Biblical love. We note how John's letters often harp on the connection between love and 'truth'. Jer. 32:41 speaks of how "I will plant them in this land in faithfulness"- the same Hebrew idea as 'truth'. But Zechariah has to appeal to the people to have that faithfulness. In the end, they didn't. And a case can be made that the rest of the prophecy, Zech. 9-14, moves on to reinterpret the prophetic possibilities with reference to the Lord Jesus and the establishment of His Kingdom in an even more glorious way, seeing that the people didn't want it then. And that is why the appeals for repentance in Zechariah finish here, and the prophecies are no longer dated specifically, as they have no immediate relevance to the time of Darius.

Indeed it could be argued that Zech. 8 is a summary of the previous prophecies in Zech. 1-7, and gives Judah an ultimatum- to live the Kingdom life now, or the Kingdom will not be restored. The rest of the prophecy then focuses upon the future. The connections are persuasive: 8:2 = 1:14; 8:3 = 1:16; 2:14,15; 8:4,5 = 2:4,8; 8:7,8 =

2:6,11,12; 8:9-13 = 3:10; 4:9; 8:14,17 = 5:3,4; 7:9,10; 8:19 = 7:3,9; 8:20-22 = 2:15; 5:5-11; 8:23 = 2:10-12,15.

Zechariah 8:20 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Many peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come*- The "many peoples" could refer to the peoples of Judah / Israel (as in Dt. 33:3,19). Consistently, the restoration prophecies envisaged God's restored people as being a blessing to the nations around them; they would recognize that Yahweh had done great things for His people (Ps. 126:1-3) and would wish to therefore become part of that people. The reality was that Judah and Israel continued worshipping the idols of those nations, and later evolved an exclusivist, superior attitude toward them.

Zechariah 8:21 *And the inhabitants of one shall go to another, saying*- "The inhabitants of one" is LXX "five cities", perhaps alluding to the five cities which were the capitals of Persia and which therefore became a figure of speech for Persia. Likewise the five cities (the Pentapolis) of the Philistines may also be in view. The peoples of their captivity could have turned to the wonderful God of the Jews; but this didn't happen.

'Let us go speedily to entreat the favour of Yahweh, and to seek Yahweh of Armies. I will go also'- "Speedily" is also rendered 'continually'. This is the picture of the closing vision in Zech. 14; Gentiles coming up at regular intervals to keep the feasts. But we see here how the word of the Gospel spreads; it is by the invitation of those seeking God artlessly passed on to others. We see here a powerful picture of effective evangelism. Those who ask others to go the journey to Zion must themselves lead by example: "I will go also".

Zechariah 8:22 *Yes, many peoples and strong nations will come to seek Yahweh of Armies in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of Yahweh*- Perhaps Nehemiah was some kind of potential Messiah- for the surrounding Gentiles 'came up' to him and shared in the luxurious temple meals (a common Kingdom prophecy- the same Hebrew words are used for the Gentiles 'coming up' to the temple in Is. 60:5,11; Jer. 16:19; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). Those meals could have been the Messianic banquets. See on Mal. 1:10.

Zechariah 8:23 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: In those days, ten men will take hold-*

It has been estimated that about 20,000 Jews were taken to Babylon. But the population of Babylon was 200,000, indeed it is noted as the first city to pass 200,000 population. This would mean that the population of Babylon was ten percent Jewish. The ideal was that Babylon would turn to Judah's God, 'taking hold of the skirt' in covenant relationship.

Out of all the languages of the nations- Initially the reference would have been to the 127 languages of the Persian empire. They would beg for acceptance by the minority nation amongst them, the Jews.

They will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'-See on Ez. 16:63. It was God's intention that ten men (a reference to Israelites of the ten tribes?) would take hold of the skirts of a Jew (i.e. one of Judah) and come with him to worship in the new temple. The idea was that those Jews still in Babylon and Persia would return, and there would be many Gentiles who would come with them. But in fact the opposite happened. So few wanted to live in Jerusalem, that the rulers had to cast lots to force one in ten Jews to

go and live in Jerusalem (Neh. 11:1). Most of the captives chose to stay where they were, in captivity, assimilated into the culture and ways of the world around them. And the ten tribes didn't really unite with Judah, but went off and got lost in the Gentile world.

"A Jew" is literally 'a Yehudite'- a specific term for a resident of the Persian province of Judah. They could have had the peoples of all the nations in the Persian empire grabbing hold of their skirt. Yehud could have risen up to be the head of all the nations in the land promised to Abraham, i.e. the Persian empire. These were the very real possibilities.

"God is with you" refers to how the visible presence of Yahweh would have been seen in Zion, when Yahweh Shammah, "the Lord is there". This should have been the effect of the Gentiles witnessing a mass return of Jews and the reestablishment of God's Kingdom at that time. But that didn't happen, and so the words are alluded in 1 Cor. 14:25 of how Gentiles who behold the functional Christian church would say that "God is with you".

The LXX hints that even this prophecy is conditional, upon the Gentiles actually wanting to join the Jews in Yahweh worship: "In those days my word shall be fulfilled if ten men of all the languages of the nations should take hold—even take hold of the hem of a Jew...".

We see a number of different potential movements within God's purpose. Jeremiah and Ezekiel had offered the captives a return from exile, a new covenant and a restored Kingdom, with a new temple and a Messianic "Prince" and conditions of great blessing in the land, with the Gentiles becoming proselytes. But this was conditional upon their repentance. They didn't repent and only a relatively few returned from exile. They didn't build the temple as commanded by Ezekiel and sought to return to the [now broken] old covenant. They didn't repent and were only interested in their own properties and material betterment. Haggai and Zechariah appealed for repentance, but it was only done on a surface level. Through Zechariah, God offered them a new version of things- a priest [Joshua] and a king [Zerubbabel], and offers to cleanse the Levitical priesthood. And offered the blessings of the old covenant in return for obedience to the old covenant. Jeremiah's prophecies of the new covenant are alluded to in Zechariah 1-8 and parts of them are mixed in with the new deal God was offering a people who still wanted the old covenant, for reasons of preserving tradition. But even that wasn't acceptable to them. God condemns them as "unclean" (Haggai) and unacceptable (Malachi). After Zechariah 8, Zechariah refocuses the possible futures upon the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. Yet Mal. 1: 11 is clear that God enjoyed fellowship and worship from a faithful remnant of exiles still in captivity, quite without a temple and sanctuary. And quite possibly without a Levitical priesthood. Zech. 8:20-23 and other restoration prophecies speak of a pilgrimage of nations to worship at the restored temple in Jerusalem. But Malachi sees the possibility of individual Jews [initially] acceptably worshipping God from a distance. And this merges with the wider vision of individual Gentiles worldwide glorifying Him, without the temple and restored Kingdom in the specific form envisaged by the restoration prophets. In all this we see God's earnest desire to somehow work with men, on whatever level.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 9

Zechariah Chapter 9

Zechariah 9:1 *An oracle. The word of Yahweh is against the land of Hadrach*- Hadrach is another name for the area around Damascus. It may be mentioned because here Alexander the Great of Greece won his victory which opened the way for him to then pursue his campaign against Syria and the areas around Israel, which the next verses describe. Or the reference could be to the Syrian god Chadrak; the oracle was specifically against the god of Damascus.

And will rest upon Damascus; for the eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel is toward Yahweh- This continues the theme of Zech. 8, that in the Messianic Kingdom there would be a joining together of the Gentiles with the Jews in turning to God. This time would also be of unity between the ten tribes and the two tribes- *all* the tribes of Israel would together turn toward Yahweh. Our common repentance and relationship with God is what is in practice the basis of fellowship between God's people; it is based upon spiritual experience rather than common theology. But this time of turning to Yahweh would only come about after terrible judgments upon the nations around Judah. These would elicit repentance of a remnant, as the following prophecy makes clear. In the first instance, the reference is to the campaign of Alexander the Great against the neighbours of Judah; this could have led to the coming of a Messiah figure and the reestablishment of the Kingdom. But this possibility also didn't work out, and so these events will have their major fulfilment in the last days and the time of the Lord's return.

Zechariah 9:2 *And Hamath, also, which borders on it*- The idea is that Hamath would share the same judgment as Damascus, perhaps at the same time or at the same hands. This happened during the campaign of Alexander the Great.

Tyre and Sidon, because they are very wise- This continues the great prophetic theme; that all human strength and wisdom is as nothing before God's judgment.

Zechariah 9:3 *Tyre built herself a stronghold, and heaped up silver like the dust, and fine gold like the mire of the streets*- All human strength was and is to crumble before God's judgment. Isaiah and Ezekiel had prophesied against mainland Tyre, and their words had been fulfilled by the Babylonians. But they then built their island stronghold, as if to ensure future Divine prophecies against them would not be fulfilled.

Zechariah 9:4 *Behold, the Lord will dispossess her, and He will strike her power in the sea; and she will be devoured with fire*- Initially seen in the destruction of Tyre's island citadel by Alexander the Great building a mole into the sea to reach it. "Dispossess" is literally 'to send into exile', and there are records of 13,000 people from the conquered Tyre being sent away into slavery.

Zechariah 9:5 *Ashkelon will see it, and fear; Gaza also, and will writhe in agony; as will Ekron, for her expectation will be disappointed*- LXX "for she is ashamed at her trespass". The idea is that the Divine judgments would elicit repentance in a minority, just as was intended to happen with Judah. Or if we read as the Masoretic text, the idea would be that Ekron as the most northerly city in the route of Alexander's

advance had hoped that Tyre or Egypt would come to the support of the Philistines; but they were disappointed. All trust in human strength can lead only to disappointment.

And the king will perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon will not be inhabited- The order of mention of the cities in this section follows the route of Alexander's campaign. I suggested on Dan. 2 that there were various potential fulfilments of the sequence of metals in the image, culminating in the reestablishment of the Kingdom of God in Israel. The perishing of the king of Gaza at the hands of Alexander is recorded by Herodotus: "Betis the satrap, or petty "king," was bound to a chariot by thongs thrust through the soles of his feet, and dragged round the city".

Zechariah 9:6 *Foreigners will dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines*- Neh. 4:7; 13:24 stress that Ashdod was a particular opponent of the restoration. But they too would be cut off. Perhaps the "foreigners" in view were those whom the people of Ashdod considered foreigners, i.e. the Jews. And again we note the continued, repeated prophetic criticism of pride. This was and is the fundamental reason for Divine judgment. In :10 we read of the 'cutting off' (s.w.) of the military strength of Zion's enemies; perhaps the pride of the Philistines refers specifically to that about which they prided themselves, namely their military technology. And we can see clear similarities in the latter day fulfilment of these verses, in the judgments to come upon the latter day Philistines- the Palestinians.

Zechariah 9:7 *I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth*- This implies that the previously mentioned nations are as a beast with Judah in their mouth, whom they are treating abominably. This is the same figure as Am. 3:12 describing a shepherd taking out the remnants of Judah from the mouth of the beast which had devoured them. Such an arrest of their behaviour never happened, let alone resulting in a remnant of them repenting and joining with Israel as spoken of in the rest of this verse. Yet it will come true, in the last days. It is this which means that Zechariah 9 is clearly a prophecy of the return of Christ to earth and the establishment of His Kingdom (see Zech. 9:1,9-11 especially). But this worldwide Kingdom will be established after judgments are executed upon Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon, Ekron, Ashdod and Gaza- a collection of peoples likened to a beast with a mouth and teeth which have enclosed Israel. These areas are geographically exactly where the jihadists envisage the 'greater Syria' as being. They surround present day Israel, from the Gaza Strip to Lebanon. And they are likened to some latter day beast descending upon Israel, which must be destroyed before God's Kingdom can be established. This encourages us to see the beast of Daniel and Revelation as referring in its final form to Israel's Islamist neighbours who now surround her. Is. 9:12 uses 'beast' imagery when it speaks of the Syrians and Philistines [same word as 'Palestinians'] as being the mouth of a huge beast, closing around Israel: "The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth". This image of an Arab beast devouring Israel is repeated in Joel 1:6 concerning the later Assyrian invader.

And he also will be a remnant for our God; and he will be as a chieftain in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite- Just as remnant of Judah will be for "our God", so a remnant of the aggressive nations around Judah would likewise serve the same God ["our God"]. They would become equal to the Jews, even becoming chiefs in Judah, and the remnant of Ekron's inhabitants would be as the Jews who lived in Jerusalem

itself. It is called "Jebus" here, its Palestinian name, to demonstrate the degree of unity between the Jewish remnant and the repentant remnant of the surrounding nations. This could have happened at the time of the restoration, but neither remnant repented. This is therefore yet to come, and will bring about the situation of Is. 19:24, when in the Kingdom, natural Israel and the surrounding nations will have equal share. This message was unattractive to the returned exiles, who wanted an exclusively Jewish kingdom.

Zechariah 9:8 *I will encamp around My house against the army, so that none pass through or return; and no oppressor will pass through them any more*- The potential fulfilment was that Alexander could have come to Jerusalem, encamp against it, and be destroyed by the appearance of a Messianic figure in Zion (:9). But this also didn't happen, and so the prophecy will have a rescheduled fulfilment in the last days. "I will encamp about mine house because of the army of him that passeth by [the latter-day Sennacherib], and because of him that returneth... the Lord of Hosts (Angels) shall defend them" (Zech. 9:8,15) is all the language of Jacob under threat from Esau, being Angelically camped around. This is the basis for the latter day situation in Jerusalem. It has been noted that Alexander averted his plans to attack Jerusalem and instead bypassed Judah in his enthusiasm to get to Egypt and conquer it. This was of God, but reflected how the scenario envisaged here was not then to happen, although in essence it will do so in the last day. "Oppressor" is the word used about the Egyptians oppressing Israel in Egypt (Ex. 3:7; 5:6,10). Alexander didn't do this to Judah. The idea is that an oppressor would come into Judah and oppress them, but Yahweh would defend Jerusalem- exactly as happened when the Assyrians invaded Judah at the time of Hezekiah. This didn't really happen under Alexander, although it was potentially possible. But it will happen in the last days.

For now I have seen with My eyes- The allusion may be to how God also 'saw' His people in Egypt, and saved them (Ex. 2:25; 3:7). The problem was that they did not lift their eyes to their maker, and His gaze and theirs didn't meet.

Zechariah 9:9 *Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem!*- This is the potential "shout" of Is. 44:23-28: “Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: *shout* [s.w.], ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.... that frustrateth the tokens of the liars [s.w. Nehemiah 4:15 re. God frustrating the Samaritan opposition]... That confirmeth the word of his servant [Cyrus], and *performeth the counsel* of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built".

Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; humble, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey- This is another prophecy of Zerubbabel or Joshua which had to have its real fulfilment deferred until the coming of Jesus. This King could have brought salvation- the salvation prophesied as coming at the restoration (Zech. 8:7) when Yahweh [as represented by His appointed king] came to Zion (Zech. 8:3). See on Jer. 23:5. Did Zerubbabel / Joshua like Nehemiah enter Jerusalem on a donkey? Or were they intended to but didn't? "His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth” (:10) means that full inheritance of the territory promised to Abraham could have been possible at the restoration, had Joshua or Zerubbabel become their king. The phrase contrasts with the repeated reminder that the Persians had dominion “on this side the river” (Ezra 4:10,11,16; 5:3,6; 6:13; 8:36; Neh. 3:7). The coming King

(and Joshua was prophesied as a king) was to free Judah from Persia's dominion, and establish God's Kingdom on its territory, with boys and girls playing in the streets of Jerusalem (Zech. 8:5). "From sea even to sea" is a conscious quote of the famous Messianic prophecy of Ps. 72:8. This was David's prayer for Solomon; that he should have been the Messiah, and his Kingdom should have been Messiah's. 1 Chron. 28:6,7 definitely seems to imply that Solomon could have lived for ever had he been obedient: "I will establish his kingdom for ever, *if* he be constant to do my commandments". But as everyone knew, Solomon had failed, what was potentially possible hadn't come true, due to his apostasy. Now, again, it *could* come true through the work of Joshua and Zerubbabel, and the priesthood and people being obedient to the temple prophecies of Ezekiel. If they wanted the Kingdom to come, then they had to live the Kingdom life.

There is an intended juxtaposition here: "Your King comes... lowly, and riding on a donkey". Kings were supposed to enter upon a charger, not upon a donkey, let alone upon a foal who had not been broken in, bucking and starting in every direction rather than sedately bearing the glorious king. This was and is the great paradox- a humble king. Likewise in the New Testament, the Spirit chose 'shepherd' as an image of ecclesial leadership, when the surrounding Rabbis despised shepherds as dishonest. It's just the same as the Lord Jesus describing Himself as the humble King- a very contradiction in the terms of the contemporary culture.

Zechariah 9:10 *I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow will be cut off; and he will speak peace to the nations: and his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth*- The Greek invasion is seen as focusing upon the territory of Israel and Jerusalem particularly. A united Ephraim [the ten tribes] and Judah, freshly returned from captivity and to God, would overcome these invaders with God's help, and take over the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham for the new Messianic King; with a message of peace with God to those nations.

Zechariah 9:11 *As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I have set free your prisoners from the pit in which is no water*- The prisoners in the pit in the first instance were Judah in captivity, represented by Jeremiah who was cast into such a pit (Is. 51:14; 61:1; Jer. 37:16). Jeremiah had foreseen that a new covenant would be made with the returning exiles when they were freed from the pit of Babylonian captivity. It is this covenant which is in view here, and it is associated with blood, just as the Abrahamic covenant had been [through the blood of circumcision] and the old, Mosaic covenant, which was inaugurated through the sprinkling of blood. Quite how this would have worked out at the time of the restoration is unclear; perhaps the "blood" referred to that shed in the Babylonian invasion of Judah. But the wording is as it is because most of the exiles preferred to remain in the pit of Babylon, and those who did return repeatedly broke the covenant by their behaviour. The final fulfilment would be in the blood of the Lord Jesus, mediator of the new covenant, releasing God's people from the pit of sin and death.

Zechariah 9:12 *Turn to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope!*- The exiles are presented as prisoners, whereas in fact they enjoyed a degree of freedom, as the book of Esther reveals. So the imprisonment was spiritual, just as the exiles were urged to flee spiritual death in Babylon. They were imprisoned in the hope of deliverance at the restoration, and yet this "hope of Israel" was rejected by them, in preference for

life in Babylon. They were asked to turn or return to the stronghold of Zion. They had been released from prison (:11); but they needed to actually leave. And they for the most part chose to remain in their cells.

Even today I declare that I will restore double to you- "Even today", when the exiles were still so weak and sinful. "Restore" is the same original word as "Turn" at the start of the verse. Their returning literally and spiritually to God and the things of the Kingdom would result in God's returning "double" to them. And so it is today; any move we make toward God is compensated double by His movement toward us.

Zechariah 9:13 *For indeed I bend Judah as a bow for Myself. I have filled the bow with Ephraim; and I will stir up your sons, Zion*- "Stir up" is s.w. Ezra 1:5 about Judah's spirit being 'stirred up' to return. But most of them preferred to remain in exile. And so this prophecy of Judah and Ephraim being reunited at the restoration and used by God to achieve military victory against their enemies... simply never happened.

Against your sons, Greece, and will make you like the sword of a mighty man- The envisaged scenario was that the Greek invasion of the Middle East would come against Jerusalem, and be defeated by a united Judah and Israel; who would then dominate the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. This had also been envisaged in Daniel. The little horn of Daniel 7 grows out of the fourth kingdom, represented by the fourth beast. But in Daniel 8, a very similar horn grows out of Greece, the third kingdom. We can therefore conclude that the antichrist figure of Daniel 8 would have appeared as an outgrowth of the Greek kingdom, and been destroyed by Messiah's coming. But this didn't happen, and Antiochus Epiphanes became but an incipient fulfilment of the antichrist of the last days. Zechariah, like Daniel, contains many conditional prophecies- "And this shall come to pass, *if* you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God" (Zech. 6:15). Zech. 9:13 appears to be another such conditional prophecy, similar in reference to that of Daniel 8 about the possibility of Messiah's coming at the time of the Greek empire. God says He will place Ephraim within the bow of Judah, to be fired at her enemies; and He would "raise up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece" (Zech. 9:13), leading to the final salvation of God's people, the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom, and her Messianic king coming unto her (Zech. 9:9). But this didn't come true; the resistance of the Maccabees was not based on true spirituality, and the Romans took over control of the land from the Greeks. No Messianic Kingdom was established. This would explain the purposeful ambiguity of interpretation which there is in the image of Daniel 2; a good case can be made for the sequence Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece, and yet also for the sequence Babylon-Medo Persia- Greece-Rome. Daniel 8 predicts the breakup of the Greek empire after Alexander's death into four horns, out of which a little horn arises (Dan. 8:8). The only other prophetic reference to four horns is again in Zechariah, when we read of how the four horns who had scattered God's people were to be cut off by the carpenters (Zech. 1:18,19). The carpenters surely look forward to the carpenter Messiah. He could have appeared and cut off those four horns; but He did not, and so another prophetic sequence was allowed, in which another [fourth] beast arose, this time with ten horns, not just four. And in Revelation we find this developed further, in that seven heads also appear on the beast, and a whore rides the best, sitting upon [another?] seven hills / kingdoms. The number and ferocity of the enemies of God's people seems to increase over time. If Israel had repented earlier, then all this would have been unnecessary. The three horses of Zechariah 1 thus become four horses in Zechariah 6. The fact the four cherubim chariots are sent out in

judgment of those same coloured horses speaks of how all earthly entities have their representative Angels in Heaven. See on Zech. 1:12.

Zechariah 9:14 *Yahweh will be seen over them; and His arrow will go flashing like lightning; and the Lord Yahweh will blow the trumpet, and will go with whirlwinds of the south*- "The Lord shall be over them"- as the Angels went over David beyond the mulberry trees (2 Sam. 5:24) and as the Angel in the cloud was over Israel in the wilderness. "His arrow shall go forth as lightning"- Angel cherubim language. He "shall go with whirlwinds of the South"- the group of Angels sent into "the south" (i.e. Judah) in Zech. 6:6. If Judah returned, both physically and spiritually, then they would be walking in step with the Spirit in that they would be in harmony with the Angel cherubim who were also returning to Zion, having left in Ez. 1 and returning when the glory would have returned to the rebuilt Zion in Ez. 40-48. Thus in the next verse Zechariah attributes Israel's final success as thanks to "the Lord of hosts"- the hosts of Angels working with them and for them. See on Zech. 10:1. But they didn't rebuild according to those specifications, many didn't return physically, and only a very few returned to God in repentance. And so it didn't happen; and the trumpet blowing, perhaps alluding to the announcing of the year of release and day of atonement, never happened.

Zechariah 9:15 *Yahweh of Armies will defend them*- In the restoration context, this would be a reference to the Angel cherubim working with the returned exiles, defending them from the Greek invasion; see on :14.

And they will destroy and overcome with sling stones- The reference is clearly to David's victory over Goliath and the Philistines, who have been mentioned earlier in this chapter. The idea is that there would be a revival of how things were in David's time when Israel were God's kingdom in the past. See on Zech. 10:5. But instead of subduing the nations around them with the victory of Israel's God, they brought their own brethren into subjection unto them, that they might gain out of them (Zech. 9:15 s.w. Neh. 5:5). It could've been the Kingdom, Israel could have become the joy of the whole earth and her people a joy. But instead, they were obsessed with their petty, miserable little kingdoms, and the next few centuries had nothing of the joy which Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied as being possible for them.

And they will drink, and roar as through wine; and they will be filled like bowls, like the corners of the altar- The drinking of wine in the context of the altar bowls suggests the drink offering. But they would be as bowls, filled by God- a reference to the filling with His Spirit which was promised at the restoration and entering of the new covenant. But the GNB and LXX offer to the effect that: "They will shout in battle like drunk men and will shed the blood of their enemies; it will flow like the blood of a sacrifice poured on the altar from a bowl". This mass military victory over their enemies never really happened at the restoration, but it will at the Lord's return. This will be the sacrifice in Bozrah of Is. 34:6; 63:1.

Zechariah 9:16 *Yahweh their God will save them in that day as the flock of His people*- This salvation could have happened at the time of the restoration; but the flock were not obedient to the call to return to Zion and spiritually to their shepherd. And they were misled by false shepherds from amongst themselves (Zech. 10:2). We noted on :14 that the Angels were potentially a big part of the restoration. The Angel leading the exiles is elsewhere styled a shepherd (Is. 63:9-11; Ps. 80:1). "The lord of

Hosts (Angels) has visited His flock the house of Judah" (Zech. 10:3). Similarly, Israel "went their way as a flock, they were troubled because there was no shepherd" (Zech. 10:2)- i.e. the Angel was not with them because they refused to follow Him.

For they are like the jewels of a crown, lifted on high over His land- As explained on Zech. 6:11, Joshua could have been crowned as priest and Messianic king, but the jewels of the crown were God's people. Malachi speaks of them likewise, but accepts that the day was yet future when they would be made up together into a crown (Mal. 3:17).

Zechariah 9:17 *For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!*- The beauty may refer to the potential beauty of Israel as jewels (:16), made so by the grace / goodness of their God.

Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins- Grain and new wine were the blessings for an Israel who remained in covenant relationship with their God. This could have happened at the restoration, for Ez. 36:29 had spoken of how at that time "I will also save you from all your uncleanness: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you". But instead, as Hag. 1 notes, they were beset by famine and crops ruined by plague.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 10

Zechariah Chapter 10

Zechariah 10:1 *Ask of Yahweh rain in the time of the spring rains; Yahweh will make storm clouds, He will give rain showers to everyone for the plants in the field*- I explained on Zech. 9:14 that the Angels had potentially prepared a way for Judah to return and prosper into a restored kingdom of God, just as the Spirit now fulfils that function for those who wish to be God's people today. Had Judah moved in step with this, they would have become part of the cherubim system. The cherubim reference is continued here. Yahweh would again “make bright clouds” (AV) for Israel, reminiscent of Ezekiel’s cherubim. Finally, the Lord *shall* go before them, as He had wanted to in Ezekiel’s time, and even the feeble amongst Israel “shall be as the angel of the Lord [who goes] before them” (Zech. 12:8). They would become as the Angel in the same way as Ezekiel became part of the cherubim system, following eagerly where the Angel-cherubim lead. All this huge potential, to move forward with the Angel cherubim above them, was theirs for the asking- "Ask [this] of Yahweh...". The drought which was crippling the exiles at this time (see on Hag. 1), would be replaced by showers.

Zechariah 10:2 *For the teraphim have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie; and they have told false dreams. They comfort in vain*- Here is evidence enough that the Jews returned from exile with teraphim and false prophets; perhaps the term "teraphim" is used to recall how the historical Jacob had also returned from his exile with teraphim (Gen. 31:32).

Therefore they go their way like sheep. They are oppressed, because there is no shepherd- As noted on Zech. 9:16, God was eager to shepherd His people; but they preferred false shepherds (:3), and chose not to walk in step with the Angel cherubim who were to shepherd the people (see on Zech. 9:16). This was exactly why they had gone into captivity (Ez. 34:8), and they were behaving the same at their return. The

situation would only finally be resolved by a new shepherd arising in the Lord Jesus, and the final homecoming will be at His return.

Zechariah 10:3 *My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the male goats; because Yahweh of Armies has visited His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His majestic horse in the battle*- God was angry with the false shepherds who claimed that now was not the time to rebuild the temple (see on Hag. 1:2); because it was the time, and the Angel hosts / armies of Yahweh had potentially enabled the way for them to return, and to be ridden by Him as a horse in victory against all their enemies. Those false shepherds acted as male goats, who were used to direct the sheep in the absence of a human shepherd. Zechariah and Malachi repeatedly criticize the shepherd-priests of Judah for not leading the people as they should have done, and thereby enabled the restoration as potentially envisaged. Because Yahweh had visited His people and (potentially) made them capable of establishing His Kingdom, *therefore* the priests were at fault for not enabling Judah's spiritual revival. See on Zech. 13:7-9.

Zechariah 10:4 *From Him will come forth the cornerstone, from Him the nail, from Him the battle bow, from Him every ruler together*- The cornerstone of the new temple had been laid, but a far more glorious structure was possible, in line with that in Ez. 40-48. God would have raised up a new leadership, as explained on Zech. 6:14. "The nail", like the cornerstone, was the language of Messiah (Is. 22:23; Mt. 21:42). Under this leadership, a repentant Israel and Judah would have vanquished all opposition and established a restored Kingdom of God in the territory of the *eretz*. But they didn't, and yet the prophecies will come true when they do repent in the last days.

Zechariah 10:5 *They shall be as mighty men, treading down muddy streets in the battle; and they shall fight, because Yahweh is with them; and the riders on horses will be confounded*- The reference to trampling as mud is the language of 2 Sam. 22:43 about David, who has already been alluded to in Zech. 9:15; this would be a restoration of the Davidic kingdom. See on Gen. 49:17. As noted on :1 and Zech. 9:14, repentant Judah could have merged into the Angel-cherubim system; they could have been 'mighty ones', *elohim*, just as the Angels. Horse riders would be confounded because the restored Judah were as a horse ridden by Angels, and Yahweh Himself (:3). "Yahweh is with them" may be a hint that "God with us" in the person of Messiah was with them; and all this has its major fulfilment at the Lord's second coming. There is the implication that the returned exiles could have won great military victories; but instead they feared to challenge the local powers.

Zechariah 10:6 *I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them back*- Again we see the Divine intention to reunite both Judah and the ten tribe kingdom in their restoration; but this didn't happen because the majority preferred to remain in the lands of their exile. Ez. 37:16 had clearly spoken of such unity at the restoration: "Judah... the children of Israel... Joseph, the stick of Ephraim... all the house of Israel". They didn't return despite God's desire to strengthen them and bring them back. And Judah was not strengthened or 'made to prevail' above their brethren (same Hebrew in 1 Chron. 5:2), even though this was the Divine intention. See on :12.

For I have mercy on them; and they will be as though I had not cast them off- This mercy was dependent upon their asking for it in repentance; but they didn't. And so it must have its fulfilment in a latter day scenario. Paul's positive approach to Israel's conversion is reflected in his whole reasoning in Romans 11, his classic

statement about preaching to Israel. He begins by saying that God has not cast off His people Israel totally, because some, e.g. himself, have turned to Christ. So, seeing that God will not cast off His people Israel in the ultimate sense, it perhaps follows that in every generation some of them will come to Christ as Paul did (Rom. 11:1,2). In some sense, God has cast off His people (2 Kings 21:14 RV; Zech. 10:6); and yet, because a minority of them will always accept Christ, it is not true that God has cast off His people in a total sense (Rom. 11:1 RV). It was only because of this remnant that Israel have not become like Sodom (Rom. 9:29)- even though Old Testament passages such as Ezekiel 16 clearly liken Jerusalem to Sodom. Yet they are not as Sodom ultimately, for the sake of the remnant who will believe.

For I am Yahweh their God, and I will hear them- As noted on :1, if they had asked for the restoration to come about and done their part, it would've done.

Zechariah 10:7 *Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will rejoice as through wine; yes, their children will see it, and rejoice. Their heart will be glad in Yahweh*- Ephraim, the ten tribes, were not regathered because they didn't want to be. I noted on :5 that it would've been possible for the exiles to be the earthly function of the Angel cherubim of the heavens. Ephraim would be "mighty ones", *elohim*. They would receive the blessing of wine, the sign of covenant blessing, and the next generation, "their children", would experience the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. All this was possible but tragically was precluded by a lack of repentance and short term outlook which wanted to remain in the old and familiar. "Mighty man" is literally *gibbor*, the term used of Messiah in Is. 9:6. Finally these prophecies will come true when a repentant Israel identify with ["be like"] the Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming.

Zechariah 10:8 *I will signal for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them*- "I will hiss for them" (AV) is the same phrase used in Is. 5:26 of the latter day regathering of Judah. But even at the time of the restoration it could have been fulfilled; God had hissed for them, urging them to return, because He had already potentially redeemed them. They were to quit Babylon to accept that redemption. And like many today, most of them just didn't want to do that. The short term attractions were too great for them. The regathering of Israel is therefore related to their redemption. The fact so many have now been regathered to the land is surely an indication that their redemption draws nigh; and should we not therefore tell them of the Gospel which they must accept as part of that redemption?

And they will increase as they have increased- The promise to Abraham of the seed multiplying would come true; for those promises are the basis of the new covenant, the new deal offered to repentant Israel and Judah.

Zechariah 10:9 *I will sow them among the peoples; and they will remember Me in far countries; and they will live with their children, and will return*- The context is of the return from captivity, so perhaps the reading of the GNB is correct: "Though I have scattered them among the nations, yet in far-off places they will remember me. They and their children will survive and return home together". We note the repeated mention of the children (:7 too). Likely the reason given for remaining in captivity was that it was better for the children to remain, rather than drag them on a long, uncertain journey to a strange land and live amongst the ruins. But their children would be blessed if they did return in penitence, with the experience of growing up in God's restored Kingdom. The exile was a 'sowing'; the fruit intended to rise up was a

generation of penitent young people who would seek to return to their ancestral homeland. But instead, that generation bitterly blamed God for punishing them for their fathers' sins (Ez. 18). "Remember me" is better 'make mention of me'. The idea was that they would openly witness to the surrounding nations about the Hope of Israel, and even bring those Gentiles with them to Zion.

Zechariah 10:10 *I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and there won't be room enough for them*- In the first instance, the Jews in Egypt were those who had gone there in Jeremiah's time, disbelieving the promise that they would be safer remaining in the ruins of Judah. Those once spiritually weak ones, along with the ten tribes in Assyria, would return in great numbers, and live in the now fertile land of Gilead and Lebanon, back in the northern Kingdom. The potential for this had been set up by the chariots of Angels in the vision of Zech. 6:6. But they didn't- at that time. The potential prepared by the Angels wasn't actualized by them. Such a restoration will be realized, but in the last days. That generation resisted God's 'bringing them again' and 'gathering' of them, just as the invitation to participate in the Hope of Israel and the restored Kingdom of God is resisted by those who hear it today. "Bring them again" translates the usual Hebrew word for "return". God would return them; but they had to return. If they took that step in faith, just as today, then God would make it happen. They would be "gathered... with a mighty hand and [God's] stretched out arm" (Ez. 20:34 s.w.). But they refused that might hand which would have brought them safely through their physical and spiritual journey.

Zechariah 10:11 *He will pass through the sea of affliction, and will strike the waves in the sea, and all the depths of the Nile will dry up; and the pride of Assyria will be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt will depart*- If the Jewish exiles in Egypt and the ten tribes in Assyria had wanted to return, then as noted on :10, God's mighty hand would have even dried up the Nile, taken away the power of the Egyptians and brought down Assyria- just so that they could return. God will work powerfully in the geopolitics of the world for the sake of just a minority with whom He has a purpose. In my days I saw God open up then Communist Eastern Europe, allow the internet to be developed- for the sake of getting the Gospel to millions He sought to call out and save.

Zechariah 10:12 *I will strengthen them in Yahweh; and they will walk up and down in His name, says Yahweh*- see on Zech. 12:5,8; Ez. 16:63. As in :6, the strengthening in view is not simply prevailing above others in military terms; they would be spiritually strengthened. The new covenant offered to the exiles involved being given a new heart (Ez. 36:26), and that strengthening of the Spirit is still a part of the same new covenant we accept today in baptism. To some degree a repentant natural Israel will take over the role of the Angels as God's eyes walking up and down and to and fro in the earth (land?). This follows from Zechariah earlier describing the Angels as walking to and fro in the earth (Zech. 1:10;6:7). As noted on :1 and Zech. 9:14, repentant Judah on earth could have become part of the glorious system of the Angel cherubim above them. But this is to be fulfilled in their latter day repentance, when in visible, literal terms the glory returns to Zion eternally.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 11

Zechariah Chapter 11

Zechariah 11:1 *Open your doors, Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars*- The tone of Zechariah changes as the prophecy progresses. All the wonderful potentials were not being used by the exiles, and so judgment and rejection was to come. The returned exiles from Assyria could have lived in Lebanon, as stated just a few verses earlier in Zech. 10:10. But God in this chapter is now as it were breaking up all those potentials. The cedars of Lebanon were to be devoured by fire. Finally this came true in the sense that the cedars which characterized the temple were destroyed by fire in AD70.

Zechariah 11:2 *Wail, fir tree, for the cedar has fallen, because the stately ones are destroyed. Wail, you oaks of Bashan, for the strong forest has come down*- As noted on :1, the potential just stated in Zech. 10:10 was not now going to come about. The exiles didn't want to return, and so they would not live in Bashan; rather, the oaks and forests there would be burnt. This initially applies to the breaking of all the potentials in Zechariah's time, but the prophecy came to a fulfilment in the destruction of the northern areas of Palestine in the Roman advance of AD70, and will likely have another fulfilment in the last days. The relevance to the first century becomes more apparent later in the chapter. The "stately ones" uses the same word for the "nobles" in Judah at the time of the restoration (Neh. 3:5; 10:29). They could have become the leaders of the restored kingdom of God in Israel at Zechariah's time; but that potential was rejected by them, and now broken by God.

Zechariah 11:3 *A voice of the wailing of the shepherds! For their glory is destroyed: a voice of the roaring of young lions! For the pride of the Jordan is ruined*- The wailing of shepherds and the roaring of lions create the idea that the invaders [lions] came as a result of the failure of the shepherds. This was why Judah had gone into captivity (Ez. 34), and sadly they didn't reform and so their final destruction in AD70 was a result of their bad shepherds. "The wailing of the shepherds" occurred when Babylon took Jerusalem (same phrase in Jer. 25:36). The Jordan was the famed habitat of young lions; the idea is that the destruction of their habitat made them roam.

Zechariah 11:4 *Thus says Yahweh my God: Feed the flock of slaughter*- Zechariah was asked to act out a parable of a shepherd. God had decided to slaughter the flock, and they were to be prepared for that by their own shepherds. The slaughter of the post-exilic community didn't come until AD70; this again was a reflection of God's huge patience.

Zechariah 11:5 *Their buyers slaughter them, and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, 'Blessed be Yahweh, for I am rich;' and their own shepherds don't pity them*- The buyers and sellers of the flock are presented as worshippers of Yahweh. The slaughter of the flock was to be in the first century when the covenant was finally broken; but the abuses of the Jews against each other was effectively a slaughtering of the flock for their own enrichment. Nehemiah records how the rich enslaved the poor during the famine. And they "repent not" (LXX; NEV "Go unpunished"). There was not the required repentance of the exiles, but rather a simplistic desire for personal wealth out of the situation in Judah (see on Hag. 1).

Zechariah 11:6 *For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, says Yahweh*- God had often stated in Ezekiel that He would not pity Judah. But at the restoration, He did pity them, by absolute grace (Ez. 36:21 s.w.). But this pity is now as it were withdrawn; they were to be destroyed, and only God's true remnant would find His pity (Mal. 3:17 s.w.).

But, behold, I will deliver the men, every one of them, into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king. They will strike the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them- Earlier in Zechariah, God had enthusiastically explained that Zerubbabel and then Joshua could have been the Messianic king of the restored kingdom. But both those men and their people didn't want that, and returned to remain under the kingship of the Gentiles. And so Judah was to be destroyed by each other, and also by the one they had chosen king. When they crucified the Lord, they stated that Caesar was their only king (Jn. 19:15), and he was the one who was to destroy them in AD70.

Zechariah 11:7 *So I fed the flock of slaughter, especially the oppressed of the flock*- LXX "And I will tend the flock of slaughter in the land of Chanaan". The returned exiles would grow into the 'Judea' of the first century. But they were to be led by their shepherds, whose role Zechariah played, towards their final slaughter in AD70. Or consider the GNB: "Those who bought and sold the sheep hired me, and I became the shepherd of the sheep that were going to be butchered".

I took for myself two staves. The one I called Grace, and the other I called Union, and I fed the flock- Grace is to be the basis for unity between God's people. The covenant relationship experienced with God naturally binds us in union with others in that same covenant. Unity with God and with our brother is therefore connected. It could be deduced that division between brethren is therefore a reflection of how some have not grasped the wonder of personal, covenant relationship with God through His grace. All interpersonal issues take on a completely different colour in the face of God's grace. And is this which is the stave or rod which will guide the flock rightly. But those staves were to be broken; without an awareness of Divine grace and unity between brethren, God's people are really without any shepherding. It had been God's intention to reunite Israel and Judah at the restoration, on the basis of the fact that both would accept His grace as offered in the new covenant.

Zechariah 11:8 *I cut off the three shepherds in one month; for my soul was weary of them, and their soul also loathed me*- GNB "I lost patience with three other shepherds, who hated me". God had patiently waited for Judah to respond, there had been several potential Messianic shepherd figures (Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah), and yet His patience had limits.

Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah returned from Babylon and were intended to be leaders who would crown Joshua / Jesus as the Messiah-Priest-Branch who would rebuild Jerusalem. See on Zech. 6:10,14. But nothing is heard of them further. Perhaps it is to them that this refers. They had gone into captivity because of poor shepherds, and now at their return they again lacked men willing to be their Saviours; and God is saying that He would not do the shepherding job which He had delegated to others. It could be that Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah all died in one month as a result of Zechariah's prophecy at the time of Ezra 5:1.

Zechariah 11:9 *Then I said, I will not feed you*- GNB "I will not be your shepherd any longer". In this acted parable, Zechariah is reflecting God's feelings. The shepherds were unwilling to manifest God to the people, and the flock / people didn't want His shepherding. They would not 'return' to Him.

That which dies, let it die; and that which is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let those who are left eat each other's flesh- This was finally fulfilled in the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem in AD70. It is the spirit of Rev. 22:11: "He that is unrighteous, let him continue to do unrighteousness, and he that is filthy, let him remain filthy, and he that is righteous, let him continue to do righteousness, and he that is holy, let him remain holy". We get the impression that this calamity was intended for Zechariah's time, but by grace and God's continual efforts and longsuffering it didn't come about until AD70; and it yet will come true in the last days.

Zechariah 11:10 *I took my staff Grace, and cut it apart, 'That I might break My covenant that I had made with all the people'*- The breaking of "grace" meant breaking the "bands" of unity between Israel and Judah. The basis for interpersonal unity is response to God's grace, rather than an academic, technical agreement on theology. The basis of the new covenant offered to Israel at the restoration was grace. By that grace, God was willing to accept the unspiritual exiles if they came to Him. But they didn't, they refused covenant relationship with Him. And so having spurned and broken the covenant, He broke it from His side too. God will not break His covenants; but He is here confirming that His people had broken the covenant.

Throughout Zechariah we have seen multiple allusions to the work of the Angels. This was in that time how God revealed Himself to men, and invited them to conceive of Him. We recall the words of the Angel in Jud. 2:1 "And an Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers: and I said, I will never break My covenant with you". The subsequent rebuke of Israel by the Angel makes this passage imply that although the Angel had promised never to break the Covenant, He could and would do so- reflecting the God of Hosea, who has emotion and can change His mind in accordance with the mind of His people. Now, the Angel speaking to Zechariah does break the covenant. There is another Angelic reference in :6: "I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, says the Lord" (cp. Is. 63:9 regarding the wilderness Angel: "in His love and in His pity" He redeemed Israel from Egypt). Although the Angelic covenant was broken, it is to be re-established: "I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant (i.e. you've broken the covenant, I'll do the same). Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with thee... and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant... thou shalt receive thy sisters... and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy (former) covenant. And I will establish My covenant with thee" (Ez. 16:59-62). This covenant was a marriage covenant. "For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God" (Michael the Angel?), Is. 54:6. This is all referring back to the Angel calling Hagar, showing that God's Angel was figuratively 'married' to Israel; thus Judah were invited to understand that it was the Angel representing God who divorced and will take back Israel.

Zechariah 11:11 *It was broken in that day; and thus the poor of the flock that listened to me knew that it was the word of Yahweh*- LXX "The Chananites, the sheep that are kept for me, shall know that it is the word of the Lord". There was a minority amongst the returned exiles who did respond to Zechariah's teaching; perhaps the

Lord alludes here when commenting that "to the poor the Gospel is preached" (Lk. 7:22). There's no doubt that "the poor" in whatever sense, be it poverty of spirit or finances, are those more likely to respond to God's word of the Kingdom. "The poor" perceived that Zechariah's breaking of the staff meant that the covenant was broken; what had been possible for returned Judah now wasn't.

Zechariah 11:12 *I said to them, If you think it best, give me my value; and if not, keep it. So they weighed for my wages thirty pieces of silver*- In the acted parable, Zechariah asks the sheep merchants what wages they will give him for having kept their flock for slaughter. The implication is that they had now arrived at the time for slaughter, and he was handing the flock back to them which he had prepared for slaughter. The time of slaughter was in the first century. The Lord Jesus was the shepherd who had tried to save the flock but His very efforts with them, and their rejection of them, made them the generation that had to be slaughtered. In this sense He shepherded the flock to slaughter. Zechariah at this point therefore becomes a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. The way he asks them if they wish to pay him, leaving the choice with them, perhaps again hints at the huge freewill Judah were allowed; they need not have gone ahead with the path that led to the betrayal and murder of their own Messiah.

Zechariah 11:13 *Yahweh said to me, Throw it to the potter, the handsome price that I was valued at by them!*- This appears to be sarcasm, as if it was a very low price for his work. It was the price of a slave; and all Judas could buy with it was a field of muddy clay soil, not much use for anything. It is incredible that Judas did what he did for so little; but this is the power of avarice, greed, insisting blindly upon our own agenda and jealousy.

I took the thirty pieces of silver, and threw them to the potter, in the house of Yahweh- This clearly looks forward to Judas throwing down the thirty pieces of silver in the temple, and the money being used to purchase the potter's field. It has been suggested that there were earthen, potter's vessels in the temple, and Zechariah threw the coins to a potter who was in the temple at the time, perhaps in connection with the earthen vessels there. Zechariah has been speaking in this chapter of how because the exiles had refused God's offer of a new covenant, the community would be judged and rejected. This came to its full term in the first century, and so his acting out the rejection and betrayal of the Lord Jesus is appropriate and in context.

Zechariah 11:14 *Then I cut apart my other staff, even Union, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel*- At the time of Zechariah, that brotherhood was already broken. Repeatedly in Zechariah, there has been the message that Judah and Israel would be reunited at the restoration. This didn't happen, as the majority of both groups preferred to remain in the lands of their exile. But that unity was potentially prepared. But it seems now God breaks that, He takes away that potential because it is clear that in Zechariah's time, that was just not the wish of God's people to make use of it. And we have surely all seen potentially unity between groups and persons being broken by God in response to the way that the humans involved just didn't want it. We note again that union between individuals is related to our acceptance of grace, the first 'staff' which was to guide the flock.

Zechariah 11:15 *Yahweh said to me, Take for yourself yet again the equipment of a*

foolish shepherd- This final acted parable appears to speak specifically of the failure of Zerubbabel, the one who could have been the shepherd. Just as the shepherd leaders of Judah had been foolish and this had led Judah into captivity (s.w. Hos. 9:7), so now the restored community likewise were foolish and had foolish shepherds.

Zechariah 11:16 *For, behold, I will raise up a shepherd in the land*- "Raise up" is the language of restoration (s.w. Am. 9:11 and often). God had raised up a shepherd in the land, indeed it seems when Zerubbabel failed, Joshua was raised up, and even Nehemiah. But despite this initiative of God, the shepherds were like those before the captivity.

Who will not visit those who are cut off, neither will seek those who are scattered, nor heal that which is broken, nor feed that which is sound; but he will eat the flesh of the fat sheep, and will tear their hoofs in pieces- This is the language of Ez. 34 concerning the shepherds of Judah before the exile. Now those who had been restored were behaving the same way. The leadership of Judah were not interested in the spiritual welfare of people, but rather just their own material benefit from them. This came to full term in the generation which led Judah to crucify their King, the Lord Jesus the Messiah. The "great mountain" of Babylon was to become a plain before Zerubbabel (Zech. 4:7)- a clear allusion to Dan. 2:44, in which the little stone of Messiah destroys the Kingdoms of men and becomes a great mountain to replace the statue headed by Babylon. But Zerubbabel didn't destroy Babylon- according to Jewish tradition he returned there after 'giving up' in Jerusalem. He was "the worthless shepherd" who didn't gather "those that be scattered", who didn't encourage the Jews scattered in Babylon to return to the fold of Zion, and who didn't care for their spiritual wellbeing. And so the prophecy that Babylon would be destroyed before Zerubbabel has to be reapplied, and will be fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus. "That which is broken" would then refer to the walls and buildings of Jerusalem and the temple. These were not rebuilt as potentially possible.

Zechariah 11:17 *Woe to the worthless shepherd who leaves the flock!*- I suggested on :16 that this refers to Zerubbabel leaving the flock of Judah in the land and returning to Babylon.

The sword will be on his arm, and on his right eye. His arm will be completely withered, and his right eye will be totally blinded!- This could also speak of leprosy. Was this how he ended his days, we wonder? Yet he, the 'shoot out of Babylon' as his name means, *could have been* the promised Messianic shoot out of the withered stem of Jesse. He could have been the Messianic shoot out of the dry ground of Babylon (Is. 53:2) who would accompany the return of the temple vessels from Babylon (Is. 52:11). But he disappears strangely out of the record. Thus the events of Nehemiah 8, where the Feasts of Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles as well as the dedication of the wall are all recorded, make no mention of the High Priest or Zerubbabel officiating. He, Joshua and indeed anyone who could have taken their place somehow didn't rise to the occasion. And so Is. 51:17-18 lamented, prophetically: "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury [at the end of the 70 years captivity]... [but] There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up". Perhaps Zerubbabel, or whoever could have been the Messianic prince, was smitten with a stroke which left his arm withered and his right eye blinded. That language certainly sounds like a stroke. And those who had heard Zechariah's words would immediately have perceived their fulfilment.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 12

Zechariah Chapter 12

Zechariah 12:1 *An oracle. The word of Yahweh concerning Israel*- The previous chapter has stated that the potential unity between Israel and Judah at the restoration had now been broken; that was not to happen at Zechariah's time. But Judah's judgments in the last days would in fact bring about the final fulfilment of God's plans, which He had potentially enabled for fulfilment at Zechariah's time. And so "Israel" is addressed as Jerusalem, capital of Judah (:2), and used as a parallel with "Judah".

Yahweh, who stretches out the heavens, and lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him says- God's ability to stretch out the *eretz* and the sky above it was a figure understood to refer to His ability to rebuild and restore that land and its people, just as He had stretched out and founded the literal heavens and earth (Is. 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12 and often). He had promised to place His Spirit in the restored Judah at their return from captivity (Ez. 37). All these Divine capabilities, and therefore human potentials, had been refused by the Judah of Zechariah's day. But they would again become possible in the last days.

Zechariah 12:2 *Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the surrounding peoples, and on Judah also will it be in the siege against Jerusalem*- As explained on :1, the focus now is specifically upon the latter day, final fulfilment of God's prophetic purpose for Judah and Jerusalem. Babylon is depicted as a latter day entity which gives a cup to others to drink; and that cup is here defined as Jerusalem. There will be a requirement that all within latter day Babylon are somehow associated with Jerusalem, and this will cause their condemnation; for the cup is also a symbol of condemnation. It is their 'taking' of Jerusalem which is the taking of the cup of condemnation. The "surrounding peoples" are the constituents, therefore, of the latter day Babylon which Revelation constructs upon the basis of prophecies such as this. And this is the arena of focus of Bible prophecy- the land promised to Abraham and its immediate neighbours. These "surrounding peoples" are "all the nations of the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham" of :3. We notice the increased focus upon Jerusalem in radical Islamist theology. The "siege against Jerusalem" seems to refer to that of the last days and not AD70, for the "surrounding peoples" were not destroyed then as required by :3,4.

Zechariah 12:3 *It will happen in that day*- Zech. 12:3-11 is a passage which contains seven occurrences of the phrase "In that day...". The passage does not have to be interpreted chronologically; this is a list of events which will occur around the same

time, "in that day". They are snapshots of the same scene from different angles. The seals of Rev. 6 and the repeated references to a three and a half year tribulation period can be understood likewise; they do not necessarily refer to chronologically different events, but are giving different aspects of information about the same basic scene. The lack of strict chronological sequence in prophecy is a major feature of the Old Testament; thus a consideration of the phrase “in that day..." in Isaiah reveals that the context 'jumps around' all over the place, from the first coming of Christ to the Babylonian invasion to the Kingdom. There is no reason to think that Revelation is any different.

That I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all the peoples- Babylon's judgment will be to have a stone placed around them and then to be thrown into the sea (Rev. 18:21). But they will themselves have prepared this judgment, by lading themselves with the stone of Jerusalem. "All the peoples" therefore refer to all those within the Babylon confederacy of the last days.

All who trample upon it will be severely wounded, and all the nations of the earth will be gathered together against it- The nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham are the "surrounding peoples" of :2. They will be gathered together against it through accepting a radical jihadist theology which focuses upon Jerusalem; and that theology is clearly now in development. This trampling upon Jerusalem is clear evidence that Jerusalem will fall. Israel and the IDF are not invincible, as some Protestants like to imply. This is the time when Jerusalem is trodden underfoot of the Gentiles during the "times of the Gentiles" [domination of Jerusalem]; see on Lk. 21:24. Those "times" appear to be the 1260 days / 42 months / three and a half years of other prophecies. "Severely wounded" is literally "cut to pieces", and this is the picture of Dan. 2:44; the stone of God's Kingdom shall dash to pieces those who trample upon the stone of Zion.

Zechariah 12:4 *In that day, says Yahweh, I will strike every horse with terror, and his rider with madness*- All the apparently invincible military technology of the latter day invasion will be brought to nothing and revealed as foolishness. To be struck with terror and madness from Yahweh is the very term used of God's judgments upon Israel for their disobedience (Dt. 28:28). All that was done to Israel will be done to their abusers. The confounding of the horse riders is that spoken of in Zech. 10:5, and it is to be achieved by God working through a repentant Jewish remnant.

And I will open My eyes on the house of Judah, and will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness- God's eyes are a metaphor for His Angels. The Angel Michael is described as "standing up" for Israel in the last days (Dan. 12:1); as if Angelic activity on Israel's behalf revives in the last days. Striking with blindness recalls what the Angels did to the men of Sodom, in order to preserve a tiny remnant of God's people within it.

And those events typify the latter day salvation of the remnant from the city called Sodom, which is Jerusalem. The image of blind horses may mean in modern terms that some sensory technology which is used in weaponry will be disabled. We note that horse riders are used to represent the latter day invaders of Israel in Revelation, and also in the prophecy of Gog's invasion (Ez. 38:15).

Zechariah 12:5 *The chieftains of Judah will say in their heart, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in Yahweh of Armies their God'*- The chieftains or governors of Judah are referred to in Zech. 9:7, where they refer to repentant Jews and Gentiles. These repentant ones who will become the rulers in the restored Kingdom of God will be strengthened by those then dwelling in Jerusalem. And those are "Yahweh of Armies", the Angels with which the Lord Jesus will return to earth, the saviours who appear on mount Zion to deliver her from her latter day abusers (see on Obadiah 21). This shows how Angels will be very much in evidence on earth at the time of Jerusalem's surrounding by armies and Armageddon. : "The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of Hosts (Angels) their God". Who this 'God' refers to is defined in :8: "He that is feeble amongst them (the "inhabitants of Jerusalem") at that day shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God, as the Angel of the Lord (which will go) before them". This implies that the inhabitants of Jerusalem will have the same power as the hosts of Angels which will have been seen fighting "before them". Thus the Jews will "walk up and down in His Name" (Zech. 10:12) as the Angels are now said to do (Zech. 1:11; Job 1:7).

Zechariah 12:6 *In that day I will make the chieftains of Judah like a pan of fire among wood, and like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they will devour all the surrounding peoples, on the right hand and on the left*- As explained on 2 Pet. 3:7,12, literal fire will be used to destroy the latter day abusers of God's land and people. And that fire will be directed by the chieftains of Judah, who as explained on :5 refer to the repentant Jewish remnant now directly empowered by the Angels who have returned with Jesus to Zion; and those Angels are made as a flaming fire (Ps. 104:4). We see again how the faithful Jews on earth will be in step with the Angel cherubim above them. The invaders will be as "sheaves" awaiting judgment- the idea of 'Armageddon', cp. Mic. 4:12.

And Jerusalem will yet again dwell in their own place, even in Jerusalem- "Jerusalem" is here put for its people, the daughter of Zion.

Zechariah 12:7 *Yahweh also will save*- 'Jesus' means in Hebrew 'Yah will save'. His second coming is here in view.

The tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem be not magnified above Judah- This is reflective of how David reigned first over Judah and then later took Jerusalem and all Israel (2 Sam. 5:3). The

Lord Jesus as the true Davidic king will act as His forefather. "First" can be as LXX and others, "as in the beginning" or "as in former days". The theme is of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom as God's Kingdom. In the Kingdom to be established, association with any particular place or family line, even David's, will be irrelevant compared to the glory of the Lord Jesus. And this needed to be written, for the generations to come after Zechariah would tend to glory in such things.

Zechariah 12:8 *In that day Yahweh will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem*- I suggested on :5 that this term there referred to the Angels who come to Zion at the Lord's second coming. But here it refers to the human Jews in Zion (see :10); because they will be identified with the Angels, "like the Angel of Yahweh", as this verse goes on to say. This may appear to contradict the command of the Olivet prophecy to flee Jerusalem (Mt. 24:16). We see here an example of God's grace. Those who were commanded to flee, but did not, are still saved- but by grace alone.

He who is feeble among them at that day will be like David- The theme of Zechariah is the restoration of the Davidic king and kingdom; but the final, latter day fulfilment of this is that all God's people shall be as David. "Feeble" is literally 'he who has stumbled' and is often used in a spiritual sense, as it is in Mal. 2:8 of the spiritually stumbled / fallen exiles. But they will then repent, and from their weakness will be made spiritually strong by the gift of the Spirit.

And the house of David will be like God- David accepted that his house / family was "not so with God" (2 Sam. 23:5), but in the last days it will be; for the Lord Jesus and His spiritual children are in that sense from the house of David. God's family will be David's family.

Like the angel of Yahweh before them- As often noted, the repentant Jews on earth were to be identified with the Angel cherubim above them. See on :5; Zech. 10:12.

Zechariah 12:9 *It will happen in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem*- These nations are the "surrounding peoples" of :2, who are gathered against Jerusalem by accepting a theology which persuades them that Jerusalem must be taken by them at all costs; see on :3. The Hebrew for "destroy" is used multiple times in Deuteronomy about the destruction of the nations of the *eretz* so that Israel could inherit that land. And this continues to be the context and frame of reference here.

Zechariah 12:10 *I will pour on the house of David, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem,*

the spirit of grace and of supplication- The restored exiles had been offered a new covenant with God, which would involve His Spirit being put into them, "a new heart" given, and all the blessings of the gift of the Spirit which the New Testament promises to those who accept that same new covenant today. They had then refused it, but now in repentance they will accept it. This spiritual gift will lead them to the acceptance of the crucified Christ now spoken of. The spirit of supplications is GNB "the spirit of prayer". As Paul puts it, we know not what to pray for as we ought (Rom. 8:26), but the gift of the Spirit makes supplication for us. For those open to the Spirit, we are guided what to pray for, and our relationship with God and Jesus in prayer is guided by His Spirit. This will be experienced by the repentant Jews.

And they will look to Me whom they have pierced- Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: " They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*… and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10 AV). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood.

These words are quoted in Rev. 1:7: "Behold, he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him". This passage from Zechariah appears to be a prophecy of how Israel shall see the Lord at His second coming, and that is the interpretation given here. Those who crucified the Lord had this prophecy come true as they looked upon and gloated over the pierced Lord Jesus on the cross (see on Jn. 19:37). But it shall come true again, when they are resurrected to judgment at the last day, see His enthronement in glory ["he comes with the clouds" is the language of Dan. 7 about this], realize from marks in His body that this is the one whom they crucified, exclaim "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mt. 23:39), but find they are not able to be in His Kingdom. That bitter disappointment at the future they have missed, that they now so want, with all the resulting self-anger, is described as weeping and gnashing of teeth. That will be psychological punishment enough for the rejected. "The tribes of the earth", every eye of them, shall see the Lord in that moment. "The earth" refers to the land, of Israel; all those who looked upon Him upon the cross, "every eye", shall then be resurrected to see Him and mourn bitterly over what they did. The "every eye" is I suggest unpacked and defined by "they that pierced him" and "all the tribes of the land". The "and..." does not have to mean 'in addition to'; it can be a device for defining the term which has gone before it. As if to say 'Yes, even...'.

And they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and will grieve bitterly for him- Men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. And so it has been observed that the cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought; the people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord. In coming before the cross we likewise have a foretaste of judgment day.

As one grieves for his firstborn- The idea is of a firstborn who dies in babyhood, with no other children. All the parent had has been lost. This is a window into God's feelings at the loss of His only begotten son; and their mourning would help them know His feelings. And it was the Lord Jesus Himself was "grieved" in His crucifixion sufferings (s.w. Gen. 49:23).

Haggai and Zechariah clearly set up Zerubbabel as the Messianic king who could have ruled over a restored kingdom. But he strangely disappears from the scene. One possibility is that he was killed by the priestly group in a power struggle with Joshua the

High Priest. In this case, this would be the primary potential interpretation of Zech. 12:10.

Zechariah 12:11 *In that day there will be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon*- The historical event in view seems to be the mourning for Josiah in that location, for which Jeremiah wrote special lamentations (2 Chron. 35:22,25).

Zechariah 12:12 *The land will mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart*- This mourning is that of the last days. We can conclude that David and his son Nathan and their families will be resurrected, the Davidic kingdom will be so fully restored; and will mourn for what their descendants had done to the Lord Jesus, their great descendant. Zerubbabel, the failed potential Davidic king, was in the line of Nathan (1 Chron. 3:5; Lk. 3:27,31) and perhaps the mourning will also be for all the failed potentials.

And their wives apart- The emphasis upon how the wives would mourn separately is to highlight the fact that repentance is deeply personal; religion is not just for men, as it was traditionally. Every man and woman of every family would realize their guilt for having failed to accept Jesus as Christ, and for having thereby sided with His historical persecutors and crucifiers.

Zechariah 12:13 *The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of the Shimeites apart, and their wives apart*- The idea is that the kingly (:12) and priestly (:13) families would mourn; and this would have been also because of how Joshua had failed to be the priestly king and high priest which he could have been (see on Zech. 3:1; 6:11). Why mention the Shimeites particularly? The LXX gives, "the tribe of Simeon", and after the exile it seems that this tribe was also accepted into the priesthood. "Simeon and Levi" are connected in Gen. 49:5. They were between them particularly responsible for the Lord's death, hence their mourning. They would mourn "apart", i.e. from their own deep sense of personal sin; rather than guilt being as it were elicited from the proximity of others in mourning. All emotional response tends to be influenced by those close to us; but this was and is not to be when it comes to the issues of repentance, which are so essentially personal.

Zechariah 12:14 *All the families who remain, every family apart, and their wives apart*- Those who "remain" could refer to the very few Jews who remain alive after the traumas

of the last days, and who come to repentance. Or it may mean that all the other tribes / families of Israel would likewise mourn.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 13

Zechariah Chapter 13

Zechariah 13:1 *In that day there will be a spring opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness*- The purifying is alluding to Mosaic rituals of purification from sin and uncleanness, and also of preparing the priests for service. This spring is mentioned in Joel 3:18, where it apparently emerges from the temple mount. And in a symbolic sense it is used in John's Gospel and Rev. 21 of the cleansing available in Christ. Entry to the new covenant offered to the exiles had involved receiving purification and the Spirit as it were sprinkled on their hearts (Ez. 36:25). They didn't want this at that time, and yet it shall be given finally in the last days to those who want it. Whether or not there will be a literal spring from mount Zion at the Lord's return is to my mind a too literal and secular perspective. John and Revelation, along with Ez. 36:25, are clear that the essence is that the repentant mind will be washed by the Spirit, just as it can be for those in this life who accept God's dominion over them, His Kingdom.

Zechariah 13:2 *It will come to pass in that day, says Yahweh of Armies, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they will be remembered no more. I will also cause the prophets and the spirit of impurity to pass out of the land*- In contrast to the spirit of grace that will be poured out (Zech. 12:10), all other spirits will be driven out. The "that day" is that of :1, which finally will be the Lord's return. At Zechariah's time, there were still problems with idol worship and false prophets; and we can deduce from Nehemiah and Mal. 3:5; Zech. 10:2 that these were problems even after the restoration from Babylon. But the essence of these issues will again be seen in latter day Judah. Idolatry is now covetousness (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5), and this is currently the spirit of latter day Judah. "The spirit of impurity" surely connects with their being "three unclean spirits like frogs" which lead the nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham to Armageddon (Rev. 16:13).

Zechariah 13:3 *It will happen that, when anyone still prophesies, then his father and his mother who bore him will tell him, 'You must die, because you speak lies in the name of Yahweh;' and his father and his mother who bore him will stab him when he prophesies*- LXX "Bind him". Binding is part of the condemnation process (Mt. 22:13). We are reading about what is to happen "in that day" (:2), which finally refers to the last day when the Lord returns. We may have envisaged here the resurrection to judgment at that time of the false prophets of Zechariah's time, and their parents. Those who remain impenitent will then be judged and condemned. Then, their parents would be obedient to the commands of Dt. 13:6-10 about what to do if your son was a false prophet.

Zechariah 13:4 *It will happen in that day, that the prophets will each be ashamed of his vision, when he prophesies; neither will they wear a hairy mantle to deceive*- This verse could suggest that the resurrected false prophets repent, no longer wearing prophetic garb in imitation of Elijah; or at least, they suffer the shame of condemnation as they recall what they did. Too much stress should not be laid upon the Hebrew tenses here.

Jacob's flight into Syria is set up as typical of Israel going into dispersion as a punishment for their idolatry. But they will return, as Jacob did. *Then* Israel will not

wear a rough garment to deceive any more as Jacob did in order to deceive his father; *then* they will have renounced the human side of Jacob and captured his final spirituality for their own.

Zechariah 13:5 *But he will say, 'I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the ground; for I have been made a bondservant from my youth'*- This again could be read as a statement of repentance by the resurrected false prophets, insisting that they were no longer prophets. Or it could be a desperate denial of their being false prophets; the accused would be claiming that he only wore a hairy garment because he was an agricultural labourer. It is this denial which leads to the objection of :6.

Zechariah 13:6 *One will say to him, 'What are these wounds in your hands?'. Then he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends*- This appears to be in objection to the resurrected false prophet protesting his innocence in :5. In this case, there is an element to which the judgment process is a collective affair, with people effectively judged by others, like the men of Nineveh judging first century Israel; see on Rev. 16:15. The wounds in the palms would refer to the self-inflicted wounds made by the prophets of Baal, as happened at the time of Elijah's contest with them on Carmel. The Hebrew behind "With which I was wounded" apparently implies 'Which I wounded myself with', and this would confirm the application to how the false prophets wounded themselves in worship sessions. This implies that the resurrected still have some characteristics of their previous life. And the false prophet in this case caves in and admits, that he had done this in the house of his friends. He recognizes that the house of Baal was the house of his friends, and his claim to have been an agricultural labourer-slave with wounds in his hands from his labour was just an untrue excuse.

It is tempting to apply these words to the Lord Jesus showing wounds in His hands from the nails of the cross. But this is quite outside of the context.

Zechariah 13:7 *Awake, sword*- The idea is that the sword of judicial judgment of men (Rom. 13:4) is commanded by God; whatever happens as a result of it was therefore willed by God and was not random chance.

Against My shepherd- The intended shepherd was Zerubbabel and then Joshua. But they didn't live up to this. The intended scenario was that this shepherd would be smitten, and Judah again be scattered in captivity. But for whatever reason, perhaps because of the repentance and prayer of a tiny minority, that didn't happen. But the prophetic word came true at the time of the Lord Jesus, and the scattering and salvation of the weak faithed disciples became its fulfilment. Therefore the shepherd here clearly finally refers to Jesus (Mt. 26:31), although the shepherd elsewhere in Zechariah refers to the Angel- another proof that there was one specific Angel in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Jesus, presumably Gabriel.

And against the man who is close to Me, says Yahweh of Armies- The term can mean a close relative, an 'equal' only insofar as they are related. The term is supremely relevant to the relationship between Father and Son.

Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; and I will turn My hand against the little ones- The "little ones" are the lambs of the scattered sheep, and the term is also used of the disciples (Mt. 10:42; 18:6,10), who are also the scattered sheep (Mt. 26:31). The image of scattered sheep in the absence of shepherds is used of Judah's scattering as a result of their bad shepherds (Jer. 10:21; 23:1,2; Ez. 34:5,6). But this intended second scattering of Judah didn't then happen; the disciples as it

were bore the fulfilment of it when they were scattered from the Lord and then spiritually reformed- for the Hebrew phrase "turn My hand against" doesn't have to mean that God was against the lambs. "Against" can as well be translated "upon" (as AV), and the identical Hebrew term is used in Is. 1:25: "I will turn My hand upon you and purge away your dross". There is the idea there of God's direct intervention in order to ultimately save.

Zechariah 13:8 *It shall happen that in all the land, says Yahweh, two parts in it will be cut off and die; but the third will be left in it*- This appears to continue in the context of :7 and therefore refers to the fate of the flock once the shepherd is cut off. I suggested on :7 that there was an initial scenario of the appointed "shepherd" of Judah being smitten, and the people being scattered again; and now we learn that there would have been the cutting off of two thirds within the land, and then the final spiritual purging of the remaining third. The cutting off is that of :2, where the same word is used of the cutting off of idols and those who worshipped them. For those who worship and trust them are like unto them (Ps. 115:8); the cutting off of the idols (:2) meant the cutting off of those who worshipped them (:8). But there has never been a time when two thirds of Judah were cut off and a third brought to repentance (:9). Perhaps, given that the preceding verse talks about the first century, the idea was that the Roman invasion would have led to a third repenting. This would fit in with the clear possibility that there was for the Lord Jesus to have returned in AD70. But they didn't repent. So this threatened scenario was deferred, and will therefore come true in the last days. The reference to "all the *eretz*" may intend us to understand that this is not in fact talking solely about Judah in Palestine, but about all the inhabitants of the *eretz* promised to Abraham; and a third of them will come to repentance.

Zechariah 13:9 *I will bring the third part into the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will test them like gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will hear them. I will say, 'It is My people;' and they will say, 'Yahweh is my God'*- This could well be speaking of how God cut off men like Zerubbabel who were poor shepherds, although potential Messiahs; and it *could* have then happened that during the 'cutting off' of Jewish population during the Antiochus invasions, a minority could have repented and ushered in the true restoration. But this didn't happen, and so the prophecy had a deferred fulfilment, although humanly speaking somewhat out of context, in the cutting off of the good shepherd, the scattering of the disciples, and their spiritual refining. And then another possible fulfilment arose in the scattering of AD70; but the refinement was again not achieved, and so the whole scene is deferred to the last days for fulfilment. See on Zech. 10:3.

If the two halves of this verse are indeed chronological, we have a salvation by grace, a pulling out of the fire just as Judah had been plucked out of the fire of Babylon (Zech. 3:2)- which is only then followed by a repentant calling upon God's Name. God took the initiative in bringing Judah and Jerusalem out of the fire- but they had to then respond. They didn't, but the remnant of latter day Judah will do. God's statement that they are His people is matched by their response that He is their God. But the point is that He takes the initiative in declaring impenitent people 'My people', and they then respond. It's rather like how the Lord broke His bread with impenitent sinners, showing them He accepted them, exactly *so that* they would repent. And we need to follow the Father and Son in taking such initiatives of grace; forgiving without repentance in order that God's grace leads those forgiven to repentance.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 14

Zechariah Chapter 14

Zechariah 14:1 *Behold, the day of Yahweh comes*- All the previous potentials had not been responded to by Judah, and I have continually mentioned throughout Zechariah that the various prophecies were therefore rescheduled and reapplied to the last days. In this sense, God's prophetic word will come true in essence. And so it is appropriate that Zechariah finishes with a prophecy specifically about the very last days, when all the previous prophecies will come to their final term. Likewise the many judgments upon Judah which had been promised but somehow had been delayed, will all come true. Hence the coming of the day of Yahweh was to be seen as judgment for Judah (Mal. 4:1).

When your spoil will be divided in your midst- The significance of "in your midst" is that it is done there rather than in the camp of the invaders outside the city. This would imply the total fall of the city and its possession by the invaders. The Egyptians sought to pursue Israel and "divide the spoil" (s.w. Ex. 15:9). But there will be no Passover deliverance. Jerusalem will fall.

Zechariah 14:2 *For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle*- The gathering of all nations to battle predicted here is the language of Rev. 9 and 16 regarding the gathering of the nations to Armageddon after the release of the hordes bound by the Euphrates- and we have already seen that happening with jihadists bursting across that river into the *eretz* promised to Abraham. The point is, the words of Zechariah 14 are applied to the events of the last days. Jerusalem therefore must fall. The final outworking of all this, of course, depends upon whether, or to what degree, Israel repent in response to our appeals: "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the Earth" (Rev. 3:10-11).

And the city will be taken, the houses pillaged, and the women raped- This is a quotation from Is. 13:16 about the fate of Babylon. Jerusalem was to be treated as Babylon because that is how they were in spirit. Zechariah was prophesying in the context of Judah's rather unenthusiastic return from captivity in Babylon; and most of them remained behind in Babylon. The memory was still relatively fresh of how a generation ago, Babylon had captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and taken the people into captivity. And now they had returned after the 70 years captivity- and Zechariah was telling them that yet again, Jerusalem was to be "taken" and the population taken into captivity. It would be hard to imagine a more unpopular message. The same Hebrew word translated "taken" is many times used of how Babylon took Jerusalem (Jer. 32:3 "I will give this city into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall *take* it"; Jer. 32:24,28; 34:22; 37:8; 38:3,28). Clearly the implication is that a second, revived Babylon would arise and take Jerusalem; and there would be yet another captivity. We are seeing Babylon – Assyria reforming, with a jihadist theology focusing upon taking the city of Jerusalem. The prophecy of Zechariah 14 has never been fulfilled- but it will be.

Half of the city will go out into captivity, and the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city- Significantly, half of Jerusalem is comprised of East Jerusalem, which is Arab. So when we read of how "Half of the city will go out into captivity",

this may well refer to the Jewish half of the city. "The rest of the people" is literally "the remnant"; the implication is that there will be a faithful remnant which will not be cut off and will remain in Jerusalem.

Dan. 9:26,27 require the city of Jerusalem to be taken, and the abomination of desolation placed there; and this is quoted by the Lord Jesus as requiring fulfilment in the last days just prior to His return (Mt. 24:14,15,29-31). Any previous fulfilments were incipient at best; they did not immediately herald the Lord's visible return as required by the Oliver prophecy. Lk. 21:24 adds: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot".* This part of Luke 21 is clearly alluding to Zechariah 14, a prophecy about the final desolation of Jerusalem:

Jerusalem surrounded by armies (Lk. 21:20)= All nations against Jerusalem to battle (Zech. 14:2).

The desolation of Jerusalem is near (Lk. 21:20) = The city shall be taken (Zech. 14:2).

Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains (Lk. 21:21) = You shall flee to the... mountains (Zech. 14:5)

Great distress in the land(Lk. 21:22) = Houses ransacked, women raped (Zech. 14:2)

Led away captive into all nations (Lk. 21:24) = Half the city shall go into captivity (Zech. 14:2)

Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24) = Jerusalem a stone trodden down by the Gentiles (Zech. 12:3 LXX).

The "treading down" of Jerusalem didn't end in 1967; for if that is the reference of the prophecy, then Christ should be back by now. The presence of the Dome of the Rock and Arab possession of East Jerusalem hardly sounds as if 1967 was much of a fulfilment anyway. The times of the Gentiles have clearly continued since 1967. The more logical interpretation is surely that Jerusalem must be trodden down by Gentiles until the "times" of that domination end- and that is probably a reference to the 42 months / 1260 days / three and a half year down-treading which we meet in both Daniel and Revelation.

Zechariah 14:3 *Then Yahweh will go out and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle*- God again will act openly as He did against Israel's neighbours in past conflicts. The 'going out' will in a literal sense be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, on behalf of His Father, going forth out of Heaven to intervene against Judah's abusers.

Zechariah 14:4 *His feet will stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east*- The description of the Lord's feet standing on the Mount of Olives naturally looks ahead to the words of the Angels at the ascension of the Lord Jesus from that same Mount, promising that He would return in the same way. As He stands upon His feet, so do the opponents (:14 s.w.). This is the greatest showdown of human history, between God and man, Spirit and flesh.

And the Mount of Olives will be split in two, from east to west, making a very great valley. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward

the south- This will create four separate elevated areas, with a large valley running north-south between them. Hence the reference to "My mountains" plural in :5; this valley will be the way to flee in :5. The mount of Olives is described as being on the East of Jerusalem; the faithful will flee eastwards and then through the newly created valley. This will then become the valley of Judah's revival spoken of in Ez. 37; they will arise as a powerful army to subdue their enemies, energized by the Spirit and led by the returned Lord Jesus.

Zechariah 14:5 *You shall flee by the valley of My mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azel*- As noted on :4, this implies they flee out of Jerusalem to the east and through the new valley opened up through the mount of Olives. The GNB offers: "You will escape through this valley that divides the mountain in two", avoiding interpreting "Azel" as a proper noun. A way of escape will be made, through a mountain; parted as the Red Sea was parted, that God's people might escape. And yet according to Ezekiel, the glory is to enter from the east (Ez. 43:2); so we are to imagine them uniting with the Lord of glory at the mount of Olives, and joining Him in returning through east Jerusalem. The western slopes of the Mount of Olives appear to be part of what forms the "valley of decision" of Joel 3:14, the "valley of slaughter" of Jer. 19:6. It is through this new valley that the way of Yahweh is prepared to come to Zion from the east.

Yes, you shall flee, just like you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah- The LXX is significantly different, implying instead that there will be no way of escape: "And the valley of my mountains shall be closed up, and the valley of the mountains shall be joined on to Jasod, and shall be blocked up as it was blocked up in the days of the earthquake, in the days of Ozias king of Juda". Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional; depending upon the faith of the remnant, the earthquake will either open up a way of escape through a new valley across the former mount of Olives (:4), or will block their escape and leave them to their final destruction. The earthquake at Uzziah's time may have been one of the ways in which he was "marvellously / miraculously helped" against his enemies (2 Chron. 26:15). Zechariah's prophecy is based around the restoration of the throne of David, and there are therefore allusions to the historical David throughout. Here, to the fleeing of David from Jerusalem via the Mount of Olives along this same path (2 Sam. 15:30,32).

Yahweh my God will come, and all the holy ones with you- LXX, as GNB: "The LORD my God will come, bringing all the angels with him". This is quoted in the New Testament about the return of the Lord Jesus on God's behalf, with "all the angels with him" (Mt. 25:31). Note the change of pronouns; it's as if Zechariah is caught up in the wonder of having Yahweh as his personal God, when otherwise addressing God ["with you"]. Such shifting of address are likely familiar to us if we have ever tried to make a transcript of our own personal prayers. Focus and address shifts within the same sentence, as we often see in the prayers transcripted in the Psalms.

Zechariah 14:6 *It will happen in that day, that there will not be light, cold, or frost*- The idea is that seasons will be no more. But the Hebrew is difficult; the RVmg. offers "There shall not be light, the bright ones shall contract themselves". This radical change in the planets, sun and stars at the Lord's return is likewise spoken of in

Joel 3:15; Is. 13:10; Mt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12,13. It was prefigured by how Joshua-Jesus made them stop in their tracks (Josh. 10:12,13).

Zechariah 14:7 *It will be a unique day*- Literally, "it will be one day". This recalls the first day of creation, described this way in Gen. 1:3. We will note on :21 that there are seven occurrences of "that day" in this vision. A new creation is being presented. This verse then goes on to allude to "there was evening and morning, the first day".

Which is known to Yahweh; not day, and not night; but it will come to pass, that at evening time there will be light- LXX "When this will happen is known only to the LORD"; alluded to in NT teaching that none knows the day nor hour, but only the Father. But this may be one of a number of indications that the meaning of time will be collapsed around the Lord's return. This is really necessary for there to be the individual judgment of a multitude as many as the sand on the shore. This also explains why it's impossible to construct a chronology of events around His coming in terms of a linear progression. "In that day" is a favourite phrase of Zechariah's, and the events spoken of as then happening are hard to fit into a chronological framework. It would also explain the apparent tension between passages which imply an immortal emergence from the grave, and those which suggest a mortal emergence and then judgment and reward. It just depends which view of time one takes. If there is light at evening time, we would have here another way of saying that the sun will never go down, which is the language of the Kingdom of God established on earth (Is. 60:20; Rev. 22:5).

Zechariah 14:8 *It will happen in that day, that living waters will go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the eastern sea, and half of them toward the western sea; in summer and in winter will it be*- LXX "in the dry season as well as the wet". The new valley spoken of in :4,5 will have living waters flowing in it. The situation of Ez. 47:1-12 which was potentially possible for the restored exiles will then be finally brought about. Just as the waters are mentioned as being created in Genesis (see on:7,21), so in this new creation the equivalent is these living waters, parallel with the law of Yahweh going out of Jerusalem in Is. 2:3; Mic. 4:2, causing the nations to flow back to Zion. And they will revive the otherwise 'Dead Sea' to the east. These are the living waters which Judah could have earlier experienced but refused (Jer. 2:13). Clearly this water of life is used symbolically in Rev. 22:1, but this is not to say that the symbol will have no literal basis. Most symbols do. We can live the essence of the Kingdom life now, in that this living water should come forth from our innermost being to give life to the dead world around us (Jn. 7:38). And this outflow from us should be constant, just as these future waters are not seasonal nor occasional.

Zechariah 14:9 *Yahweh will be King over all the earth*- Zechariah has previously spoken of a Davidic king reigning for Yahweh over all the *eretz* or "earth" promised to Abraham. Now this King will be reigning for Yahweh, and clearly looks forward to the Lord Jesus.

In that day Yahweh will be declared as the one and only- This declaration will cut out all idolatry amongst God's people, and all other forms of worship amongst the Gentiles. The command to exalt Yahweh as the only God in Dt. 6:4 was and is therefore an invitation to live the Kingdom life now. In this sense, as in John's Gospel, we can experience the nature of the life eternal right now. The "one day" of :7 is an eternal manifestation of the one God.

And His name unified- It may well be that Eph. 4:4-6 is alluding back to this verse; this passage inspires us to keep the unity of the Spirit, because here and now "there is one body, and one Spirit... *one Lord* ... one baptism, one God"; Paul is saying that the unity of the Kingdom, as spoken of in Zech. 14:9, must be found in the ecclesia of today.

Zechariah 14:10 *All the land will be made like the Arabah*- GNB "will be made level". A new flat plateau is envisaged. This could be brought about by the shaking / earthquake predicted in Hag. 2:6 and which could have come at the end of the Ez. 38 invasion: "in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel... all the men who are on the surface of the earth, shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall and every wall shall fall to the ground" (Ez. 38:19,20). Had Judah accepted the new covenant offered to them in Ez. 33,34, they would have revived as in Ez. 37, the Ez. 38 invasion and earthquake would have happened and then on the resultant plateau, the new temple would have been built. Despite Judah's failures to engage with these things, Haggai and Zechariah were saying that if the people wanted, they could have the earthquake and temple. God really was trying to force through His saving purpose.

From Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; and she will be lifted up, and will dwell in her place, from Benjamin's gate to the place of the first gate, to the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses- These locations feature in the account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the temple (Neh. 3:1,31,32; 12:39). Zechariah was prophesying in this context. He is implying that the work of rebuilding the temple and city had not been done according to the specifications and commandments for the exiles in Ez. 40-48 and Jer. 31:38,40, and so God will finally make it good in His own way. The reference to "the king's winepresses" at the south of Jerusalem (Neh. 3:15) would only have made sense to the primary audience of Zechariah; he is inviting them to imagine how places they knew well would one day be in the literal, eternal Kingdom of God on earth. And we can imagine the same, regarding things in our lives.

Zechariah 14:11 *Men will dwell therein*- LXX "They shall dwell in the city". This was in contrast to how in Nehemiah's time, the returned exiles had been reluctant to dwell there because it was not safe. It was a reminder to the initial audience of the potential they had wasted.

And there will be no more curse- Quoted in Rev. 22:3 about the future Kingdom of God on earth. The "curse" in view is not only that placed in Genesis, but the specific curses for disobedience which had come upon Judah.

But Jerusalem will dwell safely- Proof enough, surely, that the invasion of Gog when Jerusalem 'dwells safely' is *after* the Lord's return and not before it (Ez. 38:8,11,14). Attempts to identify the invaders at this stage are therefore slightly misplaced. The Hebrew phrase for 'dwelling safely' is repeatedly used about the blessings of living in covenant relationship with God

Zechariah 14:12 *This will be the plague with which Yahweh will strike all the peoples who have warred against Jerusalem: their flesh will consume away while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will consume away in their sockets, and their tongue will consume away in their mouth*- See on :4. This implies that the plague will be sudden, whilst the warring soldiers are standing up. The language could suggest the effects of

nuclear radiation. Perhaps Yahweh will punish the nations through their destroying of each other with their own weaponry, and this is implied in :13. This is how He has destroyed previous invaders. The triple reference to "consume away" is perhaps to serve as a signpost to the fact that most of the occurrences of this word relate to the consuming away of Israel because of their sins. Now what has been done to them shall be done to those who did it, as the structure of Revelation explains.

Zechariah 14:13 *It will happen in that day, that a great panic from Yahweh will be among them; and they, each of them, will lay hold on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand will rise up against the hand of his neighbour*- This is how historically the invaders of Israel were destroyed (Jud. 7:22; 1 Sam. 14:20; 2 Chron. 20:23). I suggested on :12 that they may use their nuclear weaponry against each other. "Panic" translates the word used in Dt. 7:23 about the destruction of the Canaanite nations; and these are the same nations in view in the last days: "But Yahweh your God will deliver them up before you and will confuse them with a great confusion until they are destroyed". It is also the word used of the destruction of the Philistines / Palestinians in 1 Sam. 5:9,11.

Zechariah 14:14 *Judah also will fight at Jerusalem*- The repentant Jewish remnant are here prophesied as liberating the captured Jerusalem. This contrasts with passages like Psalm 2 which suggest Jerusalem will be defended and preserved from her invaders. A common way of dealing with these apparent contradictions has been to postulate a timeline of events, a series of invasions, with some happening after the return of the Lord Jesus and His enthronement in Zion. This may be a legitimate way of dealing with the problem, but no proposed chronology seems to resolve all the points of contradiction between the various prophecies. My suggestion again is that Bible prophecy is conditional. Various scenarios may happen, depending upon various factors such as the speed of Israel's repentance, the amount and quality of prayer and spirituality in the believers of the last days, God's grace, His desire to just end it all and get on with the Kingdom balanced against His desire to see more saved by prolonging things... And so Jerusalem may or may not fall, various invasions may or may not happen, in accordance with the human freewill factors that God so respects in how He finally works things out with Israel and this world.

And the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered together: gold, and silver, and clothing, in great abundance- What was done to Judah in :1 would now be done to her abusers. This explains the structure of the book of Revelation; the seven seals of judgment upon Israel are reflected in the bowls of judgment then poured out upon those who judged her. This verse is behind Rev. 21:26: "They shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into" the restored Zion.

Zechariah 14:15 *So will be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the donkey, and of all the animals that will be in those camps, as that plague*- The animals mentioned were all of military usage, and refer to the military resources of the invaders. In latter day terms this translates into the military technology and hardware of the attackers being plagued and thereby destroyed in the same way as the users thereof (:12).

Zechariah 14:16 *It will happen that everyone who is left of all the nations*- The remnant that is left is a term which is usually used about the repentant remnant of

God's people. There will also be such a remnant amongst her latter day enemies. This is a major theme- that there will be a minority amongst the attackers who repent.

That came against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, Yahweh of Armies- We note the focus of the attackers as specifically upon Jerusalem. This fits with an increasing focus in jihadist Islam [the religion of Israel's surrounding nations and enemies] upon Jerusalem. We can expect to see the Jerusalem issue becoming increasingly prominent, both politically and in their theology.

And to keep the feast of tabernacles- This festival is chosen because it celebrated the entry into the promised land. It will be a way of celebrating God's grace to Israel; the Gentiles will keep it because they have so identified with Israel that her God and her history is now theirs. It was a celebration too of the end of harvest, which is often used as a metaphor for judgment. It is a mistake to think that the Law of Moses will be reinstated for some period at the Lord's return. That law was ended permanently, as the New Testament makes clear. Under that law, men were required to appear three times before the Lord at the main feasts (Ex. 23:17); but here, only one feast appears to be required. Likewise the legal requirements of the restored temple in Ez. 40-48 were not the Law of Moses, as they differed significantly from it.

Zechariah 14:17 *It will be, that whoever of all the families of the earth doesn't go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, Yahweh of Armies, on them there will be no rain*- At the time of Zechariah, rain was being withheld upon Judah because of their disobedience, as Hag. 1 and Malachi mention. The initial audience would have been aware of this and realized they were being treated like the obstinate Gentiles of the last days who would refuse all evidence of Yahweh's supremacy and refuse to submit to Him. For this is what they were doing.

Zechariah 14:18 *If the family of Egypt doesn't go up, and doesn't come, neither will it rain on them*- The obvious point is that Egypt was then the nation which was independent of rainfall, because it depended for irrigation upon the flooding of the Nile rather than precipitation. With all the huge tectonic upheavals of the last days, this situation will change. That is the clear implication of this threat. "The family of Egypt" is a slightly unusual term. The implication may be that at Zechariah's time, the family of God in Egypt had chosen not to 'come up' to Zion, preferring the land of their exile.

This will be the plague with which Yahweh will strike the nations that don't go up to keep the feast of tents- Perhaps God expected the Jews in Egypt to come to Jerusalem to keep the feast. But they didn't, and thereby were living out the condemnation of latter day people who refuse the most obvious evidence that Yahweh is indeed king in Zion.

Zechariah 14:19 *This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations that don't go up to keep the feast of tabernacles*- Egypt as so often is presented as representative of "all the nations". We note that even when the Lord Jesus is enthroned in Jerusalem, obedience will not be forced. And we also are reminded that in the face of the most overpowering visual evidence, human nature is such that men can still refuse it. "Punishment" translates the same original word translated "sin", e.g. in Zech. 13:1. The Hebrew language at this point was structured to reflect the fact that sin is its own punishment. It's not so much that God punishes sin, but that sin is its punishment.

Zechariah 14:20 *In that day there will be on the bells of the horses, HOLY TO YAHWEH*- "The horses" suggests a specific group of horses is in view; and the horses of the context are those ridden by the invaders in :15. Instead of bearing slogans glorifying their dedication to pagan gods, the "bridles" (LXX, NEV "bells") of the surviving horses will be dedicated instead to Yahweh. This is another way of saying that swords will be beaten into ploughs (Is. 2:4). "Holy to Yahweh" was the inscription on the High Priestly mitre (Ex. 28:36). The idea is that such holiness would extend equally; the horses were to be as dedicated to Yahweh as the High Priest. This thought continues in the second half of the verse, where sacred bowls are to be as holy as earthen pots. And we can live with that spirit now; every part of our lives is to be dedicated to Yahweh. No area of life or field of human endeavour is to be considered as more or less sanctified than any other.

And the pots in Yahweh's house will be like the bowls before the altar- LXX "The cooking pots in the Temple will be as sacred as the bowls before the altar". Holiness will extend to absolutely everything.

Zechariah 14:21 *Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to Yahweh of Armies; and all those who sacrifice will come and take of them, and cook in them*- This rather conflicts with the practice amongst the Jews of the priests preparing the sacrifices, with the resultant abuses exemplified in the situation in 1 Sam. 2:13-15. But God seeks for personal relationship with individual people; both now and in that future day, we are to personally prepare and offer our own sacrifice to Him. We cannot depend upon any religious structure to do this for us, assuming because we made a general donation to a fund or charitable appeal we are thereby freed from any further concept of sacrifice.

In that day- This phrase occurs seven times in the prophecy of Zech. 14; see on :7. We are perhaps invited to see this as the consumption of the creation week, a new creation. The final "in that day" we expect to be something very significant, but instead the prophecy concludes with what could appear an anticlimax- a reference to there no longer being traders / Canaanites in the temple. But this is typical of the prophets; to focus upon moral failure which might appear relatively minor, and show how deeply significant it in fact is to God.

There will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of Yahweh of Armies- This was of obvious relevance to Zechariah's generation; for the book of Nehemiah laments how Canaanites came and traded and even had chambers in the temple. So the crowning blessing of the Kingdom "in that day" will be that there will be no more spiritual weakness within us the people and temple of God. And this is what surely every spiritually minded believer wishes for above all. Fear of our own weakness and the corruption of God's "house" by apostacy will then be no more.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: MALACHI

MALACHI

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

MALACHI CHAPTER 1

Malachi Chapter 1

Malachi 1:1 *An oracle: the word of Yahweh to Israel by Malachi*- "Malachi" is a form of *malak*, the word usually used for messenger o**r** Angel. The appeal of the prophecy is to the priests, who are described in Mal. 2:7 as "the messenger of Yahweh of Armies". So it would seem that Malachi [s.w. "messenger"] was himself a priest who was modelling what a priest should be like by giving his prophecy. So we have here a priest rebuking priests; and this is always the most powerful way to preach, teach and pastor, when the teacher or pastor has commonality with the audience. It was and is why the Lord Jesus fully had our human nature. The priests were to 'turn' [s.w. 'convert'] believers away

from the life of sin and behind the way of God (Mal. 2:6 LXX); the priestly mission was to bring about the conversion which was required before the revelation of Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom. As explained on Haggai and Zechariah, the exiles who returned could have experienced Joshua and / or Zerubbabel as their Messianic rulers in God's restored Kingdom in Judah. But they didn't 'return' to Yahweh spiritually, and most of them preferred to remain in exile anyway. It could be that 'Malachi' was an appeal for repentance by a priest who was attempting to prepare the way for Messiah's coming. But still Judah refused to respond, and his fellow priests, perhaps his own relatives, refused to prepare that way; and Malachi as the messenger of the covenant was rejected by his people. And so Malachi's mission failed, but it would come true in the work of the future Elijah prophet. Hence he concludes by speaking about this. John the Baptist was the primary fulfilment of it, and the latter day Elijah prophet will be the main fulfilment. John the Baptist felt that the Elijah ministry was about being "a voice crying", and he gives no direct answer to the question "Who are you?". He was just a voice, he felt his name was irrelevant. This might explain why 'Malachi' is anonymous, simply the messenger- of a possible new covenant. LXX reads "The words of the Lord to Israel by the hand of His messenger", asking us to connect with the message about the messenger of the covenant in Mal. 3:1.

Malachi 1:2 *I have loved you, says Yahweh. Yet you say, How have you loved us? Wasn't Esau Jacob's brother? says Yahweh, Yet I loved Jacob-*

This repeats the language of the new covenant: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3). But Judah had rejected that offer of a new covenant made to them by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and tried to return to the old covenant- which Zechariah had explained was now broken. They shied away from God's pure love, just as many do today. They like spoilt children wanted to think that "love" means the gift of material prosperity here and now. Although they had rejected the new covenant, God's love for them was unchangeable (Mal. 3:6). The gifts and calling of God to Israel were unchangeable (Rom. 11:29) and as such, a parade example of His grace. For Israel were chosen as God's beloved child not because of their goodness, but simply because He loved them- and no real explanation is given for that choice of love. "For the fathers' sakes" still only throws the question one stage further back. And certainly with our calling and predestination likewise.

And yet for all the focus of the returnees upon separation from others, the temple and the ritualism of the old covenant, they are presented here as not really believing God loved them and offering Him the cheapest of their sacrifices. Their words are not what they actually said, but how their attitudes were read by God. And so it can be with us today. It's why Paul prayed on his knees that the converts would know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. It's quite possible to have a religious approach to faith that

leaves us not feeling the love of God, and therefore uninfluenced by it. For we love only because He first loved us; as loved children we also walk in love (Eph. 5:1,2).

Isaiah speaks of this same inability of Judah to believe in God's love. "The LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me” . Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me" (Is. 49:14-16). And the marks on God's palms look ahead to the marks left in the Lord's palms by the nails of the cross. So often the exiles were dejected because the restoration prophecies hadn't worked out as they had hoped- because of their wrong attitudes. They returned to the land expecting personal material blessing, and turned against God when that didn't happen. Just as so many turn away from God today after coming to Him with wrong expectations of immediate blessing. God doesn't just shrug and make no further response. He appeals to them on the basis that His love for Israel is eternal and is shown by how He has chosen, taken hold of and called them: "But you, Israel My servant, Jacob whom I have *chosen*, the seed of Abraham My friend, you whom I have *taken hold of* from the ends of the earth and *called* from its corners and said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have *chosen* you and not cast you away’; don’t you be afraid, for I am with you" (Is. 41:8-10). We too cannot surely deny that we have been chosen, taken hold of and called. We find the same in Jer. 33:24-26: "Don’t consider what this people has spoken saying, The two families which Yahweh chose, has He not cast them off? Thus do they despise My people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus says Yahweh: If My covenant of day and night fails, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob". This was in response to the feeling of the dry bones of Judah in captivity: "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are totally cut off" (Ez. 37:11). So God appeals to them, that He has not and will not cut them off. At the beginning of the exile, they felt that "My strength is perished, and my expectation from Yahweh" (Lam. 3:18). And the same mentality continued in Malachi's time.

A sense that 'nobody loves me' is at the root of so much sin, addictions etc. It may quite possibly be true in this world, but the pain of being humanly unloved too easily leads people to believe that therefore, not even God loves them. Or at least, not very much. If our heart is melted by the love of another, then we are so hugely empowered. And we have that love… from God and the Lord Jesus. The New Testament defines the love of God and the love of Christ as specifically referring to the Lord's death on the cross. But we are too often up against the problem Malachi addressed- of religious people, believers in God, who feel somehow distant from God's love. Like them, we might never say in so many words "Wherein have You loved me?" but that is too often effectively our position.

Paul cites predestination as a parade example of God's grace. God's love of Jacob over Esau was not because Jacob was better; in secular terms, he was not such a nice guy as Esau. But God's love was for Jacob, to demonstrate His grace and to thereby elicit the response of faith and devotion. But Jacob / Israel refused. In Malachi's time, Israel had greatly slacked in keeping the Law: "What a weariness is it!", they grumbled to each other. They divorced faithful wives so they could marry Gentiles, they practiced sorcery and sexual perversion (Mal. 2:14-16; Mal. 3:5). But the *first* problem which the Spirit addresses is their lack of appreciation that God really did love them deeply (Mal. 1:2). All the other immorality flowed from this. We need to constantly remind ourselves never to feel "Nobody loves me". God loves us, in His Son. Let us never ever forget that.

The clear parallel between the historical man Jacob and the people of Israel is brought out here. Had Israel appreciated God's love for the man Jacob, and perceived that he was typical of them, then they would never have doubted God's love for them. And the same is true of us, whom Jacob likewise represents. It can be demonstrated that the weakness of Jacob, morally and even doctrinally, runs far deeper than may be apparent on the surface. Even at the end, despite the level of spiritual maturity which Jacob doubtless achieved, he still had serious aspects of incompleteness in his character. And yet he is held up as a spiritual hero, a victor in the struggle against the flesh. This was (and is) all possible on account of the phenomenal imputation of righteousness which God gave to His Jacob. He was saved by grace, not works; and Malachi appeals to God's people to see in Jacob's salvation an eternal reminder of God's grace (Mal. 1:2; 3:6). Very often, the name Jacob is associated with the way that God sees His people of Jacob / Israel as righteous when in fact they are not (Num. 23:7,10,21; 24:5; Ps. 47:4; 105:6; 135:4; Is. 41:8).

The various questions and statements put into Judah's mouth in Malachi, such as "How have you loved us?", are unlikely citations of what they actually said. Rather do we see here how God perceives the thought as the word, and how He sees and traces to the end the implications of our positions. We note that these same people who questioned whether God loved them were at the same time intensely religious and emotional in their apparent devotions to Him, covering His altar with tears (Mal. 2:13). In this we see a challenge; we can very seriously go through the motions of religious devotion, and yet disbelieve the simple love of God toward us.

Malachi 1:3 *But Esau I hated-*

We may ponder why God says He loves Israel but "hates" Esau. It has been truly said that 'hate' might be understood as meaning 'to love less'. But all the same, the Hebrew word translated "hate" means just that. It is used of how God hates child sacrifice (Dt. 12:31); idolatry (Dt. 16:22); of how a woman felt her husband "Hates me and doesn't love me" (Jud. 14:16); of how Amnon hated his rape victim more than he had once loved

her (2 Sam. 13:15); of how Haman hated the Jews (throughout Esther this word is used). Love and this "hate" are presented as polar opposites (e.g. 2 Sam. 19:6; 2 Chron. 19:2); the "hate" is not simply a lower level of "love". I suggest God says that He loves sinful Jacob and hates Esau in order to shake Judah from their lethargy, from their sense that God just treats them like any other nation. His love for Jacob was so strong that anything other than that love looked like hatred. This statement of extreme love prefaces the forthcoming message that God notices and feels their disregard of Him and has emotions appropriate to that; but they are overarched by this eternal love for Israel.

But it is true that "Hated" effectively means 'loved less' (as in Lk. 14:26 cp. Mt. 10:37; and Gen. 29:30,31 cp. Dt. 21:15,16). We read that Rebekah loved Jacob, but Isaac loved Esau; this isn't to say that each parent hated the other child, but that they loved them less. God seems to be saying that He too had (as it were) this kind of favouritism- by grace. And "Jacob" was to be awed by that grace; but they were not. In wrath God had said of Israel: “I hated them” (Hos. 9:15). Yet God loves Israel with an eternal love, and hates their enemies Esau (Mal. 1:3). He will “love them freely” ultimately (Hos. 14:14). These windows into God's internal struggles reveal that His love is far from cheap.

And made his mountains a desolation- Esau was judged for his sins; whereas so often, God didn't judge Jacob as he deserved.

And gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness- God gave Esau and inheritance and then took it away, giving it to the jackals. Jacob / Israel sinned even worse; their mountains were also made desolate, their heritage given to others- but despite a dearth of repentance, God had still restored them to their land in Malachi's time. This restoration was by grace alone; and Israel ought to have responded more and not questioned God's love. The destruction of Edom / Esau was by the Babylonians, who also destroyed Judah (Jer. 49:17-22). But Judah simply bemoaned their lot whereas Edom rebuilt their ruins (:4).

Malachi 1:4 *Whereas Edom says, We are beaten down, but we will return and build the waste places; thus says Yahweh of Armies, They shall build, but I will throw down*- God challenges Judah’s indolence to rebuild the temple by drawing their attention to how zealously Edom had rebuilt their “desolate places”. If Edom can do it… why can’t you, Judah, with all God’s prophecies and support behind you? God threw down what the Edomites tried to rebuild, but was eager to confirm and magnify every stone laid by Judah. We too are challenged by the devotion and commitment of secular people to causes which are unspiritual and not Godly. If they can do so much for their causes; how much more should we devote every atom of our being to the things of the Kingdom.

And men will call them ‘The Wicked Land’, even the people against whom Yahweh shows wrath forever- Judah at this time were also "wicked"; the same word is used of

them at Malachi's time 'working wickedness' (Mal. 3:15); 'doing wickedly' (Mal. 4:1). Just as the land was full of wickedness a generation before in the time of Zech. 5:8. The curses against Judah and Edom were similar (Is. 34:5); but God never lifted the curse upon Edom, whereas by grace He had done so upon Judah. Petra remains desolate to this day. The surrounding peoples throughout the generations were persuaded that Edom was a "Wicked land" and would not rebuild it. We see here how God can act directly upon the perceptions and hearts of people; and He can do so positively through His Spirit with us. God's wrath with Israel is described as eternal, but His grace to them was such that it was not.

Malachi 1:5 *Your eyes will see, and you will say, Yahweh is great- even beyond the border of Israel!*- "See" is s.w. "discern" in Mal. 3:18 ["you will again discern the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not"]; as explained there and on Mal. 2:4, all too late, the rejected will perceive spiritual truths. The connection with Mal. 3:18 suggests the "Your eyes" in view are those of rejected Israel. They oppressed Gentiles (Mal. 3:5) and considered *eretz* Israel the sole dominion of God's kingship or kingdom. But they would realize all too late that His Kingdom included Gentiles. The context is God's grace poured out to Jacob but not to Esau; the Jews of Malachi's time who refused and despised that grace would be resurrected to judgment and then see Gentiles such as Edom glorifying the God of Israel. Just as the Lord says that the unbelieving Jews of His generation would "see" Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom and themselves thrust out; they would not see Him again until they did see Him at the resurrection and would say, all too late, "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord".

"Beyond the border of Israel" can as well be rendered "up until", right up to the Biblical definitions of "Israel" from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. This would be the same idea as Mic. 5:4 "for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth" / land promised to Abraham. It would continue the theme of Zech. 14:9: "the Lord will become king over all the earth" / land. And note that Malachi follows straight on from Zechariah in 'the book of the twelve' minor prophets. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are all on the same physical scroll.

Malachi 1:6 *A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, then where is my honour?*- Just as Judah questioned in their hearts whether God loved them (:2), so they acted as if they weren't the children of God, and therefore didn't need to give Him the response which a son does to a father.

And if I am a master, where is the respect due me?- One doesn't give sub-standard service to their employer. One didn't bring him a defective animal as a gift. And yet Israel gave their God the lame and the blind animals, they only served Him as far as it didn't hurt them (Mal. 1:6-9). They gave Him what cost them nothing. And yet they should not only have served Him *as* they served their earthly masters; but, because He is the "great God", they should have given Him even more. And so we must ask: the time we give to our careers and development in them, the *thought* we give to our secular lives, the respect we pay it... how does this compare to our attitude to Divine things?

Says Yahweh of Armies to you, priests- The appeal to the priests is made explicit in Mal. 2:1, but it begins here. As noted on :1, Malachi was a priest, and he was appealing to the priests, possibly his own family members. The criticism of the priests for offering defective animals was really a criticism of their keeping the best sacrifices for themselves, and also allowing the people to offer defective animals. This is why the mass of society were as culpable as the priests.

Who despise My name- To know the name of Yahweh is an imperative to serve Him (1 Chron. 28:9). The greatness of the Name should have led to full and costly sacrifices (Mal. 1:6-8,9-11,14; 2:2). Thinking upon the Name led the faithful to pay their tithes and fellowship with each other (Mal. 3:6,10). Giving unto Yahweh the glory due to His Name is articulated through giving sacrifice (Ps. 96:8). If we know God, we will act and judge as He does (Jer. 22:16). To perceive that Yahweh is indeed so righteous results in us humbling ourselves (2 Chron. 12:6), just as the declaration of the Name made Moses hide in the cleft of the rock, and as it will make men in the last days throw away all their vestige of human pride (Is. 2).

You say, 'How have we despised Your name?'- The priests perhaps excused themselves by reasoning that it was the people bringing defective offerings. The fact is, God demands our all, our total best. Anything less than that is an excuse. The Hebrew for "despised" is used of Esau (Gen. 25:34). In the context we have just read of how Esau was worse than Jacob but God saved Jacob by grace. This ought to have elicited in Jacob / Israel a desire not to act as Esau, but to be transformed by that grace. But instead they acted like and even worse than Esau, also despising spiritual things. To despise the Name was the presumptuous sin (Num. 15:31). It was because of despising God that they had broken the covenant and gone into captivity (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:16; Ez. 16:59; 22:8). Now they had been restored by grace, but they were behaving the same way. They didn't deserve to be in the land, but rather to be sent away again into another captivity.

The priests despised Yahweh's Name (Mal. 1:6), unlike their ancestor Levi, who "revered Me and stood in awe of My Name" (Lev. 2:5). But it seems that some of the ordinary people did respond, and feared the Name: "Those who feared Yahweh spoke frequently one with another; and Yahweh listened, and heard, and a book of memory was written before Him, for those who feared Yahweh, and who honoured His name" (Mal. 3:16).

And for them, God promised the Messianic "sun of righteousness" to arise for them “who revere My Name” (Mal. 4:2). Despite the bad example of their priests / religious leaders, individuals can still respond.

Malachi 1:7 *You offer polluted bread on My altar-*

As teachers of God's law (Mal. 2:7), the priests ought to have refused such offerings from the people. But they didn't, and offered them on the altar. We note the love of Judah for the altar; it was the first thing they restored on return from exile and they covered it with tears (Mal. 2:13). But they offered sub-standard offerings upon it. This is typical of a religious approach to God, where the altar rather than the offering is seen as paramount.

The abuses against “My altar” of Mal. 1:7,10 refer to the much-mentioned altar of Ez. 40-48, which was to be used in a way unlike the previous abuses of the pre-captivity period. Judah had made no difference between clean and unclean, and therefore had gone into captivity (Ez. 22:26); and therefore the temple was a command / prophecy to divide the clean from the unclean in the whole way the building was designed and was to be built and operated (Ez. 42:20). It was a “law” that the top of the house be “holy” (Ez. 43:12). See on :8. Malachi is primarily addressing the priesthood; they were already "polluted", unable to prove their genealogy as the records had been destroyed when Jerusalem was sacked, and were only allowed to serve by grace (Neh. 7:64). But they didn't respond to that grace; they themselves polluted God's service.

God had sworn not to allow His Name to be polluted or profaned, e.g. Is. 48:11 "For My own sake, for My own sake, will I do it; for how should My name be profaned? I will not give My glory to another"; also in Ez. 20:9. But He never forces, and so He 'allowed' Judah at this time to pollute it. God invites us to see His efforts to stop His Name being polluted as somehow defeated by the extent of Israel's pollutions. This theme comes out clearly in Ezekiel: they polluted Him, but He strove lest His Name should be polluted. Here is the extent of freewill which God gives man to sin- and also the extent of the hopefulness of God. It's as if He didn't imagine they would pollute Him as much as they did.

You say, ‘How have we polluted You?’ In that you say, ‘Yahweh’s table contemptible’- “They shall come near to my table” (Ez. 44:16) in the restored temple. They did, but they despised it (Mal. 1:7,12), they found it such a weariness. Yet they covered the altar with tears of religious devotion (Mal. 2:13), when in reality they despised it. For God's table was His altar, He ate in fellowship with the offerers. We have here a powerful challenge to mere religiosity. "Contemptible" is s.w. despise" in :6. They despised God's Name by despising His table. Our attitude to His table, which in our day could refer to the

breaking of bread service, is our attitude to His Name. If we treat it as mere religion, a weapon to control others with, a sign of local club membership, then we like Judah are despising His Name.

Whilst the "table" refers to the altar, we note how Ez. 40:39-43 labours how there were to be tables for the offerings to be laid on and slaughtered. It was presumably on these stone tables that the animals were examined for defects. It seems that they were intended to construct eight stone tables for the sacrifices to be laid on. But we read here in Malachi of a singular "table", which they had despised and polluted with their stolen or substandard sacrifices. The priests laid the animal on the table, saw it was defective, but shrugged and accepted it anyway. Always the point is being made that this was all so far from the glorious temple scenario which Ezekiel had taught them and commanded them whilst in exile.

Malachi 1:8 *When you offer the blind for sacrifice, isn't that evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, isn't that evil?-* The idea is that the people presented or offered a sick animal to the priests, and the priests accepted it; this is not the word for "offer" in :7. "Isn't that evil?" is as RV "It is no evil!", ironically, or quoting their words. The offering of defective animals was likely encouraged by the poor harvests, poverty and blight on animals which the returned exiles faced, as detailed in Haggai. Indeed the economic situation was so bad by the time of Neh. 5:1-5 that they were selling their children as slaves just to get food to eat. But that was a result of their own sins and wrong attitudes. The excuse of the priests would have been that it was the people who offered these defective animals. But they were judged as responsible, as their acceptance of them encouraged the masses in their disrespect.

They offered blemished sacrifices, when it had been prophesied / commanded in the Ezekiel prophecies of the restored temple that Israel were not to do this (Ez. 43:23). Those prophecies were command more than prediction, and only conditional upon Israel's obedience- which was not forthcoming. So much prophetic potential was wasted, as it is in human life today. See on Mal. 1:7,10; 2:14; 3:8.

They offered the blemished sacrifices which Israel presented to them (:8,14). Thus they failed to speak out against the low spiritual standards of their flock, but instead went along with them. So the masses got the spiritual leadership they wanted, even if they despised them (:9). For this reason, both society and priesthood were equally to be condemned.

Present it now to your governor!- A Persian term is here used, suggesting Malachi was speaking not long after the restoration, when the Jews were still influenced by Persian language.

Will he be pleased with you? Or will he accept your person? says Yahweh of Armies- Heb. "accept your face". Sitting at God's table / altar with acceptable sacrifice would have resulted in them meeting God face to face as it were, over the table.

Malachi 1:9 *Now, please entreat the favour of God, that He may be gracious to us-*

Zech. 7:13 had clearly stated that God was not open to hearing their prayers until they changed: "Just as, when I called, they would not hear, so, when they call, I will not hear, says the LORD". Despite the potential being that the rebuilt temple would be a "house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7). Perhaps that's why prayer isn't ever really mentioned in Malachi, apart from here. And yet here Malachi still urges them to pray. He knew God's grace. And this is not the only time when Godly men have prayed when it appeared God had turned off. Jeremiah is a classic example.

It appears that a minority did respond to Malachi's words. But as religious people tend to, they asked the priest [Malachi] to pray for them, rather than wanting to engage personally with God. They are perhaps alluding to the intercession of Moses for a faithless Israel.

With this, will He accept any of you? says Yahweh of Armies- The problem was that the nature of the failures was such that the whole society was implicated. The priests offered the defective sacrifices which the people brought. And yet despite this, God as it were changes His mind and does accept that minority in Mal. 3:16. Such was and is His enthusiasm to save at least some.

Malachi 1:10 *Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain!-*

"Oh that there were one..." suggests that there was not a single faithful priest. The idea seems to be that God felt it were better to close the temple, to shut the doors, than keep them open to offer sacrifices like these. We see how far the glorious potential for the restored temple had failed. As the Lord would later put it, better hot or cold than lukewarm.

God's desire for the temple to be closed down stands in sharp contrast to the glorious prophecies of the temple's restoration. He is moving towards a way of relating to people without the temple; as we will note on :11.

There were to be gate openers in the restored temple (Ez. 46:12). There were gate openers, but they demanded to be paid for their services (AV); or [LXX] the gate openers were nowhere to be found. The difference in the translations reflects the Hebraism: if you won't serve for nothing, then you haven't served.

An indication that Nehemiah could have been a Messiah figure is to be found in Mal. 1:10 RV, which laments that even if *one* man could be found to shut the temple doors properly, then God's pleasure would have returned to Israel. It was Nehemiah who shut the doors (Neh. 13:19- i.e. organized the temple services?), but presumably the implication is that he didn't continue as required. See on Hag. 1:1; 2:7; Zech. 8:22.

The AV offers: "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought". If this is legitimate, then we have an allusion to the book of Job, which appears to have been rewritten under inspiration with relevance to the return from exile. The satan in the book of Job expresses his serious doubt that any man would serve God for no prospect of reward in this life (Job 1:9). One of the themes of the book of Job is to show how a real believer *will* serve God for nothing. In fact, Job went beyond this. He says that he will still serve God even if he gets nothing from Him in this life *and even if there is no future reward either,* and even if God treats Him unfairly; 'Even if', Job speculates, 'God *slays me* (not just 'kills' me)' (consider Job 13:15; 14:7,14; 19:10). This was love of God, this was devotion to ones' creator, despite not understanding His ways. In Malachi's time, the Jews were expecting a reward from God for every little thing they did. They are rebuked in language which is full of allusion back to Job, and his willingness to serve God "for nought" (Mal. 1:10 AV).

I have no pleasure in you, says Yahweh of Armies, neither will I accept an offering at your hand- The glory of Yahweh as described at the end of Ezekiel could have appeared in Haggai's time- but this wonderful possibility was held back by Israel's petty minded, self-satisficing laziness. The same word is used in Ez. 43:27- *then*, when the temple of Ezekiel was built, Yahweh would "accept / take pleasure in" His people and temple. But because they built and served Him with such a mean spirit, He did not "accept" them at that time (Mal. 1:10,13 s.w.).

Malachi 1:11 *For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering: for My name is great among the nations, says Yahweh of Armies*- Note the conflict of tenses; His Name will be glorified, because it is right now great. The implication is that we glorify that Name now, and thereby live the Kingdom life now. This is the sense of the Lord's repeated offers of "life eternal" to be experienced right now. The exiles despised Gentiles (Mal. 3:5), but ultimately it was Gentiles who were to offer a more pure sacrifice than the Jews. Their "pure offering" contrasts with the defective offerings of the Jews at this time. And the Jews of that generation would be resurrected to see this, and then be condemned (see on :5). "Every place" uses *maqom*, the word for a holy place; the whole earth was to be full of such holy places, where incense could be offered acceptably; which meant that the Jerusalem temple would no longer be the

only sacred space- a lesson the exiles ought to have learnt through their relationship with God in Babylon.

The Gentiles are understood in Mal. 1:11 as being able to offer a pure offering "in every place". The Jerusalem temple was not required to make an acceptable offering. That had been the initial plan, as Ez. 48 had envisaged the Yahweh Name would be "there"; but the Jews had despised God's Name. So anyone who did make His Name "great" could offer an acceptable, pure offering- from wherever they are. And yet in Mal. 3:4 another scenario is given- the Levitical priesthood will be purged and "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old" (Mal. 3:4). It never was purged. But Malachi's generation were still being given the opportunity to have that scenario. Mal. 1:11 makes it clear that He foresaw that their spurning of His holiness would actually lead to a situation where He was glorified by far more people over a far greater area.

The idea could be: “I will no longer accept the local and polluted offering, for I will substitute for it a pure and universal offering”. This looked forward to the Lord's sacrifice. And possibly the readjustment of these things would come to its fulfilment in the “spiritual sacrifices” of prayer and praise (Heb. 13:15), generous deeds (Heb. 13:16; Phil. 4:18) and self-dedication (Rom. 12:1).

Another option is that the present tenses could lead us to read this as speaking of the Jews and Israelites who had not returned to the land. They were offering acceptable incense without the temple, throughout the Persian empire. And this was acceptable, whereas the offerings made at the temple weren't. We recall how Ezekiel established a "little sanctuary" in exile and there likely were others. There are records of Jewish sacrifices being made in the Elephantine colony in Egypt, in Babylonia, and at the Jewish temple in Leontopolis in Lower Egypt. These and other sanctuaries may have been the referent of how "in every place [the Hebrew often refers to a holy place]" amongst the Gentiles in the territory of the land promised to Abraham, incense was being offered acceptably to Yahweh.

We see a number of different potential movements within God's purpose. Jeremiah and Ezekiel had offered the captives a return from exile, a new covenant and a restored Kingdom, with a new temple and a Messianic "Prince" and conditions of great blessing in the land, with the Gentiles becoming proselytes. But this was conditional upon their repentance. They didn't repent and only a relatively few returned from exile. They didn't build the temple as commanded by Ezekiel and sought to return to the [now broken] old covenant. They didn't repent and were only interested in their own properties and material betterment. Haggai and Zechariah appealed for repentance, but it was only done on a surface level. Through Zechariah, God offered them a new version of things- a priest [Joshua] and a king [Zerubbabel], and offers to cleanse the Levitical priesthood. And offered the blessings of the old covenant in return for obedience to the old

covenant. Jeremiah's prophecies of the new covenant are alluded to in Zechariah 1-8 and parts of them are mixed in with the new deal God was offering a people who still wanted the old covenant, for reasons of preserving tradition. But even that wasn't acceptable to them. God condemns them as "unclean" (Haggai) and unacceptable (Malachi). After Zechariah 8, Zechariah refocuses the possible futures upon the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. Yet Mal. 1: 11 is clear that God enjoyed fellowship and worship from a faithful remnant of exiles still in captivity, quite without a temple and sanctuary. And quite possibly without a Levitical priesthood. Yet their offerings were "pure" and they glorified Yahweh's Name, unlike those offered in the rebuilt temple. Zech. 8:20-23 and other restoration prophecies speak of a pilgrimage of nations to worship at the restored temple in Jerusalem. But Malachi sees the possibility of individual Jews [initially] acceptably worshipping God from a distance. And this merges with the wider vision of individual Gentiles worldwide glorifying Him, without the temple and restored Kingdom in the specific form envisaged by the restoration prophets. This is confirmed by the way these words of Mal. 1:11 are quoted in 1 Tim. 2:8 and applied to Christians praying to God: "I desire then that men pray in every place". This would explain the clear feeling of personal relationship with God which is so marked in Malachi: "Out of a total of 55 verses in the book, 47 contain the first person address of Yahweh to Israel". In all this we see God's earnest desire to somehow work with men, on whatever level.

Malachi 1:12 *But you profane it*- The purpose of building the temple system was so that Yahweh's Name would no longer be profaned by His people in that temple (Ez. 36:23; 44:7); but they had profaned it (also Mal. 1:12), in that they saw it all as mere religion, and the fire of a true relationship with the Almighty was smothered. Judah profaned the Sabbath too (Neh. 13:17,18). The potential kingdom situation of Ez. 40-48 was therefore precluded by their disobedience to it.

In that you say, 'Yahweh's table is polluted, and its fruit, even its food, is contemptible'- This is typical of the prophets- to perceive the real implication of attitudes. For the Jews probably didn't actually say those words. But because those words didn't pass their lips and weren't formed by their tongue... this didn't mean that they didn't think that. The Lord brought all this into simple truth when He stated that the thought is the action and the words.

According to the LXX titles, there were certain Psalms which were written for the dedication of the rebuilt temple, and others written by Haggai and Zechariah. They include: Psalms 96,138,147,148. These all seem to speak as if the time of a glorious temple was to be the time of God's Kingdom; this was the possibility, and it was the prevailing hope in the minds of the faithful minority. But the Psalms had to remain prophecies of the future day of Zion's glory. Psalms 96 is very clear: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name [i.e.] bring an offering, and come into his courts" (:8). But

Judah did *not* bring the right offerings, although the glory of Yahweh's Name ought to have elicited them (Mal. 1:11-16).

They are accused here of blaspheming God's Name, faithlessness (2:10-17), wearying the Lord with their words (2:17), failing to return to the Lord Almighty (3:6-7), saying "it is futile to serve God" and robbing God (3:8,13). Yet they covered the altar with tears (Mal. 2:13), such was their religious devotion. But still God assures them that He loves them.

Malachi 1:13 *You say also, 'Behold, what a weariness it is!'-*

They considered serving God a "weariness" because they felt there weren't getting anything immediate and material out of it. The same word is used in Is. 43:22: "You have become weary of me, O Israel!". There was a mutuality here: "Your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them" (Is. 1:14). God was wearied with their weariness, and so it is in the breakdown of relationship between God and men today. And yet despite this, God reaches out to them again and again.

What a contrast with David! The whole of Ps. 119 describes how he rejoiced at God's law, staying up late at night, straining his eyes into the candlelight to read it, getting up first thing in the morning to read some more (Ps. 119:147,148). "Travail" is the same word translated "weariness" here, used by Nehemiah as a summary of all the trouble that had come upon Judah in their history (Neh. 9:32). This is the mindset of so many- they have travail in the world, and they consider relationship with God to likewise be "travail". Anything apart from total commitment to God will result in this miserable mindset.

And you have sniffed at it, says Yahweh of Armies- "Sniffed" alludes to an animal snorting or 'breathing back' at food they don't like. It is the word used about how Yahweh "sniffed" or 'blew away' the harvest reaped by the exiles (Hag. 1:9). As noted on *What a weariness it is*, Judah had slumped to a situation where they sniffed or blew away at the idea of giving God the best, and He sniffed or blew away what they harvested. Only total devotion to Him of our very best will bring us out of this mire of mediocrity which grips unbelieving society.

And you have brought that which was taken by violence, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring the offering- The returned exiles were stealing cattle from each other, and then quickly using them as offerings before the theft would be discovered. And by so doing, they robbed God (Mal. 3:8). The Hebrew for "sick" is literally 'that which is worn away', and it is also one of the Hebrew words translated "prayer". It is used in :9; to pray to God with entreaty is as it were to wear Him down, as in the parable of the insistent widow. The play on words here is to reflect how God would not be 'worn down' by their prayers if their sacrifices were of worn down animals. The timeless message is that we are not to

sacrifice to God that which costs us nothing, that which is in any case superfluous to our personal needs. And we need to examine all our giving to God in this light.

Should I accept this at your hand? says Yahweh- The prophetic intention was that God would "accept" the offerings of the restored exiles in the rebuilt temple (s.w. Ez. 20:41; 43:27). But He is saying that they were precluding the fulfilment of those prophecies by offering that which was clearly unacceptable. Again we see the open ended nature of God's purpose, and the extreme importance thereby attached to human freewill decisions.

Malachi 1:14 *But the deceiver is cursed, who has in his flock a male, and vows, and sacrifices to the Lord a blemished thing-*

The cruel tragedy here is that a vow meant that you promised to make a sacrifice to God if He did something for you. God had answered their prayers, He came through for them as asked- but their gratitude was in offering a blemished animal even when it was in their power to offer Him what they had promised.

"Blemished thing" is feminine. Freewill vow offerings were to be male. We may ask, 'Who were the offerers deceiving?'. Not the priests, because they knew the blemishes of the animals they sacrificed. Like Ananias and Sapphira, the offerers were deceiving God. And they thought they could get away with it. They would naturally have recoiled at this being stated in such bald terms, but this is effectively what we are doing if we don't offer the best according to our potential. The law required male offerings (Lev. 1:3,10); the offerer was claiming that he had only a flock of females and hence couldn't offer a male. This was obviously untrue, but they thought they could thus deceive God, as if He wouldn't notice.

For I am a great King, says Yahweh of Armies- "The great king" is the title beloved by the kings of Assyria, Greece and Babylon (2 Kings 18:19,28; Jer. 25:14; Dan. 8:21). The emphasis is therefore upon "*I*". The restored exiles still felt that their imperial rulers were their great king, rather than throwing off the yoke of tribute and tithing to them and accepting Yahweh as the one and only "great king". We too can so easily fear man's greatness rather than God's.

And My name is awesome among the nations- It is a continual theme of Malachi that the Gentiles would ultimately serve God acceptably and better than Judah (see on :11). We note the present tense, "is awesome", as if this potential was already being developed.

MALACHI CHAPTER 2

Malachi Chapter 2

Malachi 2:1 *Now, you priests, this commandment is for you*- The idea would be that the following is specifically for the priests, although Mal. 1 is largely directed at them also. I suggested on Mal. 1:1 that the priesthood was to specifically be the messenger of the new covenant heralding the potential arising of a Messiah figure. But Judah refused, and so the potential was rescheduled and reapplied to John the Baptist, and then to the latter day Elijah prophet.

Malachi 2:2 *If you will not listen*- Heb. "hear". This was the epitome of God's covenant: "Hear, O Israel". To not even hear meant that all the rest of the covenant principles were lost on them. To hear God, to respect His word, is essential. This is why the Bible must have paramount place in all our thinking about God.

And if you will not lay it to heart- Judah had gone into captivity because they did not "lay it to heart" (Jer. 12:11 s.w.). The restoration from captivity was to involve setting or laying to heart the new covenant (Jer. 31:21). They had returned from captivity, but were still not laying to heart their relationship with God. This lack of mental focus is one of the most common diseases of the soul, and affects many who would otherwise consider themselves religious Christians. They covered the altar with tears (:13) but didn't lay God's word to their heart. For all time we see demonstrated that mere religion and emotionalism isn't the same as a heart response to God.

To give glory to My name, says Yahweh of Armies- The exiles developed such an obsession with the Name that they even forbad the pronunciation of it. But this was typical mere religiosity, seeing that their root problem was a refusal to glorify the characteristics of God's Name.

Then will I send the curse on you- The curse with the article suggests the specific curse for disobedience to the covenant (Dt. 27:15-26; Dt. 28).

And I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart- This may refer to how as recorded in Hag. 1, there was famine and none of the covenant blessings which they had been promised for obedience. Or the idea may be that what apparent blessings they had were already cursed from God's viewpoint, but there was a gap between the curse and its fulfilment; note the future sense of :3. This explains the apparent contradiction: "I will curse... I have already cursed". In that gap, they could have repented and changed God's intention. We too live within that gap, and it should impart an intensity to our living, repentance and self-examination. God had already cursed the priests, He had made that statement. But the whole point of Malachi's appeal was that the priests would repent, and thus the curse that had "already" been pronounced would not come into operation. Note that God isn't saying: 'If you don't repent, beware, I will curse you'. He had already cursed them, but at that late stage, even then, He was willing to change His word- if they repented. It was exactly the same with Nineveh. Indeed, many of the OT appeals to repentance and outlines of judgment to come are of this nature. That judgment had already been decreed. But the power of the repentance appeals is that even so, God is so sensitive to genuine repentance that He is willing to go back on His own word. It's a great encouragement not only to personal penitence, but to perceiving the deep significance of the repentance of others, and accordingly framing our personal attitudes and judgments concerning them.

"Already" translates a Hebrew term which could mean "I have cursed them severally", taking the grammar distributively- as if to say, "I have cursed each one of your blessings". This would mean that there were a whole list of blessings potentially

prepared, which one by one were now cursed. The amount of potential lost was tragic, and it continues in so many lives today as so many possible futures simply don't come about.

We must remember that it is specifically the priests who are being cursed; their specific blessings were to be cursed. What were their blessings? As discussed on :14, the priests were not trusting in the blessing promised to faithfully teaching God's word and arranging Israel's worship. The promise of blessing to the tribe of Levi was clear: "Yahweh, *bless* his substance [s.w. "wealth"]. Accept the work of his hands" (Dt. 33:11). Possibly this general 'blessing' of the Levites is implied in Num. 6:27: "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them" (RSV). Somehow everything will work out if we go God's way. But they didn't trust that, and divorced their wives and married Gentile pagans to try to ensure their own wealth.

Malachi 2:3 *Behold, I will rebuke your seed*- The reference could be to literal seed, but more likely to their children. The most common excuse for lack of devotion to God is that resources are needed for our children. This was the reason given by faithless Israel for not entering Canaan. But it was their children who would suffer. GNB "I will punish your children". The priests married Gentile women and divorced their Jewish wives, and as such decided themselves that their seed would not be a "Godly seed" (:14,15). So they worked out this curse by their own decisions and actions, just as Jeremiah had said of them: "Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you. This is your doom" (Jer. 4:18). Their descendants would cease from being Levites if their mothers were pagan Gentiles. They would be taken away from the altar just like dung was taken away from it, and dumped outside the camp (Ex. 29:14; Lev. 4:11; 16:27). But this was their own choice. God didn't want this to happen- "I have sent this commandment to you, that my covenant may continue with Levi" (2:4, NASB).

And will spread dung on your faces, even the dung of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it- This is one of the harshest, crudest condemnations of the priesthood in the whole Bible. And yet it is prefaced by the statement of God's amazing love for all Israel in Mal. 1. It is the wrath of love. The allusion is to the taking of the dung of the sacrifices "without the camp" to an unclean place of destruction (Ex. 29:14; Lev. 8:17 etc.). Judah were being told that without repentance, they would again be cast out from God's holy space. "Spread" is the same word used for God's scattering of His people into exile (Lev. 26:33). They didn't repent, but this didn't happen for centuries, until AD70. Such was God's amazing patience, setting us a powerful challenge whenever we think we have been patient enough with lack of human response to His word. But finally, God did end their feasts by destroying the temple and ending the Mosaic law, and expelling Israel. The language is crude and shocking, purposefully so, in order to get over to these religious people who wept tears over God's altar in apparent devotion (:13)... that they were so deeply unclean and their devotions and blemished animal sacrifices so abominable.

Malachi 2:4 *You will know that I have sent this commandment to you*- This continues the theme discussed on Mal. 1:5 and Mal. 3:18, that all too late when resurrected to judgment, that generation would know the truth of all these things. This explains why condemnation is described as the mental anguish which leads to gnashing of teeth. Or we can read this as NASB, as a continued begging for the priests to return to the covenant: "I have sent this commandment to you, that my covenant may continue with Levi" (2:4, NASB). And yet God had offered His people a new covenant, indeed the old covenant was broken. But they wanted to still stick with the old covenant and so He

goes along with that desire. The Lord likewise spoke of how He appealed to Israel by all means, offering to play weddings, then funerals- but the just didn't want to play ball.

That My covenant may be with Levi, says Yahweh of Armies- God wanted to make a new covenant with the priests who are here addressed (:1) as "Levi". I will suggested on :5 that this was not the same as the Mosaic law, and was a separate although similar covenant to that made with Phinehas in Num. 25:12,13.

On a general level, all those in true covenant relationship with God will realize the fullness of commitment to us which He has entered into, and will likewise make a whole-hearted response and sacrifice (Mal. 2:4,5). Ps. 103:18 parallels "such as keep his covenant" with "those that remember His commandments to do them". Covenant relationship brings a natural desire to live within the atmosphere of God's spirituality. For Israel in covenant with God, absolutely nothing- not sex, menstruation, the content of clothing fabric, diet- could fall outside the scope of their covenant relationship. And so in principle it is with us under the new covenant.

Malachi 2:5 *My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him that he might be reverent toward Me; and he was reverent toward Me, and stood in awe of My name*- The old covenant could not give life (Gal. 3:21), nor peace with God because there was a remembrance made of personal sins each year because of the inadequacy of the animal sacrifices alone to deal with personal sin (Heb. 10:3). As noted throughout Zechariah, God in Jeremiah and Ezekiel had offered the returning exiles a new covenant, which did offer life and peace: "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant" (Ez. 37:26; Is. 54:10). But they had refused it. This surely is the covenant in view rather than the old covenant. But the statement here is that this covenant had already been given and accepted. The priest who first accepted it was I suggest not the historical Levi, but Joshua the high priest who could have become a Messianic ruler. He initially accepted it but didn't continue in that covenant, neither did the priesthood after him; see on Hag. 1:1; 2:4; Zech. 3:1,3,6,8,9; 6:11. See on :7. The allusions to Phinehas are also clear: "'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace: and it shall be to him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel" (Num. 25:12,13). This was itself an incipient form of the new covenant, which was repeated to the priesthood at the time of the restoration as part of the new covenant offered to all Judah who returned to the land.

Malachi 2:6 *The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips. He walked with Me in peace and uprightness*- The man in view was "Levi" but this means surely an individual, specific priest, rather than Levi personally. As suggested on :5, it may not so much be Phinehas in view, but rather Joshua the intended high priest who began well but then fell away. God's law was to be taught in truth, whereas as explained on :8, the priesthood in Malachi's time had begun to twist the law in an untruthful way. Is. 59:3 uses the same words in condemning Judah after the restoration for having unrighteous lips. They influenced the priesthood, and the priesthood influenced them. And thus the entire community was guilty. The particular unrighteousness on the lips of the priesthood would have been in teaching unrighteousness as righteousness, thereby making their audience "stumble at the law" (:8). "Uprightness" is the word translated "straight" in explaining how the priestly messenger of the covenant would make the way "straight" for Messiah's coming (Is. 40:4; 42:16). This was what was required of the priesthood and high priest in order to

prepare the way for Messiah's coming. But the priest [Joshua?] failed in this, and so did the priesthood subsequently.

And turned many away from iniquity- "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God" (Lk. 1:16) was alluding back to Malachi's message and prophecies of Messiah's forerunner; and it also referred to this definition of the ideal priest as one who "did turn many away from iniquity". The high priest Joshua and the priesthood at Malachi's time failed to prepare the way for Messiah's coming; and so it was reapplied to John the Baptist, and again to the Elijah prophet of the last days. "Turned away" is the usual word used for Judah's "return" from exile. They had been intended to return to God as well as literally to the land. They had failed to do so, and so they were given by grace the messenger of the covenant to prepare them. This appears to have been a priest, maybe Joshua, or the figure presented as 'Malachi', but the priesthood generally were not fulfilling this role as intended. And so it was rescheduled for fulfilment in John the Baptist and the Elijah prophet of the last days.

There is clearly a connection with Dan. 12:3 promising blessing for those who turn many away from iniquity. Daniel's prophecy that there would be a time of trouble for Israel, followed by a resurrection and judgment, may have had a potential fulfilment in Haman's persecution. The LXX of Esther 5 includes her prayer, in which she says that Haman was seeking to hinder the work of the temple. This would explain why initially the Samaritans persuaded the Persians to make the work cease, but then (humanly inexplicably) another edict is given for it to resume. The people were delivered (Dan. 12:1), as they were by Michael the Angel manipulating Esther. But the resurrection, judgment and Kingdom didn't follow, because Israel weren't ready for it. Then those who turned many to righteousness- i.e. the priesthood, in the primary context- would be rewarded (Dan. 12:3). But Malachi and Haggai repeatedly criticized the priesthood at the time of the restoration for being selfish and not teaching Israel. Daniel and Jeremiah were heartbroken that there had to be such a delay to the full fulfilment of the Messianic restoration of the Kingdom.

As noted on :7, all Israel were to be priests in spirit. The priests were to 'turn' [s.w. 'convert'] believers away from the life of sin and behind the way of God (Mal. 2:6 LXX), but this is applied to all of us in James 5:19.

Malachi 2:7 *For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth-*

Dt. 33:10 had stated that Levi "shall teach judgments to Jacob" i.e. the rest of Israel. But this was command more than prediction, because Mal. 2:7 says that therefore the priest's lips should keep knowledge. They didn't, but they ought to have done. Again we see how "shall" is so often command rather than prediction of how things shall be in the future.

As noted on :5, the priests had entered a new covenant on returning from exile. This new covenant required Judah to have God's law written on their hearts, so that they each had the knowledge of God (Jer. 31:34); and yet Mal. 2:5-7 laments that the priests were more interested in divorcing their wives than teaching God's law to the people; their lips didn't keep nor teach the knowledge of God. The priests of the new temple system were to teach Judah and to make others *discern* between good and evil (Ez. 44:23). But they did the opposite, and therefore the huge potential predicted for them in Ez. 40-48 didn't come about.

Although there was a special priesthood, it was clearly God's intention that all Israel should be like priests; they were to be a "*Kingdom* of priests" (Ex. 19:6). "The

priests lips should keep knowledge"; but the average Israelite was encouraged to study the Law for himself, "that your lips may keep knowledge" (Prov. 5:2 s.w.).

For he is the messenger of Yahweh of Armies- As suggested on Mal. 1:1, Malachi [s.w. "messenger"] was himself a priest who was modelling what a priest should be like by giving his prophecy. The messenger of the covenant (Mal. 3:1) was therefore a priest or priesthood which would prepare the people to accept the new covenant in Messiah. The implication is that Malachi and the priesthood of his time could and should have been doing this; but the priests refused. So we have here a priest rebuking priests; and this is always the most powerful way to preach, teach and pastor, when the teacher or pastor has commonality with the audience. It was and is why the Lord Jesus fully had our human nature. The prophecy was reapplied to John the Baptist, who was also a priest; and seeing Israel generally failed to respond, again to the latter day Elijah prophet.

Malachi 2:8 *But you have turned aside out of the way*- I suggested on :5 that initially at the return from Babylon, the priest did teach God's ways. Certainly Nehemiah and Ezra did. But the subsequent priesthood didn't.

You have caused many to stumble in the law- This was the effect of their not rejecting the law, but finding all manner of ways of twisting it to allow female animals to be offered instead of the males stipulated (Mal. 1:14), and crippled animals to be accepted instead of unblemished ones. Finding ways around God's requirements only makes others stumble; again, a timeless warning.

You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says Yahweh of Armies- As explained on :5, that covenant was not the old covenant, but a new covenant offered to the returning exiles, as detailed in Jer. 31 and Ez. 37, which they initially accepted, but now the next generation had corrupted it. There is clearly also an allusion to the covenant with Phinehas. The priests "corrupted the covenant of Levi", in that they married out of the Faith (Neh. 13:29), thus violating the Spirit of the Phinehas covenant- which was given in recognition of zealous action against relationships with Gentile women (Num. 25:12,13).

Malachi 2:9 *Therefore I have also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according to the way you have not kept My ways, but have had respect for persons in the law*- By letting the people 'get away with' things like offering sick animals, the priests became despised by the people. As will be explained on :11, the people came to despise the priests just as they had done at the time of the young Samuel. But because of this, the people were driven to idolatry. This is what happens when the leadership of God's communities drive people away and make them simply not want to have anything to do with the community any more; those driven away rarely keep the faith, but rather drift off to various forms of idolatry. By respecting persons, showing favouritism to some, the priesthood became despised before all the people. They were unable to have a platform of respect from which to teach the people, and what they taught anyway was a corruption of the law.

Malachi 2:10 *Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother-*

It could be argued that Malachi is quoting their words of justification for marrying Gentiles: "Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us?". They reasoned that seeing all men are created by God and descend from Adam, we are a brotherhood of man and so we can intermarry. This was totally different to God's insistence in Mal.

1 that He has a unique and special love and purpose for Israel, which He doesn't have with any other nation. But the returned exiles considered themselves rejected by Yahweh, and used this as an excuse to divorce their Jewish wives and marry Gentiles.

The treachery in :14 was against their wives. But here it is against their own brethren, and often elsewhere the word is used of treachery / unfaithfulness to the covenant with God. Unfaithfulness in personal relationships inevitably leads to breakdown in relationships with ones' brethren. And tearing up your covenant with your wife was related to tearing up your covenant with God/ You won't be unfaithful in one aspect of your life without it affecting other aspects; spirituality is "the whole man". On Mal. 4:6 we will see how reconcilliation with God is related to reconcilliation within human relationships.

The covenant in view is that explained on :5. Remember that Malachi is addressing the priests (:1), and he himself was a priest (:7), probably a family relative of the priests he was addressing. Therefore the reference to brothers and having one father is to be understood in that context; the "one father" Malachi shared with his audience would then have been Levi. But the wider principle remains; the unity of God and our common relationship with Him should mean that we do not at treacherously against our brother, who also has God as Father.

Profaning the covenant of our fathers?- The purpose of building the temple system was so that Yahweh's Name and covenant would no longer be 'profaned' by His people (Ez. 36:23; 44:7); but they had profaned it (also Mal. 1:12), in that they saw it all as mere religion, and the fire of a true relationship with the Almighty was smothered.

Breaking covenant with God was related to breaking covenant with their wives and marrying Gentiles. Thus those who 'married out' in Ezra's time admitted: "We have broken covenant with our God ("have broken faith with our God" , RSV) and have taken strange (i.e. Gentile) wives of the people of the land... now let us make a covenant with our God, to put away all these wives" (Ezra 10:2 LXX). Ezra confirms the truth of what they said: "You have broken covenant and taken strange wives" (Ezra 10:10 LXX). Some years later, Nehemiah stridently criticized Israel for yet again marrying Gentiles. He described their action as "breaking covenant with our God and marrying strange wives" (Neh. 13:27 LXX); the Levites likewise "defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood" (Neh. 13:29) by their marriages. Notice how the repentant Jews in Ezra's time realized that they had broken the covenant, and sought to rectify things by re-entering the covenant, through serious repentance. Marriage with unbelievers needs to be assessed in the light of these words. In nearly every reference to marriage to Gentiles, there is the comment that this would surely lead to adopting the religious views of the Gentile partner; views which inevitably take a man away from the one and only Divine Truth, as revealed in the covenants of the Gospel. Turn through the following passages, which all make the connection between marriage out of the covenant, and adopting idolatry: Ex. 34:12-16; Dt. 7:2-9; Jud. 3:6,7; 1 Kings 11:2,3; Mal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 6:14.

Malachi 2:11 *Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the holiness of Yahweh which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god-*

The context is of the priests being criticized, that is the theme throughout this chapter. We enquire why they are addressed here as "Judah". Perhaps because the original Judah married the daughter of a Canaanite (Gen. 38:2) and his first two sons by this marriage were slain by God (Gen. 38:7,10). Just as God would curse the seed of the priests who married Gentiles (:2,3). "Judah has profaned the sanctuary of Yahweh"

(Heb.) was something which the priests specifically are made guilty of doing in Malachi's criticisms of them. The priests were not to marry a "profane" woman (Lev. 21:7), and here the same word is used of becoming profane by marrying a pagan, who was "profane".

The treachery was therefore marital unfaithfulness. This is the great burden of Hosea; that Judah were in covenant relationship with God but were unfaithful. And yet there was never a time when Judah stated in so many words that they were through with Yahweh and were remarrying idols. The prophets so often perceive the true implication of human actions and attitudes. They had effectively divorced God and remarried. We recall that Malachi was speaking at the time of the restoration. The common impression that they left their idols in Babylon when they returned to Judah is incorrect. It's true that under the Maccabees they did reject idolatry, but not for a few generations. All the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem was therefore done against this background of idolatry. Remember that it is the priests being addressed here (:1). They had made Judah stumble (:8); they are being blamed for Judah effectively divorcing Yahweh. They had effectively taught idolatry, although they would have strongly denied this. But by driving people away from Yahweh worship by their corruption and theft from the people, which led to the people despising them (:9), they had driven the people to idolatry. There is a religious need and instinct within people; if we or our church leadership make others stumble away from serving God, putting them in a position where they feel they can't come to meetings or remain within the believing community... then they will stumble off to other faiths. And it will be our fault.

The people were warned that the temple had been destroyed because of their previous "abominations", and that the rebuilt temple was not to feature any such abominations (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13). "Let it suffice you of your abominations" they were told- and were commanded not to allow the uncircumcised into the temple, as they had been doing (Ez. 44:6,9). This sounds as if the prophecy of Ezekiel was more command than prediction- to those of his own day. But they returned, and committed the abominations [s.w.] of the Gentiles (Ezra 9:1,11,14) and married their daughters. Judah did not 'separate' themselves from the surrounding tribes but instead married them and worshipped their idols (s.w. Ezra 9:1 "The people of Israel... have not separated themselves from the people of the land, doing according to their *abominations*... for they have taken of their daughters for themselves"). The same word for "abominations" occurs here; they had "dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel". Yet it had been emphasized that the temple system Ezekiel described was to be free of all the "abominations" [s.w.] previously committed by Israel (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13).

Malachi 2:12 *May Yahweh cut off out of the tents of Jacob the man who does this, and his descendant; may he not offer an offering to Yahweh of Armies*- As explained on :11, God is furious with those who cause others to stumble by effectively driving them away from the community of His children. Those who uphold disfellowship, excommunication, a closed table etc. must take this challenge very seriously. "May he not offer..." confirms that we are reading specifically about the priests, who offered the sacrifices. But by divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying into the families of idolatrous Gentiles, the Levites were themselves bringing this curse about- for their children would not be able to serve in the temple.

The AV has "The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar". Yahweh cut off the "master" ['the stirred up one', s.w. about how their spirit was 'stirred up' to achieve the work of the Kingdom at the restoration (Ezra 1:5)] because they divorced their wives and married Gentiles (Mal. 2:12). The potential work

of God on men's hearts was frustrated by their hardness of heart. "The scholar" would refer to those taught by the "master" priest; perhaps Joshua the potential high priest is in view.

Malachi 2:13 *This again you do: you cover the altar of Yahweh with tears, with weeping, and with sighing, because He doesn't regard the offering any more, neither receives it with good will at your hand-*

"This again..." begs the question as to what is the force of "again". It may well just mean 'And further...'. Although it's tempting to make a connection with Ez. 8:14, where Judah went into captivity because Jewish women entered the temple of Yahweh and wept for Tammuz [perhaps ritual weeping, a form of worship]. But the context requires that those who wept at the altar because their offerings weren't accepted are those of :14-16, who are given as a reason that they had divorced their wives. Access to the altar suggests that this is addressed to the priests, who have in the previous verses been convicted of making the people stumble into idolatry. Covering an altar with tears and emotional behaviour recalls the priests of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:28). They professed such loyalty to Yahweh when effectively they had divorced Him. This is all proof enough that emotionalism in religious worship is not necessarily reflective of true spirituality. Their semblance of Yahweh worship was no better than Baal worship. Going through the motions and emotions of worship may in fact be no more than idolatry. This is an incisive challenge. They covered the altar with tears of apparent devotion whilst in their hearts doubting God loved them (Mal. 1:2) and robbing and attempting to deceive God.

Malachi 2:14 *Yet you say, 'Why?'*- They were somehow aware that God didn't accept their offerings. Perhaps it was simply because Malachi was telling them so. Or maybe the absence of the shekinah glory in the temple was the evidence of this; for the restored temple scenario of Ez. 40-48 featured the glory and visible presence of God returning to the temple.

Because Yahweh has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion, and the wife of your covenant- see on Jer. 31:32; Mal. 1:8. The priests married Gentile women (Mal. 2:11,14-16), even though Ez. 44 commanded they should not do this**:** "they shall take virgins of the seed of the house of Israel" (Ez. 44:22). They thereby precluded the possibility of the prophecies of Ez. 40-48 being fulfilled. I suggested on :5 that the covenant in view is that which the priests entered on returning from captivity. This is why that generation are being charged with departing from a covenant which they personally entered. Their broken covenant relationship with God and their breaking of the covenant with Levi was reflected in their breaking covenant with their wives. As they had divorced God and married Gentile gods (:11), so they had divorced their Jewish wives to marry Gentiles. That is the implication of the parallels. Yet their Jewish wives remained their "companion", some kind of concubine. This again reflects how Judah had effectively divorced Yahweh and married Gentile idolatry, and yet they still professed devotion and commitment to Him. The Hosea - Gomer situation expresses just the same.

We naturally enquire why the priests were divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying Gentile women. We must remember the extreme poverty of the times, caused by the plagues and bad harvests brought by Yahweh. The Jews were even selling their children into slavery for bread (Neh. 5:1-5). It seems that these Gentile women were

from wealthy local land owning families who had been moved into Judea during the exile. Land was needed in order to grow food, and the landless Levites were tempted to do anything in order to get access to land- seeing they weren't being paid tithes, as Malachi later laments. Neh. 13:10 confirms that: "the portions of the Levites had not been given to them; so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field". There was therefore financial advantage in such marriage as it gave access to land; and that was why they divorced their Jewish wives. They didn't have to financially support them after divorce, and the families they married into likely demanded this too. To simply take another wife would have been economically difficult for them- polygamy was only for the wealthy. And the priests particularly did this because they had no land inheritance, tithes weren't being paid to them and therefore they were desperate. And so they were tempted to marry into pagan families that owned land. But they were guilty of not being faithful to the covenant with Levi; for in return for the tribe of Levi focusing on teaching God's word and arranging His worship, He had promised to always take care of them: "Yahweh, bless his substance [s.w. "wealth"]. Accept the work of his hands" (Dt. 33:11). This promised blessing was not being experienced by them because they didn't trust it (see on :2). Somehow everything will work out if we go God's way. But they didn't trust that, and divorced their wives and married Gentile pagans to try to ensure their own wealth. And yet they covered Yahweh's altar with tears, as if trying to demonstrate that they actually were still close to Yahweh despite their unconscionable actions. Such demonstrations of zeal for God, when the heart and body are far from Him, are psychologically credible and seen amongst us today.

Malachi 2:15 *Did He not make you one, although He had the residue of the Spirit? Why one? He sought a godly seed*- Possibly "Although He had the residue of the Spirit" might mean that God made one man and one woman- although He could have used His Spirit to create more than one wife for Adam. But He didn't. Because He saw that one man : one woman was the best basis for them raising "A Godly seed". Or perhaps God 'made you one' in allusion to how He would make man and woman "one flesh" in marriage (Gen. 2:24). He cements the relationship over the years, and divorce for the reasons they were divorcing was breaking apart what He had tried to joint together. This was the Lord's perspective on divorce (Mt. 19:4-6) and Paul's perspective on extramarital sex (1 Cor. 6:15-17). Certainly a father divorcing his wife and taking a Gentile unbelieving wife was not going to easily raise a Godly seed. And how many divorces and second relationships have simply not taken into account the negative spiritual effect upon the children...

The wife of youth whom they had divorced was primarily Yahweh (:11). But as so often happened, a man's relationship with God is reflected in his relationship with others. Their divorce with God was connected to their literal divorcing of their wives and taking others, from pagan backgrounds. Just as they had divorced Yahweh and married the daughters of strange gods (:11). The Levites were not to marry divorcees or Gentiles (Ez. 44:**2**2), so they precluded the fulfilment of that potential scenario of Ez. 40-48.

The Hebrew is difficult and the GNB is of some help: "Didn't God make you one body and spirit with her? What was his purpose in this? It was that you should have children who are truly God's people". The basic point is clear; their remarriages to Gentiles were not going to produce "a Godly seed", and that is one of the reasons why marriage with unbelievers is wrong.

If husband and wife are one spirit, psychologically joined by the marriage bonding which God applies to married couples not just at the wedding but throughout their relationship, then breaking that apart is undoing His work. Our spirit is thereby working against God's Spirit. The Lord's teaching about marriage and divorce in Mt. 19:6 seems based on His reflections upon this verse. If we have the Spirit of God we will not act in marriage as they were acting- hence we could translate "No one has acted like that if he has a remnant of the spirit".

Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of his youth- Typical of the prophets, the appeal to repentance is on the most personal level- an appeal to watch their mind and thinking, "your spirit". And this appeal to the spirit is repeated in :17. This appeal for repentance had been made in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, and there had been response, to the point of those who had married Gentile wives divorcing them. And yet very quickly, the very same failure was committed again. No matter how intense the repentance of a moment, this is not guarantee that we can drift on acceptably to God. That is the lesson.

Malachi 2:16 *For I hate divorce, says Yahweh, the God of Israel*- Malachi began by speaking of God 'hating' Esau in the sense of loving him less. Perhaps this idea is present here too; for God and Israel divorced. God is perhaps saying that He 'loves less' divorce, it is the least preferred option. But in the next sentence, He will state that He equally hates the use of the institution of marriage to cover violence. It could be that we are to conclude that in such a case, then the open separation of divorce is preferable, although God 'loves it less' or 'hates' it.

But the LXX and ESV offer a translation to the effect "But if thou shouldest hate thy wife and put her away, saith the Lord God of Israel, then ungodliness shall cover thy thoughts...". This makes better sense of the connection between the words "hate" and "putting / sending away" ['divorce'] which is to be found in Gen. 26:27 and Dt. 24:3. "Divorce is hatred" is a fair interpretation- for in their context, they were hating their wives and divorcing them for no good reason. Without changing any of the consonants, the Hebrew can be read with different vowels to give as LXX "if anyone hates, let him divorce". Or we may consider the NIV: "The man who hates and divorces his wife… does violence to the one he should protect".

And him who covers his garment with violence! says Yahweh of Armies- The garment refers to the metaphor of a man casting his garment over his wife as a sign of protection and acceptance in marriage (Dt. 22:30; Ruth 3:9; Ez. 16:8). The idea could be that the man was using the garment of marriage to cover violence. On one hand God hates divorce, but He balances this by saying that He equally hates those who do not formally divorce but use the institution of marriage to conceal violence. Or we can understand this as meaning "divorce is like a garment that covers wrongdoing / violence". As if the divorce and remarriage somehow obviated them from moral responsibility for how they had behaved to their first wives. "I hate divorce" can be understood as God saying He considers divorce, in this case, as hateful. Rashi renders "For injustice shall cover his garment". Instead of covering their wife with a garment, they were being 'violent' to her. Possibly they were being literally violent to their Jewish wives to make them leave them and return to their parents, in which case the husband was free from financial responsibility towards her.

Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you don't deal treacherously- For all their gross immorality, the appeal was to take heed to how they thought, their spirit. For this is the root of our behaviour. This is twice repeated (:15). Divorce and all marital failure begins in the mind, in the spirit. The LXX makes the connection clearer: "But if thou

shouldest hate thy wife and put her away, saith the Lord God of Israel, then ungodliness shall cover thy thoughts, saith the Lord Almighty: therefore take ye heed to your spirit".

Malachi 2:17 *You have wearied Yahweh with your words*- Several times we read of God being wearied by Israel's sins (Is. 7:13; Jer. 15:6; Ez. 24:12; Mal. 2:17). Even though God does not "grow weary" (Is. 40:28) by nature, it seems to me that in His full entering into His people's situation, He does allow Himself to grow weary with the sins of those with whom He is in covenant relationship. He as it were limits Himself, in order to enter into meaningful relationship with us. It was this kind of capacity which God has which was supremely revealed in His 'sharing in' the crucifixion of His Son.

Yet you say, 'How have we wearied Him?' In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Yahweh, and He delights in them;' or 'Where is the God of judgment?'- Again, it is doubtful if their lips framed these actual words. But the prophets perceive the real implication of positions. And God does the same with us today. The priests are being addressed here (:1), and perhaps their false teaching was to the effect that judgment was now past and whatever the people did would not come into judgment; and that God delighted in sinners. God had given them the land because He "delighted" in them (Num. 14:8 s.w.). Perhaps the priests were wrongly teaching that the mere fact they were physically within the land showed that God delighted in them, even though they were doing evil.

Evidence of God's judgment was all around them. Not least the drought, leading to them even selling their children for food (Neh. 5:1-5). But they acted as if all this was either bad luck or God being unreasonable and unjust to them- remembering that the Hebrew for "judgment" also has the idea of justice. Like many today, they had blanked out in their minds the possibility that they needed to deeply repent- and then things would be so different.

Or we can read this with GNB "Where is the God who is supposed to be just?". They expected a materially blessed life from God despite their selfishness and lack of devotion to Him. And they ended up saying He was unjust, because He didn't come through for them materially. Just as many do today. The Judeans were living in a world of broken dreams [the restoration prophecies hadn't come true, and they were impoverished not wealthy], lost hopes, sadness, religious and political cynicism. Exactly as so many do today. Isaiah gives more background: "'(Why) do we humble ourselves, if you do not take note of it? (Is. 58:3) ... We await justice, but there is none, salvation, but it is far away from us" (Is. 59:11). Malachi elsewhere reports their claim that God didn't love them (Mal. 1:2), and that "It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping his charge and walking in abject awe of the Lord of Hosts?" (Mal. 3:14). But they refused to accept the reason for all this which Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi gave them- they had not repented, were disobedient to the commands for the restored Kingdom, and were looking solely for their own immediate material benefit rather than God's glory.

MALACHI CHAPTER 3

Malachi Chapter 3

Malachi 3:1 *Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me*- We are accustomed to the application that was given to John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord Jesus (Mk. 1:2; Mt. 11:10; Lk. 7:27). But surely the initial potential was that an Angel / messenger / priest (Mal. 2:7) would be sent to clear the way before

a triumphant Israel, just as an Angel went ahead of Israel to clear the nations from the promised land and lead them in to the Kingdom of God. The "you" who would be sent the messenger is the same "you" as addressed throughout Malachi- his generation. The messenger of Yahweh was also a prophet (Hag. 1:13). An Angel controlled prophet / priest was to come, for in the post exilic prophets, this is the usage of 'messenger'. Joshua may have fitted this, but he failed. Possibly Malachi himself, whose name means 'messenger', was the potential fulfilment. And so the prophecy was reapplied to John the Baptist, who was a prophet in the priestly line and the last prophet. The prophets were until John. The preparation of the way is the scene of Is. 40:3 which is specifically applied to John; and Mk. 1:2,3 seems to mix quotation of Is. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1 as if they refer to the same event in John the Baptist. But there is some flexibility in interpretation allowed for in Mt. 11:14: "if you are willing to receive [it], this is Elijah, the one about to come". The Elijah prophecy of Mal. 4 could be understood to have the same fulfilment in view as the "Messenger" prophecy of Mal. 3:1. But the flexibility in interpretation is because there were and are various potential fulfillments. John presented himself as an Elijah prophet, wearing camel's hair and a leather girdle (as Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8), locating his ministry in the wilderness with its associations with Elijah.

Israel didn't as a whole accept John's message- because they killed their Messiah. Neither the Malachi prophet nor John succeeded in purging the priesthood as required here. Malachi has specifically criticized the corrupt priesthood. And so it will have a latter day fulfilment in another "Elijah" prophet, which is the burden of Mal. 4. Although the prophecy will be readjusted as there is no literal priesthood to cleanse. Just as the prophecy could have had an immediate fulfilment in Malachi's time, but didn't. This open ended nature of prophecy is actually seen in our own lives; we are given potential futures which we may preclude from fulfilment, and so the prophetic intention becomes reinterpreted and reapplied.

This prophecy of preparing the way of the Lord, in readiness for His glory to ride over it to Zion, is based on similar prophecies in Is. 40:3; 57:14; 62:10. But although these Isaianic prophecies use similar language, they are commands to servants in the plural to prepare the way: "Prepare you the way of Yahweh in the wilderness!... Cast up, cast up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of My people... Prepare the way of the people! Cast up, cast up the highway! Gather out the stones!". Malachi calls these servants "the messenger". They not only do the work of removing the stones from the path, but give a message of repentance at the same time. The latter day "Elijah" may well be a group of preachers doing this work. And the stone of stumbling to Israel is defined by Paul as Israel's refusal to accept Jesus as their Messiah. The mission of the latter day Elijah ministry will be to take this stone out of the way, by converting them to accept Jesus as Christ and Him crucified.

See on Is. 40:4. As explained on Mal. 2:7, the messenger of the covenant was a priest or priesthood which would prepare the people to accept the new covenant in Messiah; for the priests were to be "the messenger" (Mal. 2:7). The implication is that Malachi and the priesthood of his time could and should have been doing this; but the priests refused. The prophecy was reapplied to John the Baptist, who was also a priest; and seeing Israel generally failed to respond, again to the latter day Elijah prophet. The restored community are accused of turning to or 'preparing' [s.w. "prepare"] their *own* way rather than the way of the Lord (Is. 53:6; 56:11 cp. Is. 40:3). But the Messianic prophecy of Is. 53:6 claims that this turning to their own way would be resolved and corrected by the coming of Messiah. But for Him to come, there must first be a messenger who prepared that way (s.w. Is. 40:3; 57:14; 62:10). The priesthood and high

priest of Malachi's time failed in this, and so the work was rescheduled for John the Baptist, and later the Elijah prophet of the last days. The same words for "prepare the way" are found in Ez. 43:1; 44:1; 47:2 about "the way" that is 'prepared' or 'looks' eastward. This was the way or road over which the glory was to re-enter the restored temple. But Judah didn't rebuild that temple as specified and as Malachi often demonstrates, the priests failed to act as commanded in Ez. 40-48. And so the messenger who was to prepare that way likewise failed; but finally the essence of the prophecies will come true through the work of the Elijah prophet and John the Baptist [also a priest] preparing the way of the Lord Jesus, so that His glory and Spirit could enter a spiritual temple of restored people.

Isaiah begins his section on the restoration with a bold prophecy that the restoration of Zion was to be associated with a way being prepared for Israel's God to come to them (Is. 40:1-3). These words are repeated here in Mal. 3:1-3, where the messenger was to prepare the way of Yahweh's coming. It seems that in some sense they could have come true in the first return of the exiles along the wilderness way back to Zion, under Ezra. But over 100 years later, in Malachi's time, the prophecy was still capable of fulfilment, if the priesthood would be purged. But finally it was all deferred in fulfilment until the coming of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus

"Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" is how Mk. 1:2 quotes Mal. 3:1; but "before thy face" is added, as if to create a reference to the Angel sent before Israel in the wilderness, to find a resting place (Ex. 23:20). The parallel is set up between John and the Angel, and therefore between Jesus and the people of Israel. The Lord Jesus *is* His people. He personally is the vine, the one body- symbols of the whole community. He isn't the trunk, and we the branches. We are the branches, and He is the whole vine. We are Him to this world.

And the Lord, whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple- The Lord will return to Zion to find a repentant remnant there, converted by our preaching. When the way has been prepared, then "the Lord… shall suddenly [Heb. 'immediately'] come to his temple". It seems that He comes as soon as, almost to the moment, that the way is prepared. Is it going too far to imagine that when the last Jews are baptized in Jerusalem, perhaps literally on the Temple Mount, then the Lord will immediately return there, "to his temple"? Then the Lord shall "come down to fight for mount Zion and for the hill thereof" (Is. 31:4).

But we can also understand the sudden coming of "the Lord whom you seek" as a warning of judgment to Malachi's generation of impenitent Jews. Am. 5:18 and Mal. 3:1,2 warn that just 'seeking' or desiring the coming of the Lord isn't enough; for what end will it be, if we don't *truly* love His appearing? Yet Amos goes on to say that Israel "put far away" the reality of the day of the Lord, in their minds (Am. 6:3). And yet they desired or sought it. We can study prophecy, but not really love His appearing in seriously preparing ourselves for that day. Indeed, we can subconsciously put it far from us. When we grasp for a fleeting moment how *very near* is the second coming for us; can we dwell upon it, retain that intensity? Or would we rather put it "far away"? This is surely why the Lord brings the list of signs of His coming to a close with some chilling parables concerning the need for personal watchfulness.

And the messenger of the covenant whom you desire, behold, He comes! says Yahweh of Armies- As noted above, Judah 'desired' the coming of the day of the Lord and the "messenger" which was to prepare the way for Him; they even 'delighted' in these things [AV]. But they didn't morally respond, so the way was not prepared. Yet He would come, ultimately, to their judgment and condemnation. "Behold, he comes"

could be read as a request for them to "look" for him to come. This fits with the Lord teaching that John the Baptist was Elijah if they would receive it. Likewise, this "messenger" could have come and prepared the way for Messiah in Malachi's time. For it is Malachi who is telling his generation to behold / look.

Malachi 3:2 *But who can endure the day of His coming? And who will stand when He appears?-*

One answer is: Nobody. Ps. 130:3 is clear: “If Thou, Lord, wilt mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”. Joel likewise: “The day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?”. The implication is that the only one who can stand before the Lord is the one justified by faith in His grace. This was a call to repentance and trust in Him, rather than a bland foretelling of their condemnation. These words are quoted in Rev. 6:17 about the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

The implication is that Malachi's generation would not stand but fall, they would not abide the day of His coming in that they would be resurrected to condemnation in that day (cp. Joel 2:11). Knowledge of the coming of judgment leads to self-examination: "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come... But who may abide the day of his coming?" (Mal. 3:2 AV cp. Rev. 6:17). Belief in the second coming must provoke the question: "What manner of persons ought (we) to be...", as we hasten towards the day of judgment? "Wherefore, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of Him... without spot, and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:11,14).

For He is like a refiner’s fire, and like launderer’s soap- The implication is that the priests of Malachi's generation would be resurrected at "the day of His coming" to pass through this refining process; and would not abide it. In Malachi's time, they could have responded to the day of the messenger by allowing themselves to be refined. But they refused to respond to Malachi ['messenger']. The appropriacy of the imagery of soap and laundry is because this would cleanse dirty priestly garments. This is the picture presented in Zech. 3, of the Jewish priesthood of that time being dressed in "filthy garments". They could have been reformed and cleansed by responding to Malachi's message; but they didn't.

Ultimately for us too, the day of judgment is to purify us- not ultimately, for that has been done by the Lord's blood and our lives of faithful acceptance of this. But the fire of judgment reveals the dross of our lives *to us* and in this sense purges us of those sins. The judgment seat is for our benefit, not God's- He knows our lives and spiritual position already. Without the judgment, we would drift into the Kingdom with no real appreciation of our own sinfulness or the height of God's grace. The trials of our faith are like fire which purifies us (1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12). And yet this is the language of the last judgment. In our response to trials, we have the outcome of our judgment. We must rejoice *now* in our tribulations with the same joy which we will have when we are accepted by the Lord at the last day (1 Pet. 4:13). Job felt that his calamities were God entering into judgment with him (Job 14:3). If we react properly to trials, we thereby receive now "the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9). Thus the question of the degree to which we now are 'saved' is connected with the fact that to some degree, the judgment process is also going on now.

The soap was to totally remove the stain. This came to ultimate term in the Lord's sacrifice cleansing and deep cleaning the conscience. Possibly the idea is that the only one who can stand before God's judgment is the man totally cleansed by this soap.

Malachi 3:3 *And He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver; and they shall offer to Yahweh offerings*

in righteousness- The implication of :2 is that the priests of Malachi's generation would be resurrected at "the day of His coming" to pass through this refining process; and would not abide it. Once they are destroyed, then there will be left a remnant who will be able to serve Yahweh acceptably. All these prophecies could have had a fulfilment at Malachi's time or at the time in the first century when John the Baptist was the "messenger" and could have reformed the priesthood. But they resisted. And so the essence of the prophecies will come true in the last days. But that is not to say that every literal detail will; and so the refined Levites will not necessarily offer literal sacrifices. The offering of sacrifice will perhaps be spiritually interpreted, as it is in the New Testament (Heb. 13:15). The "He" who refines the Levites is not necessarily Yahweh; it could be the messenger of the covenant, which initially referred to Malachi and later John the Baptist in their attempts to reform the priesthood.

The Levites of the restoration had been taken from among the many nations that comprised Babylon / Persia; they were brought, as many as could be bothered to go, to their own land. They were cleansed there (s.w. Ezra 6:20; Neh. 12:30 "The priests and the Levites purified themselves"). But they became un-cleansed or defiled through allowing Tobiah into the temple chambers, by trading on the Sabbath, and by marrying Gentiles (Neh. 13:9,22,30). The priesthood needed to be "cleansed" again (Mal. 3:3 s.w.). The promise of Ezekiel 36 sounds unconditional- as if, whoosh, God would make His sinful people righteous regardless of their own will; but they still needed to respond: "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ez. 36:24-29). Israel were to return from captivity, destroy all the Gentile abominations and idols from their land, and then receive a new heart and a new covenant (Ez. 11:18,19). But they didn't do so, and now at Malachi's time they needed cleansing again. But they refused it, and so that cleansing will ultimately only be at the Lord's return.

Malachi 3:4 *Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years*- The restored kingdom of God in Israel and the restoration of the Davidic king "as in the days of old" could have come about in Malachi's time. If the priesthood had responded to the purging, they would again have offered acceptable offerings. But Mal. 1 explains that they offered blemished sacrifices which were not "pleasant to Yahweh". And so this possible scenario was precluded. But as explained on :1-3, the essence of the prophecies will come true in the last days. The offering of sacrifice will perhaps be spiritually interpreted, as it is in the New Testament (Heb. 13:15).

The Gentiles are understood in Mal. 1:11 as being able to offer a pure offering "in every place". The Jerusalem temple was not required to make an acceptable offering. That had been the initial plan, as Ez. 48 had envisaged the Yahweh Name would be "there"; but the Jews had despised God's Name. So anyone who did make His Name "great" could offer an acceptable, pure offering- from wherever they are. And yet in Mal. 3:4 another scenario is given- the Levitical priesthood will be purged and "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old" (Mal. 3:4). It never was purged. But Malachi's generation were still being given the opportunity to have that scenario. Mal. 1:11 makes it clear that He foresaw that their spurning of His holiness would actually lead to a situation where He was glorified by far more people over a far greater area.

Malachi 3:5 *I will come near to you in judgment*- This is the answer to the complaint in the previous chapter, “Where is the God of judgment?”. 'He is coming', is the answer. In the immediate context, God was going to judge the priesthood of Malachi's time. He was going to charge them with theft from Him, and He would be a witness in their court case, as well as their judge. But that generation did not have judgment executed upon them. This was deferred, by grace, until AD70 when the messenger in the form of John the Baptist had again come to them, and God's own Son had appeared as their Messiah. Such is God's amazing patience.

God's Son was by His coming alone the manifestation of "the God of judgment", the supreme judge of men by His very being (Mal. 2:17; 3:1). In His coming, God "visited His people" (Lk. 7:16); but the OT image of Yahweh visiting His people was one of visiting in judgment (Ez. 32:34; Jer. 23:2; Hos. 2:13; 9:9). By His very being amongst men He would convict them of their sinfulness. His light would show up the shadows of their sins. Mark begins his Gospel by quoting this Malachi passage, as if to say that the appearance of Jesus was the coming of judgment for men (Mk. 1:2). This judgment-coming of Jesus at His revelation to Israel 2000 years ago is then described as God coming near to men in judgment (Mal. 3:5). This is why a consideration of the Lord Jesus in bread and wine inevitably and naturally leads to self-examination; for He is, by His very being, our immediate and insistent judge.

And I will be an alert witness- Or, "swift". Swift in the sense of 'I come quickly' or suddenly**.** God is presented as both judge and witness. For He alone is judge, and yet as omniscient, He is also the ultimate witness. And yet He is also presented as pleading as an advocate for His sinful people before His own judgment. God can both maintain our cause [as an advocate] and forgive, as a judge (2 Chron. 6:39). God is the one who will both plead our cause as an advocate, and take vengeance, i.e. order the sentence, as judge (Jer. 51:36). Micah 7:9 speaks of how Micah has sinned against Yahweh, and yet He will plead his cause and also execute judgment. Likewise with Israel, "the Lord standeth up to plead, and (also) standeth up to judge his people" (Is. 3:13); even though He is also the witness against them. David understood this when he asked that God would "judge [RV "give sentence"] between me and thee, and see [i.e. be the witness], and plead my cause [i.e. be the advocate]" (1 Sam. 24:15). These are Old Testament anticipations of the Lord Jesus as witness, advocate and judge. All these things are simply metaphors to try to expose to us the various balanced aspects within God's view and final judgment of men.

Against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the perjurers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and who deprive the foreigner of justice, and don’t fear Me, says Yahweh of Armies- All this was going on in the restored community in Malachi's time. It was why the mass of the people came to despise the priests and avoided Yahweh worship, leading them to stumble into idolatry (see on Mal. 2:9,11).

In the restored temple, the princes would not oppress the people (Ez. 45:8); “Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession” (Ez. 46:18). But the priests did just this (also Neh. 5:1-5; Zech. 7:10).

“The [Gentile] people of the land” were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11;

Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not. Is. 56:6 defines what is meant by "a house of prayer for all nations"- it is for those of all nations who "join themselves to the Lord, to serve him and to love the name of the Lord... every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and *taketh hold of my covenant*". But Judah herself had polluted the sabbath and broken the covenant, as Malachi makes clear. The word for "foreigner" means literally a guest, a sojourner- surely referring to the Gentiles who had immigrated to the land during the Babylonian and Persian reigns. But these people had now been settled for a few generations. Yet still the Jews called them immigrants- when it was they, born in Babylon, who were more like immigrants to the land. Whilst still in exile, the Jewish returnees had been specifically told to share the land inheritance with such people. The same word is used in Ez. 47:22,23: "You shall divide it by lot for an inheritance to you and to the aliens who live among you, who shall father children among you; and they shall be to you as the native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. It shall happen, that in what tribe the foreigner lives, there you shall give him his inheritance, says the Lord". Yet the fulfilment of this was precluded by the way the returned exiles treated such foreigners.

Oppression of the widow and fatherless was because the Law explained that tithes were in order to benefit these people. Malachi will go on to lament that the Jews weren't paying their tithes as required- and these groups therefore suffered. Man is held responsible by God for the indirect outcomes of his sins of omission. And that's a principle that has huge implications.

Malachi 3:6 *For I, Yahweh, don't change; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed*- The unchanging nature of God's loyalty and love for Israel is contrasted with how they have not changed in their disloyalty to Him: "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My ordinances" (:7). The promised restoration of the Kingdom hadn't happened as prophesied, for the reasons given in Haggai and Zechariah. But the Jews liked to think that this was because God had changed; He protests that He hasn't. Hence LXX "I have not changed". Yahweh does change, as witnessed multiple times. Such is His grace. We think of the way He changed His purpose of destroying Israel and making a new Israel from Moses, of destroying Nineveh after 40 days etc. What is unchanging is His grace in not destroying His sinful people. This verse should not therefore be used to support the wrong idea that Yahweh is like the gods of the pagans, who were characterized by stone faced immutability.

Because of the sins listed in :5, the sons of Jacob should have been consumed. Those same sins are those listed in Zech. 5:4, and there God uses the same word to say that He will "consume [the house of Jacob] with the timber and stones thereof". But this judgment was not in fact brought upon the exiles. It was deferred, by grace alone; although it finally came true in the destruction of the temple in AD70.

Malachi 3:7 *From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My ordinances, and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'*- The returned exiles being addressed had physically returned from captivity. But they had not returned to God. He had even taken the initiative of returning to them when they had not returned spiritually to Him (see on Zech. 8:3 "I have returned to Zion"). But all the initiative of His grace had been spurned

by them; it had not elicited repentance [s.w. "return"]. Because they refused to accept the need for personal repentance, as many do today. "How shall we return?" is not a question about the method or path, but rather carries the sense of 'Since when do we need to return / repent?'. See on Zech. 1:3. Time and again in the context of the restoration it is emphasized that God would return to His people if they returned to Him (Zech. 1:3). And they didn't return to Him- most chose not to return to the land, and those who did for the most part did not return to their God in their hearts. The whole basis of Israel's covenant relationship with God was that if they were exiled from the land for their sins, they must repent and *then* God would return to them (Dt. 30:1-10). Yet God graciously states to the exiles: "I am returned unto you" (Zech. 1:16; 8:3). Here was grace indeed. Passages like Ez. 36:24-31 therefore speak as if God's grace to the exiles was effectively a new covenant- which has in essence been extended to us. Having stated the conditionality of His 'returning' to His people, and recognizing they hadn't fulfilled their part of the conditions- God all the same returns to them, such was and is His almost desperate desire for relationship with His beloved people. This is a lesson for us in our relationships with others- to continue our acceptance and 'return' to them, even if they don't fulfill their part of the deal. For this, day by day, is how our God deals not only with us but with His weak and wayward people as a whole.

The implication of Hag. 2:17 is that they had not totally turned to Yahweh. They had responded to Haggai's call to resume work in Hag. 1:12,13 and God had been as it were much enthused by it. But after a month's work they needed more appeal. They still hadn't turned completely and permanently to Him, with a 'repentance not to be repented of' as Paul would say. Zechariah's prophecy came two months after Haggai (Zech. 1:1). And he appeals again for the people to turn to God (Zech. 1:3). And even after Zechariah's time, the people still didn't really return to Yahweh in repentance, despite their focus on legalism and xenophobic hatred of Gentiles: "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'" (Mal. 3:7). Clearly their turning to Him had been only temporary. But still God was enthusiastic over their even very temporal response. Despite surely foreknowing how they would very quickly flag. He so wanted the Kingdom to be restored and His people to live in all joy and peace of relationship with Him. And that desire is unabated to this day, despite having been frustrated by His people so often, so deeply and for so long.

Malachi 3:8 *Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me!*- The fact God owns everything means that there can be no distinction between what is ours and what is God's. To think like that is to steal from Him. And hence the power and force of the argument here: "Will a man rob God?". Have we robbed God in this way, especially in our attitudes and perceptions? To take for ourselves what is God's is to play God. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God. This was Achan's sin- to take what was devoted to God for himself. And this was why he is described as having 'stolen'. But from whom? From God (Josh. 6:18; 7:11).

But you say, 'How have we robbed You?'. In tithes and offerings- In the restored temple, they were to use just measures (Ez. 45:9-14), unlike what they had previously done. But they robbed God in their sacrifices in the restored temple (Mal. 3:8). See on Mal. 1:8. Tithes were to be paid to the Levites (Ez. 44:30). But Nehemiah's record and Mal. 3:8 make it clear that this didn't happen, due to petty selfishness. But we must remember that Malachi is largely addressing the priests; the tithes given to them should have been tithed in turn by them to God, but they didn't do this. Offerings intended for sacrifice were kept by them. Only in :9 are "this whole nation" addressed.

Malachi 3:9 *You are cursed with the curse; for you rob Me, even this whole nation*- The Hebrew stresses "Me... Me you have robbed". They robbed God Almighty... The Hebrew for 'robbed' here is *qaba*, the last part of the name 'Jacob'. Despite the similarity with the cheating, materialistic, deceitful Jacob, Malachi began by explaining that "Jacob have I loved". God's love for them wasn't in doubt, despite calling out their deceit. "This whole nation" may be a reference to how they were all Jacob / Israel. And yet we will soon read that a minority did speak to one another and Yahweh noted them for future salvation. "This whole nation" would suggest this minority repented at this point, until then they were in the "whole nation" who were cursed for deceiving God; which makes their humility to Malachi's word even more impressive.

Although it seems Malachi the priest (see on Mal. 1:1) is addressing the priests primarily after Mal. 2:1, "this whole nation" are charged with robbing God, and are cursed. They had been driven away from Yahweh worship by the priests (see on Mal. 2:11), but they were still guilty. If someone is made to stumble, the one who caused it is guilty; but so are they who stumbled. We cannot come to the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus and explain that we were indifferent to His love, His death for us, the offer of eternity... because he did this and she said that.

"*The* curse" presumably refers to the curse for disobedience to the covenant of Dt. 28. God cursed them with that curse; but there is no particular evidence that it was carried out until AD70. They were not sent again into captivity until then, and they had many years of good harvests. So again we marvel at God's grace and longsuffering. At Malachi's time, the curse was pronounced, but there was a gap of many generations until it was carried out. In a sense we too live within such a gap, heightening the sense of intensity and urgency in responding to God's offer to cancel the curse and instead bless us.

Malachi 3:10 *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house*- The initial reference is to the way Hag. 1:9 laments that the returnees had brought their harvests to their own houses rather than to God's house. See on Hag. 1:9. "The storehouse" references the “great chamber” which surrounded the temple on three sides, of three stories, each containing several rooms (1 Kings 6:5,6). Hezekiah used these chambers to store the tithes (2 Chron. 31:11,12). But these were the very rooms given to the enemy of the Jews, Tobiah, in the time of Neh. 10:38; 13:5-9, 12,13.

"The *whole* tithe" suggests they were tithing but incompletely. Just as they made offerings, but offered only the lame or blind animals. It is this partial commitment which God finds so offensive. They thought they were testing God by doing this, and getting away with it: "they put God to the test and escape" (:15). Hence God's response, challenging them to "test" Him by giving the whole tithe, and to receive immediate blessing and amazing fecundity- which is all the language of the restored kingdom of God coming on earth. "The windows of heaven" that would open in response refer to the gift of rain (as in Gen. 7:11), which would miraculously come down and cause immediate growth and fruitfulness. This is perhaps the reference of Joel 2:23,24: "He gives you the former rains in just measure, and He causes the rain to come down for you, the former rains and the latter rains, as before. The threshing floors will be full of wheat, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil". This test was not therefore a principle for all time, but related specifically to the exiles at that point. The Jews at this time were poor, some had to borrow money and sell their children into slavery just to buy food and pay taxes (Neh. 5:14,15). Their poverty was related to drought and plague which was their own fault, as Haggai and Malachi made clear. All the same, they were

poor- and were being challenged to still give the tithes. The lack of tithes meant that the Levites weren't supported and therefore weren't around much to teach them God's law and encourage them. We see here how once God's people slip into a downward spiral, obedience gets harder and harder- although God still appeals for it.

The criticism of their position on tithing was not so much because God *per se* wanted or needed their tithes. Tithing was a common practice, and was a sign of devotion to the one tithed to. Mal. 2:11 has said that the people divorced Yahweh and married the daughter of another god. Their tithes were therefore being paid to idols; it was because of this that Yahweh asked for their tithes to be paid to *His* house and not to the idol temples. And we must remember that the priesthood is being addressed by Malachi; they were to tithe to God the tithe which they received from the people. But they gave only a part of it and not the "whole" which was due. "That there may be food in My house" implies they were as it were starving God. They put very little on the altar, His "table" at which He ate with the worshippers, and in any case only placed upon it the lowest grade "food", the blind and sick animals. Entertainment and hospitality culture was paramount to the Middle Eastern mind. Yet they are accused of giving God low grade and small portions. As we sit at His table, we must ask ourselves this same question, as to what we are putting before Him.

And test Me now in this, says Yahweh of Armies- The Lord's first temptation- to turn stones into bread- would not in itself have been a sin if He had agreed to it. But it would have been choosing a lower level, by breaking His fast. But the next temptations were to actually sin. If He had agreed to the first suggestion, obedience to the next ones would have been harder. It could even be argued that to put the Lord to the test was permissible on a lower level- for passages like Ps. 34:8 and Mal. 3:10 almost encourage it for those with a weak faith. Gideon likewise put the Lord to the test and was answered. But the Lord chose the higher level: and He knew Scripture which could support it.

However we must give full weight to the fact that only five verses later, this same word for "test" is used; the people complained that those who "put God to the test... escape" (:15). We could conclude that God didn't actually intend for Him to be put to the test, and rather is He here using irony. This would take away the mainstay from beneath all Pentecostal appeals for tithes to be paid in order for the givers to receive more personal wealth. Or it could be that some did test God as invited to, and "escaped" or 'were saved' (s.w. Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:32).

If I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough for- See on Hag 1:9. Hag. 1 notes that there was a famine in the land at the restoration. In response to this, the priests and the people were giving God small portions and deficient animals. The covenant blessings of fertility were not experienced. If they returned to covenant with God, as symbolized by giving their tithes to Him and not to the idols, then they would receive the covenant blessings. This is significantly different to interpreting these passages as meaning that if you give tithes to God, then you will get material blessing.

We shouldn't underestimate the seriousness of the famine conditions in Judah as described in Neh. 5. The sheer lack of food led the Jews to sell their children and land to their richer brethren just to get something to eat. Mal. 3:5-15 says that this was directly a result of their lack of zeal to rebuild and care for God's house. What a far cry from the prophecies of plenty and huge harvests which had been made. So much potential was wasted. Neh. 5:8 records Nehemiah's comment that the wealthy Jews were victimizing the poorer Jews just as Babylon once had, and now Nehemiah needed to redeem them from slavery just as God had redeemed His people from servitude in

Babylon. God's deliverance of His people simply hadn't been responded to. Tragically, it would appear from Neh. 5:15 that Zerubbabel, the potential Messiah of Israel, had acted in this oppressive way too. There could even be the implication in the Hebrew of Neh. 1:3 that the majority of those who initially returned to Judah then returned back to Babylon- for Nehemiah speaks of "The remnant that are left of the captives there in the province" [of Judah]".

But we need to enquire whether the "blessing" promised for proper tithing was in fact material blessing. The "blessing" of fundamental importance was the blessing promised to Abraham, of relationship with God and the coming of the saviour seed. The idea of pouring out blessing upon the restored Jews of this time is repeated in Zech. 8:13 and Is. 44:3: "I will pour My Spirit on your seed, and My blessing on your offspring". The poured out blessing was undoubtedly spiritual rather than material- the gift of the Spirit to the seed of Abraham. And this is how the New Testament understands the poured out "blessing"- of the Spirit, of forgiveness (Acts 3:25,26).

Malachi 3:11 *I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground*- The immediate context is of material, agricultural blessings of the covenant. The second half of the verse speaks of the vines yielding fruit at the right time. Here, "rebuke" is literally "corrupt", and is used in Mal. 2:3 of how God corrupted the seed they sowed. "The devourer", tiny rodents and lice that devoured, corrupted and ruined their seed before it sprung up, would be in turn corrupted by God, so that the crop brought forth fruit.

This sounds as if there was an Angel called "the devourer" at the time of the restoration, as there was one called "the destroyer" at the Exodus. He was given command to destroy Judah's harvests due to their lack of commitment to God's house; yet He could be rebuked or restrained by God, implying the Angel focused on fulfilling what He was told to do without taking into account any other factors- until God overrode or restrained Him.

But Malachi 3 is specifically about the final cleansing of Judah when the messenger of the covenant comes, and this has reference to the last days. Then, there will be a "devourer" in the form of a beast like invader devouring the land, which will be "rebuked".

Neither shall your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field, says Yahweh of Armies- The Kingdom prophecies about agricultural fecundity and bumper harvests produced miraculously would have come true had Judah tithed at this time. In the context of the restoration from Babylon, Zech. 8:12 prophesied: "For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things". But we know that in reality, Judah were not obedient to the heavenly vision of Ezekiel, and therefore Judah's agriculture was *not* blessed in this way; the vines cast their fruit, and the fruit of the ground was destroyed (Hag. 1:6,11; Mal. 3:10,11). The reason was that Zech. 8:12 was conditional- upon Zech. 8:16,17: "These are the things that ye shall do [i.e. to bring these prophecies about]; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD". But Judah abused each other, and didn't fulfil the conditions for the prophecy.

They were gathered back [although they resisted this in that many preferred to stay in the soft life of Babylon], but they hardly dwelt safely or confidently in their land.

They planted vineyards, but received a poor harvest due to their lack of attention to God's house; their enemies destroyed their fruits, and their vine "cast her fruit before the time" (Hag. 1:6; Mal. 3:10,11). Haggai and Malachi criticized Israel for this, saying it could be rectified by their obedience to the tithing principle (:10). Yet in Nehemiah's time, Judah refused to pay tithes properly; but even then, if they had thoroughly repented, the Kingdom conditions were still possible. Such was God's desire to continue working with His hopeless people.

The withholding of agricultural blessing occurred several times- in Neh. 5:2,3 (as prophesied in Is. 5:9), in Haggai's time, and now later in Malachi 's time; when the restored Zion could have been as the garden of Eden, i.e. paradise restored on earth (Is. 51:3). Here we see frightening similarities with ourselves. We know, but often don't do. We sense this cycle of failure, crying out for mercy, receiving it, failing again, crying for mercy, receiving it, failing again... we see it in Israel, in our brethren and those around us, and in ourselves. We can expound it, lament it, feel the shame and tragedy of it all... and yet continue to have a part in it. Eventually, the people stayed in this groove so long that they degenerated into how they were at the time of Malachi- self-righteous, with no sense of failure any more, living self-centred lives of petty materialism, earning wages as they did in Haggai's time, to put into pockets with holes in, life without satisfaction, achieving nothing, passively angry. This is what Malachi clearly portrays. It's a terrible picture, and one which we can sail dangerously close to identifying with. We too easily conclude that life is tough and unfair, it's all the fault of others and an unreasonable, distant God- rather than our lack of repentance.

I discuss on Neh. 5:14 how Persian taxation rates had risen to about 50%. The famine meant they had borrowed money from the wealthy Jews and they were charging abusive interest rates. And yet Mal. 3:8-11 says that the famine at the time was because the Jews hadn't paid a tithe to the priests: "You rob Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?'. In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with the curse... Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says Yahweh of Armies, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough for. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field". The temptation to not give that 10% tithe was strong. Seeing they were being so heavily taxed by the Persians, with Nehemiah as the governor being the chief tax collector. But because they didn't put God first, the drought came and they had collapsed into this unbearable situation.

Malachi 3:12 *All nations shall call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land, says Yahweh of Armies*- The allusion is to the promises to Abraham being fulfilled- if the people at that time tithed and returned to God. The willingness of Yahweh to work with His people and bring about His Kingdom with them is really amazing. They had failed to live the Kingdom life for well over 100 years since Ezra first returned from Babylon. All sorts of potential Kingdom opportunities had slipped through their fingers. Finally Malachi appealed for their repentance, for them to pay the tithes, and then their land would be "delightful" and all nations would call them blessed; Messiah would come and purge a corrupt priesthood, so that "then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old" (Mal. 3:1-4). But only a remnant "hearkened and heard" (Mal. 3:16), their future salvation was guaranteed, but "the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven" to judge the heedless majority. He had offered them the Gospel of His Kingdom, had maneuvered and manipulated the greatest nations of the day to enable them to take up the offer, affecting the lives of millions of people

throughout the Middle East... but they were more worried about their little farm and storing up their crops for themselves, too mean spirited to look out of themselves, too self-satisfied with their own religion, too sure of their own righteousness. Instead of subduing the nations around them with the victory of Israel's God, they brought their own brethren into subjection unto them, that they might gain out of them (Zech. 9:15 s.w. Neh. 5:5). It could've been the Kingdom, Israel could have become the joy of the whole earth and her people a joy. But instead, they were obsessed with their petty, miserable little kingdoms, and the next few centuries had nothing of the joy which Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied as being possible for them. And so with Malachi, the sun went down over the prophets, and the Father's appeal to His wayward sons came to an end, until the coming of His Son.

Malachi 3:13 *Your words have been stout against Me, says Yahweh. Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?'*- 'Stout words' is the same phrase translated "... words prevailed against..." (1 Chron. 21:4). God is sensitive to words and the thoughts behind them. He reads thoughts as words and sees the implications of our positions as if they are words. For Judah protested they had never actually framed such words against God, when their thoughts and attitudes had in fact done so. We have highlighted the paramount importance of spiritual mindedness, emphasized heavily in the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Malachi 3:14 *You have said, 'It is vain to serve God;' and 'What profit is it that we have followed His instructions, and that we have walked mournfully before Yahweh of Armies?*-

The drought, leading to them even selling their children for food (Neh. 5:1-5), resulted in their conclusion that there was a huge gap between the glorious prophecies of temple restoration and what they were experiencing. Hag. 2:18,19 had prophesied that the economic woes could be gloriously reversed; but it hadn't happened, because they didn't repent. And so they concluded that the temple services were pointless. Because they were 'in it' only for their immediate material blessing, and refused to accept the words of Haggai and Zechariah pointing out how the whole situation was their fault. Malachi likewise points out that there would be blessings for obedience to God (Mal. 3:10-12,20) and curses otherwise (Mal. 2:2,3; 3:19).

Nehemiah, seeking for Israel's obedience to Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 40:46; 44:8,14-16), tried to get them to "keep the charges" (s.w. Nehemiah 7:3; 12:9,45; 13:20). But soon, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges (Mal. 3:14 s.w. "instructions"). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God's Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose even the true faith- because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God's law, rather than willingly devoting their way of life to the realization of His vision.

They had "walked mournfully", they were bowing their heads in mock grief like a bulrush (Is. 58:5); establishing at least three annual fasts to mourn the events of the fall of Jerusalem (Zech. 7:3,5; 8:19), covering His altar with tears (Mal. 2:13), whilst placing upon it miserly portions of inferior meat, as Malachi has just pointed out. They considered that this external appearance of religious devotion ought to be enough to get His full blessing; and this is a lesson so many religious people have to learn. And they rightly concluded that their religious devotions were "vain"; they had effectively taken His Name in vain (Ex. 20:7). Before the captivity their religious devotions had been

"vain" (s.w. Is. 1:13); and the restored exiles were doing just the same. And so the day would come when it would become openly apparent who served God and who didn't, in that their service of Him was in fact nothing of the sort (:18).

Time and again, Haggai and Zechariah had appealed for repentance. This is what would stop the bad harvests and failed expectations about the restoration of the Kingdom. The response of the people had been to perform ritual mourning, as a token sign of repentance. This is the "mourning" that they now consider to have been pointless. We readers see the obvious point- that their 'repentance' was not for real. And the challenge of genuine repentance echoes down to us.

Malachi 3:15 *Now we call the proud happy; yes, those who work wickedness are built up*- The "we" may mean that Malachi is identifying himself with his sinful people as did Ezra and Nehemiah. Likewise today there is a tendency to think that the proud and sinful are somehow truly prosperous and "built up", established well. But pride and happiness don't go together; the pride is really a reflection of their internal unhappiness. And those who work wickedness rarely keep the results of it; they are not "built up" in the medium or longer term of their lives. But the people then as now looked at the apparent success of a man at one moment, and assumed that 'this is the way to go, the life to live, the man to be'.

Yes, they put God to the test and escape'- Only five verses earlier (:10), this same word for "test" was used when the people were invited to test God by tithing properly and receiving blessing. Now we read that they complained that those who "put God to the test... escape". We could conclude that God didn't actually intend for Him to be put to the test, and rather is He here using irony. This would take away the mainstay from beneath all Pentecostal appeals for tithes to be paid in order for the givers to receive more personal wealth. Or it could be that some did test God as invited to, and "escaped" or 'were saved' (s.w. Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:32). Overall, putting God to the test is condemned in Scripture. We are to believe in Him rather than cynically testing Him out. Israel were condemned for putting God to the test in the desert.

Malachi 3:16 *Then those who feared Yahweh spoke frequently one with another; and Yahweh listened, and heard*- "This whole nation" had been cursed; so we assume that the "then" means that at this point, some were struck with fear of God and repented, and took strength in talking of their repentance to each other. There was response to Malachi's preaching and appeal, even if only amongst a minority. We shouldn't get the impression that the prophets were totally ignored; in many of their writings there is the hint that a very few did respond. And it has always been that way, as God's word never returns fruitless. The repentant minority spoke to each other about the truth of Malachi's challenges and confessed their sins to each other. And God was so thrilled with their words that He as it were wrote them down for eternity. This is the significance of our words; we shall be judged by the words we speak now (Mt. 12:37). They will as it were be played back to us at judgment day. We could wish for no stronger encouragement to watch our words, and to enquire as to the real content of our discussions with one another in this life.

And a book of memory was written before Him, for those who feared Yahweh, and who honoured His name- Their faithful words to each other contrast with the unfaithful words of :14,15. The words of the faithful were written in God's book and will form the basis for His final judgement of them. We see the huge importance of words. For by

our words shall we be condemned or saved. The allusion is to how the Persians kept a diary of events, of good and bad deeds done to them by their servants, and then at a later point remembered them and rewarded or punished them- as seen in the book of Esther. This "book" (singular) therefore contains a record of our individual works, or good words in the Malachi context. We aren't saved by works, but our works will be reflected in the nature of the eternity which we experience. There are other indications that the book contains a record of our individual works and ways: "The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12). "I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life" (Phil. 4:3). Notice how being in the book of life is associated with certain works committed by those in it. This "book of life" was written from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; 17:8), although it contains the records of our individual works. "The works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3)- the works and actions that comprise each saint were finished from the beginning, written by the Angels in God's book. The statement in Gen. 1:31 that at the end of the natural creation "God saw everything that He had made..." may imply that He saw then everything He would ever make- "the works were finished from the foundation (creation?) of the world". Notice again how the unfathomable system of predestination and foreknowledge is in the hands of the Angels. The Angel wrote the book initially- Moses pleaded with the Angel on Sinai in Ex. 32:32 "Blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book (of life), which Thou hast written" (from the foundation of the world).

Nehemiah several times asks God to "remember unto me" the good deeds he had done for Judah (Neh. 5:19 RV), and to likewise "remember" the bad works of the wicked (Neh. 6:14 RV- the bad words of the false prophetess Noadiah were to be remembered by God). He clearly perceived judgment day as featuring the good deeds of the righteous being as it were listed, and the sins of the wicked being likewise recounted. Perhaps his prayer was heard in that in a restoration context, Mal. 3:16 comments that a book of remembrance was written by God to record the good deeds of the faithful at that time.

The priests despised Yahweh's Name (Mal. 1:6), unlike their ancestor Levi, who “revered Me and stood in awe of My Name” (Lev. 2:5). But it seems that some of the ordinary people did respond, and feared the Name: "Those who feared Yahweh spoke frequently one with another; and Yahweh listened, and heard, and a book of memory was written before Him, for those who feared Yahweh, and who honoured His name" (Mal. 3:16). And for them, God promised the Messianic "sun of righteousness" to arise for them “who revere My Name” (Mal. 4:2). Despite the bad example of their priests / religious leaders, individuals can still respond.

"Honoured" is as in AV "thought upon". Thinking upon God's Name is the same idea as in Phil. 4:8 "Think on these things".

Malachi 3:17 *They shall be Mine, says Yahweh of Armies, My very own possession in the day when I make up My jewels*- "They shall be Mine" is a phrase that naturally invites comparison with the fact Yahweh owns all things. Likewise "My very own", the same idea used by a child in wanting an object "of my very own". We are personally and quintessentially "His" because we repent, because we thereby honour His Name, because He becomes all for us, because He so loves how we speak together with other believers. And that is a huge challenge to the nature of our communications and conversations with each other. And looked at this way, God is not so wealthy. He is as

the poor widow woman who only has ten coins and therefore the loss of one is significant. Or the man who only has two sons and nearly loses both of them.

This faithful minority who spoke well were a minority of a minority [the Jews who returned] of a minority [the Jews were God's people but a minority of earth's population]. The term for "jewels" is that used of how God's obedient covenant people would be His "peculiar treasure"(s.w. Ex. 19:5; Dt. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). They were to be His very own personal wealth, just as personal as the peasant woman had her dowry of coins around her forehead, the only thing in the world that was truly hers. And to lose one of them was to lose part of herself, knowing that not even her body was her own, only those few coins. This is how thrilled God will be with those who responded to Malachi's words, and we can respond likewise. But the emphasis is upon total obedience to the covenant as the basis upon which they were His "peculiar treasure". And the next sentence indicates that this was lacking; for they needed to be "spared" by grace. But their words of repentance to each other, their spiritual conversations, their desire for relationship with Him, were enough for God to note that eternally and spare them. And so they shall eternally be some of the jewels in His eternal collection.

And I will spare them, as a man spares his own son who serves him- That is, undeservedly, only because of his parental feelings and mercy toward the child. Even the faithful will only be accepted because they are 'spared'. Those who enter the Kingdom will genuinely, from the very depth of their being, feel that they shouldn't be there. They will cast their crowns before the enthroned Lord, as if to resign their reward as inappropriate for them (Rev. 4:10). Indeed, they shouldn't be in the Kingdom. The righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18). The righteous remnant who spoke often to one another about Yahweh will only be "spared" by God's grace (Mal. 3:17). The accepted will feel so certain of this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that he hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that.

Malachi 3:18 *Then you shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves God and him who doesn't serve Him*- This is spoken to the "you" of Malachi 3 (e.g. :14) who refused to repent. God had asked them to repent, but their response was: "Wherein shall we return?" (3:7). In the last day, they would realize that they had not really served God, whereas their humble brethren of :16,17 had done so. In their final rejection, they would repent, all too late, and appreciate the basis of the Lord's condemnation: they will discern the crucial chasm between the righteous and the wicked, just as "then shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1). Then, the wicked will understand the judgments of God. But it is our wisdom to learn and appreciate them now. *Then* they will go through the sensation of conversion ['returning'], realising with crystal clarity the separation between the ways of the flesh and spirit which they ought to have grasped in their day of opportunity. Then they will "discern", just as Christ will "appear" [s.w. 'discern'] at the judgment; they will then see things through His eyes, from the perspective which He will have at the judgment (Mal. 3:2). Malachi begins by saying that at the day of judgment, Edom's eyes "shall *see* [s.w. 'discern'], and ye shall say, the Lord will be magnified" (Mal. 1:5 AV)- although they refused to make this recognition now.

We will come to know and share the mind of our Lord as we watch Him judge, as He discerns between the sheep and the goats. Knowing God's present judgment should have a powerful practical effect upon us. If we know the judgment of God against

certain types of behaviour, we will keep away from them totally. It is only the rejected who refuse to know "the judgment of their God" (Jer. 5:4).

When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected (how else to understand Mt. 23:39?). Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them... they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18).

MALACHI CHAPTER 4

Malachi Chapter 4

Malachi 4:1 *For, behold, the day comes, it burns as a furnace; and all the proud, and all who work wickedness*- The day or the sun comes, in judgment for these people. Yet the sun of righteousness will arise for the faithful. This is the day of final judgment just spoken of in Mal. 3:16-18. Note that pride is the epitome of wickedness. Likewise to the Lord, humility was the very epitome of righteousness (Mt. 5:5 cp. Ps. 37:29).

Will be stubble; and the day that comes will burn them up, says Yahweh of Armies- The burning of straw (s.w. stubble) is the language of condemnation at the harvest of the last day in Is. 10:17; 25:10; 1 Cor. 3:12.

That it shall leave them neither root nor branch- Root nor branch may mean 'son or grandson'. Malachi is joined to the Hebrew scroll of Zechariah as if as an appendix. So we should be guided by Zechariah for the meaning of "root" and "branch". Root and branch were both words used of the Messianic shoot and branch who could have arisen at the restoration; see on Zech. 3:8; 6:12, the root and branch of David (Rev. 5:5). These possibilities **would be removed, but** were finally fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, but His salvation will not be available for the proud and wicked who shall be burnt up in the last day.

Malachi 4:2 *But to you who fear My name*- The imperfect but repentant minority of Malachi's time of Mal. 3:16,17. It seems Malachi is addressing them directly as his audience at this point. They feared God's Name whereas the priests, their religious leadership, are condemned for despising that Name. They had come to their relationship with God quite without the teaching or example of their religious leaders; their relationship was based solely on having heard and responded to God's word personally. The priesthood had failed. There was now nobody standing between God and man. Only a minority of the ordinary people, who responded to God's word directly, were ready for the arising of the sun of righteousness. And that is the situation we are in today. Organized religious structures have failed. The church and its leadership are, summing up and generalizing, a failure. We who await the Lord's coming are the spiritual descendants of that small minority who repented at Malachi's preaching.

Shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his rays- We noted on :1 that the salvation of the Lord Jesus will not be available for the wicked at the last day; but "to you", the faithful minority responding to Malachi, the coming of Messiah would be a time of healing and salvation [the two ideas are combined in the same Hebrew word]. We note that He returns to those in Israel who already fear the Name. Israelite repentance is a condition for the Lord’s return. He is the sun of righteousness in that He is the basis for the righteousness imputed to them; for we noted on Mal. 3:17 that even

the repentant remnant are "spared" by grace, they are treated as totally obedient to the covenant (see on Mal. 3:17) when in fact they were not. We note that even at the Lord's coming, we will require 'healing'. This is tacit recognition that we die imperfect and "we shall be changed" at His coming.

But the healing in His rays or wings of His garment (Heb.) is of course true now. Understanding that leads to faith in His healing. The *faith* of the sick woman who grabbed the hem or wings of His garment is commended by the Lord (Mk. 5:34; Mt. 9:20)- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

Zacharias clearly understood the Elijah prophet to be his son, John the Baptist; and he interprets this arising of the sun of righteousness as the giving of knowledge of salvation in Jesus right now: "You will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk. 1:76-79). The sun of righteousness is for “the righteous” (Mal. 3:18). They already spread the rays of that sun. "Jesus Christ the righteous", "the righteous judge" may allude here (1 Jn. 2:1; 2 Tim. 4:8).

The "healing" of the sun of righteousness in Mal. 4:2 is that spoken of in the promise of the new covenant: "I will cure them [s.w.], and reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth" through knowing the Lord Jesus (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). Malachi's generation had refused that new covenant offered to them whilst still in exile. But the work of Elijah would lead a later generation to accept it. The Jews in exile had "looked for the time of healing, but behold, trouble" (Jer. 8:15; 14:19- this is twice emphasized)- because they didn't repent and accept the new covenant. "Healing" [s.w.] is a result of repentance (Is. 6:10; 57:19; Jer. 3:22; Hos. 6:1). This is why there was "no remedy", literally 'no healing', for the generation who went into exile (2 Chron. 36:16), and why Jeremiah's prophecies often lament the lack of healing for Judah's wounds; they had broken the old covenant, for which one of the curses was that there would be no healing (Dt. 28:27,35). Ultimately, "by his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5). It will only be by repentantly coming to the crucified Jesus as Lord and Saviour that He can be as the sun of righteousness giving healing. The priesthood had failed to heal (Zech. 11:16 and often in the prophets).

You will go out, and leap like calves of the stall- As we struggle in our daily battle with the flesh, it is necessary to keep our eye on that split-second moment of total acceptance by our Lord. We will burst out, mentally and physically, like stalled calves given freedom for the first time. Currently we have changed masters, from sin to the Lord. But we are still slaves. There awaits what Paul calls the "glorious liberty of God's dear children". The slave who traded his master's talents well shall be given that which is his very own. Seeing he was faithful in that which was another man's. Ps. 68:1-3 speak of how the rejected will be chased away, but the righteous will "be glad" and "exult before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice", after the pattern of Israel's ecstasy after their deliverance at the Red Sea.

"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning [i.e. you'll have a part in the Lord's glory, Mal. 4:2], and thine health shall spring forth [cp. Mal. 4:2 springing forth as stalled calves]... and thy righteousness shall go before thee [our good deeds recited by the Judge]... then [at the judgment seat of Christ] thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am" (Is. 58:6-9). If we show mercy to the desperate now, we won't necessarily have our prayers automatically heard in this life. But in the poverty and desperate need of the judgment, our cries will be heard on account of our generous, forgiving response in this life.

Malachi 4:3 *You shall tread down the wicked*- This is the language of God's treading upon the wicked Egyptians (Hab. 3:13). But "the wicked" in the context are the wicked amongst God's people (:1; Mal. 3:18). The faithful will then discern them for who they are (Mal. 3:18), whereas in this life, and particularly at Malachi's time, it must have been difficult to perceive who were genuine and who were not. Just as we cannot discern now between wheat and weeds. The destruction of the wicked abusers of God's people seems to be part of the same process as the destruction of the wicked amongst God's people. They will be "condemned with the world". This is one of the passages which imply that the rejected will be physically annihilated by the Lord. Given the terrible descriptions of the mental anguish of the condemned, this would essentially be a merciful act. It may be that many will die in the judgments which come upon the world. But it could be that others are simply put out of their agony by the Lord. Some now in the ecclesia will be dashed to pieces by Him (Rev. 2:27), and Malachi implies that the faithful will play a part in the destruction of their wicked brethren.

For they will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I make, says Yahweh of Armies- The idea of burning feet turning the wicked to ashes is precisely that of the cherubim (s.w. Ez. 1:7). As often intimated in Zechariah, the faithful are to become identified with the cherubim.

Malachi 4:4 *Remember the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded to him in Horeb for all Israel, even statutes and ordinances*- This was so that the curse for disobedience to the law would not come upon them (:7). The faithful minority of Mal. 3:16,17 are bidden remember the actual law, because the priests were teaching it wrongly (see on Mal. 2:8). It was "for all Israel", not just for an enthusiastic minority. And all of that law was still binding upon Malachi's generation, every statute and ordinance; whereas the priests were teaching that only some parts needed to be attended to.

Usually we read of 'observing' or 'obeying' the law. Perhaps the idea of 'remembering' it is in the context of the way they have offered lame animals, paid only part of the tithes- they had kept the law of Moses as lip service, on a surface level. They were to "remember" what the law actually said and do it. Again we see the possibility of fulfilment of these words in Malachi's own time and in the lives of his immediate audience.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel had given the exiles the opportunity of accepting a new covenant. The old covenant was broken. But the people still hankered for that old covenant. And it seems God went along with that by still offering those in Malachi's time some future with Him even on the basis of the old covenant.

Malachi 4:5 *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes*- As explained on Mal. 3:1, the restored community could still have seen a Messiah figure arise if they had responded to the messenger of the covenant

preparing His way. 'Malachi' was that messenger, as was the priesthood. But they failed to respond, and so the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied to another priest, John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the true and full Messiah. So if Israel would receive it, John the Baptist was the Elijah prophet. The course of fulfilment of prophecy was conditional upon whether John succeeded in turning the hearts of Israel back to the fathers or not; on preparing them for the great and terrible day of the Lord. Brethren as varied as John Knowles and Harry Whittaker have all recognized in their expositions that the Kingdom could have come in the first century had Israel received John as Elijah. But they would not. And so another Elijah prophet is to come in the last days and prepare Israel for her Messiah. "If ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah which is to come" (Mt. 11:14 RVmg.) says it all. More details about him are noted on Rev. 11. He need not be the literal resurrected Elijah, although that is possible; recall how the Lord Jesus is called "David", when He is not David but in the spirit and line of David (Hos. 3:5; Ez. 34:23 etc.). The Elijah prophet who was to herald the Messianic Kingdom *could have been* John the Baptist- if Israel had received him. But they didn't, and so the prophecy went down another avenue of fulfilment. It could be that :6 implies that there is still the possibility that even the latter day Elijah mission could fail. But ultimately it will succeed, for the great and dreadful day of Yahweh is that of the Lord's final return (Joel 2:31). I suggest this approach is what explains the apparent contradiction between John's denial that he was Elijah (Jn. 1:21,25), and the Lord's statement that for those who received it, John was the Elijah prophet. He says "Elijah has come" [in John] in Mk 9:12; and yet at the same time, "Elijah is coming / will come" (Mt. 17:11). Seeing that Greek NT tenses are specific, I suggest He said both: "Elijah is coming, Elijah has come". John's denial that he was the Elijah prophet was tantamount to his acceptance that he had not succeeded in being the Elijah prophet- even though his choice of clothing clearly consciously imitated that of Elijah.

As discussed on Mal. 3:1, the Elijah prophet is "the messenger" who is the servants of Yahweh of the Isaianic prophecies about a way being prepared. They are both servants, doing the work of removing the stumbling stones [= rejection of Jesus as crucified Christ / Messiah], and also a messenger giving a message of Him. They will be the Elijah prophet. Hence the Hebrew here is strictly "the Elijah the prophet". "The Elijah" is a strange way of expression if Elijah personally is meant.

But Elijah failed in his mission because he failed to act as a prophet, and God effectively fired him. He didn't achieve renewal of the covenant between Yahweh and His people; the implication is that the latter day Elijah will achieve this. The duty of a prophet was not only to return the people to God. It was to defend the people before God in prayer, praying to God on their behalf (Gen. 20:7,17; Ex. 32:31–35; Num. 14:11–25; 1 Sam. 7:5–9; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; Ps. 99:6). The role of the Elijah prophet was therefore also to mediate for the people that they might receive God's grace. This is also part of the latter day Elijah ministry.

Malachi 4:6 *He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers-*

The tragedy of "You didn't turn to Me" in Hag. 2:17 is that God has repeatedly tried to comfort the returned exiles that "I am with you" (Hag. 2:4; 1:13)... "My Spirit dwelt [and dwells] among you" (Hag. 2:5). But they didn't want to be with Him, to realize the presence of His Spirit amongst them, just as the Corinthians were not spiritual although they had been richly given the Spirit. The returnees were preoccupied by the immediate, and their desire to live their petty dreams. And so it is oftentimes with man. Haggai's call echoes to us- not to be preoccupied with life and material things.

The final restoration prophet concluded with the promise that God would have to send the Elijah prophet to turn their hearts to God: "He will turn the hearts..." (Mal. 4:6). Literally, to return [s.w. 'repent'] their hearts. He would bring about their repentance; in the latter day context, this would refer to their repentance for crucifying their Messiah.

Despite the religious system developed by the returnees and their exclusion of others, they didn't obey Haggai's call to turn their hearts to their God. And so through the Elijah prophet it was God's plan to almost forcibly turn their hearts to Him. But even the fulfilment in John the Baptist and the appearance of God's Son only achieved this in a minority. The problem was [and still is] preoccupation with man's immediate agendas, be they religious or secular.

Mal. 3:7 offered a "return" of God to the people if they returned / repented to Him. But they argued they had nothing to repent of, no distance over which to return to Him. Now God says, as He does in the offers of the new covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, that He will make them return to Him- so desperate is He for continued relationship with them. No longer is His return to them contingent upon their freewill return to Him. He will force them back to Him.

Reconcilliation with God will produce or be associated with reconcilliation within personal relationships. The LXX speaks of this involving also turning the hearts of the people to their neighbours. As discussed on Mal. 2:10, breaking covenant with others was related to breaking covenant with God. They were all at sixes and sevens with each other because their relationship with God was broken. This was now to be forcibly ended. And we discussed on Mal. 2:14-16 how the priests had abandoned their children and Hebrew wives. The results of this would potentially be undone by the Elijah prophet, the messenger of the covenant of Mal. 3:1. But he failed... so it was reapplied to John the Baptist, who likewise failed to convert all Israel. And so the success of the latter day Elijah ministry, in removing the stumbling stone of Christ crucified, will result in restored and enhanced human relationships. For that has to be the result of no longer stumbling over the Lord Jesus.

"The hearts of the children to the fathers" is interpreted for us in Lk. 1:17, at least insofar as John the Baptist was a fulfilment of the Elijah prophet: "And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous [GNB "back to the way of thinking of the righteous"]; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord". "The children" are "the disobedient" and their fathers are "the righteous". The question is how these righteous fathers are turned towards the children, thanks to the work of the Elijah prophet. The account of John's 'Elijah' ministry in Mt. 3:7-12 is full of allusion to Malachi 4; and one of those connections is with the comment that that generation could not truly say that Abraham was their father (Mt. 3:9). This leads us to understand the righteous fathers as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That would have been the natural interpretation of "the fathers" in first century Israelite society. It could be that in the latter day, ultimate fulfilment, the Lord Jesus returns, resurrects the dead, including the Jewish fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and there is then a process of work by the Elijah prophet which brings about repentance in Israel, whereby the resurrected Jewish fathers turn towards the children of that last generation, and those children likewise turn to those fathers. The righteous fathers are turned to the once disobedient children- by the work of "Elijah". But how and when this happens is a stubborn exegetical problem.

One possibility is that the language of fathers and children forms an inclusion with how Malachi opens: "Children honour their parents... I am your father— why don't you honour Me?" (Mal. 1:6). In this case, the "fathers" would be an intensive plural referring

to their great Father, God. Just as the plural elohim is used for the one singular God; and just as in fact Mal. 1:6 uses the plural for "master" with reference to God, as if "masters", the one great master, God. And His heart would be turned to His children by the Elijah prophet converting the "children" to Him in repentance. Is. 63:16 speaks of the repentant remnant saying "Doubtless You are our father". Thus the children are reconciled to God. Most references to the people 'returning', especially in Malachi, Haggai and Zechariah, are to the children of Israel returning / repenting to God, and His returning to them. "Return unto Me … and I will return unto you" (Mal. 3:7; Zech. 1:3). Another possibility is to accept the interpretation of Rashi and the rabbis, that the hearts of the fathers are turned "onto" the children and vice versa- meaning that fathers and children are united in heart by their common experience of repentance before God. This message would then be relevant to Malachi's earlier observations of social and family breakdown amongst the returned exiles. And he closes his prophecy with this thought, because it is the reconcilliation between people, as a result of their individual reconcilliation with God, which is the ultimate achievement of God's grace in practice.

Through the preaching of John, he turned men's hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6). Such is the power of our preaching, the possibility which our words of witness give to our hearers. We have such power invested in us! If we are slack to use it, the Lord's glory is limited, and the salvation of others disabled.

Israel were out of step with their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob, Levi, Moses and "Elijah" have just been mentioned (Mal. 1:2; 2:4,6; 3:3-4). The appeal of the latter day Elijah is to return to the promises made to the fathers, which are the essence of the new covenant. The turning of the fathers' hearts to the children need not imply that the fathers are still alive; the idiom of the passage means that the hearts of the children and the fathers will be at one with each other. Lk. 1:16,17 interprets "the heart of the children to the fathers" as meaning "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just".

Elijah was only interested in demonstrating Yahweh's superiority over Baal, but it is questionable whether he made any lasting converts from Baal worship to Yahweh. Because he wasn't interested in people- at least initially. He was removed from his post after his shameful intercession *against* Israel in 1 Kings 19. But we must square this against Malachi's apparently strange comment that Elijah in future will turn the heart of the fathers to the children and vice versa. This makes sense once we understand that Baal worship involved child sacrifice, as the preceding section in 1 Kings 16 makes clear. This created tension and no "heart" between fathers and children, and vice versa. After his demotion, Elijah carried on believing- and we can assume that he "got it". His future work will therefore involve caring for people, and turning fathers and children towards each other in that they have quit Baal. Elijah will finally learn from his immaturity, and become people focused. LXX has "(who shall turn again) the heart of a man to his neighbour".

Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse- The ultimate salvation of the earth / land of Israel and its people is still conditional, upon their response to the Elijah prophet. There is no automatic salvation just because a day on the calendar has arrived. Salvation is intensely personal and human response is absolutely essential; and that is the appropriate finale of the prophecy. And yet if the last word of the Old Testament is "curse", the first recorded word of the Lord Jesus is "Blessed". But that blessing was upon individuals who responded to Him. It could be argued that the work of John the Baptist as the Elijah prophet failed to reform Israel [as did Elijah and Malachi]- and so in AD70 the land was indeed struck with a curse, "with a decree of utter destruction"

(ESV). Is. 43:28 had said the same: "Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; and I will make Jacob a curse". But Zech. 14:11 had foreseen this, and yet prophesied that through the return of the Lord Jesus, "Men will dwell therein, and there will be no more curse [s.w. Mal. 4:6]; but Jerusalem will dwell safely". This suggests that indeed all but the final Elijah ministry would fail. The land would be cursed. But this will be lifted at the Lord's return.